

The Influx of East Asian Culture in Nagaland

ALEMINLA

Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences and Languages,
Lovely Professional University, Jalandhar (Punjab) India

ABSTRACT

With the growth of globalization and rapid development of information and communication technology, foreign cultures started infiltrating the state of Nagaland, a small state in North East India with a rich cultural heritage. Despite the presence of indigenous cultural practices and forms, youngsters have been greatly influenced especially with that of Korean and Japanese culture. Media has played a great role in introducing these foreign cultures in the state. This interest got magnified because of the easy accessibility of Korean and Japanese films and soap operas. Though this influx is seen as a threat to the indigenous Naga culture yet it too provides some incentive on developing the traditional culture for the better. This has led to a mixture of the traditional and foreign culture leading to 'Cultural Hybridity' in the region.

Key Words : Popular Culture, Hybridity, Globalisation, K-Pop, Anime, Manga

INTRODUCTION

The world is filled with a number of cultures differing from one country to another and every society has their own culture, with a unique way of food habits, dressing and way of living. We can see that culture is very much dominant in our life and existed among us since time immemorial. As the world developed further, especially with the introduction of technology and mass media, there has been a phenomenon of intermixing of culture and adoption of these different cultures among different people. This has led to the phenomenon known as popular culture where a group of cultured group imitates and adopts a different culture. Popular culture can be simply understood as the culture of the masses. It may include movies, music, clothing, food habits and a host of other practices.

People started following the so called 'Popular Culture' as it grew and started spreading. According to Alan Bloom, a patron in the field of popular culture studies, "this change from a liberal-arts tradition of Culture to the adoption of popular culture marked the end of Western dominance in the world" (The Morung Express, 2014).

Popular culture is very much evident in our day to day lives and it seems to be playing an important role in creating identities among the people. It gives a sense of belonging to the common folk.

Nagaland has also been greatly influenced by this growing popular culture. The population of Nagaland, almost two million people, is tribal and majority of the people are Christians. Most Nagas feel detached racially, historically, culturally and politically from India, and they have been fighting to protect the unique identity of the Nagas from the influence of the mainstream Indians. The first culture that Nagas got influenced with was the Western culture which dramatically changed the way people lived, from animism to Christianity, from traditional education to English education. Nevertheless, a different culture has been making an impact in Nagaland recently- that of Korea and Japan (Saldanha, 2010).

Nagaland, a land of rich folk songs and music, has a rich cultural heritage. However, other music genres, especially Korean and Japanese pop are gaining popularity, and the younger generation seems to enjoy it more than the traditional songs and music. Non-indigenous cultures of Nagaland such as rock contest, selling of

foreign goods, fashion night, beauty contest, etc. as displayed during Hornbill festival, which is a major festival of the Naga's held annually, are gaining much popularity which seems to contribute to a sense of Naga identity. There are influences of many foreign cultures in the region which are changing the lifestyle of the people. This cultural impact among the youths can be considered the effect of the popular culture. If we look at the Naga society, we find that East Asian cultural influence as of the Korean and Japanese culture has become an important element of their identity.

Nagaland, as stated earlier, initially had been influenced by the popular Western culture, which brought in Western style of dressing, eating and behaving. Though Western influence still exists among the people, up recently, Nagas have been commonly influenced by the East Asian culture which is spreading in and around Asia. Thus, Korean and Japanese culture has been seen entering the state. Social media and mass media have played an important role in bringing in these cultural influences in the region. The connection and intermingling of different cultures was made possible with the introduction of mass media through the channel of television, internet and social media. These influences termed as Korean *Hallyu*¹ and Japanese wave can be seen changing the way people live and behave.

