



□ Jung, Sun:

'Bae Yong-Joon, Hybrid Masculinity & the Counter-coeval Desire of Japanese Female Fans'

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## Bae Yong-Joon, Hybrid Masculinity & the Counter-coeval Desire of Japanese Female Fans

### Abstract

This essay examines the transcultural consumption of new Korean masculinity in Japan using the star construction of Bae Yong-Joon (BYJ/aka *yon-sama*) as its key example. Through sociological research on the middle-aged Japanese female fans (BYJ's largest fan base), this essay demonstrates how these fans desire BYJ's hybridized masculinity in consumption practices and how these practices reflect the sentiments of Japan's nostalgia towards Korea.

This essay engages with John Frow's argument on desiring the 'Other's primitiveness', which he suggests is derived from a denial of coevalness. Extending this theory, I argue that the Japanese fans' desire for BYJ's hybridized masculinity can be conceptualized within the framework of a contradictory combination of 'counter-coevality' and 'cultural proximity'. In this essay, I discuss how BYJ's hybrid masculinity has been built up through transcultural flows in the region caused by the cultural proximity of geographical/spatial familiarity. Then, I examine how some middle-aged Japanese female fans desire his soft masculinity in terms of a counter-coeval sentiment towards Korea caused by the temporal difference between the two nations, possibly based on their post/colonial experiences.

The counter-coeval desire of the Japanese fans is evident in their pre-modernistic interpretations of BYJ's post-modern *mom-zzang* (muscular hard) body. His *mom-zzang* body is representative of the coeval ideology of post-modern globalized culture. I argue that Japanese fans ultimately still desire BYJ's post-modern body through a traditional teleological lens – particularly, the framework of Confucian *wen* masculinity. Finally, I show how the fans consume their commoditized memories and nostalgia through their counter-coeval desire of BYJ's hybridized masculinity, exemplified by their concept of *Otokorashii Otoko* (a man like a “real man”). This form of temporal displacement in transcultural Japanese consumption reflects how new Korean masculinity is constructed in Korean popular culture through the commodification of memory.

**Key words:** Bae Yong-Joon; *Hallyu*; Japanese fan; new Korean masculinity; *wen* masculinity; counter-coeval desire

### Bae Yong Joon and the *Yon-sama* Syndrome

On 4 April 2004, an unfamiliar word “*Yon-sama*” occupied the headlines of most entertainment and sports newspapers in Korea and Japan. “Welcome *Yonsama!* 5,000 fans at Haneda Airport”, “*Yonsama* has arrived! Over 5,000 go crazy!”, “*Yonsama* paralyzes Haneda Airport!”, “Japan’s middle-aged women’s infatuation with *Yonsama!*” “*Yonsama* beats Beckham!!” (Herald Kyung-je 2004; Cho 2004; Nikkan Sports 2004; Kookmin-Ilbo 2004; D. Lee 2004; Sankei Sports 2004) Numerous newspapers devoted their front pages to describe the welcome by the 5,000 ‘crazy’ Japanese fans of the Korean actor Bae Yong-Joon (BYJ) at Haneda international airport. The articles emphasised how most of the fans are middle-aged women. Many of these fans came to the airport the night before BYJ’s arrival and stayed up all night to find the best spot to see him. Many of them brought gifts and flowers for him. Thousands of fans took photographs of him with their cameras and phone-cameras. Even the evening television news programs reported the ‘intensity’ of those middle-aged female fans, whose eyes were filled with tears, while holding their welcome placards. Some media wittily compared BYJ with David Beckham by pointing out that it was a much bigger crowd than those who turned up for Beckham – there were only about 1,000 fans gathered at the airport when he visited Japan in June 2002 (Park 2004).

BYJ has gained remarkable recognition in Japan since the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* was first screened in April 2003 on NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai/Japan Broadcasting Corporation) - the most influential Japanese broadcasting company. For the following two years, the complete series was broadcast four times on NHK due to the overwhelming flood of requests for reruns by viewers – who mostly consisted of middle-aged or older generations (Huh and Ham 2005: 13). During the third run, it was broadcast on NHK’s regular television channel every Saturday at 11:10pm. Even though the drama was scheduled after prime time, its average rating was 14.4%, which was double of the other programs from the same time slot. Its highest rating was 22.2% - the highest of all drama series programs (Chae 2005: 10). In Japan, *Winter Sonata* has achieved enormous success nationwide and created what is known as ‘the *Yon-sama* syndrome’. This refers to the popularity of the main actor Bae Yong-Joon. *Yon-sama* is a coined conjunction of his name *Yong* and the Japanese word *sama*. Normally *sama* refers to the high honour originally reserved for royalty and aristocrats. *Yon-sama* can be translated as “Prince Yong” or “My Dear Lord Yong”. The honour of *Yon-sama* indicates the immense respect for BYJ from Japanese fans. Even Japan’s Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi once enviously commented on BYJ’s popularity among voters, saying that “I would like to emulate *Yon-sama* to become a *Jun-sama*” (OANA 2004). Francesco Guardini has suggested that a “new form of monarchy has emerged in our time”. He has argued that sports stars, singers, film actors and supermodels are like new kings and queens and that they operate like a new aristocracy (Guardini quoted in Ndalianis 2002: vii). In 2004, *Yon-sama* became a new king of popular culture in Korea and Japan.

What are the reasons behind this phenomenon? I argue that there is a tendency for Japanese fans to desire BYJ in ways that can be considered 'retrospective' and 'nostalgic'. This can be explained through John Frow's argument on desiring the 'Other's primitiveness', which he suggests is derived from a denial of coevalness. Extending this theory, I argue that the Japanese fans' desire for BYJ's hybridized masculinity can be conceptualized within the framework of a contradictory combination of 'cultural proximity' and 'counter-coevality'. In this essay, I discuss how BYJ's hybrid masculinity has been built up through transcultural flows in the region caused by the cultural proximity of geographical/spatial familiarity. I argue that middle-aged Japanese female fans desire BYJ's star persona which is based on his hybridized masculinity as a result of intra-Asian transcultural flows of popular cultural products. I argue that the transcultural flows between two countries foreground the significance of *mu-kuk-jok* (non-nationalism) in the globalization of Korean popular culture. *Mu-kuk-jok*, a concept used to describe a cultural practice that has no particular national trait or odour, is an example of cultural proximity. Then, I examine how some middle-aged Japanese female fans desire his hybrid masculinity in terms of a counter-coeval sentiment towards Korea caused by the temporal difference between the two nations, possibly based on their post/colonial experiences. BYJ's popularity in Japan can be explained as a kind of consumption of the simulacrum of Japan's past.

This essay examines the transcultural consumption of new Korean masculinity in Japan using the star construction of BYJ as its key example. Through sociological research on the middle-aged Japanese female fans, this essay demonstrates how these fans desire BYJ's hybridized masculinity in consumption practices and how these practices reflect the sentiments of Japan's counter-coeval desire towards Korea. This form of temporal displacement in transcultural Japanese consumption reflects how new Korean masculinity is constructed in Korean popular culture through the commodification of memory. Audience reception research was conducted from 28 August to 5 September, 2005; I interviewed four separate focus groups with 18 BYJ fans in Tokyo and Okinawa in Japan. Each group has five, four, seven and two participants. Among them, seven of the participants are in their thirties; three are in their forties; six are in their fifties and two are in their sixties. I also collected 56 questionnaires at the *Saitama Super Arena*, where BYJ's film *April Snow*'s promotion event was held on 31 August 2005. Because of the issue of confidentiality, I use pseudonyms to indicate each participant. Firstly, I will look at BYJ's three central star personae - in particular, examining the construction of "Kang Joon-Sang", the character he plays in *Winter Sonata* - which I believe represents BYJ's hybrid masculinity. Then, I will examine how the Japanese female fans have received these personae.

