

| Editor's Note |

***Hallyu* and Gender I: Women's Identities in Transition in Southeast Asia**

Southeast Asia is one of the world's most diverse and dynamic regions. Comprising of 11 countries and over 650 million people, the geographical proximity of its countries has resulted in many of its nations sharing long-standing cultural heritages, colonial histories and destructive wars, and the interaction of various races, ethnic and language groups and cultures. It is a region where capitalist, socialist and transitional countries co-exist and massive transformations in social, political and economic structures have occurred. With its rapid industrialization and modernization since the mid-20th century, Southeast Asia is also the world's fastest growing region. In spite of various challenges and obstacles, economic growth and structural transformation achieved over the past three decades has been dramatic. Recording an accumulated gross domestic product (GDP) of more than USD 2.9 trillion as of 2018¹, the region accounts for a substantial portion of international trade and the high-tech marketplace².

For Korea, Southeast Asia is an important partner in both political-economic relations and socio-cultural interactions. Socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation between Korea and Southeast Asian nations have been particularly remarkable in recent years thanks to the growing popularity of Korean contemporary culture, also known as the "Korean Wave" (*Hallyu* in Korean). Owing to the widespread use of online and social media, Korean music (K-pop) and TV dramas (K-drama) have fascinated the Southeast Asian audience, particularly women.

In this context of rapid economic and social changes and transnational cultural

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¹ Pletcher, H. (2019, August 9). Gross domestic product (GDP) of the ASEAN countries from 2008 to 2018 (in billion U.S. dollars). Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/796245/gdp-of-the-asean-countries/>

² Wee, R. Y. (2017, April 25). The Economies of Southeast Asian Nations. Worldatlas. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-economy-of-the-southeast-asian-nations.html>

flows, women in Southeast Asia have been most affected in terms of their modern identity and role in society. Having both positive and negative spillover effects, the rise of *Hallyu* in particular has seen Southeast Asian women become dominant consumers of Korean culture, goods and services including not only K-pop and K-drama but also K-beauty, fashion and food. Despite the increasing influence and consumption of *Hallyu* among Southeast Asian women in their daily lives, the impact of *Hallyu* on its female supporters in the region has been rarely discussed, with little qualitative inquiry into their growing empowerment and sense of agency through their acceptance of *Hallyu*.

The articles presented in this special issue of Asian Women 2019 provide a range of qualitative analyses on how women in Southeast Asia strive to attain a modern female identity in the context of various socio-cultural trends such as the spread of *Hallyu*. Md Azalanshah Md Syed and Seung-Ho Kwon examine the popularity of *Hallyu* and the growing debate over its impact on the construction of modern femininity among young Malay women. The authors explain how the emergence of *Hallyu* in Malaysia in the early 2000s not only changed the national landscape of popular culture consumption, but inspired Malay women to reconceptualize representations of modernity. Based on data collected during in-depth interviews with 10 female university students who have experiences as exchange students in Korea, Md Syed and Seung-Ho Kwon suggest that Malay women exercise strategic interpretations in strengthening their identity as Muslim women through the consumption of *Hallyu*.

Based on the idea that proverbs uphold certain values, beliefs and attitudes that persist across generations, Keum Hyun Kim and others examine Malay and Korean proverbs to assess how they maintain female stereotypes and their inferior position in society. The authors highlight the use of proverbs as a tool that manifests, accentuates and perpetuates patriarchal ideas (and narratives) and as a key to understanding gender inequality in Korea and Malaysia, where patriarchal religious traditions are well engrained. They suggest that Korean and Malaysian female stereotypes are culturally based, not necessarily derived from religious beliefs or customs.

Hyunsook Kim and others explain the popularity of *Hallyu* among Myanmar women by focusing on the relationship between women's gender role identity and their perception of femininity representation in *Hallyu* products. Drawing on survey research conducted with 262 Myanmar women working in seven Korean-owned garment factories in Myanmar, the authors examine how gender

role identity among Myanmar women is related to their perception of Korean women's gender role images as represented in *Hallyu* products and their *Hallyu* acceptance. Their findings add to an understanding of the positive impact of androgynous gender role identity on *Hallyu* acceptance and in shaping a modern female identity in Southeast Asia.

In the final article of this special issue, Pirae Kim articulates the influence of gender identity on language learning experiences of Southeast East Asian women who have migrated to Korea with the purpose of marrying Korean men. Based on the autobiographical narratives of marriage migrant women from Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Malaysia, the author finds that the motivation to learn the Korean language among these women is greatly affected by their pursuit of an identity as a good mother, a career woman, a transnational being and a good citizen of Korea, which in turn determines their sense of empowerment in Korean society.

Through the examination of different groups of Southeast Asian women living in Malaysia, Myanmar and Korea, these four articles bring to light the manner in which Southeast Asian women act as active agents in the construction of modern female identities. The studies improve our understanding of the global impacts of *Hallyu* in reshaping female gender identity in Southeast Asia, and provide an insightful addition to the scholarly literature on the intersection of gender, identity and *Hallyu*. Based on the findings of these studies, future research should also be conducted to address a wider range of women's issues in Southeast Asia.

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