Nagaland has been very much influenced by the so called Korean Wave, especially K-pop, which is short for Korean Pop. It is a musical genre which originated in South Korea and is characterized by a wide variety of audio-visual elements. Although it comprises all genres of 'popular music' within South Korea, the term is more often used in a narrower sense to describe a modern form of South Korean pop music covering mostly dance-pop, pop ballad, etc. (The Shillong Times, 2017). The influence of Korean dramas and Japanese animes (Japanese animation) and Mangas (Japanese comics) can also not be ignored. It can be seen prominent among the youths.

According to Gaswami (2017), "Korean and Japanese popular culture has taken such a hold in the minds of the young Nagas that throughout the region they

have started adopting Korean and Japanese hairstyles, makeup, and fashion." Their outfits, hair styles and fashion as well as the combination of dance, music and entertainment make these cultures quite attractive among the youths. Lucy Nelia, editor-in-chief at destinationkpop.com says, "I think the appeal of K-Pop lies with its concept of fresh, colorful, youthfulness, with a certain amount of innocence that you do not see in other music industries anymore. Despite the usual cynicism, the fact remains that it connects with the youth in a huge way."

Though Naga ancestors and elders have tried their best again to preserve the rich heritage of their ethnic culture, it is evident that the younger generation today, being influenced by many other cultures have somewhat fallen back from their old tradition and continues to imitate the foreign cultures. The culture that we find today, as adopted by the younger generation, is a combination of the ethnic as well as the foreign culture, which infiltrated into the ethnic Naga culture. This has changed the way Nagas use their traditional attires and has also affected their way of living. This introduction of foreign cultures have changed the way people identify themselves and has changed their mind set for better or for worst.

Foreign cultures in Nagaland:

Culture is not inherent in anyone; it is learnt from one generation to another from parents and ancestors. People learn about their cultures through socialization, from the time they were born. It is learnt through imitation and through language. One important aspect of culture is that it does not remain the same. It keeps on changing and keeps evolving according to changing times in order to meet the needs of the present scenario. Culture cannot stay constant. What was considered acceptable in the past may not be appropriate in the present times. Thus, it becomes necessary that culture evolves itself so that people can adjust to the changing times. Certain norms and customs finds a need to change as people's perspective widen and people's thoughts broaden.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a change came about in cultural analysis and scholars started to take note of the

1. *Hallyu* is a term coined by the Chinese media, which literally means 'Korean Wave'. It was coined in mid- 1999 and refers to the phenomenon of Korean entertainment and popular culture. These have become popular worldwide in the past two decades (Gaswami, 2017; Chitranshi, 2012). It refers to the popularity of Korean culture around the world, particularly in and around Asia (Saldanha, 2010). It is a collective term used to refer to the phenomenal growth of Korean popular culture, which includes music, movies, drama to online games and the Korean cuisine (Kshetrimayun and Chanu, 2008).

so called popular culture seriously. Popular culture is the culture of daily life of the large number of people. Everyday activities like dressing style, eating habits, use of words etc. are included in popular culture. Popular culture came about with urbanization and modernization together with the influence of mass media. Nowadays, every culture is influenced by other culture as people try to adopt different cultural practices. There is an exchange of cultural practices and beliefs among the people.

Societies in the past had been influenced by 'cultural imperialism' which is the process of promoting one culture over another. In the present times, the influence of Western culture, mostly American culture, popularly known as Americanization is of significance. One important aspect of it is the phenomenon of McDonaldization which has spread throughout the globe. Coined by George Ritzer in his book *'The McDonaldization of Society'* (1993), the concept is embedded in the process of rationalization. The introduction of such western style of living played a role in the cultural change of the Indian society. India had since then been very much influenced by the Western culture and people starting changing their lifestyle and behavior according to the ways of the west. India's most popular Bollywood film industry is itself an influence of American- style film making which is popularly known as Hollywood. This process of Westernization also affected Northeast India, particular in Nagaland.