### **Star Persona 1: Hybridized Masculinity**

The story of *Winter Sonata* is about the experience of first love, lost memory and unknown family ties. The drama starts from the innocent, but at the same time humorous

encounter of two high school sweethearts, Joon-Sang (BYJ) and Yu-Jin (Choi Ji-Woo), the female lead. Because of a tragic accident Joon-Sang loses his memory and the couple are separated for ten years before they meet again. On the day of Yu-Jin's engagement ceremony with her old friend/fiancé Sang-Hyuk, she runs into Joon-Sang on the street. However, he cannot remember Yu-Jin because now he lives a new life as Min-Hyung, a Korean-American architect. Even though Yu-Jin knows that he is not her first love – Joon-Sang – she cannot stop her feelings towards Min-Hyung. Joon-Sang and Min-Hyung physically have same body, but are different persons. She is confused between Min-Hyung and Sang-Hyuk. Later, Joon-Sang gets his memory back, however the situation becomes even more complicated as the secret family ties are revealed. In the series, BYJ is Kang Joon-Sang/Lee Min-Hyung, who smiles tenderly and maintains his pure love for Yu-Jin. The drama repeatedly portrays the soft smile and gentle demeanour of BYJ. Some Japanese scholars declare that the key point of his popularity is his 'soft smile' (Endo and Matsumoto 2004). At the same time, BYJ portrays a man who willingly sacrifices himself for his lover Yu-Jin. This sweet, touching and devoted characteristic has enthralled Japanese audiences the most. For example, when lovesick Sang-Hyuk is dying in the hospital, Joon-Sang/Min-Hyung takes Yu-Jin to the hospital to let her see Sang-Hyuk:

Min-Hyung: You can go in now.

Yu-Jin: (without looking at his face) You shouldn't do this.

Min-Hyung: Yes, I should... You are worried about him. Aren't you?

Yu-Jin: (tears in her eyes) Min-Hyung...

Min-Hyung: I'm fine. You can go...

Yu-Jin: (without looking at him, with trembling voice) What if I can't come back?

Min-Hyung: (frightened expression) !!!

Yu-Jin: If I see Sang-Hyuk, I might not be able to come back. Then... what should we do?

Min-Hyung: (sorrowfully) That's... ok. That's better than watching you suffer in pain.

The above scene describes how Joon-Sang/Min-Hyung puts up with emotional hardship for Yu-Jin's sake. It seems as if he would bear any pain for Yu-Jin. BYJ portrays a man who cries for his lover while still holding a strong will inside. BYJ's character is an embodiment of a devoted man's image which ideally hybridized between feminine and masculine aspects (Yu et al 2005: 81). This screen image is often overlapped with real-life BYJ.

Many of the Japanese fans I have interviewed have often described BYJ as an ideal, perfect man who has 'manly charisma' and 'feminine tenderness' at the same time. In

other words, they consider this hybridized masculinity as a symbolic image of an ideal man. Interviewee Ga explained:

“He is different from any other actor or any other guy. He is tender but not weak. His dialogues are so sweet, poetic and intelligent but at the same time he has such a charismatic manner.”

Na said: “In his photo album, he looks so manly and tough! But he is still my sweet prince. Always! Look at his smile... how beautiful!”

Ga described BYJ as an ideal man who has both ‘tender’ and ‘charismatic’ manner. Na also mentioned BYJ’s “toughness” and “sweetness” which desirably co-exist in one body. Kuroiwa, a producer at NHK, also points out BYJ’s hybridized masculinity which is constructed by his neutralized images.

Bae Yong Joon is very neutral. Not very sexual[ly appealing], not very manly but not too feminine either. When the woman wants to be led by somebody, he does that. He is gentle, charming, and polite but at the same time, when he has to say something he says something. He is the man when the woman wants him to be a man. He fulfils all the needs of the middle-aged Japanese women.

Kuroiwa’s point highlights that BYJ’s hybridized masculinity might be one of the most significant star personae to bring about the Yon-sama syndrome in Japan. In his image, masculinity and femininity are hybridized and unified, or in the words of one of my interviewees (Sa), he is “gentle and feminine, yet sometimes very manly”. BYJ’s hybridized masculinity stays in the third space; though it contains a feminine aspect it is “not feminized”. According to the Japanese fans’ responses, even though BYJ’s hybrid masculinity implies femininity, they still consider him as an ideal “manly” man. For example, Ban described BYJ as “tender and strong, a typical man”. Based on the binary of the words “tender (femininity)” and “strong (masculinity)”, Ban’s expression of “typical man” has to be understood differently from the general concept of “being a man” or “manly”. Jan’s description, for instance, supports the concept of ideal manliness which these Japanese female fans desire. Jan said:

“he has masculine attraction. ... [such as] sensitiveness, softness, nobility and dignity”

Jan explained how BYJ’s feminine traits, such as softness and sensitiveness, complete his masculine attraction. In the later section of this essay, I will examine how and why the Japanese fans perceive BYJ’s hybridized masculinity as an ideal concept of a ‘manly’ man and how this is related to their sense of nostalgia.

### **Star Persona 2: Purity**

The drama's 'purity' was also praised by the older Japanese viewers, who said it reminded them of simpler times from their younger days (Onishi 2004). Since *Winter Sonata* was broadcasted, NHK has received countless phone calls and e-mails and more than 20,000 letters from viewers, many of whom write about their own experiences of love and loss (Tabata 2003; Wiseman 2004). Comparing *Winter Sonata* to the recent Japanese television dramas, some interviewees point out the innocence of main characters. Ga stated:

“Today’s Japanese dramas contain too much representation of sex. But in *Winter Sonata* we don’t see those embarrassing sex scenes. They [the characters] love purely.”

Those viewers, who do not like the blunt representation of sex in Japanese dramas, fall for the idealistic depiction of 'pure' love in *Winter Sonata*. Some viewers describe that BYJ is an “old-fashioned gentle man who reminds me of my first love” and some say “the high school setting takes us [Japanese women] back to the days before marriage”. Watching the innocence of BYJ and CJW allows them to remember their younger selves (Wiseman 2004). Baik Seung-Kuk, a professor of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, claims that the major attraction of *Winter Sonata* is its storytelling which stimulates nostalgic memory of Japanese viewers' first love (2005: 174). Baik states that “the sender of *Winter Sonata* encodes “pure love” in the message [drama contents] and the Japanese viewers decode them” (2005: 175). According to him, the drama employs 'pure love' as a cultural code and it uses various audiovisual methods to deliver this coded message to the receivers (2005: 175-78). In other words, there are dramatic signifiers which imply first love. For example, Joon-Sang plays the piano for Yu-Jin and the title of the piece is “The First Time”. This piano music is an example of a signifier of first love (Y.-S. Kim 2005). As the seasonal background is winter, there are many scenes of white snow which also implies a sense of purity. In episode two, Joon-Sang steals a first kiss from Yu-Jin while they are playing with snowmen. The impact of the coded message of first love is enhanced through the bicycle riding scene in the first episode. In the scene, Joon-Sang rides a bicycle along a riverside bicycle-path and Yu-Jin holds his waist, sitting on the back seat. Romantic background music is played as they ride along the path, and there are scenes of an orange coloured sunset, sparkling water and golden-brown shrubs. This happy and smiling couple looks pure and innocent in their high-school uniforms. To explain the representation of first love in this scene, professor Kim Ki-Kook, of Kyung-Hee University, uses Jean Baudrillard's concept of “simulacre and simulation” (2005: 95). According to Kim, this bicycle scene is a perfect model of first love for many Japanese fans. He argues that the above listed “romantic images are Baudrillard's simulacra” and the viewers indulge in this imaginary reality which was actually never existed. One of my interviewees, Na, said that “I watched *Winter Sonata* more than 20 times (...) especially I watched the bicycle scene again and again. It reminds me of my first love from high-school.”

