

IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
KOREAN WAVE

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Impact of Government Policies on the Development of the Korean Wave

The Korean Wave has turned into a global phenomenon over the past decade.

Whereas the popularity of the Korean Wave was mostly limited to Asia until the end of the 2000s, it started to spread all over the world from the early 2010s and evolved from niche cultural trend status to a global phenomenon. In a world dominated by Western cultural hegemony, South Korea has become one of the few countries that can export many forms of its cultural content globally. This thesis investigates the reasons behind the spread of the Korean Wave, and discusses the role of the South Korean government and Korean conglomerates, as well as the importance of digital platforms. This study also explores the contribution of the development and spread of the Korean Wave to South Korea.

ÖZET

Hükümet Politikalarının Kore Dalgası'nın Gelişimine Etkisi

Kore Dalgası son on yılda küresel bir fenomene dönüştü. Kore Dalgası'nın popülaritesi 2000'li yılların sonuna kadar çoğunlukla Asya ile sınırlıyken, 2010'ların başından itibaren tüm dünyaya yayılmaya başlamış ve niş kültürel trend statüsünü geride bırakarak küresel bir fenomen haline gelmiştir. Batı kültürünün egemen olduğu bir dünyada Güney Kore, birçok kültürel içeriğini küresel olarak ihraç edebilen sayılı ülkelerden biri olmuştur. Bu tez, Kore Dalgası'nın yayılmasının ardındaki nedenleri araştırıyor ve Güney Kore hükümeti ile Koreli şirketlerin, rolünü ve dijital platformların önemini tartışırken, aynı zamanda Kore Dalgası'nın gelişiminin ve yayılmasının Güney Kore'ye olan katkısını inceliyor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, a new term has entered the vocabulary of many people from all around the world, the term *Hallyu*.¹ This term was used by the Chinese media for the first time back in the 1990s to express the deep interest the Chinese people were showing in Korean popular culture.² As it can be understood from its meaning, the word Hallyu, or as it is often referred to as the Korean Wave, is more about the effect the Korean popular culture creates in the territory outside of South Korea rather than Korean popular culture itself.

The wave first started attracting people from South Korea's neighboring countries around the mid-1990s. Korean television series, which are often referred to as dramas or K-dramas, mainly revolved around stories of romance and heartbreaks and had underlying themes of Confucian beliefs, such as family values, or respect towards the elderly, attracted Asian countries that share similar sentiments. In the early 2000s, the slowly expanding cultural trend took a leap with the release of the drama, *Winter Sonata*. The drama had become such a success in Japan that during its airing time, it doubled the average rating and created a devoted fan base that suffered from, as they call it, *Yon-sama* syndrome due to its lead actor.³

In the following years, the Korean Wave continuously expanded its borders and reached other parts of the world taking more people from North and South America, Europe, and the Middle East under its influence. However, unlike many Asians who met with Hallyu through dramas, the majority had their first exposure to

¹ Hallyu 한류 (韓流) consists of the Chinese characters "han" meaning Korea and "ryu" meaning wave.

² Lee, "A Decade of Hallyu Scholarship: Toward a New Direction in Hallyu 2.0.," 6.

³ Lee, "A Soft Power Approach to the 'Korean Wave'," 131.

Hallyu through the singer Psy's famous track called *Gangnam Style* in 2012. The song was a success that no one could anticipate; it had taken the whole world by storm. From then on, Korean popular music (K-pop) turned into the driving force of the wave. The K-pop group BTS has been named the world's biggest boy band, hit the Billboard Top 100, made it to the cover of TIME magazine, and received Grammy nominations; all these achievements were a first for Koreans.

Just as the territory that the Korean Wave spread has grown, its contents have also expanded over time. In its current form, Hallyu consists of television series, music, film, video games, variety shows, fashion, cosmetics, webtoons,⁴ food, and so much more. In 2019, the movie *Parasite* shed another light on Hallyu when it won the Best Picture Oscar. In 2021, the Netflix series *Squid Game* became the most-watched Netflix show ever and won critically acclaimed awards including Golden Globes and Primetime Emmy Awards. South Korea's gaming market is also leading the way globally, taking fourth place only after the United States, China, and Japan. As a result of the expansion of core Hallyu forms of production, related areas such as tourism, food, and cosmetic products are also on the rise.

Today, in a world dominated by Western cultural hegemony, South Korea is among the few countries that can globally export many forms of its cultural content. The Korean cultural industry was developed as a national project to brace globalization as well as neoliberalism. The 1997 IMF financial crisis was a turning point for the South Korean government to understand that the nation's economy cannot solely depend on export-led industries. In the meantime, research that had been conducted by the Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology showed that the box office grossing of *Jurassic Park* was equal to foreign sales of

⁴ Webtoons are a type of digital comic that originated from South Korea.

1.5 million Hyundai cars.⁵ Thus, the government realized that economic gain was possible through the commodification of culture. Understanding that culture can play an important role in the development of the country, the South Korean government decided to take the necessary steps for the development of the cultural industry by joining hands with the private sector, *chaebol* (conglomerates).

A country that used to be overshadowed by its neighboring countries and deemed as a “shrimp among whales,” a country that had gone through a devastating war that resulted in the separation of the country, South Korea had come a long way. It managed to turn into a democracy from a dictatorship and form a fully developed economy from being the poorest country after the Korean War. Today, South Korea stands as the 10th largest economy in the world; it possesses many world-renowned brands, such as Hyundai, Kia, Samsung, LG, and SK Group, and billion-dollar companies such as Naver, and Kakao. In addition to all of these, South Korea also turned itself into the new source of popular culture and one of the major cultural content exporters in the world with high-quality television shows, spectacular music performances, and critically acclaimed cinema. And all of these were achieved in the span of 70 years.

Within this context, the primary goal of this thesis is to investigate the reasons behind the worldwide spread of the Korean Wave and discuss the role of the South Korean government and chaebols. This thesis, first of all, explores the cause and background of this phenomenon. It looks into Korean history and the cultural policies during the military dictatorship and analyzes the reasons behind the rise of the Korean Wave after achieving democracy in the 1990s. This thesis argues that one of the major underlying reasons for the emergence of this phenomenon was South

⁵ Shim, “Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia,” 15.

Korea's transition from an authoritarian regime to a civilian government. Only after reaching democracy, South Korea could find its place in the global arena and its citizens were free to enrich the culture without restrictions. In order to support this argument, the main differences between the cultural policies of the authoritarian regime and the democratic period will be delineated. Moreover, this thesis will look into the ways the South Korean government supports the cultural industries to develop cultural content and expand it globally. It will delineate the cultural policies that were implemented by the governments that come after the transition of democracy to support the cultural industries and related industries. Besides the government's efforts, this thesis will also look into the other contributing factors that helped the expansion of the Korean Wave, such as the private sector and digital media. Lastly, this thesis will focus on the impact of the Korean Wave on the country's image, the soft power effect of it, and how the government used the Korean Wave to brand the nation.

1.1 Theoretical framework

The rise of the Korean Wave raised curiosity and a need to explore and understand this phenomenon. Even though Hallyu dates back to the end of the 1990s, over the past decade it had reached global popularity. And although Hallyu had been a topic of research in Asian academia since the early 2000s, parallel to the increase in its popularity, studies on this subject have increased globally. Chua Beng Huat, Iwabuchi Koichi, Cho Wu-Suk, and Doobo Shim were some of the first scholars who treated Hallyu as an academic subject. Scholarly discussions on Hallyu often focus

on the authenticity of the wave, the government's involvement, the manufacturing of cultural content, and its benefits to the country.⁶

Theories that have been discussed by scholars since the beginning of Hallyu also have changed drastically through time; during the first years of Hallyu, when its popularity was prominent only within Asian territories; scholars often argued that cultural proximity theory (Joseph Straubhaar) could offer the explanation of its success.⁷ Cultural proximity theory which is a comparative advantage factor based on cultural similarities was considered as an explanation for the greater acceptance of Korean popular products in Korea's neighboring countries.⁸ It was believed that due to the resembling backgrounds and the cultural similarities including Confucian ethics, language, humor, or food a Korean Wave was formed within these countries.

Throughout the years Hallyu began to spread to non-Asian countries and when the global reach of Hallyu is taken into consideration, cultural proximity theory cannot possibly explain the success of this phenomenon. When the western elements, especially the American influence, that are prominent in the contents of Hallyu are taken into consideration, hybridity theory seems to be more fitting, as it has been used by many scholars such as Jin Dal-yong, Ryoo Woong-jae, Doobo Shim who work on Hallyu.⁹ Hybridity in cultural studies has been approached in various ways that mainly revolve around two different perspectives; one argues that hybridity occurs when two separate cultures mix together and the other argues that

⁶ Kim, "Past, present and future of Hallyu (Korean Wave);" Jin, *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in The Age of Social Media*; Jin and Yoon, "The Korean Wave: Retrospect and Prospect;"

⁷ Kim, "Past, present and future of Hallyu (Korean Wave); Yoon and Jin, *The Korean Wave: Evolution, Fandom, and Transnationality*; Jin, *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in The Age of Social Media*; Lee, "A Decade of Hallyu Scholarship: Toward a New Direction in Hallyu 2.0."

⁸ Lee, "A Decade of Hallyu Scholarship: Toward a New Direction in Hallyu 2.0.," 7.

⁹ Jin, *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in The Age of Social Media*; Ryoo, "Globalization, or the Logic of Cultural Hybridization: The Case of the Korean Wave;" Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia"

hybridization or hybridity occurs from the interweaving of elements between the colonizer and colonized and results with the creation of new transcultural form.¹⁰

And in the case of the Korean Wave, cultural hybridization occurred as local cultural agents and actors interacted and negotiated with global forms.¹¹ Due to its hybrid nature, Korean cultural content becomes more universal and easier for foreigners to digest. Therefore, hybridity theory will be used in this thesis while explaining the underlying reasons for the expansion of Hallyu.

Moreover, this thesis examines the Korean Wave from the aspect of cultural diplomacy and makes use of the soft power and nation branding concepts as reasons for governments' initiative to invest in the cultural content industry. Broadly, cultural diplomacy refers to a country's strategic efforts to promote its national interests by using its own culture. On the other hand, the concept of soft power was first proposed by Joseph Nye, who defines power as the "ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes that one wants."¹² Nye uses the term soft power as the power that comes through attraction. Thus, a country's attractiveness stems from its culture and political standpoint. And Hallyu serves as an excellent model for this concept, as it will be delineated, South Korea has managed to build its attractiveness throughout the years through this phenomenon.

Nation branding is a concept that is related to soft power and used as a way to enhance the value or the appeal of a nation's image in the minds of foreign people.¹³ South Korea began giving proper importance to the national brand since the Lee Myung-bak period (2008-2013) with the establishment of the Presidential Council on

¹⁰ Jin, "The Rise of the New Korean Wave," 13.

¹¹ Shim, "Hybridity and the rise of Korean popular culture in Asia," 38.

¹² Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, x.

¹³ Anholt, *Places: Identity, Image and Reputation*.

Nation Branding (PCNB) in 2009.¹⁴ As it will be further explained, South Korea designates the cultural industries to revive the country's image.

1.2 Sources

Throughout the thesis primary and secondary sources have been used. The primary sources include official documents by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST), as well as official reports and White Papers by Korean governmental authorities such as the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Korean Culture and Content Agency (KOCCA). Secondary sources consist of academic journals, books, news articles, websites, and newspapers.