Western style of food habits, dressing style and behaving were very much witnessed among the North eastern people. They were influenced not only by their way of dressing and eating but also by their movies and music. Thus, English became a widely spoken language among the people. This Western culture was dominant among the people for a long time until East Asian culture came about and started influencing the people. The Nagas, as they were, traditionally, had many customs and rituals related to their ancestors. Nagas had their own distinct cultural beliefs and customs. But, the coming of the British together with the change in times had changed their traditional culture. The introduction of different other cultures, such as the East Asian culture, through mass media had greatly affected the younger Naga generation. Naga youngsters were fascinated by the influx of this new culture and willingly started imitating and adopting this new foreign culture.

Korean culture became popular through Korean dramas which were aired in cable TV channels earlier

before it was aired through a channel now known as 'Arirang'. Later, the popular Japanese animation movies or series known as 'Anime' also became prominent especially among the male youngsters which were aired in the TV channel 'Animax'. During those periods 'Arirang' and 'Animax' were the mostly watched television channels at home. Thus came the introduction of these two cultures among the people of Nagaland which later had a great impact on the behavior and lifestyle of the people. As time passed, people became more addicted to the Korean dramas and Japanese Animes and they started wanting to know more about their cultures.

The business persons in Nagaland took this advantage and started selling Korean CDs and DVDs initially. Students started buying and exchanging these Korean CDs and DVDs. Anime CDs came much later and the pace of its influence grew much slower compared to Korean Dramas especially because it was popular mostly among the male youngsters. With developments in information technology and mass media and with the knowledge to utilize these modern developments, youngsters started to watch Korean dramas online. They were also introduced to K-pop, short for Korean Pop which is very popular these days. Youngsters also came to know about 'Mangas', which are Japanese comic books.

The initially stage which started with Korean dramas and Japanese 'Anime' evolved so much that slowly they started learning their language, that is Korean and Japanese for fun to interact with their friends. Later people started knowing more about their lifestyle and their food habits through Korean dramas and Japanese movies, which led them to become more fascinated in their culture. These cultures became so influential that youngsters started imitating the living style of Korean and Japanese people in their everyday life.

Japanese culture might not have become very popular among the people of Nagaland initially as compared to Korean culture. But later, efforts by youngsters like that of Beibe Natso started focusing on Japanese culture through the introduction of NAJ (Nagaland Anime Junkies), a Facebook page for anime lovers. This group started growing and organized the NAJ Cosfest in the later years which grew much and is now very popular among the people, both young and old. The two cultures evolved and grew together in the region affecting every aspect of life among the people.

The East Asian Culture: People's Perception:

Today youngsters are influenced by everything Korean and Japanese. Youngsters have started adopting much of the practices of these two cultures and has identified mostly with these cultures in spite of existence of other cultures around them. The visit of two Korean celebrities, 'Pops In Seoul' queen VJ Isak and singer Ilac in 2008 during the 'Hornbill Festival' was a great phenomenon which garnered more interest among the young Nagas. Nagas became interested in Koreans because, according to a teenager, "They are beautiful people" (Lipokshila, personal communication, July 7, 2018). Koreans are also well mannered and the way they present them are organized. One teenager states that she likes everything about Korea, "their tradition and the way they respect their elders" (Ajung, personal communication, July 7, 2018). K-pop fans in Nagaland are also of the view that they like K-pop because it has multi-genre, their dressing styles are fashionable, and their choreographies are cool. They also feel that K-Pop singers are good singers and dancers and are inspirational to them. Many K pop fans are amazed by the hard work K-Idols put on their work and are inspired to work hard like them.

Despite the attractive display of Korean music and drama, there are always drawbacks to everything. While Korean culture might be helping youths to behave in a respectful manner and develop themselves into responsible people, it also has its ill effects. A K-pop fan states, "They [North-eastern] try to be like those idols [Korean] who earn a lot from their careers, their fashion sense and their styles. But they themselves earn nothing and try to copy their [actors] lifestyle forgetting their own goals and dreams leading them to become depressed later on in life" (Dei Dei, personal communication, October 20, 2018). Another K-Pop fan says that, "It [Korean influence] is not good as many youngsters tend to follow their styles especially their hairstyles and the dressing styles which is not appropriate for them in many ways. Following styles and trend is not a bad thing but too much is not good, we need to know the limit which most of the youngsters do not. Also, the movies and the dramas affect our health, sleeping pattern and most importantly our studies as when we become so much into it, we forget the time flow" (Apoukung, personal communication, October 20, 2018).