Cinema studies scholar Angela Ndaliansis claims that stars are “very personal things”, who are, she states, “producing meaning that is personal to him or her” (2002: xii). She argues that stars “interact and merge with an individual’s subjectivity” (2002: xii). Na’s memory of her first love merges with the image of a uniformed bicycle riding BYJ. In the context of *Winter Sonata*, BYJ interacts with Japanese fans’ individual memories. One of the interviewees, Ba also stated:

“I think it’s because of those comics... when we were girls we read lots of girl’s comics. The drama’s story and characters are very similar to those comics. Innocent girls and boys... first love... *Winter Sonata* really reminds me of those days.”

Many scholars see stars as variously conceptualized inner wants of the masses (Dyer 1998: 18). BYJ is a reflection of the inner wants of the middle-aged Japanese female audiences: in the case of Na and Ba, it is a desire for their purity of their “past”. Dyer articulates that “every society (and each class/group at each period of that society) foregrounds certain needs, by virtue of both what it promises and what it fails to deliver. Likewise, agencies in those societies (e.g. the cinema) provide and/or define answers to those needs” (Dyer 1998). In view of the *Yon-sama* syndrome, BYJ fulfils the desires of Japanese fans: those desires are their memories and nostalgia.

### **Star Persona 3: Politeness**

In *Winter Sonata*, BYJ is portrayed as a well-mannered and intelligent young man. He speaks to CJW very softly in a very respectful manner and always carefully considers her needs – just like a well-mannered aristocrat. Ba said:

“I was so surprised [when I saw his polite image from the drama] because I thought Korean men were very rude and authoritative”

In the drama, his politeness is often exemplified through the portrayal of caring for Yu-Jin. For example, when Joon-Sang finds out that he and Yu-Jin are half-brother and half-sister, he decides to keep this painful news a secret. His only concern is Yu-Jin’s happiness and he tries to protect her from any traumatic experience. In episode 18, they travel to a small beachside town. Yu- Jin is excited because it is their first trip together, while Joon-Sang is in a deep sorrow because it is a farewell trip for him.

Yu-Jin: Let’s make lots of memories. I want to remember every single thing!

Joon-Sang: (voice only) I don’t want to leave anything behind, Yu-Jin... anything that would remind you of me.

From the above scene, it is clear how much Joon-Sang considers Yu-Jin and tries to protect her from being hurt. Even after he finds out that they are not blood relations he leaves Yu-Jin as he believes that Yu-Jin would be happier with Sang-Hyuk. Because of

such polite and considerate manners, the Japanese fans gave him a noble title “*sama*”. Beyond his polite image from the drama character Joon-Sang, the real life BYJ is also praised as a polite young man. Most of the interviewees/questionnaire participants I met in Japan mentioned his politeness. Na said:

“He is so polite and considerate. [Look at] how he treats his fans. So considerate!... We love his politeness and modesty.

Chan said: “he is humble and polite... I like the way of he greets others.”

According to the fans’ quotes from the above, BYJ’s politeness is singled out as the most significant factor in desiring BYJ. In particular, these fans make an emotional connection with the way he treats fans as a family. BYJ calls his fans “my family” and always shows his respect and consideration to them. For example, on his second visit to Japan in 2004, over 1,000 fans gathered outside his hotel. When BYJ left the hotel, all of a sudden hundreds of fans converged on his car. In the chaotic situation, about ten fans were wounded and hospitalized. The Japanese media started criticizing BYJ for his changing of his schedule which led to the tragic accident. However, before negative public opinion spread too far, BYJ held a press conference and politely apologized for what had happened. He said, “I was too naïve. I believed that such an accident would never happen. I’m so sorry what has happened to my valued family” (Choi 2004). The deep regret for his action was enhanced by his tears. The Japanese media soon turned their focus from the tragic accident to his polite apologies, accompanied by his crying. Later, in the name of a family, each one of the wounded fans received an autograph letter from BYJ. They consider his politeness to be one of the most significant differences of BYJ from other stars or other men. Some fans emphasised his polite attitudes by comparison with the rudeness of young men in Japan today. Ma said:

“Today’s Japanese male actors? Oh no! They are rude, too shallow and vulgar. We can’t even compare with him [BYJ].”

Ra also said: “Of course he has the prettiest face and sweetest smile and that is why I love him. But I love him also because of his polite and considerate attitudes (...) he bows to his fans with his two hands together. We don’t see that [polite manner] any more here.”

According to them, politeness is a value which they hardly find in today’s Japan. These fans see the virtues of the past from BYJ’s polite gestures. Ga said:

“Even the way he waves his hands is so noble.”

Pan said: “[I like his] gentleness and courtesy. He has something we Japanese have already lost”

His polite image represents something Japan has lost, such as old virtues. For the Japanese fans, his polite (body) gestures are a symbol of old virtues and memories. In this sense, his body is a retrospective site. Likewise, BYJ’s polite body became an object

of Japanese female fans' retrospective desire. This is also evident from the Japanese fans' appreciation of the fake *yon-sama*. At the *Saitama Super Arena*, where BYJ's film *April Snow*'s promotion event was held, over 30,000 enthusiastic Japanese (mostly female) fans were gathered to see BYJ. Among them, some were busy taking photos of a Japanese man dressed up as BYJ. Even though this man does not look like BYJ, he can become BYJ by merely showing his teeth (for a smile) and by politely putting his hands on the chest. Because of this polite gesture, the Japanese fans identify this anonymous Japanese man with *yon-sama*. Again, as Kim Young-Soon and others observed in their semiological analysis, this fake *Yon-sama*'s gesture is a signifier to encode the BYJ-like characteristic – i.e. politeness. Because this coded message is familiar to the receivers, they could immediately decode it as BYJ's polite body. The Japanese fans recognize BYJ by identifying his politeness.



Fake *yon-sama*

As observed from the three star personae, BYJ can be characterized as embodying a hybrid masculinity, as well as a combination of the attributes of purity and politeness. This is counter to the previous representations of dominant and hard masculinity of Korean men. In the next section, I will discuss how this hybrid masculinity differs from pre-existing ideas circulating about Korean masculinity in Japan.

### **New Korean Masculinity, BYJ**

BYJ's Kang Joon-Sang character in *Winter Sonata* has changed many Japanese people's perceptions of Korean men. A Korean women's studies' scholar Kim Eun-Shil, who is researching the effects of the *Yon-sama* syndrome on postcolonial relations between Japan and Korea, states: "to the Japanese, Korea used to be associated with images of the 'dark, noisy and smelly,' but now *Yon-sama*'s middle-aged fans associate Korea with 'beautiful things' and see *Yon-sama* as an idealized man" (Onishi 2004). In

particular, it is evident from the result of research questionnaires that Japanese women's perceptions of Korean men has changed from that of a previous uncivilized macho image to one that is highly idealized, such as BYJ. For the question "is BYJ's character/image different from those pre-existing images of Korean men which you have seen from other movies, dramas or in your real lives?" among 56 participants, who answered this question, 46 participants answered "Yes". Among them, 38 participants described the pre-existing Korean men's images using negative expressions, such as "dark, scary, sly, aggressive and violent". In particular, many of them use the word "scary". Dan explained as follows:

"Before, they had scary images. After I knew BYJ, the images of Korean men have become better and I feel friendly towards them."