The chapters are designed as follows in the thesis; Chapter 1 gives an introduction to Hallyu, where South Korean popular culture stands in the 21st century and the reasons for the government's interest in Hallyu. It also mentions the theories that will be used throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2 briefly looks into the pivotal points in the history of modern South Korea before entering a democratic period, and the steps that have been taken to improve the economy. It also dwells on the cultural policies of the authoritarian regime. This chapter also inspects the reason why the government changed its approach toward the cultural industries and looks into the developmental process of Hallyu.

Chapter 3 inspects the different periods of Hallyu and what they entail, and how they are differentiated from one another. It delves into the reason behind its spread and the role that the government plays in hand with the private sector. It looks

¹⁴ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave," 5524.

closely into some of the cultural policies that have been implemented and their associated effects.

Chapter 4 deals with Hallyu's overall contribution to the country. How South Korea uses Hallyu as a tool for cultural diplomacy, benefits from the soft power aspect of Hallyu, and uses it as a nation branding strategy.

And lastly, the concluding Chapter 5 gives a summary and discussion of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

THE RISE OF THE KOREAN WAVE

This chapter will very briefly summarize the historical development of modern South Korea. This chapter will also explain the reasons behind the government's interest in the cultural industries, and delineate the progression of the Korean Wave or Hallyu from its initial stage to its current state.

2.1 Introduction

The Republic of Korea, with its centuries-old rich history, still carries the culture and traditions of the Joseon dynasty that lasted for more than 500 years. With its state structure based on Confucian beliefs, the Joseon dynasty had a relatively peaceful history and a rather quiet one that often led to being considered as the *hermit kingdom*.¹⁵ However, that was until Japan's interest in Korea took a different turn.

Japan's colonization of Korea lasted from 1910 to 1945. And it would be an understatement if we say this period changed the life of every single person living in Korea in every aspect possible. Japanese rule left deep scars on the country that Koreans still remember up to this day.

On August 15, 1945, Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of Japan, putting an end to World War II and ultimately an end to the Japanese hegemony over Korea. The day is marked as the National Liberation Day in calendars and is still celebrated both in South and North Korea. With the Japanese surrender, the course of Korean history changed and a new chapter has begun.

¹⁵ The term was first coined by William Elliot Griffis in his book *Corea: The Hermit Nation in 1882*. The hermit kingdom term was used for Korea due to the country's doors being closed to the rest of the world with the exception of China and later on Japan, through unequal trade agreements and Japan's eventual annexation of the Korean Peninsula in 1910.

However, when the colonization period had ended Korea was left with too little of what it had before, and unfortunately, that was not the end of the hardships that the country would have to face.

After 35 years of being a colony of Japan, Korea was only free to come under the tutelage of the Soviet Union and the United States. The United States' fear of the Soviet dominance over the territory due to the possible security problems it can cause in the future led Washington to establish the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK).¹⁶

In 1945, Korea was divided at the 38th parallel by the Americans, in a way that the United States would have the capital on their side.¹⁷ Even though the line was intended as a temporary division of the country, it ended up being not. Three years after the rule of the Army Military Government (AMG), on August 15 1948, the Republic of Korea was inaugurated and Syngman Rhee became the president.¹⁸

The Korean War that would strip almost everything away from the country began on June 25, 1950. The war lasted for three years and when it ended the remnants were heartbreaking. At the end of the three-year conflict, there were 4 million casualties; at least 2 million of them were civilians, and Korea ended up becoming one of the poorest countries in the world.¹⁹

Starting with Syngman Rhee administration (1948-1960), South Korea (hereafter Korea) came under successive authoritarian regimes. Throughout Rhee administration, the country was surrounded by political corruption and turmoil and mainly depended on massive aid coming from the United States.²⁰ The following

¹⁶ Cumings, *Child of Conflict: Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953*, 13.

¹⁷ Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 140.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁹ Cumings, *The Korean War a History*, 46.

²⁰ Seth, "An Unpromising Recovery: South Korea's Post-Korean War Economic Development: 1953-1961."

Park Chung-hee government (1961–1979) has great significance for the history of South Korea. The period that started with a coup and lasted for 18 years, transformed almost all aspects of the country. The nature of the politics, military, civil liberties and relations between the government and private sector all were changed in one way or another.

Park had an admiration for Japan’s rapid modernization and he knew that the modernization of Korea depended on industrialization.²¹ “Nation building through exports” was the motto of the Park administration as they based the economy on a government-led development paradigm and export-oriented industrialization approach.²² Thus, South Korea began its industrialization process with labor-intensive light industrial goods, such as textiles, toys, and shoes. However, this would not be enough for the development of the country. Therefore, the Park administration adopted the Heavy Chemical Industrialization policy in 1972.²³ In the following period, in addition to light manufacturing industries, major investments were made in steel, shipping, and machine building. Accordingly, the Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO), and an export manufacturing zone in Seoul, Guro Industrial Park, were established.²⁴

The economy was getting better but the working conditions or the wages of workers were not. As a result, laborers often rebelled for a more humane workplace and better pay. Laborers were not the only ones who rebelled against the ever-growing authoritarianism; youth, students to be specific, often riot for the restoration of democracy or against the normalization process with Japan.²⁵ However, as the

²¹ Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 198.

²² Hahm and Heo, “The First Female President in South Korea: Park Geun-Hye’s Leadership and South Korean Democracy,” 11.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 198.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

number of people who try to voice their opinions rise, the government decided to take harsher precautions to silence them.

On one hand, there was an extreme suppression of labor, on the other, the South Korean government actively fostered the growth of *chaebols*. Chaebols were another key factor that played a huge role in the economy and the development of the country during Park's regime. Many of these business conglomerates had started as small family businesses during the colonial period and had become globally-renowned brands that we all are accustomed to; such as Samsung, LG, or Hyundai.²⁶ And during this period, Park and chaebols were intertwined with each other, Park needed chaebols to achieve his dream of a "rich nation, strong army", and chaebols needed Park to be able to grow and dominate the South Korean economy.²⁷ Therefore, the government often helped chaebols with loans, taxes, or licensing.

Even though the strict authoritarian regime cast a dark shadow over the country, Korea did begin to experience "the Miracle on the Han River." During the 1970s, in conjunction with economic developments, the South Korean middle class as well as a consumer culture began to take shape. As people began making more money, they began spending it more freely. Aside from that, huge investments were made in education and the universal healthcare system. There were also cultural improvements in the music and cinema scene. American cultural content began entering the country through AMG; Koreans began watching American movies, listening to American artists, or following American fashion trends.²⁸

The following seven years were led by another military dictator, Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988), and witnessed Gwangju Uprising (May 18, 1980) which is one of the biggest protests in the history of Korea. The economy followed the path of Park's

²⁶ Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 199.

²⁷ Kim and Vogel, *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation Of South Korea*, 269.

²⁸ Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 200.

with the exception of a more relaxed marketplace, likewise, improvements in education and health continued.²⁹ There was also a relaxation of censorship; consequently, there had been a change in the arts.

The middle class kept growing, they could do many things they aspire to, buying houses, cars, and televisions; they could go on vacations; however, they could not choose their own president. And this started to not sit right with many Koreans. As the public kept getting more educated and financially more independent the repression they have been kept under began feeling more out of place.³⁰ The efforts of the Korean people made over the years to achieve their freedom and live in a democratic order and the losses they have given along the way have finally been met with the official transition to democracy in 1987. With the following Roh Tae-woo administration (1988-1993) pursuing political democratization, the authoritarianism of four decades came to an end.

In 1988, South Korea got the chance to host the Olympic Games which has a really important place in Korean history. The Seoul Olympic Games was a great opportunity for the country to show itself to the rest of the world, not as a war-ridden country but as a modern one with a rich and unique culture. A lot has changed since the Korean War.

²⁹ Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 231.

³⁰ Kim, "History of Korean Popular Culture: From Its Embryonic Stage to Hallyu," 21.



Figure 1. Opening ceremony of 1988 The Seoul Olympic Games

Source: International Olympics Committee, <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/the-legacy-of-seoul-1988-inspires-pyeongchang-2018>

Even though there have been many unfortunate and turbulent incidents, there have also been many drastic changes for the better. And Koreans were very proud to introduce themselves as a democratic country that one day would become on par with developed countries. In addition, this event opened South Korean society to a range of international influences.³¹ Not only did they get the chance to show themselves to the world, but they also saw what the global world has to offer.

In 1993, Kim Young-sam became the first civilian president of South Korea in 32 years. With the change in the presidency, many steps were taken toward democratization and carrying out honest and transparent policies. During this period, a lot of work has been done to improve civil rights, and women's rights; there has been a large amount of growth in civil organizations, and also many cultural changes took place.

³¹ Kwon and Kim, "From Censorship to Active Support," 521.

2.2 Cultural policies of the authoritarian regime

Until the late 1970s, the cultural policies that were implemented were based on repairing the cultural erosion caused by Japanese colonialism, the division of the country, and the subsequent American presence after the Korean War which led to a flow of Western culture in the country.³² Cultural policies were focused on enriching the arts such as painting and traditional music, as well as building a cultural identity. Therefore, the cultural policies were more about protecting the culture from foreign infiltration, rather than spreading the culture abroad. Because this was a period when the country was ruled by military regimes the media was under strict governmental control. Due to the restrictions brought by the regime, mass media was also under state control and because of that, there was no room for creative freedom. Cultural products such as television shows, films, or music that did not support the government's economic objectives were subject to strict censorship. The cultural industries were expected to support the ideology of the Korean state.

Starting from the Syngman Rhee administration (1948-1960) national culture has become an important factor for state development. On this basis, the Park Chung-hee government (1961-1979) established laws, institutions, and organizations, and also provided resources to the cultural sector. During Park's period, the main goal was to establish a national cultural identity. Therefore, Park's government issued "the first five-year master plan for cultural development" for the promotion of culture and arts, and it was the first long-term plan for cultural policy. Park also used mass media as a tool for promoting his regime's legitimacy, national unity, anti-communism, and modernization.³³

³² Yim, "Cultural Identity and Cultural Policy in South Korea," 39.

³³ Kim, "History of Korean Popular Culture: From Its Embryonic Stage to Hallyu," 19.

The Chun Doo-hwan government (1980-1988) perpetuated the same ideology; however, during this period the Korean nation had undergone a great transformation. Koreans whose educational and economic levels had increased wanted to consume better and newer things. Therefore, the Chun government included contemporary art in publicly subsidized culture as well as traditional arts.³⁴

The Chun government also gave into the pressures, mostly coming from the United States, to open their markets, in the name of globalization, in various sectors including the cinema and television.³⁵ This, of course adversely affected local distributors and the vitality of the local film industry. Because of this situation, the number of films produced gradually decreased.³⁶ The government also pursued what has come to be known as the 3S policy of promoting screen, sex, and sports as a way of distracting people from political events.³⁷

After the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, the Korean government began realizing the importance of culture in the era of globalization. In this context, the government launched an official *segzehwa* (globalization) policy as a way of “actively responding to external pressures imposed by the United States and to survive in the new world of infinite global competition.”³⁸ The following Roh Tae-woo government (1988-1993) established a “ten-year master plan for cultural development,” that focused on establishing cultural identity, promoting arts and culture, and improving overall cultural welfare.³⁹

³⁴ Yim, “Cultural Identity and Cultural Policy in South Korea,” 45.

³⁵ Shim, “The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave,” 15.

³⁶ Shim, “Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia,” 31.

³⁷ Kim, “History of Korean Popular Culture: From Its Embryonic Stage to Hallyu,” 20.

³⁸ Kim and Jin, “Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave,” 5521.