The Japanese culture was also introduced to the people through media, initially through the channel

'Hungama', an Indian- based channel which aired Japanese cartoons like 'Doraemon', 'Keteretsu', 'Shinchan' etc. It was the initial stage which later led to the rise of many 'Otakus'. Eventually, a channel solely for Japanese anime started, which was known as 'Animax'. This channel aggravated the interest the youths on anime and compelled them to know more about the Japanese culture. The Director of Japanese Language and Studies, Yojiro Tanaka states that, "Japanese culture has started making its Japanese impact felt across the globe and eastern India is also not untouched."

Japanese culture has a reputation for being considered chic and cool by young people all around the world. Thus, it is not a surprise that Indian youths, especially North-eastern youths, looking for another form of culture that is different from Hollywood and Bollywood have developed an interest in the Japanese culture (Pillalamarri, 2014). One youngster states, "Their culture fits every genre for both young and old. They are open minded people; weird sometimes but openly accept new things, Japanese culture is a culture to love" (Jamir, October 20, 2018).

People think that it is good to get exposed to other cultures. According to observation, kids these days are more into being creative. Instead of being lazy they look for tutorials to make cosplay outfits, which makes them progressive, creative and productive. It is good that we are catching up with the rest of the world. "We are passionate about manga, anime and cosplay. It's a hobby. Slowly, the perception that our tribe is wasting its time or is good-for-nothing is changing," says AngutobiShohe, a NAJ member (Kamarkar, 2018). Events such as cosplay and Kpop contest which are organised in the region also makes youngsters try their best to use their talents and show their creativity.

Japanese and Korean cultures are followed by Nagas because we cannot actually relate with Bollywood. We are influenced to these cultures because many believe that we look like them and somewhat behave like them. They resemble us much more closely or rather we resemble them, their taste in food and music is much more similar to us as compared to the rest of India. Most North Easterners also prefer Korean and Japanese movies over Bollywood. We can also see that many youngsters learn languages like Japanese and Korean instead of learning Hindi. Talk about music and most North Easterners prefer English or Korean and Japanese songs as to that of Hindi songs. Even when it comes to

fashion, North East people prefer more fashionable clothes as worn by East Asians for daily use. Thus, it is evident that North Easterners can relate more to the East Asian culture and thus they are more welcoming to them and follow them more instead of following the Indian culture.

However some people are not very supportive of these foreign cultures; they believe that it is more important to promote our own culture because if we continue adopting new cultures, we might lose our heritage which was inherited from our forefathers and might eventually lose our identities. They believe that we better focus on our own Naga culture as we do not have much events for our culture; a person believes that this will be better for the youngsters as it will help them know their roots. He believes that foreign influences are good but it might lead to withering of our traditional culture because according to him, when we focus more on westernization our culture will go down.

We should of course not forget our roots and our identity but adopting new cultures should also not be an objection and must be welcomed if it is for the of the people. According to a teenager, "As long as we know our culture, outside influence is okay" (Vileituolie, personal communication, July 8, 2018). It is very important for people to understand that no matter what other culture might come and influence them, they should remember and preserve their ethnic culture.

Accepting Change in One's Culture:

Every culture needs some kind of inspiration from another culture. No culture can survive by sticking to only its own culture. The world arena has become a mixture of different cultures. The intermixing of different cultures turns our attention to the phenomenon commonly known as 'Cultural hybridity'. Hybridity is one important characteristics of our era. According to Kraidy (2005), "It captures our spirit with its obligatory celebration of cultural differences and fusion. It characterises with globalization of the unrestricted economic exchanges and the unavoidable transformation of all cultures." "When a person from a different culture adds to another culture, it may be known as cultural hybridity. Hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within a community.