Nan said "Previously [Korean men's images were] violent and scary. But BYJ is tender, gentle and he takes his life seriously."

According to the above quotes, since the Japanese fans were introduced to BYJ from *Winter Sonata*, their perception of Korean men has dramatically changed from a scary machismo to that of a tender gentleman. One of the participants, Kan, explains that these scary images are mostly from the media representations of "protesting students against the dictatorship during the 1980s". Ba also points out that "some Korean middle-aged men I see in [television] dramas are quite bossy and they don't treat women fairly". As Kan and Ba described, the Japanese built up the pre-existing idea of Korean men through the media presented images. These negative images were represented mostly due to the historico-socio-political crisis and its source traces back to the Japanese occupation era.

During the 35 years of Japanese occupation, Korean people were exploited and Korean traditions, industries and culture were completely oppressed. Following the Liberation in August 1945, another traumatic historical event, the Korean War (1950-1953) further devastated Korea. Due to these national tragedies, Koreans have always been portrayed as a poor and filthy people, living in a dirty and undeveloped country. In particular as a neighbouring country and a former colonial empire, Japan has always treated Korea as an inferior country with a second-rate culture. An article in the *Wall Street Journal* describes this prejudicial view towards Korea:

(But) in Japan the Korea craze is particularly surprising, because it has gripped a generation that has never shown much interest in Japan's nearest neighbor.

Japan's colonial rule in Korea, from 1910 to 1945, left some now-older Japanese conflicted about the country or dismissive of it. For decades, many Japanese looked down on Koreans as inferior both racially and economically. (Fuyuno 2004)

This article points out that the old generation, who were born during the period of Japanese occupation, has changed its point of view after the advent of BYJ. Most of these fans express their surprise at seeing a new Korean male image, in the form of the

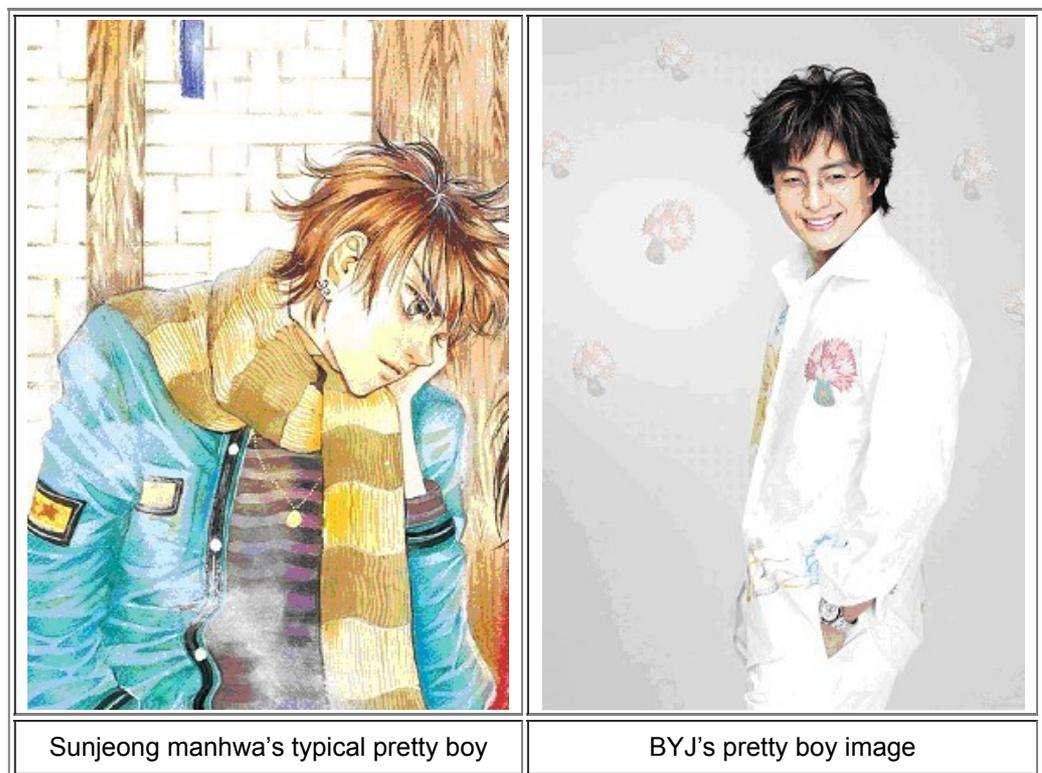
tender and soft BYJ. How, then, this new Korean masculinity has been created and why this is well resonated especially with the Japanese female fans? For this, I will explain the *kkon-mi-nam* syndrome in Korea within the framework of the popularity of *mu-kuk-jok* pretty boy images in the region.

### **Asia's shared imagination, Mu-kuk-jok kkon-mi-nam BYJ**

According to my field research, along with his 'noble' smile and "well-mannered" attitudes such as politeness, BYJ's feminine "pretty" face seems to appeal to Japanese middle-aged female viewers the most. In this manner, he is often described as so called a *kkon-mi-nam* star. The literary meaning of *kkon-mi-nam* is a 'flowery pretty boy'. *Kkon-mi-nam* refers to pretty looking, with smooth fair skin, silky hair and a feminine manner. Originally starting from Japanese *shojo manga* (Korean term *sunjeong manhwa*), the pretty boy images have been repeatedly produced in the Korean entertainment industry since the late 1990s. Television commercials, dramas and billboards have glorified pretty boys. A scholar of Korean literature, Kim Yong Hee explains that "the *kkon-mi-nam* syndrome is developed from a consequence of deconstruction and hybridization of female/male sexual identities rather than males merely becoming feminized" (2003: 104). She argues that the new mixed sexual identity, in the postmodernist popular culture, increases the hallucinated imagination and satisfies the complex human desire (2003: 104). According to Kim, a *kkon-mi-nam* fulfils a complex human (especially female) desire, which macho men are deficient in. The phenomenon declares that the era of the machismo male has passed and the epoch of the new hybrid masculinity has arrived. This is well explained in the trend of transcultural mixtures of male star sexuality in Asian countries; J-pop *Bishonen* bands such as SMAP, Arashi and winds; K-pop boy groups such as HOT, Shinhwa and Dongbangshinki and Taiwanese boy bands such as F4. Specifically the *kkon-mi-nam* images of male Korean stars are the embodiment of hybridized Asian pop cultural icons. The above listed Asian male pop-stars share the images of the hybridized masculinity of girl-like prettiness. Due to these similar feminine images, it is almost impossible to recognize their nationalities by their appearances. This is, I argue, because of a *mu-kuk-jok* (non-nationalistic) trait which has appeared as a result of the Asian transcultural flows of various pop-cultures and pop-cultural products.