³⁹ Yim, “Cultural Identity and Cultural Policy in South Korea,” 41.

2.3 South Korean government's interest in cultural industries

After 1993, governments' approach toward the cultural industries changed drastically compared to the years prior. Starting with the Kim Young-sam era, the economic perspective has replaced the cultural perspective in the cultural industries. Unlike previous governments that focused on preserving the arts and the national identity, the democratic governments began providing comprehensive support in many areas such as developing production technologies, establishing the necessary infrastructure, and training a skilled workforce.⁴⁰

There are a couple of reasons why the government changed its approach toward the cultural industries. First of all, by the early 1990s Korea had reached “the limit of what economic development could be achieved within the low-cost export-oriented manufacturing paradigm” which is also referred to as the Middle Income Trap.⁴¹ Also in this process, the country had undergone a major political change. The authoritarian regime was replaced by democracy, and the people who had become wealthier and more educated began wanting more from life. However, Korea's economy had reached the last point that could be reached in the existing economic order.

On top of that in 1997, the “miraculous” economic growth Korea has been showing since the 1970s took a huge blow. Up to this point, Korea had managed to achieve the economic growth that other countries would experience in maybe 100 years, if they could reach that level. But, during the 1990s other Asian countries were also going through an economic crisis, such as Thailand and Indonesia. And in 1997 Korea ended up in the same situation. Many factors played a role in the IMF financial crisis. Speedy growth, conglomerates that were often favored by the

⁴⁰ Jin, “Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era,” 27.

⁴¹ Walsh, “Hallyu as a Government Construct The Korean Wave in the Context of Economic and Social Development,” 14.

government, and their access to easy credit as well as their unpaid loans, also foreign factors were some of them. All of these reasons came together and led South Korea to take the route of getting bailout loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) totaling \$57 billion, the largest loan the IMF had ever given at the time.⁴² Due to the IMF's requirement for tight fiscal policy, interest rates soared. The crisis led to bankruptcies in big and small companies, a rise in unemployment, a depreciation of the Korean won, and a drop in GDP.⁴³ Thus, the 1997 IMF financial crisis made the Korean government realize that the economy could not progress in the way it had been. Therefore, the government has taken a different direction in the economy by adopting neoliberalism.⁴⁴

At the same time, an interesting event occurred; the *Jurassic Park* movie was released and was a huge success at the box office. This success made an impact on how Korea perceives the cultural industry, created what is called the "Jurassic Park Syndrome," and led the Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology to look into it. Upon research, they realized that a single film could potentially generate as much revenue as exporting 1.5 million Hyundai cars, and recommended the promotion of media content production to the administration of President Kim Young-sam.⁴⁵

In this setting, the Korean government placed the cultural industries at the core of its economic development strategies and took action to provide the necessary resources for the development of the cultural industry. In 1994, President Kim Young-sam stated that,

⁴² Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 237.

⁴³ Hahm and Heo, "The First Female President in South Korea: Park Geun-Hye's Leadership and South Korean Democracy," 6.

⁴⁴ Walsh, "Hallyu as a Government Construct The Korean Wave in the Context of Economic and Social Development," 14.

⁴⁵ Shim, "The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave," 15.

In the twenty-first century, the cultural industry itself will be the largest industry through the advancement of diverse audio-visual media. Since Western countries compete with each other in the cultural sector, we must develop new cultural products to meet global sense, and big corporations have to invest in the realm of culture.⁴⁶

From this point on, the Korean government has started to work on transforming its cultural policies in a way that will enable the marketing of Korean culture to the world by making the cultural sector work in accordance with the logic of neoliberalism.⁴⁷ However, even though Korea has transitioned toward a market-driven approach, Korean governments still played a crucial role in providing the necessary foundation for the development of the culture industry by prioritizing the growth of strategic industries, producing a series of developmental plans, and providing financial assistance and workforce. Besides that, governments ensure that the industries that will be necessary for the growth of cultural industries such as electronics, mobile communication, and multimedia industries grow simultaneously with the cultural industries.⁴⁸

2.4 Hallyu (Korean Wave)

By definition, popular culture means “culture that is widely favored or well-liked by many people.”⁴⁹ In the world we live in, popular culture is often viewed as synonymous with American popular culture. Even though, there have been many countries that made an imprint on popular culture, such as England’s Rock music, Brazil’s telenovelas, India’s Bollywood or Japan’s anime and manga; it is only the United States that could penetrate almost every aspect of culture and impose its own to the rest of the world. From Hollywood to Facebook, Starbucks to McDonald’s,

⁴⁶ Jin, “Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era,” 28.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Kwon and Kim, “The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave,” 424.

⁴⁹ Storey, *Cultural Theory And Popular Culture An Introduction*, 5.

Hip-Hop to NBA, Coca-Cola to blue jeans, many things that are considered popular globally originate from the United States. And through these global cultural icons, the American influence spreads all around the world in a way that it has become impossible to untangle what we perceive as popular culture or American culture.

As it has been defined by Herbert Schiller (as cited in Lee, 2015) in media imperialism there is only a “one-directional flow of information from core to periphery and it represents the reality of power.”⁵⁰ Up until recently, it was a handful of Western countries and in particular, it was the United States that held that power. The global cultural flow had been a one-way flow from the United States to the rest of the world.⁵¹ And yet, the last decade showed that South Korean popular culture can be a formidable competitor to the American hegemony over popular culture.⁵²



Figure 2. Promotional poster for drama *What is Love?*

Source: <https://mydramalist.com/5755-what-is-love>

⁵⁰ Lee, “A Decade of Hallyu Scholarship: Toward a New Direction in Hallyu 2.0.,” 11.

⁵¹ Jin and Yoon, “The Korean Wave: Retrospect and Prospect,” 2243.

⁵² Cicchelli and Octobre, *The Sociology of Hallyu Pop Culture*, 1.

In 1997, a drama called *What is Love* aired on a Chinese network and turned out to be a mega-hit.⁵³ Other shows continued to attract attention, gaining viewers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. It was during that time that the word Hallyu was used by the Chinese media for the first time to express the growing interest in the Korean cultural content shown by the Chinese people.⁵⁴ The popularity of dramas was followed by Korean popular music, K-pop. After a regional music channel began airing K-pop music videos, many fan bases began to form in Asia.⁵⁵ The Korean cultural content boom has been further fueled by the advancement of Korean films. In 1999, the blockbuster, *Shiri* attracted many viewers from Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.⁵⁶ Hereafter, Korean films became a fixture in cinemas all over Asia. With the introduction of new content, the interest shown in Korean popular culture continued to grow.

Hallyu indicates the rapid growth of Korea's cultural industries and the popularity of cultural products that are exported all around the world, such as television shows, K-Pop, film, and video games.⁵⁷ So, rather than the Korean popular culture itself, Hallyu is about the influence of Korean popular culture outside of Korea. As Choi Jung-bong indicates, "*Hallyu* is meant to signify the tidal wave of Korean popular culture generated outside Korea."⁵⁸ And just like tidal waves Hallyu grows both territorially and content-wise.

⁵³ Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia," 28.

⁵⁴ Lee, "A Decade of Hallyu Scholarship: Toward a New Direction in Hallyu 2.0.," 6.

⁵⁵ Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia," 28.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁷ Jin and Yoon, "The Korean Wave: Retrospect and prospect," 2241.

⁵⁸ Choi, "Hallyu versus Hallyu-hwa: Cultural Phenomenon versus Institutional Campaign," 31.

2.5 Hallyu 1.0 vs. Hallyu 2.0

Hallyu has undergone major changes over the years; these changes and the growth of the wave have led many scholars to examine Hallyu in two different periods.⁵⁹

Although it is difficult to designate exact dates for the beginning and the end of these eras, Hallyu 1.0, the initial stage of the Korean Wave, began around 1997 and roughly lasted until 2007; on the other hand, Hallyu 2.0 began in 2008 and still continues.⁶⁰

Some scholars separate the timeline further because of the rapid growth of the Korean Wave and consider the period that we are in right now as Hallyu 3.0 or 4.0. This division is made mostly for marketing purposes, if not; by scholars who focus on one aspect of Hallyu and divide the process according to the popularity of said aspect.⁶¹ I will examine Hallyu in two main periods because even though the popularity of Hallyu has grown significantly in the last five years and there have been additions to major cultural industries that are exported; they are still in the realm of digital media.⁶² In other words, there are not many substantial differences worth dividing the flow, in the way that Hallyu 1.0 and Hallyu 2.0 are different from one another. Therefore, I believe it is not necessary to separate this period any further.

Hallyu 1.0 and Hallyu 2.0 differ from one another on the following issues: exported cultural content, consumer portfolio, technological developments that took

⁵⁹ Scholars that view Hallyu in two periods (Cho and Sim 2013; Choi and Im 2018; Hwang and Epstein 2016; Jin 2016; Ko 2009; Lee 2015).

⁶⁰ Jin, "The Rise of the New Korean Wave," 4.

⁶¹ Jin, "Ten Myths about the Korean Wave in the Global Cultural Sphere," 4154.

⁶² Webtoon, animation, and mobile gaming join the digital media industries that have become popular since 2008.

place during both eras, and most importantly cultural policies of the respective governments.⁶³

⁶³ Jin, "The Rise of the New Korean Wave," 4.

CHAPTER 3
THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KOREAN WAVE

Throughout the chapter, the important turning points in the Korean Wave, the government, as well as the chaebol's (Korean conglomerates) role, and other reasons that play part in the development and global expansion of this phenomenon will be discussed.

3.1 Hallyu 1.0

The great interest that the drama *What is Love* (1992) has received in several East Asian countries is often considered the beginning of the Korean Wave. The popularity of *What is Love* was followed by several other Korean dramas such as *Jealousy* (1992) and *Stars in My Heart* (1997). During this period, the economic crisis affected most of Asia and as a result, a new wave of Korean drama buyers appeared. Korean dramas were cheaper than their Japanese and Hong Kong counterparts and yet they did not lack quality.⁶⁴ Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and some other Asian countries joined China in the Korean drama trend. The popularity of Korean dramas continued with *Winter Sonata* which was broadcasted in 2002 and later on with *Jewel in the Palace* (Dae Jang Geum) which was broadcasted in 2005.

⁶⁴ Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia," 31.



Figure 3. Promotional poster for drama *Winter Sonata*
Source: <https://www.amazon.com/Winter-Sonata-Season-1>

Winter Sonata's success was unlike the other dramas, it took almost all of Asia by storm, but it attracted the most attention in Japan. When *Winter Sonata* was aired on Japanese national television, it had twice the average rating.⁶⁵ The drama generated a massive fandom around the main actor of the drama Bae Yong-jun, and it was stated that the fans were suffering from *Yon-sama* syndrome.⁶⁶ As it is claimed by Ryoo Woong-jae "*Winter Sonata* has politically done more for South Korea and Japan than the FIFA World Cup they co-hosted in 2002".⁶⁷ It was only after *Winter Sonata*'s release that the interest in South Korea was piqued in Japan.

The popularity of the television series was also seen in cinema and popular music. The rush of Korean movies that started with *Shiri* continued to grow exponentially with movies such as *Joint Security Area* (2000), *My Sassy Girl* (2001),

⁶⁵ Lee, "A Soft Power Approach to the "Korean Wave", 131.