The word hybridity is usually associated with biology. For example, as used in horticulture, the term refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, 'hybrid' species (Mambrol, 2006). However, in cultural studies, hybridity represents

a wide record of "multiple identity, cross-over, pick-'n'-mix, boundary-crossing experiences and styles, matching a world of growing migration and diaspora lives, intensive intercultural communication, everyday multiculturalism and erosion of boundaries" (Pieterse, 2001). Homi K. Bhabha (1998) is generally associated with the term 'Hybridity', for him, "hybridity takes place in conditions of inequality, during the attempted imposition of culturally hegemonic practices. Hybridity simple may mean multiple cultural attachments on identity or the process of mixture of cultures." Thus, one may understand hybridity as a process where one culture takes some practices or beliefs of another culture and forms a kind of culture which is a blend or mixture of both the cultures. This creates a type of culture different from the original culture as well as different from the foreign culture. It basically creates a new type of culture by transforming the original culture with the influence of the foreign culture.

This type of hybridity culture can be seen in clothing style as in, when people try to modify one's own cultural attires with western influences. Even food habits change with influence. We can take the example of KFCs or McDonalds which were apparently started by the Western countries but are popular even in other developing countries. But what is impressive about it is that KFC and McDonald's restaurants in other countries include not only the original snacks menu but also other snacks which were developed depending on the food habits of that particular country. For Example, McDonalds is mostly popular for its beef-based Big Mac but in India half of its menu is vegetarian and the indigenously developed McAlooTikki burger is quite popular among the people (Mukherjee, Bailay, 2012). According to Vikram Bakshi (2012), a manager of McDonald's restaurants, "We see a huge potential (for veg outlets) as, by nature, Indians are religious." Even in KFC, which is based on Chicken and chicken burgers, India developed vegetarian based menu including Paneer Zinger and Veg Twister, Veg strips, Veg Rice Bowl etc. It is not only India but many other countries also developed their own menu depending on which type of food will be more popular among their native people.

Also; presently, with much influence from East Asian cultures as of Korean and Japanese in and around Asia, Bollywood filmmakers started copying from Korean films and dramas. Though initially Indian filmmakers were influenced by Hollywood movies, up recently they are turning their gaze to South Korean cinema. A filmmaker,

Sanjay Gupta (2015) states, “There is a reason why Korean films’ stories resonate with Indian audiences in a big way – they are high on emotional quotient and plus, there are conflicts [in them]. That’s what we – as Indian film-makers – also look for. In a nutshell, Korean films are way more accessible, affordable and adaptable [as compared to Hollywood film].”

Together with this, Korean and Japanese Cuisine are also becoming quite popular among the people in India. There are restaurants in India which cater to this need. For example, the ‘K2 Korean Restaurant’ in Haryana, ‘Busan Korean Restaurant’ and ‘Gung The Palace’ in New Delhi. Even sushi restaurants have opened up all over India, in all of its major cities. For example, the ‘En-Japanese Restaurant, the ‘Megu Restaurant’ and the ‘Fuji Japanese Restaurant’ in New Delhi. Japanese and Korean cuisine is slowly spreading. It was earlier believed that Indians would not be able to handle foreign cuisines, however young Indians show their interest to try out new food and accept different cultures.

Korean cuisines have also opened up in Nagaland. Andrew Park from Korea took the initiative to open a remarkable Café in Dimapur known as the ‘Korean Uncles’ Café’. He set this restaurant up because of the rising popularity and demands for Korean food. He initially started by opening a stall at ‘Night Bazaar’ during the ‘Hornbill Festival’ in Kohima which was received successfully. He then opened a similar stall during the Dimapur ‘Night Carnival’ which was also successful. Enthusiast by this he decided to open the restaurant. Apart from Korean food, the restaurant also sells Korean goods like clothes, accessories and shoes. It also sells Korean make up and skin care products which are very popular (Longchar, 2016).