Asian pretty boy pop-stars possibly can be described as a globalized, transcultural and non-nationalistic (*mu-kuk-jok*) product. The Korean term *mu-kuk-jok* means 'no nationality' which implies no particular national taste or odour, i.e. culturally odourless as Iwabuchi suggests (2002: 27). BYJ's image is actively accepted in other Asian countries because it reflects the 'odourless' aspect of a *mu-kuk-jok* pretty boy. This can be also explained Appadurai's term mediascape which recognises the media's capabilities to produce and disseminate information and images through transcultural flows (1996: 35). He also suggests the concept of "shared imagination" to explain non-nationalistic sentiments, arguing: "part of what the mass media make[s] possible, because of the conditions of collective reading, criticism, and pleasure, is what I [have] called ... a

“community of sentiment”, a group that begins to imagine and feel things together” (1996: 8). What Appadurai claims here is that collective experiences through the mass media can create ‘sodalities’ of worship and taste. Likewise transcultural media influence between various Asian countries creates odourless – culturally acceptable – presentation of pretty boys. The consequences of mediascapes, various pop-cultural flows, cultural mixing and metamorphosis all combine to create the odourless and *mu-kuk-jok* image of the pan-Asian pretty boy. I argue that BYJ is popular amongst Japanese audiences due to his odourless *kkon-mi-nam* image. This image is culturally acceptable in Japan, because it shares similarities with *shojo manga*’s pretty teen boys or J-pop *Bishonen* bands. BYJ’s hybrid masculinity is a localized form of regional feminine masculinity. Therefore the Japanese audiences can readily desire BYJ’s hybridized masculinity as they are already used to the regionally circulated pretty boy images. The *mu-kuk-jok* hybridized masculinity of BYJ as a result of the transcultural flows is one of the driving forces behind the *Yon-sama* syndrome in Japan, and it is based on the geographical familiarity – “spatial proximity” – between the two countries. Another significant impetus is Japan’s nostalgic desire for their “past” which BYJ’s polite body signifies. This implies that there is a “temporal lag” between the two countries.



### Desiring the past: our memory is in your present body

Japanese fans’ desires towards BYJ’s hybridized masculinity represented in his polite and feminine image, is heavily dependent on the cultural proximity between Korea and Japan based on the geographical familiarity and the transcultural flows of *mu-kuk-jok*. I also argue that another element of Japan’s desire towards BYJ’s hybrid masculinity is their sense of counter-coevality. The middle-aged Japanese fans desire BYJ’s hybrid

masculinity to commemorate their olden days. Shin Kyung-Mi argues that the *Yon-sama* syndrome reflects the Japanese people's yearning for the "good days" of the *Sho-Wa* era (2006: 241). The *Sho-Wa* era lasted from 1926 to 1988, when the former Japanese emperor Hirohito died. During this era, Japan experienced rapid economic growth. Shin states that "*Sho-Wa* nostalgia is a phenomenon which reflects the yearning for the era of the fast economic growth of 1950-1970 by the Japanese who are tired of today's economic depression (2006: 241). As observed above, the fans' quotes mentioning BYJ's politeness, by watching his polite gestures and images, Japanese viewers could fulfil their *Sho-Wa* nostalgia. Shin also adds that the main themes of *Winter Sonata* (pure love, devotion and politeness) resonated deeply with the desire of Japanese viewers in their 30s, to 50s who spent their youth during the *Sho-Wa* era. Ma Jung-Mi argues that "star image is a signifier which can exemplify 'the flow of consciousness' of the time" (Ma 2005). In the case of *Yon-sama* syndrome, BYJ became a star in Japan because of his polite and feminine image which exemplifies the Japanese viewers' longings and desires towards old virtues, which they believe they once had, but now have been lost. For example, one of the participants, Tan stated:

"I think he is a real man. [He is] Intelligent, humble, polite, takes care of others, elegant and has a strong will. We used to have that kind of man in Japan. But now it's hard to find that kind of character [virtue] from young Japanese men."

As is evident in the above quote, his polite image, represented through soft body/hybrid masculinity, projects Japan's imagined past, but his hybrid masculinity is not conceived as "an equal interlocutor but marked by a frozen, immutable temporal lag" (Iwabuchi 2002: 552). NHK producer Kuroiwa explained this as follows:

Only one month after (the drama *Winter Sonata* has been aired) we received many long letters from the audience. "Oh... I had the same experience when I was young..." they recall the memories of their first love and really wanted to express themselves (...). When Bae Yong Joon visited Japan, he acted so gentlemanly and politely. We used to have such men in Japan but not any more. They [the Middle-aged Japanese female fans] really hate the way the Japanese young generations behave.

Both Tan and Kuroiwa pointed out that Japan "used to" have such values, which implies a temporal lag between Korea and Japan. To the Japanese audiences Korea is still the "past" and pre-modern. The above quotes show – through desiring BYJ's soft body – how the middle-aged female fans support Japan's counter-coeval gaze towards Korea. His body has become the repository for the nostalgic desires and memories of the middle-aged Japanese women.

Regarding the notion of nostalgia and memories commoditized in the modern world, John Frow, in his book *Time and Commodity Culture*, articulates that "many accounts of modernity view the world retrospectively, in sadness (Chow quoted in Frow 1997): a *fortiori*, many accounts of postmodernity mourn a loss of history and of memory" (1997:

7). In his view, this memory is not from the historical world, but rather from a world made up of an immense accumulation of “spectacles”. Citing Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*, Frow says:

in Debord’s analysis the ‘present age’ is defined in more precise terms as a set of social relations of production, and the ‘sign’, ‘copy’ and so on reappear as the category of the ‘spectacle’: the fetishized form of the commodity in a system of representation which is in part to be understood as the system of the mass media, including advertising and design; in part more specifically as the social force of television (which can often be directly substituted for the word ‘spectacle’); but at times more generally as the visual, or the forms taken by the gaze within a consumer-capitalist society (1997: 5).

Therefore, in the case of television viewers, their retrospective gaze actually reinforces to desire the “spectacle”, which signifies and copies the real world and real history. In the case of BYJ, the Japanese fans’ retrospective gaze magnifies their desire towards the coded/imagined world, exemplified by BYJ’s politeness in his soft body. Through Japanese fans’ nostalgic gaze, his soft body becomes a spectacle of their glorious past. Their memories and nostalgia are commoditized through detaching the real world and actually exemplify the world’s real unreality. Frow argues that “the time of the commodity is irreversible time: the time of things, and of mass production, the opposite at once of an earlier, cyclical time and of ‘historical time lived by individuals and groups” (1997: 7). Therefore, the commodity demonstrates the images, time, space and even senses which have never existed. If the viewers’ commoditized memories reconstruct the non-existent time of the unreal world, what is it that these viewers are looking for – something that belongs to the past? Through desiring commoditized memories, these viewers might desire the *Other’s* primitiveness. This concept of desiring the *Other’s* primitiveness is derived from the idea of denial of coevalness. Frow says:

The concept of coevalness or cotemporality is intended to specify the conditions under which the interests of both ‘observed’ and ‘observer’ societies can be put into relation. Coevalness is assumed to be grounded in the shared intersubjective time that precedes all more culturally specific experiences of time, and it is this that opens the way for ‘truly dialectical confrontation. The word coevalness is equivalent to the German Gleichzeitigkeit, and is meant to include the senses both of co-occurrence in physical time (synchronicity) and of co-occurrence in typological or epochal time (contemporaneity). (...) Its counter-concept, Ungleichzeitigkeit (non-synchronicity, the uneven layering of times within any historical formation) seems to me in fact to provide a more adequate way of understanding the unequal relations that hold within a synchronic framework characterized by uneven development and a global division of labour. Not everyone occupies the same NOW (...) (1997: 9).