⁶⁶ Jung, "Transnational Korea: A Critical Assessment of the Korean Wave in Asia and the United States," 73; *Yon-sama* is an appellation that is a combination of Bae Yong-joon's name, Yong, and the Japanese word, *sama*. In the Japanese context, *sama* is used to address royalty and aristocrats and connoted respect for members of these classes. Therefore, *Yon-sama* can be translated as 'Prince Yong' and indicates the immense respect that Japanese fans have for the actor. For more, see: Jung, "Bae Yong-Joon, Soft Masculinity, and Japanese Fans: Our Past is in Your Present Body," 34–72.

⁶⁷ Ryoo, "Globalization, or the Logic of Cultural Hybridization: The Case of the Korean Wave," 140.

and *Friend* (2001) that broke box-office records.⁶⁸ And slowly Korean movies began earning a global reputation by winning major awards at international film festivals. In 2002 *Chihwaseon*'s director Im Gwon-taek won the award for Best Director, and in 2004 director Park Chan-wook won the Grand Prix for *Old Boy* at Cannes Film Festival.⁶⁹

K-pop, which would carry Hallyu to the next level in years to come, also experienced a rise in this period. The Korean idol group H.O.T.'s popularity exploded in Asia with more than 10 million record sales; also in China and Taiwan, they topped the music charts.⁷⁰ Among the stars of this period were idol groups such as S.E.S., Baby V.O.X., and Shinhwa, and they were followed by solo artists including BoA, Rain, and Se7en. The female pop singer BoA's albums reached the number one spot on Japanese music charts.⁷¹ Actor and singer Rain held sold-out performances at Madison Square Garden in 2006 and Tokyo Dome in 2007.⁷² They were all trained by major entertainment companies such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment which constitute the "Big 3" companies of K-pop that are still holding their ground.⁷³

The first generation of the Korean Wave had certain characteristics that were either changed or developed in Hallyu 2.0. First of all, during the first phase, the popularity of the Korean Wave was limited to Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, and some Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, the scholarly work was often based on the regional interest in Hallyu. When the interest of these countries in Korean dramas was examined, it became obvious that these people felt a

⁶⁸ Ryoo, "Globalization, or the Logic of Cultural Hybridization: The Case of the Korean Wave," 141.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia," 38.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Jung, "New Wave Formations: K-Pop Idols, Social Media, and the Remaking of the Korean Wave," 78.

⁷³ Ibid., 76.

familiarity with the stories that revolved around the subjects of family ties, morality, or communal harmony.⁷⁴

The familiarity stemmed from the portrayal of Confucian values which lacks in the Western media that Asian people have been consuming with the rest of the world for decades. Therefore, the interest in Hallyu in its early stages led scholars to decipher it as a result of cultural proximity (Straubhaar).⁷⁵ According to cultural proximity theory, culture consumers tend to lean towards cultural products that are closer to their own cultural products.⁷⁶ However, as time went by, as the borders of Hallyu extended out of Asia, it became clear that cultural proximity was not sufficient to explain this phenomenon. Throughout the years, globalization (Kuotsu, 2013; Hogarth, 2013), glocalization, (Jin, 2011; Peichi, 2013), transculturality (Huang, 2011; Jin, 2016), and cultural hybridity (Shim 2006; Ryoo, 2009; Jin and Ryoo, 2014) were opted to explain the rise of the Korean Wave.⁷⁷

Secondly, in the first period, Hallyu was a one-way flow from artists to fans in Asia.⁷⁸ After all, Hallyu 1.0 was an era without social media and smartphones. YouTube was founded in 2005, Twitter in 2006, and the first iPhone went on sale in 2007. Therefore, the space for fans to communicate among themselves or with the artists did not exist in the early years of the wave. Fans could only see their favorite artists in television shows they had attended. Another difference between the two eras is the audience they appeal to. During Hallyu 1.0, although some K-pop groups enjoyed popularity among teenagers and young people, middle-aged women

⁷⁴ Lee, "A Decade of Hallyu Scholarship: Toward a New Direction in Hallyu 2.0.," 7.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity," 39-59.

⁷⁷ Yoon and Jin, *The Korean Wave: Evolution, Fandom, and Transnationality*, xii.

⁷⁸ Lee, "A Decade of Hallyu Scholarship: Toward a New Direction in Hallyu 2.0.," 16.

constituted the main audience of Korean dramas which were the main source of the Korean Wave at the time.⁷⁹

However, the most important difference that separates the two periods is the approach of governments toward the Korean Wave. Whereas in the Hallyu 1.0 period, governmental support was more indirect, a more hands-off approach, in Hallyu 2.0, starting with the Lee Myung-bak period, governments became more involved in the cultural sector.⁸⁰

3.1.1 Cultural policies of Hallyu 1.0

3.1.1.1 Kim Young-sam government (1993-1998)

Kim Young-sam period coincided with the democratic new chapter in Korean history, he was the first civilian president in three decades. The Kim Young-sam government became the first government to actively embrace neoliberal globalization, and as a result, the financial industry was deregulated and foreign investments were more welcomed.⁸¹ Kim Young-sam also became the first president to dwell on the importance of cultural industries for economic growth, and the acceptance of globalization shed a different light on the cultural industry.

First of all, during this period, the oppressive censorship Korean films and music were under was removed. In this way, artists have become able to express themselves freely, be more creative, and produce works as they wish. The Korean government established the Cultural Industry Bureau within the Ministry of Culture and Sports in 1994 as the ministerial division that is responsible for promoting the

⁷⁹ Jin, "New Perspectives on the Creative Industries in the Hallyu 2.0 Era: Global-Local Dialectics in Intellectual Properties," 54.

⁸⁰ Jin, "Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era," 27.

⁸¹ Kwon and Kim, "The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave," 425.

cultural industry.⁸² On top of it, the government sponsored national art schools such as the Korean National University of Arts and the Korean Film Academy where the future Oscar winner film director Bong Joon-ho was trained.⁸³

Prior to the 1990s, there was a quota system that required a minimum number of days for the screening of locally produced films and restricted foreign investment in Korea's film and music industries. However, starting from the beginning of the 1990s this system was gradually lifted. For the growth of the film industry, the government initiated the Motion Picture Promotion Law in 1995 which led foreign corporations and more importantly, chaebols such as Samsung, Hyundai, and Daewoo to be included in the cultural industries.⁸⁴ While their investments were only 20-30 percent of film production costs since 1995 chaebols have started to invest up to 100 percent through this law and even started their own film productions. However, after the financial crisis and the liberalization of the Korean economy, film production shifted from government and chaebol dominance to newer and more specialized companies such as CJ Entertainment and Orion.⁸⁵

During these years Korea's focus shifted towards high-level technologies, they wanted to become a source of innovative technologies. The Kim government focused on telecommunications and worked to create the conditions for South Korea to become a world leader in this sector.⁸⁶ And during Kim's presidency, in 1996, Korea became the 29th country of the OECD (Organization for Economic

⁸² Kwon and Kim, "The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave," 428.

⁸³ Park, "South Korea Cultural History between 1960s and 2012," 99.

⁸⁴ Jin, "Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era," 28.

⁸⁵ Armstrong, "Parasite and the Global Arrival of Korean Cinema: Notes from the Underground," 56, 57.

⁸⁶ Kwon and Kim, "The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave," 424.

Cooperation and Development), the second Asian country after Japan.⁸⁷ This development made a huge impact on the global standpoint of Korea.

3.1.1.2 Kim Dae-jung government(1998-2003)

When Kim Dae-jung became the president in February 1998, he also became the first liberal president of the post-democratization era. Moreover, Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam administrations achieved the first-ever peaceful transfer of power from the ruling conservative government to a liberal-democratic opposition party.

The Kim Dae-jung administration managed to take the damage that the crisis caused under control earlier than expected.⁸⁸ IMF debt repayments ended ahead of schedule, unemployment figures fell, and per capita income rose again by the end of Kim's term. In order to cover the debt to the IMF faster than expected, but in order to do that there had been changes in the government's approach to state-led economic development.⁸⁹ Some of these changes included increased deregulation and privatization of Korea's cultural industries.

The Kim administration also allowed Japanese cultural products, which were previously banned, back into Korea in 1998.⁹⁰ Resentment from the past has led to the ban of Japanese cultural products in Korea, such as movies, music, video games, and even game consoles, which were globally popular Japanese products at the time. By deciding to lift the ban President Kim took a big step and let more foreign products enter Korea thereby, the culture that Koreans consume has also become more global.

⁸⁷ From Ministry of Foreign Affairs' webpage.

⁸⁸ Peterson and Margulies, *A Brief History of Korea*, 239.

⁸⁹ Kwon and Kim, "The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave," 424.

⁹⁰ Kwon and Kim, "From Censorship to Active Support," 522.

The self-proclaimed ‘President of Culture’ Kim Dae-jung implemented more wide-ranging policy measures to support the infrastructure needed for the development of the cultural industries. The Ministry of Culture and Sport was renamed the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 1998. To provide more systematic support to cultural industries, Kim’s administration established the Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion in 1999 and allocated a budget of \$148.5 million.⁹¹ The Kim government had become the first to provide official financial support and actively promote public funding of the film industry. And Korean blockbuster films, such as *Shiri* were made thanks to the financial support of chaebols (in *Shiri*’s case it was Samsung), and the government.⁹²

The Korean Film Council (KOFIC) was created to protect the domestic film industry from Hollywood productions, and also increase Korea’s export capacity.⁹³ Encouraged by the growing popularity of Korean popular culture across Asia, in 2001, the Korean Culture and Content Agency (KOCCA) was established under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. KOCCA’s mission is to encourage and promote Korean cultural content and products abroad.⁹⁴

During this period, the economy’s focal point became advanced technology-oriented and knowledge-intensive industries such as Information and Communications Technology (ICT), cultural and biotechnology industries.⁹⁵ The growth of digitalization was given particular attention, the government invested heavily in high-speed ICT infrastructure. By 2001, South Korea had one of the

⁹¹ Shim, “Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia,” 34.

⁹² Park, “South Korea Cultural History between 1960s and 2012,” 103.

⁹³ Won, “Hallyu, Numerous Discourses, One Perspective,” 34.

⁹⁴ Park, “South Korea Cultural History between 1960s and 2012,” 99.

⁹⁵ Kwon and Kim, “The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave,” 427.

highest broadband penetration rates in the world.⁹⁶ And a great deal of work has been done for the integration of cultural products such as films and dramas with ICT and the electronic industry.

Aside from dramas, films, and music; online games also gained great importance. The Korean government has specifically targeted the game industry with the intention of making Korea the world's leading country in this field. In the 1990s, Korean companies such as Nexon and NCSoft started developing online games. Nexon first published *Baram ui Nara* in 1996, after that, in 1998 NCSoft published *Lineage* which was the first example of the MMORPG (massively-multiplayer online role-playing game) genre.⁹⁷ In 2003, Korea exported \$182 million worth of games, mainly to neighboring countries; by 2008 the number reached \$1 billion, and in 2014 it reached \$2.72 billion.⁹⁸

3.1.1.3 Roh Moo-hyun government (2003-2008)

The Roh Moo-hyun government mainly followed the Kim Dae-jung administration's cultural policies. Roh Moo-hyun was not a very well-known political figure; however, he managed to get the overwhelming support of the younger generations.⁹⁹ Roh was one of the leaders whose campaign benefitted a lot from South Korea's development of the internet as many of his young voters were cultivated through an innovative Internet-centered campaign. Thus, the government's special attention to ICT and the gaming industry continued.

By 2003, the number of internet users in Korea had reached 30 million; consequently, access to high-speed internet had a major impact on Koreans'

⁹⁶ Kwon and Kim, "From Censorship To Active Support," 525.

⁹⁷ Jin, *Korea's Online Gaming Empire*, 15.