The Naga culture is facing tremendous challenge from modernisation and globalisation. Globalisation has played a tremendous role in changing the way people live. Its impact can be most felt in the area of ethnic cultural products. It is so because to meet global standards, most cultural products were modified and re- designed, sometimes even leading to complete transformation. For example, male traditional shawls are made in jackets and sold in tourist spots with its tradition and history totally ignored. One good thing about cultural hybridity is that it makes people accept other beliefs, practices, language etc. But on the other hand cultural hybridity or mixing of foreign culture to one’s own culture may lead to losing of one’s own cultural heritage.

No doubt, it is important to know about other culture and imitate the good in them too but this should not lead to the degradation of the ethnic culture. Care must be taken to see that these cultures do not threaten the Naga culture or practices. It is important for the society to see that the culture that is being imitated and adopted by their fellow members, especially the youths are positive in nature. Their imitation of such foreign culture must not threaten the old traditional cultures of the society which need to be preserved and carried on but it must instead help in the development of the present and future generation, also keeping in mind that any new culture adopted should go hand in hand with the traditional culture.

Conclusion:

This research paper gave an explanation of popular culture that exists today and how it is affecting the people. This phenomenon has engulfed almost all the world. The research focused especially on the North East state of Nagaland in India and how people are changing their lifestyle due to the popular culture adopted by them. It was mainly influenced by the influx of the East Asian culture, mostly pertaining to the Korean and the Japanese culture. The influence of East- Asian culture has led the younger generation away from their traditional culture. We can indeed see that youngsters these days are getting too much influenced by these foreign cultures, that of Korean and Japanese that they do not get the time to learn about their own traditional cultures. They do not discuss about traditional values and practices among their friends and instead discuss about Korean dramas and Japanese animes. They have also become disinterested in cultural folk songs as they are more interested in K-pop (Korean pop) and J-pop (Japanese pop) music. Much of the values of traditional culture are also forgotten by the younger generation as they are more intrigued by the values and practices of Korean and Japanese culture.

This imitation has led to a difference in thinking of perception of the younger generation with the older generation. Parents and elders started having a critical view of these influences. They were scared that this influx of foreign culture would lead to the loss of their traditional culture and eventually the traditional culture will diminish to nothing original but a mix of foreign cultures. They wanted their kids and the youths to concentrate more on their own traditional culture instead of imitating other foreign cultures.

However, there was also not much incentive taken

by the people especially the elders to educate youngsters in traditional culture which is one reason why youngsters are getting lured away from the traditional culture and are being more influenced by other foreign cultures. Together with difference in interest between the older and younger generation, they do not seem to understand one another because of generation gap as things have changed and is not the same as in the past. Thus, both the group should try to understand one another. The younger should understand the importance of preserving their traditional cultures while the older generation should also understand the needs of the present generation and try to bring up events where youngsters can participate and which will teach youngsters of their rich cultural heritage and how important it is to preserve it.

Youngsters should also be made to participate in cultural events so that they learn about their culture by being a part of it. Even at home parents should try to teach their kids about their cultural values. Of course it might not be accepted with a welcoming heart at the beginning but steps can be taken slowly so that what is important is preserved by the people and no matter what they adopt from other cultures the roots of their ethnic culture remain as it should be without being altered by any foreign influences.

We can see that imitation of cultures is not just undesirable but also important in some ways. It is important to understand that in this era of cultural hybridity where every culture is influenced by another culture changes in one culture by borrowing from other culture is indeed necessary. It is vital to know about other cultures and learn from them as every culture has some good that needs to be adapted by every other culture. Mixing of culture is prominent presently as every culture is unique and has its own significance.

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