As Frow argues above, each cultural group has a different structure for the experience of time. Frow’s concept of ‘unequal time’ can be explained through my term “counter-coevality”. Counter-coevality stresses its negative view on not sharing the synchronic

time structure between the observer/consumer and the observed/commodity while Frow's idea of non-synchronicity emphasizes the aspect of multiple histories and relativization of cultures. In the case of the *Yon-sama* syndrome, the commoditized memory reinforces the Japanese fans' desire for BYJ's politeness – soft body, which is based on their sense of counter-coevality towards Korea and Korean cultures.

Japan's counter-coevality to Korea is mainly due to the temporally lagged procedure and phase of modernization. Unlike Japan's voluntary active modernization since the mid-1800s, known as *Meiji Ishin* (Meiji Restoration), Korea went through the forced and compressed modernization during the early and mid-1900s led by Japan and America retrospectively. During the colonial era (1910-1945), Japan was able to build up the modern socio-cultural infrastructure relatively fast through exploiting the various colonized Asian countries, including Korea. Matsuzawa Tessei explains that under the Japan's imperialistic aggression and colonization, there was an influx of Korean and Taiwanese immigrants, who were exploited by Japanese government in construction, transport, gravel yards, factory services etc" (1988: 154). Even after the occupation, while Japan experienced rapid economic growth from the 1950s to 1970s (*Sho-Wa* era), Korea had to go through the devastating Korean War and the post-War reconstruction. After the division of the Korean peninsula, along with America's political intervention, (South) Korea experienced a dark era of dictatorships from 1962 to 1988. During the era, under the catchphrase of "turbo modernization", Korea underwent rapid and compressed economic development but at the same time, faced up to the serious socio-political conflicts such as *Kwang-Ju* Massacre, and the retrogression of democracy (Min 2003: 25-58). While Japan experienced a flourishing modernity, Korean had to undergo a filthy, dark era. Likewise, the phases of modernization between Korea and Japan indicate a significant temporal lag. The two countries occupy a "different NOW and THEN". This asynchronous temporal experience could be the main reason of the counter-coeval gaze of the Japanese fans towards BYJ's soft body. This is well-described by Koichi Iwabuchi's argument, which I will now turn to.

As Iwabuchi states that "this is the "Asia" where Japanese consumers find their lost purity, energy, and dreams" ("Nostalgia for a (Different) Asian Modernity: Media Consumption of "Asia" in Japan" 2002: 550), the Japanese audiences find their lost virtues from BYJ's hybridized soft body. Iwabuchi argues that "the politics of the transnational evocation of nostalgia is highlighted when it is employed to confirm a frozen temporal lag between two cultures, when "our" past and memory are found in "their" present" (2002: 549). In the case of BYJ's images from *Winter Sonata*, the Japanese fans find their "past" and "memory" in Korean actor BYJ's "present" body. BYJ's soft body embodies the fans' nostalgia. His body is, however, fetishized by these fans' nostalgic fantasy. His hybridized body is stereotyped by Japanese fan's retrospective gaze, which only has to be remained as pre-modern, feminine and soft. Likewise Japan's nostalgic desire of Korea through BYJ's hybridized masculinity can be described as counter-coeval and to some extent, imperialistic. This counter-coeval view is evident in the Japanese fan's consumption tendency of BYJ's photo album *The Image* Vol. One, which contains

his sexy muscular images. His muscular body reflects the *mom-zzang* syndrome, one of the most popular socio-cultural phenomena in Korea during the early 2000s.

### **Post-modern body, *mom-zzang***

The hybridity of BYJ's image is exemplified by its conscious mixtures of masculinity and femininity, and as observed earlier the *kkon-mi-nam* syndrome is the most significant driving force of this trend. Another possible force behind the construction of BYJ's hybridized masculinity is the "*mom-zzang* syndrome". The literary meaning of *mom-zzang* is 'body-master'. The word *mom* means 'body' and *zzang* is the vernacular for 'the great' or 'the best'. A neologism, *mom-zzang* refers to the socio-cultural phenomenon of having a good looking body in Korea. The term was first used in 2003 (Yu et al 2005). In the case of female, *mom-zzang* normally signifies a skinny and glamorous body while it means 'muscular body' for males. This phenomenon emerged from an Internet web-site run by a 40 year old *mom-zzang* woman and whom has a great – toned, skinny and at the same time curvy – body. Beginning with a couple of photos of this *mom-zzang ajumma* (means a middle-aged woman in Korean) the *mom-zzang* syndrome has swept Korea away.



*mom-zzang* ajumma

Korean people started building up their bodies to make themselves look good and sexually attractive. The result of this socio-cultural syndrome is often evident in the feverous changes of their lifestyles – spending more time and money on their body through yoga, exercise and healthy food. Since then, the *mom-zzang* fever continued to

the 'well-being' phenomenon. Professor of Won-Ju University, Lee Mi-Rim explains this phenomenon:

In the post-modern era, along with the growing interest in human body, creating a great body became a phenomenon (...) The well-being life style – rather spending time and money for sports dance, yoga, meditation, exercise and low fat, organic foods – became a barometer of modernization. The general concept of well-being refers to a life style or culture which pursues a beautiful happy life through the harmony between physical and spiritual health. This well-being life specifies living well; living a healthy, easy and balanced life. It emphasizes the spiritual aspect more than the material aspect (...) (Lee 2005).

Lee points out here that this socio-cultural phenomenon indicates that Korean people's interests have changed from something modern (financial stability and economic growth) to post-modern (such as their bodies and health). The *mom-zzang* syndrome is neither new nor exclusive; it is a global phenomenon, as Appadurai's concept of 'mediascapes' illustrates, spread by new media and communications technologies such as the Internet and satellite television, usually in a form of advertising or commercial application.

This tendency is evident in the globally iconic post-modern lifestyle of "metrosexuality" which is often represented by David Beckham, a soccer player, and Hollywood actor Brad Pitt. According to a British journalist Mark Simpson, metrosexuality is 'the trait of an urban male of any sexual orientation who has a strong aesthetic sense and spends a great amount of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle (Simpson 1994). As Simpson explains, a metrosexual refers a man with an aesthetic style and taste on fashion, beauty, art and culture. While a metrosexual embraces the homosexual lifestyle, it usually refers a heterosexual male who is in touch with his feminine side.

BYJ is often referred to as being a symbol of metrosexuality. According to the article, "Rampant republic of Mr. Beauty, the era of male consumption" of *Film2.0*, in today's Korea, fashionable and beauty-sensitive men have become an object of consumer marketing. At the centre of this trend, there are many metrosexual stars including BYJ (Han et al 2006). For example, from the LG-card television commercial, BYJ is portrayed in a relay of juxtaposed images of a busy urban living professional career man who knows how to enjoy his modern life through leisure, travel, fashion, music and arts. In this commercial, his image is similar to Joon-Sang from *Winter Sonata* (Ma 2005). He is an exact embodiment of urban cool guy:

displaying typical metrosexual life style such as swimming, shooting, traveling in a convertible sports car, walking into the luxurious restaurant while holding a bunch of flowers, and playing a trumpet at a Jazz bar in a fashionable brand suit . (Ma 2005)

BYJ is a commercial barometer for the popularity of metrosexuality. Regarding the global trend of metrosexuality, Kang Yu Jung, the chief editor of a cultural quarterly *Cultura*,

argues that there are two major impetuses for the rise of metrosexuality; one is a natural manifestation of contemporary male desire of becoming more beautiful; the other is a support of gigantic industry capital (Kang 2006). It is a manifestation of hybrid male desire that still maintains an element of masculinity, but paradoxically incorporates feminine yearning of being beautiful.