⁹⁸ Jin, "Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era," 26.

⁹⁹ Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 243.

lifestyles.¹⁰⁰ The development of the ICT industries also made a great contribution to the development of the country and the economy, “the contribution of ICT industries to the national GDP increased from 7.1% in 2003 to 12.1% in 2011.”¹⁰¹ And on the gaming side, in 2007, The Ministry of Culture established the Game Industry Team to promote the Korean gaming industry both domestically and internationally.¹⁰² The number of game companies rose strikingly, and so did the number of games. Between the years 2001 and 2012, the Korean game industry grew by about 1,000 percent in its domestic market.¹⁰³

In 2003, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism established a new agency, The Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE), to see “bilateral cultural exchange events, global networking, research and studies, and professional training programs for experts in related fields.”¹⁰⁴ During Roh’s period, the continuing deregulations derived from the pursuit of neoliberal reforms affected the cultural industry, specifically the film industry.

The Roh administration went for a change in the screen-quota system that had been very beneficial for Korean cinema for years. Unable to withstand the pressure from the United States, in 2006, the Roh administration deregulated this policy as a precondition for starting negotiations for a U.S.-Korea free-trade agreement (FTA).¹⁰⁵ As expected, this struck a blow to the film sector and caused a stir among filmmakers. This situation was also a harbinger of “new instruments of global governance” such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and free trade

¹⁰⁰ Kwon and Kim, “From Censorship to Active Support,” 525.

¹⁰¹ Kwon and Kim, “The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave,” 428.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 430.

¹⁰³ Park and Kim, *The Success Story of the Cultural Industry in Korea: The Case of the Game Industry*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ From Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange.

¹⁰⁵ Jin, “Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era,” 30.

agreements that will play a role in domestic cultural policies.¹⁰⁶ As Jin Dal Young states; “these international perspectives limited the ability of the nation-state to develop both social and economic policies for the benefit of citizens and domestic interests in order to ensure the impact of neoliberalism in the Korean political context.”¹⁰⁷

3.2 Hallyu 2.0

Over the years, North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America joined Asia as “fans” of Korean popular culture. Aside from the global expansion, the cultural sectors that constitute Hallyu also developed over the years. Whereas in the late 1990s and early 2000s Hallyu’s cultural exports were limited to television shows, music, and films, with the developments in digital technologies and social media, new cultural ventures got included in the export chain. The wave has diversified to include games, food, variety shows, and webtoons. Social media also changed fan participation and interaction. Pre-existed driving cultural sectors which are television shows, films and music reached new heights.

Through streaming services, especially Netflix, dramas increased their popularity around the world. Films on the other hand, aside from their global popularity, have gained critical recognition; *Parasite* (2019) is a great example of it. K-pop became the main driver of the Hallyu 2.0 era which is also the sector that benefited most from the age of social media. Moreover, online games have become one of the main cultural sectors, competing with film and music when it comes to revenues. In addition to these, the government’s approach towards the culture

¹⁰⁶ Jin, “Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era,” 30.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

industry has become one of the main determining factors of separating the two periods.

The year 2008 marks the time when the export of Korean cultural products surpassed the import of cultural products. In 2008, while Korea imported \$1.98 billion worth of cultural goods, which was \$3.35 billion in the previous year, exported \$2.33 billion worth of cultural goods.¹⁰⁸ The decline in foreign cultural goods and the increase in exports have been going on ever since, with some exceptions. In 2015, cultural content exports were \$5.6 billion, and in 2020 the number reached \$11.92 billion.¹⁰⁹

Over the course of 20 years, Korea managed to become the “top non-Western country that meaningfully exports almost all of its cultural forms.”¹¹⁰ This includes television programs, film, pop music, online gaming, and fashion and beauty trends. The content of the Korean Wave has expanded immensely over the years, and in its current form, this phenomenon involves many cultural sectors that trigger each other and feed off each other at the same time.

As Choi Jung Bong states, television dramas and K-pop constitute the core of Hallyu, the essential content. They are followed by semi-essential content which is video games and food; then comes para-Hallyu products and services which include tourism, cosmetic products, plastic surgery, fashion items, and language services. Para-Hallyu products are an extension of the essential and semi-essential content. And various platform technologies are used as distribution channels, such as social network sites and the internet. And Korea reaps the benefits of this cycle in the form

¹⁰⁸ Jin, “The Rise of the New Korean Wave,” 5.

¹⁰⁹ Park, “K-Content Industry Sets another Export Record in 2020 at \$11.92 Billion.”

¹¹⁰ Jin, “The Rise of the New Korean Wave,” 5.

of sales of commodities, public diplomacy, and overall improvement in the national image.¹¹¹

3.2.1 Components of Hallyu 2.0

3.2.1.1 Hybridity of Hallyu

As we have mentioned before, Hallyu 1.0 attractiveness was often linked to cultural proximity theory, in which shared sentiments and resembling cultures attracted the consumers of Korean cultural content. And the theory stemmed due to the popularity of Korean cultural content specifically in Asia. However, in its current state, the reasons behind this phenomenon have very little to do with traditional Asian family values or uniquely Korean elements; instead, interest in Korean popular culture seems to be due to its increasingly transnational and hybrid aspects.

Many studies of the Korean Wave agree that it features the combination of tradition and modernity as well as the combined values and characteristics of both the East and West. (Shim 2006; Ryoo 2009; Kim 2013; Jin 2013) As it is explained by Yoon and Kang,

In the cultural perspective, hybridity is often used to explain the interaction of disparate cultures and the phenomenon resulting from the interaction. Cultural hybridity especially occurs when transnational media or companies create the unique characteristics of each country and culture region, whether those are ambiguous or peripheral.¹¹²

Korean culture bears the influences of American culture and also Japanese culture. And on top of the influences that are a result of the historical past of Korea, also many Koreans and cultural producers have been influenced by Western culture as a result of Western cultural hegemony. Hallyu was composed to suit the taste of a global consumer. Therefore, one of the main reasons why the Korean Wave has

¹¹¹ Choi, "Hallyu versus Hallyu-hwa Cultural Phenomenon versus Institutional Campaign," 32.

¹¹² Yoon and Kang, "Emergence, Evolution, and Extension of "Hallyu Studies" What Have Scholars Found from Korean Pop Culture in the Last Twenty Years," 12.

become a global sensation is undeniably the hybrid nature of Korean popular culture.¹¹³ As it is a blend of diverse cultural elements, Hallyu makes it easier for foreigners to digest, either because they recognize their own popular culture imbedded within Hallyu or even if they are not part of the Western world, due to the effect of Western cultural hegemony they are already familiar with the culture.

3.2.1.2 Digital Media

Progress in digital technologies and social media platforms opened the doors of the global world for Korean cultural content creators. In its current form, Hallyu integrates seamlessly into digital media, both social media, and streaming services, and maximizes the transnational flow of cultural content. Through these platforms, Korean cultural industries reached many corners of the world that otherwise would be very difficult to tap into. For example, the success of Psy's Gangnam Style, which had a monumental effect on the Korean Wave, would have not been possible without YouTube, and Squid Games' success without Netflix. In other words, without digital technologies and social media, the current form of the Korean Wave would not exist, and this does not just rely on the Korean side, it goes for the whole world. For a consumer to reach the product that is out there, they also have to have the access to the necessary medium.

Therefore, the Korean Wave falls at the perfect timing when Korea as a nation was so developed in technology and had the right support that they could put out their content, but at the same time as recipients, we have the necessary infrastructure to access that content. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram play a crucial role in the spread of Korean cultural content,

¹¹³ Jin, "The Rise of the New Korean Wave," 9.

especially when it comes to K-pop. Digital streaming platforms like iTunes and Spotify are helping to reach global audiences when it comes to music, while Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Hulu are expanding the reach of Korean movies and television shows.

3.2.1.3 K-pop

From the 2010s and on, the spread of the Korean Wave around the globe became more prominent. Starting from the global success of Psy's Gangnam Style in 2012, the Korean music industry continued to grow while breaking record after record along the way. At the time that Gangnam Style was released, it had become the first YouTube video to surpass one billion views, and the song also spent more than 30 weeks on Billboard's Top 100 list. With the interest Psy has created, K-pop entered another phase and in the following years became the main driver of Hallyu 2.0.

Korea exported \$80.9 million worth of music in 2010, and in 2020, the export value of the music industry amounted to around \$679.6 million.¹¹⁴ Catchy melodies, synchronized dancing, striking appearances of idols, colorful and lively stage designs, as well as unique musicality play a significant role in the rise of K-pop's popularity. As mentioned, the hybrid nature of Korean popular culture is one of its main appeals and this applies especially to K-pop.

¹¹⁴ Jin, "New Perspectives on the Creative Industries in the Hallyu 2.0," 59; Shim, "Exports of S. Korean Content Industry Rise In 2020 Despite Pandemic."



Figure 4. Psy's performance in New York City, 2012
Source: Jason DeCrow—Invision/AP

The K-pop industry is led by professionals who are very well educated in their profession, often in the United States. Lee Soo-man, the founder and the CEO of one of the biggest and most renowned entertainment companies in Korea, SM Entertainment, sets a great example to highlight the origin of K-pop's hybrid structure and the importance of cultural creators in the Korean Wave. Lee had the opportunity to study American pop music in detail during his education in the United States. He aimed to globalize the Korean entertainment business, and upon his return to Korea, he extensively researched the preferences of listeners to produce financially profitable idol groups. As a result, Lee Soo-man established an almost factory-like system where K-pop idols were trained and K-pop groups are formed in a way that would blend the features that made American pop music so popular all over the world with Korean elements to suit the taste of both Korean and global

listeners.¹¹⁵ SM Entertainment was established in 1995, and it was followed by companies such as YG Entertainment and JYP Entertainment which houses many K-pop stars that are globally well-known.

In this context, we see that K-pop is an industry that is meticulously planned to target international audiences, more so than the Korean film and television industry. Featuring the hybridity of Western and Korean music, and the “idol (*aidoru*) system” of Japan, K-pop is a genre that is “characterized by the transcultural hybridity of popular culture, which is influenced not only by odorless global elements but also by traditional national elements.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, K-pop becomes a genre that creates smooth and intriguing harmony of various cultures that attracts millions of fans from every corner of the world.

After Psy, Bigbang, Girls' Generation, TWICE, EXO, BTS, and many more groups have become famous around the world and had an incredible amount of fans. In this process, K-pop evolved into a global industry rather than a niche genre.¹¹⁷ And BTS' popularity brought K-pop to a new phase of visibility in the world. Their 2018 album “Love Yourself: Tear” topped the Billboard albums chart, and their 2020 single “Dynamite” reached the top of the Billboard Hot 100 list, a success that has never been previously accomplished by a Korean artist before.¹¹⁸ The band performed at the Rose Bowl Stadium (capacity of 90,000) in Los Angeles, Wembley Stadium in London (capacity of 90,000), and Stage de France in Paris (capacity of 80,000), all of them sold out. According to a case study from Harvard Business Review, “the BTS ecosystem accounts for a staggering \$4.9 billion of South Korea's

¹¹⁵ Kim, “Between Hybridity and Hegemony in K-Pop’s Global Popularity: A Case of Girls’ Generation’s American Debut,” 2374.

¹¹⁶ Kim, *Soft power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Drama*, 14.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Kim, “BTS and the World Music Industry,” 114.

GDP."¹¹⁹ All of these achievements enabled BTS to be recognized as one of the most influential boy bands in the world.