Apart from the adoption of updated fashions and styles, this paradoxical male desire is also exemplified through various fitness activities such as exercise, yoga and diet to transform his body into a more desired form. As observed from BYJ's LG-card commercial, it is crucial for a metrosexual lifestyle to build an ideal body form through fitness. Starting from gay and metrosexual lifestyle, fitness soon became a vital element of global trendy lifestyle. Barry Glassner explains that fitness has become a widespread and growing interest over the past couple of decades, among middle and upper class Americans (1989: 180). He argues that fitness is a post-modern pursuit because it restores human faith which was lost during the modern era of machine, science and technology (1989: 181). Likewise, represented by a toned and well-being body, maintaining an ideal body form has become an essential part of a model post-modern lifestyle. The *mom-zzang* syndrome is a "localized" form of this global trend of the post-modern lifestyle. This phenomenon proves that Korea shares some post-modern values with the rest of the world, especially the developed Western world. Some scholars criticize that the *mom-zzang* syndrome promotes highly unrealistic ideals about the human physique, not to mention the commercialization of sex (Hong et al 2004). However, it also gives evidence that, having gone through the materialistic modern era, Korea has entered the 'well-being' post-modern era.

### **Localized global/regional masculinity BYJ**

The *mom-zzang* syndrome has led a boom of the well-being/*mom-zzang* marketing in almost every industrial sector. The Korean entertainment industry was not an exception. In particular, star management companies adopt *mom-zzang* marketing to produce their 'star' images. Korean fe/male stars are soon transformed to *mom-zzang* through hard training, exercises, yoga and diet. Especially Korean male *Hallyu* stars aggressively employ their *mom-zzang* images to approach the foreign (mostly Asian) audiences. This phenomenon reinforces the hybridity of Korean masculinity along with the *kkon-mi-nam* syndrome. The Korean male *Hallyu* stars boldly cultivate their hybridized sexual images to appeal to the complex desires of regional audiences. The ideal amalgamation between femininity (*kkon-mi-nam*) and masculinity (*mom-zzang*) of Korean male stars reflects a specific Korean – and Pan-Asian – ideal of a new masculinity. This ideal form of hybrid masculinity implies localization of global masculinity (*mom-zzang*) and regional masculinity (*kkon-mi-nam*).

BYJ is an excellent example of this concept of new masculinity as he aggressively displays the hybridised masculinity in his works including dramas, films, commercials and

photo albums. Among these various works, the photo album and photo exhibition particularly highlight his *mom-zzang* body. In November 2004, BYJ released his first photo album *The Image: Volume One* to commemorate the 10th year of his acting career, followed by photo exhibitions in the major cities in Japan and Korea (Yun 2005). The photo exhibition was held in Seoul, Busan (Korea), Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka and Sapporo (Japan). The exhibitions were attended by more than 600,000 fans and the total earnings were donated to various charitable organizations in both countries (Yun 2005). These exhibitions and photo album have created a big impact in Asia because BYJ has shown a totally different side of his image by showing off his muscular and semi-nude body.



BYJ's muscular image from his photo album

For this *mom-zzang* project, BYJ had to spend the entire three months to only train his body with his personal trainer in California and finally created a whole new body. In Japan, despite the high price of the photo album – 14,700 yen (AU\$170), the 50,000 limited editions were sold out in 5 days. Reprinting meant that more than 200,000 copies of photo books were sold in Japan (K. S. Lee 2004).

### **Soft body of Wen Masculinity**

From the photo album, BYJ displays the images of a tough, dark and bloody muscular fighter, unlike his previous soft and tender image. There are three general responses from the 18 Japanese fans I interviewed, regarding his new *mom-zzang* body; four fans hated it (some even denied it); two fans liked it; and twelve fans reluctantly liked it. Na

and Cha meet the first category; Na said “I don’t like those (muscular and half naked) images. I think they are too sexy.” Cha even said “I didn’t have a look at them yet because I’m afraid that my BYJ fantasy might be destroyed.” She denies BYJ’s new sexy look because she still desires her imagined memory inscribed by Kang Joon-Sang from *Winter Sonata*. On the other hand, only two find him sexy based on those photos. Ba stated:

“I actually became a fan after I saw the photo exhibition. Before this I thought he was just a boring man. Only for those old bored *ajumma* (middle-aged woman), but from those photos I found him very sexy. Then I started watching his dramas.”

Ba is a single woman in her mid-forties. She runs a private English language school and studied in America for five years when she was young. I assume that her background of overseas experience could have given her a different view on BYJ’s muscular body from the other middle-aged Japanese fans. However I will not further discuss the Ba’s case in depth because her opinion is in the minority. The majority of my interviewees show the tendency of reluctant reception for his new sexy body. Ga explained:

“I was so shocked and disappointed when I first saw his nude (and sex scenes) from the movie *Untold Scandal*. I was even crying. (...) when I saw his photo album, finally I decided to take it as one of his challenges and I respect his efforts.”

Sa said “He wasn’t just trying to sell his body through selling photo books. That was a kind of fan service. Also he donates the entire profits to the poor in Asian countries. I respect his works and his will power.”

As observed from these comments, the majority of his Japanese fans do not accept BYJ’s sexy masculine body as it is. Unlike Ba’s open attitude towards his new sexy images, the last group actually add some explanations and other reasons as a precondition of acceptance. As Ga and Sa explained above, it is not his sexy and muscular body they desire; it is something else such as his will power or challenging spirit. Because Ga is one of the most dedicated fans, who is in her mid-fifties she has travelled to Korea to meet BYJ three times during the first half of 2005; she confessed that BYJ is a kind of ‘religion’ for her. Therefore, it is possible to assume that no matter what kind of work BYJ has done, Ga would ‘religiously’ believe that it is worth consuming and she would create justifiable reasons for herself. Some of these ‘reluctant receivers’ suggest other reasons to receive his new images. Ra said:

“I saw his dark and mean side from those photos. I love to discover his other sides.”

Ja also said “It’s okay for me. They are very different from the previous images of his dramas but attractive. But I still prefer the tender and soft side (of him).”

In relation to the reception of his sexy muscular images, Ra and Ja stressed discovering the different aspects and other side of BYJ, rather than receiving his *mom-zzang* body as

it is.

As observed from the above four comments from the reluctant receivers, it is evident that they commonly praised BYJ's effort, will power and spirit. Instead of desiring his sexy body itself, these middle-aged Japanese female fans desire his star persona such as his mentality and cultured manners. This is evident in the questionnaire answers for the question "please explain the most significant aspect of BYJ which attracts you the most". Among 56 participants, more than half of them (32) answered that they are attracted to BYJ because of his personality and "the way he lives and thinks" – which includes ideas such as sincerity, seriousness, humbleness, will-power and hardworking. Han described her reasons as follows:

"[His] appearance is very good. But I'm attracted to what he has inside. Sincerity, humbleness, he always takes his life seriously. He always tries to progress and to become better with challenging spirit like building up his body for a photo book. He has the most important male value inside of him."