Figure 5. Time Magazine's 2020 Entertainer of the Year cover
Source: Time Magazine

The band also appeared on the cover of TIME magazine with the title of the entertainer of the year with an article that praised their musical career, their charitable acts, and their influence on the young generation.¹²⁰ They have also become the first South Korean music group invited to speak at the United Nations session, "helping to launch a UNICEF campaign 'Generation Unlimited' that promotes education, employment, and empowerment for young people globally".¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Elberse and Woodham, "Big Hit Entertainment and Blockbuster Band BTS."

¹²⁰ Bruner, "BTS Is TIME's 2020 Entertainer of the Year"

¹²¹ Kim, *Soft power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Drama*, 2.

3.2.1.4 Korean films

By the early 2000s, Korea was one of the few countries in the world where locally made films dominated the domestic market, and attracted the attention of foreign audiences as well.¹²² Throughout the 2010s, Korean films continued to gain recognition overseas and streaming services such as Netflix began to acquire, and also produce an increasing number of Korean content. Movies such as *Train to Busan* (2016), *The Handmaiden* (2016), and *Burning* (2018) garnered favorable reviews and a wide range of audiences.

Filmmaking and cinema are intertwined industries in Korea, and many companies are involved in both film production and theater ownership, such as CJ CGV, Lotte, and Megabox. These companies are responsible for almost 90% of the cinema screens in the country.¹²³ As mentioned before, the dominance of government and chaebol over the film industry had shifted towards more specialized companies after the financial crisis; among them, Miky Lee (Lee Mi-gyeong), granddaughter of Samsung founder Lee Byung-chul, had been the most successful. CJ Entertainment, now called CJ E&M, became the largest media conglomerate in Korea. Lee had been an investor in Steven Spielberg's *DreamWorks* in 1995 and has produced four of Bong Joon-ho's films, including *Parasite*.¹²⁴

¹²² Armstrong, "Parasite and the Global Arrival of Korean Cinema: Notes from the Underground," 56.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 6. Promotional poster for movie *Parasite*
Source: <https://www.hulu.com/movie/parasite>

Without a doubt, the biggest impact on the film industry was made by *Parasite*, a black comedy thriller movie directed by Bong Joon-ho. The movie has attracted great reviews, and won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, Golden Globe Awards, Best Picture, Best Director, Best International Feature Film, and Best Original Screenplay at the Academy Awards. *Parasite* was not only the first Korean film to win an Oscar but it was also the first foreign-language film ever to win the Best Picture Oscar.¹²⁵ Bong Joon-ho was already one of the leading directors in Korea who were also known by the global audience for his works such as *Host* (2006), *Mother* (2009), *Snowpiercer* (2013), and *Okja* (2017) which he collaborated with Netflix for its production. Today, Korean cinema has reached a point where it is no longer “an exotic and specialized commodity” but rather a part of “the global cinematic landscape.”¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Kim, *Soft power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Drama*, 1.

¹²⁶ Armstrong, “Parasite and the Global Arrival of Korean Cinema: Notes from the Underground,” 58.

3.2.1.5 Korean dramas

The popularity of Korean dramas continues to grow exponentially in Hallyu 2.0. Thanks to the development of digital media and the spread of streaming services all over the world, Korean dramas also reach global audiences without being tied to a single region. Streaming services make it possible for the audience to reach a variety of content with various subtitle options, including Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, Turkish, Spanish, and several Chinese dialects. Over the years, as accessibility became easier, dramas such as *Boys over Flowers* (2009), *Heirs* (2013), *Legend of the Blue Sea* (2016), *Descendants of the Sun* (2016), *Mr. Sunshine* (2018), and *Crash Landing on You* (2019) became hits in many countries.

Especially Netflix help Korean dramas and films reach not only fans but also non-fan viewers looking for fresh content. Studio Dragon, a Korean production company subsidized by CJ E&M Group had signed a production partnership agreement with Netflix.¹²⁷ Thus, Netflix acts as a significant promoter of Korean dramas inflowing to North America and Europe, where these dramas had been a nearly unknown genre to mainstream television audiences. The streaming service not only provides a rich catalog of older Korean dramas of the 2000s, but it also established an operating system in Korea and has started actively co-producing multiple series of dramas with Korean production companies, *Kingdom* (2019, 2020) being the first original Korean drama on Netflix.¹²⁸

However, in 2021, Korean dramas, as well as the Korean Wave, reached another height with the Netflix original series *Squid Game*. The series ended up being Netflix's most-watched show of all time. It reached the top spot on the

¹²⁷ Ju, "K-Dramas Meet Netflix New Models of Collaboration with the Digital West," 172.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

streaming charts of 94 countries and 142 million households.¹²⁹ The series has also been nominated and won at many acclaimed award shows, including Best Supporting Actor at the Golden Globe Awards¹³⁰, three awards from the Screen Actors Guild Awards¹³¹, two Critics Choice Awards¹³², and also six Primetime Emmy Awards including Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series for the lead Lee Jung-jae.¹³³ The drama made history as it was the first time that all of these awards were given to Koreans, and some of them were given to non-English series for the first time.

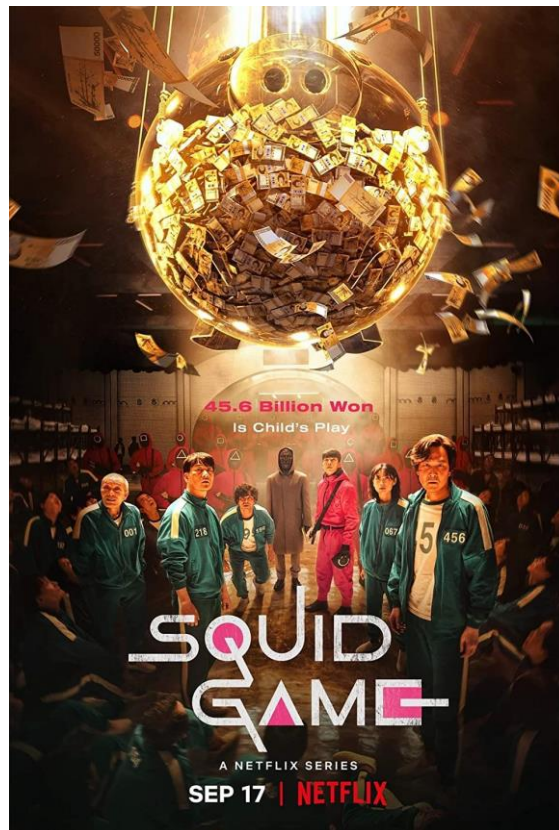


Figure 7. Promotional poster for drama *Squid Game*
Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10919420/>

¹²⁹ Yonhap, “‘Squid Game’ Becomes Most-Watched Netflix Show with Record 1.65b Hours.”

¹³⁰ Golden Globes Awards’ Winners List <https://www.goldenglobes.com/winners-nominees>

¹³¹ MacDonald, “‘Squid Game’ Makes More Awards History Winning 2 Critics Choice Awards.”

¹³² Song, “‘Squid Game’ Makes History Again With Two Critics Choice Awards.”

¹³³ Emmy Awards’ Winners List <https://www.emmys.com/awards/nominees-winners/2022/outstanding-lead-actor-in-a-drama-series>

One of the biggest factors in the success of this series is the hybrid structure of the Korean cultural content we have mentioned before. *Squid Game* presents us a great example of how Korean popular cultural content's hybrid structure makes them globally popular. *Squid Game* is a show that takes place in present-day Korea, and tells a story that revolves around a group of people who are battling with financial troubles and ends up being invited to a place where they are made to play traditional Korean children's games. The winner stands to win a great sum of money, however, the losers simply do not lose because it becomes quickly obvious that the children's games have a lethal twist to them.

As it can be understood from the show's writer and director Hwang Dong-hyuk's interview with *Variety Magazine*, the show was made as an allegory about modern capitalist society and the extremely competitive lives that most people lead.¹³⁴ And throughout the series, we see that hopeless, desperate people who are willing to do whatever it takes to get out of their debts or poverty. It is clear that the show was made to present social injustice issues, class divisions, and especially financial inequalities that many people face. Another interview with the director states that he was inspired by the financial problems he was facing in the past.¹³⁵ The director might have written the show according to the troubles he was facing within his homeland, Korea, and the show itself was made and played by Koreans, however, the topics that it covers are universal, therefore, globally relatable.

Even though the city, the characters, the language, or the culture can be foreign to the global audience as the subject matter it feels relatable. And through the traditional Korean children's games, although some of these games exist in different cultures, the audience experiences something new and interesting, therefore the show

¹³⁴ Frater, "'Squid Game' Director Hwang Dong-hyuk on Netflix's Hit Korean Series and Prospects for a Sequel.

¹³⁵ Jeffries, "Squid Game's creator: 'I'm not that rich. It's not like Netflix paid me a bonus.'"

presents the audience something fresh. And this is how Korean popular culture's hybrid nature works, it touches upon basic and universal situations or emotions but brings something uniquely Korean so that it feels familiar but intriguing. In addition, the fact that the show was given greenlight and financially sourced by Netflix makes its hybrid nature even more apparent.¹³⁶

Aside from the success of Korean dramas, foreign countries have started purchasing copyrights of Korean television shows and movies. Korean movies, *Old Boy* and *Lakehouse* had Hollywood remakes. Television shows also had been remade, the drama *Good Doctor* was remade by the United States, Turkey, and a few other countries. *Masked Singer*, a singing competition show, was also adopted by more than 50 countries, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Thailand, and Brazil to name a few.

3.2.1.6 Hallyu stars and fan interactions

As a result of the developments in Korean culture industries, some Korean artists rose to global star status, attracting the attention of the global media. K-pop acts such as Blackpink, CL or SuperM had been on popular talk shows such as *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, *The Kelly Clarkson Show*, and *The Ellen Show*. In the last couple of years, more and more Korean stars have become brand ambassadors for big fashion houses, some of them are G-Dragon for *Chanel*, IU for *Gucci*, and Song Hye-Kyo for *Fendi*. In addition, as Korean popular culture gained more audience and popularity, Korean artists began setting trends all over the world. K-pop idols' fashion, hair and make-up styles began to be reflected in the style of young people around the globe. Actresses' clear skin and shiny hair had turned into a

¹³⁶ Verhoeven, "'Squid Game' Creator Hwang Dong-hyuk Looks Back on Developing the Series."

subject of interest. As a result, Korean exports of fashion items and especially beauty products have skyrocketed.

Apart from these, social media has become an opportunity for fans and celebrities to interact. Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube enable two-way communication between artists and their global followers. In this way, fans have the possibility to directly message their favorite artists and get a reply, as well as artists, have the chance to get feedback on the work they put out. And on the other hand, fans create communities among themselves where they indulge in everything related to their favorite artists. This enables a connection between the fans and the artists that did not exist prior to these technologies, this situation also creates a new level of devotion among fans that either result in the consumption of what their favorite artists put out or even the creation of the idols' brand community on social media by arranging promotional activities for the sake of the artist.

In 2019, Twitter revealed that K-pop was the most tweeted music genre worldwide, with more than 6.1 billion tweets, and BTS was the most tweeted artist for the last three years.¹³⁷ Therefore, in the expansion of the new Korean Wave aside from the content creators, artists, and the government, fans also play a really important role. In connection with this, while the main audience of Hallyu 1.0 was middle-aged women, the new generation of the wave has come to appeal to all age groups and genders. K-pop, which constitutes the main cultural sector of this period, attracts listeners of all ages but has mostly young fan bases that are in their 20s or even teens.