Han insists that his mature mentality is the most important factor which makes him an ideal male figure. For her, his muscular body only reinforces his mature mentality. Given their explanations about BYJ's *mom-zzang* body, it is clear that these Japanese fans desire his masculinity in the framework of receiving his mentality not his sexy body. This tendency can be conceptualized through Kam Louie's theory of "Chinese Masculinities" (Louie 2002). He argues that the paradigm of the "binary opposition between *wen* the mental or civil, and *wu* the physical or martial" fit Chinese masculinity, which can not possibly be explained in contemporary Western conceptions of maleness (2002:10). This theory can be broadly applied to the concept of East-Asian masculinities as it is based on the notion of Confucianism which holds a deep influence over East-Asian cultures. According to the dyad *wen-wu*, an ideal man would be expected to embody a balance of *wen* and *wu* (2002:11). However, historically *wen* tended to be considered superior to *wu*. Because Confucius is the god of *wen*, in China the strict Confucian country, *wen* – mental attainment – was often considered a more elite masculine form than *wu* – physical attainment (2002:17-18). In the case of BYJ, the Japanese fans seem to focus on his *wen* masculinity – mental and cultural attainment.

In order to explain the concept of *wen* masculinity, Chinese Studies scholar Riyan Wang suggests the idea of "soft" masculinity demonstrated by traditional talented scholars. She states: "the sexual attractiveness of such educated males mostly derives from their cultural cultivation and literary talent. Masculinity displayed through cultural or literary engagement is soft (although by no means weak) in contrast to that of 'tough guys with muscles'" (Wang 2003). According to Wang, *wen* signifies the cultural/cultured/civil which indicates soft masculinity while *wu* signifies the physical, indicating hard masculinity. However, this dichotomous *wen-wu* concept does not seem to explain the Japanese fans' desire for BYJ's muscular body. These fans desire his muscular – *wu* – body by means of his effort and will power of cultivation – *wen*. No matter how sexy and muscular his body is, for the Japanese fans, it only signifies his mentality and civil-ness. As mentioned

above, in Confucian societies, historically *wen* was considered to be superior to *wu*. Therefore these fans, who must have been influenced by the Japanese Confucian tradition, would prefer *wen* masculinity to *wu* masculinity. That the Japanese fans prioritise *wen* above *wu* is detected by some other quotes, as seen below.

A couple of interviewees, who do not like his muscular body, still repetitively emphasized that they like BYJ because of his manly attitudes or masculine images. However, their perception of “manly” and “masculine” are somewhat different from the general Western concepts of those terms. Ka explained:

“(BYJ is manly) because he is such a faithful, loyal and sincere person (...) He donated such a large amount of money [to the poor and the sick people in Asia]. He always says that he’ll return the blessing [from his fans] to the fans. I respect such loyalty.”

Ka adds “Maybe because Korean men serve the army, they seem reliable.”

Cha said: “Compared to Japanese actors, they [Korean actors] seem more mature [that’s why they are manlier].

As observed, for the Japanese fans, the terms “manly” and “masculine” are understood within the orthodox paradigm of human virtues such as “sincerity” “loyalty” and “maturity”. As a central Confucian virtue, *yi* – righteousness – is “supposed to encase ideas of loyalty, faithfulness, friendship and honour” (Louie 2002: 36), BYJ’s cultured manner and civil body exemplifies Confucian *wen* masculinity. Gan said:

“BYJ is soft, humble, sincere and loyal. He is a man like a real man”

Gan described BYJ as a man like a “real man” (Otokorashii Otoko) mentioning his softness and loyalty. These participants’ responses all focus on how manly BYJ is, while also highlighting his *wen*-masculinity. In particular, apart from Gan, three more participants/interviewees used the term “Otokorashii Otoko” to indicate BYJ’s *wen*-masculinity. Its literary meaning is “a man like a man”, and it can be translated as “a man of men”, “a man like a real man” or “manly like a man should be”. Again, the Japanese fans desire his *wen* – soft body as a form of ideal masculinity. This tendency proves that Japanese fans desire BYJ by means of looking for the traditional virtues not by yearning for a physically attractive muscular body. Japanese fans desire his post-modern *mom-zzang* body through the paradigm of *wen* masculinity, a pre-modern ideology. In the case of Japanese fans’ desire of BYJ’s masculinity, according to my field research, the major driving force is counter-coevality. That is evident in the Japanese fans’ consumption practice of BYJ’s soft body – hybrid masculinity – where they fulfil their desires of nostalgic memories of the virtues of past societies.

## Conclusion

The middle-aged Japanese female fandom of Korean actor BYJ can be conceptualized through the disjunctive post/modern paradigm of time and space between the two countries. This is a reflection of what Appadurai has claimed: “space and time are themselves socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation, and action” (1996: 180). This is evident in a post-modern representation of BYJ’s hybrid masculinity as a form of transcultural product based upon the cultural and geographical proximity and nostalgic desire of Japanese fans based on the different temporal experience.

As examined through the popular contemporary Asian male images of *kkon-mi-nam* and *bishonen*, BYJ represents the hybridized Asian masculinity which is constructed through the repetitive intra-Asian transcultural flows. In addition, *mom-zzang* image expanded BYJ’s hybrid masculinity into the global scale, which implies metrosexuality. This localization of regional and global masculinity subsequently creates *mu-kuk-jok* of BYJ’s body, which enables the transcultural fandom of BYJ in Japan and other Asian countries. For middle-aged Japanese female fans, his *mu-kuk-jok* hybrid masculinity, which demonstrates a feminine, pre-modern and soft body, is nothing but an apparatus to travel to their “past”. This can be conceptualized as consumption of memories and nostalgia through desiring other’s primitiveness, in this case, BYJ’s soft body. BYJ is commoditized, stereotyped and fetishized through the Japanese fans’ gaze that is looking for the “otherness” of traditional or exotic cultures based on their sense of counter-coevality and imperialistic view.

As examined the Japanese fans’ responses to BYJ’s *mom-zzang* body, this counter-coevality is also evident in their pre-modernistic interpretations of his post-modern body. As mentioned earlier, BYJ’s hybrid masculinity (*kkon-mi-nam* and *mom-zzang*) is an embodiment of complex pan-Asian female fantasy and a manifestation of contradictory global male desires. In particular, his *mom-zzang* body represents the coeval ideology of global lifestyle. However, Japanese fans still desire his post-modern body through traditional teleology – in a framework of *wen* masculinity of Confucianism. As examined from Frow’s argument, through his hybrid masculinity, these fans desire their commoditized memories and nostalgia which have never existed. This exemplifies the world’s real unreality, which only emphasizes the other’s primitiveness and our (Japanese) modernity. Given the idea of *otokorashii otoko* (a man like a real man/a man amongst men) which implies traditional *wen* masculinity, it is clear that the Japanese fans desire their “past” in BYJ’s “present” body. This is evidence of Japanese fans’ counter-coeval gaze towards Korea and Korean culture. The middle-aged Japanese female fans invigorate their nostalgic fantasy through desiring the hybridized Korean masculinity, exemplified by Bae Yong-Joon. In this respect, it is noteworthy what BYJ has chosen a blockbuster epic about a loyal King of Koryu Dynasty – *Taewangsashinki* (2007) for his next television drama series. What BYJ is trying to sell next is clear – Korea’s (and regional) history (which is collective memory, more real than reality) and nostalgic fantasy of supposed traditional values.

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### Biographical note

Sun Jung is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne in Australia, currently researching on "Global Korean popular culture and Transcultural Consumption". Jung's research is based on audience reception research in the various cultural markets includes Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Bhutan and Australia. Jung has postgraduate qualifications in cinema studies and communications. Jung also has

previous professional experience as a reporter/journalist in the field of journalism as well as a scriptwriter for Korean film productions.

Contact (by email): [Sun Jung](#)