¹³⁷ Coscarelli, "Why Obsessive K-Pop Fans Are Turning Toward Political Activism."

3.2.1.7 Video games

When it comes to video games Korea is advancing with confident and extremely fast steps toward its goal of becoming a leader in this regard. Korea's game market is leading the way globally, taking fourth place, at 6.3% of the global game industry, after the United States, China, and Japan.¹³⁸ In 2020, the gaming industry commanded more than half of the exports, selling about \$8.2 billion worth of products and services.¹³⁹

Moreover, Esports which first started in Korea with *StarCraft* (Blizzard Entertainment) in the late 1990s, has grown over the years and gained an important place in the gaming world. Promoters saw the potential in the field and began forming professional leagues. Later on, corporations wanted to take this to a next level, therefore some telecommunications and media corporations, including Samsung began investing in Esports.¹⁴⁰

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the Korean government has been taking steps to promote Esports globally, and accordingly, they received high praise from many gaming communities around the world.¹⁴¹ And in May 2020 the Ministry of Culture stated that, as the current leader of the Esports industry, they will create an ecosystem to stretch it out even further.¹⁴² The ministry is planning to designate some local PC rooms as Esports facilities and turn them into centers for holding diverse amateur game events and fostering amateur teams.

¹³⁸ Lee and Kim, "Korea Stays Fourth in Global Game Industry."

¹³⁹ Park, "K-Content Industry Sets another Export Record in 2020 at \$11.92 Billion."

¹⁴⁰ Jin, *Mobile Communication in Asia: Local Insights, Global Implications*, 66.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Song, "Korea to Relax Regulations on Game Industry to Lead Global Market."

3.2.1.8 Tourism and Korean cuisine

The immense growth in cultural industries of course set off other areas such as tourism and Korean cuisine, *hansik*. People from all over the world want to see the country that they have been seeing on their screens with their own eyes and taste the food that has been eaten in dramas. As interest in Korea increases, the number of foreign visitors is also increasing. When the Korean Wave began in 1997, the number of foreign tourists visiting Korea was around 300,000; by 2008 it was around 7 million, and by 2014 this number had reached 11.8 million.¹⁴³ In 2014, Korea presented a new Korean tourism brand, “Imagine your Korea” featuring a promotional clip of the K-pop band Bigbang. In the press release, it was stated that,

The new brand emphasizes the “K” in “Korea” to symbolize a variety of resources that are offered in Korea such as K-food. In addition, “Imagine your Korea” reflects Korea’s ambition and aspiration to attract 20 million tourists and to advance as a global tourist destination.¹⁴⁴

Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Korea had come close to this aim and in 2019, 17.5 million tourists visited Korea. As in the promotional video of “Imagine your Korea”, K-pop stars and Korean artists play a huge role in attracting tourists. Also, an important part of tourism marketing in Korea is the promotion of filming locations of Korean dramas as tourist attractions. For example, the number of Japanese tourists who visited Korea in 2004 after broadcasting the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* increased by 35.5% compared to 2003.¹⁴⁵

Korean food, *hansik*, is one of the fastest-growing cuisines globally, thanks to Korean Wave. There are a growing number of Korean restaurants all over the world. And the interest in Korean cuisine also affects the number of tourists who visit the country, as it is seen on the Korean tourism page, *Visit Korea*; food is one of the

¹⁴³ Tourism records from World Data Info’s webpage. <https://www.worlddata.info/asia/south-korea/tourism.php>

¹⁴⁴ Korean Tourism Organization Press Release, <https://kto.visitkorea.or.kr/eng/pr.kto>

¹⁴⁵ Bae and Kim, “The Effect of Hallyu on Tourism in Korea.”

main attractions of Korea. As in other cultural industries, the Korean government has also stepped into this area and in 2008 stated that they will promote *hansik* as one of the five major international cuisines.¹⁴⁶

3.2.2 Cultural policies of Hallyu 2.0

Cultural policies of the second period of the Korean Wave also show differences just like aspects that have been already explained. First of all, it is important to note that with the Lee Myung-bak government Korea had re-entered a conservative era after consecutive leaderships by liberal governments. This alone led both Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments to take steps in the culture sector that will differentiate them from the previous administrations. Both governments emphasized creative content policies and they were actively involved in the cultural industries as they believed that the industry will play a significant role in the national economy and national image.¹⁴⁷

During this era, the hands-off, indirect support to the cultural industries, gave its place to hands-on, direct support, as a result of the change in political ideologies.¹⁴⁸ Another important point is, as mentioned before, digital media platforms had changed the flow of Hallyu in the new era; therefore, the cultural policies that are implemented were according to these developments.

3.2.2.1 Lee Myung-bak government (2008-2013)

With Lee Myung-bak in office, political power was passed to a conservative administration from the previous liberal Roh Moo-hyun administration, thus, ending

¹⁴⁶ Phillips and Wolfe, "Investigating the Effect of Country Image and Subjective Knowledge on Attitudes and Behaviors."

¹⁴⁷ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave," 5524.

¹⁴⁸ Jin, "Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era," 35.

a 10-year period of liberal government. The change in ideologies was also reflected in policies. The Lee administration followed neoliberal norms, and this approach applied to the cultural industry.¹⁴⁹

Lee Myung-bak was a former businessman who served as the CEO of Hyundai Group; therefore he was knowledgeable about the importance of branding and good PR. During his presidency, Lee worked to combine the Korean Wave with soft power and change “the rhetoric of internationalization toward nation branding in conjunction with the Korean Wave.”¹⁵⁰ To that end, in 2009, ‘The Presidential Council on Nation Branding’ was created to oversee the plans for increasing Korea’s brand value and prestige in the global arena.¹⁵¹ The council developed the slogan ‘Global Korea’, “a campaign orchestrated by the government in close association with a number of business conglomerates including Samsung, LG, and Hyundai-Kia Motors and major entertainment companies, such as SM, YG, JYP.”¹⁵²

Throughout his presidency, Lee emphasized the role of culture in building up national power and globalizing Korean culture, and improving the nation’s brand in order to amplify Korea’s national status in the international arena, as well as develop the national economy.¹⁵³ As Korea’s Diplomatic White Paper outlined “culture has become an essential element to a nation’s competitive edge as a useful tool for creating added value.”¹⁵⁴

Lee also had a vision for South Korea to become a responsible and contributing member of the international community. Therefore, middle power

¹⁴⁹ Jin, “Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era,” 34.

¹⁵⁰ Kim and Jin, “Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave,” 5524.

¹⁵¹ Kim and Marinescu, “Mapping South Korea’s Soft Power: Sources, Actors, Tools, And Impact,” 2.

¹⁵² Kim and Jin, “Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave,” 5525.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2008 Diplomatic White Paper.
<http://www.mofat.go.kr/english/political/whitepaper/index.jsp>.

diplomacy was adopted as the foreign policy of the Lee government.¹⁵⁵ This indicates that Lee has raised the bar and wanted South Korea to be a major agent in the global arena without being limited to East Asia. And Lee's other policies were also designed to support middle power diplomacy.

For the development and expansion of Hallyu, the government significantly increased the budget of the cultural industries from 128.4 million won (\$138.000) in 2007 to 284.9 million won (\$260.000) in 2013.¹⁵⁶ In addition, through the Contents Industry Promotion Law that was established in 2010, the government decided to invest \$160 million “in order to situate the contents industry as a national strategic industry.”¹⁵⁷ And on top of this, Lee's administration merged the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Information and Communication and created the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in 2008. Also, they merged the Korean Broadcast Institute, the Korea Game Industry Agency, and the Korean Culture and Contents Agency; and established the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) in 2009.¹⁵⁸ All of them were established in order to oversee cultural industry-related tasks.

The Lee government also created policies that included strengthening ICT and promoted innovation in sectors such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, cultural technology, environmental technology, and space technology.¹⁵⁹ Strengthening the ICT infrastructure facilitated the culture sector's use of social media networks as a primary marketing tool to promote cultural content. Also during this period, the status of the Ministry of Culture was elevated further with the establishment of the

¹⁵⁵ Lee, “South Korea's Middle Power Activism and the Retooling of its Public Diplomacy,” 108.

Middle power diplomacy will be explained in Chapter 4.

¹⁵⁶ Jin, “Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era,” 34.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 35,36.

¹⁵⁹ Kwon and Kim, “The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave,” 424.

Cultural Product Trade Division which was designed to assist the global expansion of Korean firms.¹⁶⁰ And lastly, during this period, more steps were taken for copyright protection, to protect the commercial rights of domestic producers.¹⁶¹

3.2.2.2 Park Geun-hye government (2013–2017)

Park Geun-hye was elected as South Korea's 18th president in December 2012. She was the first female president of South Korea. She was also the daughter of former President Park Chung-hee. Just like the previous Lee administration, Park Geun-hye also relied on Hallyu for economic gains as well as a tool for heightening the country's national image. Even in her inauguration speech, Park emphasized the importance of a creative economy.

In the 21st century, culture is power. This is an era when an individual's imagination becomes creative content. As the "Korean Wave" is captivating people around the world, it is becoming a source of joy and happiness as well as abiding pride for all Koreans... Creative activities across a wide range of genres will be supported, while a content industry that merges culture with advanced technology will be nurtured. In so doing, we will ignite the engine of a creative economy and create new jobs.¹⁶²

"The Creative Economy," as Park stated is "the convergence between traditional industries and information and communications technologies, thereby becoming a new growth engine of the national economy."¹⁶³ The creative economy became the paradigm of the administration and cultural prosperity turned into a key to achieving it. Throughout her presidency, Park emphasized the fusion of technology and culture in order to turn Korea into a cultural powerhouse. Thus, the role of ICTs in the expansion of Hallyu became more prominent during Park's period.

¹⁶⁰ Kwon and Kim, "The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave," 424.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Full text of Park's inauguration speech from, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20130225001500315?section=search>

¹⁶³ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave," 5526.

The Park government carried out the “Culture and Creativity Fusion Belt” project, a development center for mass media and pop culture. The project involved a Culture and Creative Venture Complex where cultural content is created, the Culture and Creativity Academy where future culture producers are trained as well as the K-Culture Valley, a venue that will house a concert hall and a theme park.¹⁶⁴ Park administration also allocated 2 percent of the national budget to culture with the legislation of a framework act about the culture which was 0.9 percent in 2010.¹⁶⁵

Park also emphasized that the government and the public sector should work together for the expansion of Hallyu in order to turn it into a mainstream culture, not a temporary one. And the expansion of Hallyu would be beneficial for related businesses such as tourism, beauty, home appliances, and medical care.¹⁶⁶ Like the previous Lee administration, Park’s agenda was about industrial perspectives as well as cultural diplomacy and soft power.¹⁶⁷

As we have seen almost all the governments since the 1990s tried their best to develop the cultural industry as well as expand Hallyu globally. However, every step taken did not help the development of the cultural industries; on the contrary, some steps ended up hindering the development. In the second period of Hallyu, both Lee and Park governments had an “artist blacklist” that encompasses more than 1,000 anti-government cultural producers, media scholars, and practitioners.¹⁶⁸ This approach of governments often arises from criticism against themselves or their administration. For instance, in the case of then President Park Geun-hye, a painting made by the South Korean artist Hong Sung-dam, depicted the president as “a

¹⁶⁴ Sohn, “Park Administration Promotes Cultural Industries, Welfare.”

¹⁶⁵ Jin, “Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave Era,” 37.

¹⁶⁶ Park, “Bigdata Review Analysis of Media Reports on Hallyu Policy Issues by Regime.”

¹⁶⁷ Kim and Jin, “Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave,” 5527.

¹⁶⁸ Jin, “Ten Myths about the Korean Wave in the Global Cultural Sphere,” 4153.

scarecrow manipulated by evil forces, including her dictator father.”¹⁶⁹ Such approaches not only undermined freedom of thought and expression but for many Koreans reawakened the memories of the country’s dictatorship days when artists and media were under strict censorship.¹⁷⁰

3.2.2.3 Moon Jae-in government (2017-2022)

When Moon Jae-in became the president of South Korea in May 2017 liberals came to power once again. Moon has also served as chief of staff to then-President Roh Moo-hyun.¹⁷¹ Moon Jae-in's stance on culture was different than the previous conservative administrations. Since his presidential campaign, Moon Jae-in introduced "support but not intervene" as the backbone of his cultural policy. And unlike the previous two administrations' hands-on cultural policies, the Moon government tried to avoid unnecessary political intervention in the cultural industry and opted for hands-off policies, similar to the governments of the Hallyu 1.0 era.¹⁷²

The administration stated that the government will only support but will not interfere in cultural production. In 2020, at the New Year’s meeting at Seoul Arts Center, Moon specifically stated that “cultural freedom will be ensured as much as possible and people in culture and the arts will receive assistance to secure their livelihoods and have their welfare guaranteed to the maximum level.”¹⁷³ Moon's presidency has been the one that witnessed the greatest global expansion of Hallyu and a period in that Korean cultural content was critically acclaimed.

¹⁶⁹ Sang, “South Korea’s Blacklist of Artists Adds to Outrage over Presidential Scandal.”

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ McCurry, “Who Is Moon Jae-in, South Korea’s New President?”

¹⁷² Jin, “Ten Myths about the Korean Wave in the Global Cultural Sphere,” 4153.

¹⁷³ Xu and Kim, “President Moon Pledges Support For People in Culture and Arts.”

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPACT OF THE KOREAN WAVE ON THE COUNTRY

This chapter will discuss the overall impact of the Korean Wave on South Korea's image and reputation and examine how the South Korean government uses this wave as a tool for cultural diplomacy, benefit from its soft power effect and uses it to brand the nation.

4.1 Cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy has developed significantly over time and gained great importance as a component in the public diplomacy of many countries. Cultural diplomacy refers to a country's strategic efforts to promote its national interests "through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmissions abroad."¹⁷⁴ In a broader frame, it can be defined as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding."¹⁷⁵ Thus, culture is not limited to being "the arts," but also undertakes a diplomatic mission that can represent a country in the global arena and advance its position.

Moreover, cultural diplomacy can be seen as a subset of public diplomacy or "the operation of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals, to combat stereotyping, develop mutual understanding, and advance national reputation and relationships across the border."¹⁷⁶ In this context, public diplomacy can be explained as government communication or action aimed at foreigners to achieve

¹⁷⁴ Cull, "Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories," 33.

¹⁷⁵ Cummings, "Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey," "1.

¹⁷⁶ Mark, "A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy," 9.

changes in their “hearts or minds.”¹⁷⁷ Meaning, public diplomacy is a strategic effort to engage with citizens of other countries through fields such as culture, arts, information, media, language, and economic and humanitarian aid.¹⁷⁸

Nowadays, change in the “hearts or minds” of the people is being tried to achieve by “soft power.” The concept of soft power was first introduced by Joseph Nye in his book, *Bound to Lead*. Nye defines soft power as co-opt power that “makes others want what you want,” as opposed to “hard power” or the use of coercion.¹⁷⁹ According to Nye, soft power is attractive power, inducing an active change in people’s preferences and thereby changing their actions.¹⁸⁰ It can be said that soft power is the ability to achieve national goals through attraction rather than coercion. As Nye and Kim state,

The soft power of any country rests primarily on three resources: (1) the attractiveness of its culture, (2) its political values, when it lives up to them at home and abroad, and (3) its foreign policies when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.¹⁸¹

And as Nye points out, we live in an age where information is power, and “modern information technology is spreading information more widely than ever before in history, which adds to the reasons why soft power is becoming more important than in the past.”¹⁸² However, it is important to note that soft power and hard power cannot be completely separated from each other, as hard power is needed to some extent in order to gain soft power. And at the end, they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one’s purpose by affecting the behavior of others.¹⁸³ Soft power creates a more favorable public opinion contrary to hard power.

¹⁷⁷ Szondi, “Public diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences,” 6.

¹⁷⁸ Kim, “When public diplomacy faces trade barriers and diplomatic frictions: The case of the Korean Wave,” 2.

¹⁷⁹ Kim and Nye, “Soft power and the Korean Wave,” 31.

¹⁸⁰ Nye, “Soft Power and American Foreign Policy,” 6.

¹⁸¹ Kim and Nye, “Soft power and the Korean Wave,” 32.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁸³ Fan, “Soft power: Power of Attraction or Confusion,” 156.

Related to soft power, nation branding revolves around the idea of creating an attractive image of the country in the minds of foreign people. According to Fan, nation branding is “a process by which a nation’s images can be created or altered, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to enhance the country’s reputation among a target international audience.”¹⁸⁴

It is important to state that every nation has a “brand” with or without the nation branding process, and nation brand refers to the images that every country has in the minds of the foreign people, whether it is strong or weak, current or outdated, clear or vague.¹⁸⁵ A nation brand may contain “people, place, culture/language, history, food, fashion, celebrities, global brands, and so on.”¹⁸⁶ Therefore, nation branding is about altering the image that foreign people have about the nation.

Anholt states that the nation brand strategy is “reinforced and enriched by every act of communication between the country and the rest of the world.”¹⁸⁷ These acts include trade, tourism, media, investments, policies and the application of those policies, how culture is promoted, how citizens represent their country abroad and treat foreigners, relations with other countries, cultural events, and many others.¹⁸⁸

Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the concept of soft power and nation branding are integrated with one another. Nation branding can be used as a tool in developing and maintaining a nation’s soft power.¹⁸⁹ As Anholt states, “nation branding is about making people want to pay attention to a country's achievements and believe in its qualities.”¹⁹⁰ In other words, through nation branding, it is possible

¹⁸⁴ Fan, “Branding the Nation: Towards a Better Understanding,” 101.

¹⁸⁵ Fan, “Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded,” 12.

¹⁸⁶ Fan, “Branding the Nation: Towards a Better Understanding,” 98.

¹⁸⁷ Anholt, *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*, 11.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Fan, “Branding the Nation: Towards a Better Understanding,” 98.

¹⁹⁰ Anholt, *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*, 13.

to create an attractive image of a country in the minds of foreign people and thereby enhance the country's soft power.

4.2 South Korea's cultural diplomacy

As seen in the previous chapters, Korea has come a long way both socially and economically. It has developed a completely democratic system with free elections and the transfer of power between different political parties, made great progress in human and women's rights, and also took very successful steps in the fields of education and health. Moreover, the government has been able to develop the country economically in a considerably short time by adopting the state-led economic development model since the 1960s.

Even though neoliberalism has been started to adopt since the 1980s and has been fully embraced since the 1990s, we have seen that the government did not give up its role entirely in the development of the culture industry. The steps taken by the government with chaebols for the development of the culture industry, as well as the development of digital media, allowed the Korean Wave to grow and spread almost all over the world. With the development of the Korean Wave, Korea has become a well-known and attractive country in the last couple of years.

However, the view towards Korea was not always like this. Despite its spectacular economic development and success, creating a positive national image has not been an easy task for Korea.¹⁹¹ When Korea was mentioned, especially in the Western public imagination, the Korean War, poverty, or a country dependent on aid usually came to mind. Besides, for many people, North Korea was more known than South Korea, as it was more covered in the media.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Elfving-Hwang, "South Korean Cultural Diplomacy and Brokering 'K-Culture' outside Asia," 15.

¹⁹² Ibid.

The main reason for the interest shown in the cultural industry and the steps taken for the development of Korean popular culture was to overcome the 1997 IMF financial crisis. The use of culture as a resource came out as a necessity to explore new export markets in the wake of the crisis that Korea and Asia in general, were facing.¹⁹³ However, as time went by, as financial troubles faded away and the Korean Wave began to spread to larger areas, the approach of the policymakers to the Korean Wave also began to change. Besides being a source of income, Korean popular culture started to be seen as a “resource for soft power, transcultural collaborations, dialogues and struggles to win hearts and minds of people.”¹⁹⁴

As explained in Chapter 3, cultural policies have changed over time. The cultural policies of the 1990s and early 2000s were steps taken to develop and grow the cultural industries, both Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) governments focused on the industrial perspective of the Korean Wave. However, as the popularity of Korean popular cultural content spread throughout Asia and the rest of the world, the Korean government saw vast opportunities to utilize these cultural entertainment products as ‘soft power’ to elevate its national image. Korean Wave steadily became a multi-purpose tool for increasing overseas export volume, engaging with global audiences by encouraging them to consume Korean entertainment products and inciting foreigners’ cultural affinity to Korea.¹⁹⁵ In a way, the government who had been inspired by the economic gains of *Jurassic Park* realized that through Hallyu, Korea can also achieve the soft power gain the United States achieves with Hollywood, even though it was not their first intention.

¹⁹³ Kim and Jin, “Cultural policy in the Korean wave: An analysis of cultural diplomacy embedded in presidential speeches,” 5517.

¹⁹⁴ Kim and Nye, “Soft power and the Korean Wave,” 35.

¹⁹⁵ Kim, “When public diplomacy faces trade barriers and diplomatic frictions: The case of the Korean Wave,” 3.

However, it is important to indicate that Korea having its popular culture getting consumed by other countries does not directly turn into soft power. As Lee Geun states,

The Korean Wave is not soft power, but is one of Korea's many soft resources. Possessing soft resources does not guarantee the automatic conversion of soft resources into soft power. Therefore, one needs to come up with very refined and sophisticated strategies on how to mobilize one's soft resources to achieve certain political and economic goals and national interests. When such efforts are realized and positively influence the achievement of the goals, then one can say that soft resources are being translated into soft power.¹⁹⁶

Thereby, the Korean government evolved its cultural policies in a way that will lead to the enhancement of the national image and acquire soft power from the attractiveness of its cultural content. In other words, Korean popular culture became more than entertainment or art but a *method* by which Korea can promote human development, nurture intercommunity interaction, and establish collaboration between countries.¹⁹⁷

Starting from the Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) government, the approach to the Korean Wave in the context of cultural diplomacy was fully embraced. From then on, cultural policies become more focused on the soft power aspect, building national brand power, raising national image as well as Korea's positioning itself as an advanced middle power with an important role to play in the global arena both as an economic and cultural power.¹⁹⁸ Meaning, through the soft power effect of the Korean Wave, the government not only seeks to, as in Nye's terms, "get other

¹⁹⁶ Lee, "A theory of soft power and Korea's soft power strategy," 134.

¹⁹⁷ Jin, "The Korean Wave"

¹⁹⁸ Elfving-Hwang, "South Korean Cultural Diplomacy and Brokering 'K-Culture' outside Asia," 15.; Kim and Jin, "Cultural policy in the Korean wave: An analysis of cultural diplomacy embedded in presidential speeches," 5519.

countries to want what it wants” but also wants to position Korea as a nation that has an important contribution to make to the global community of nations.¹⁹⁹

The Lee administration sought to promote “Brand Korea” in order to “enhance Korea’s image as a reliable and developed business partner and to create an image of a dynamic and developed country with which advanced countries can aspire to do business.”²⁰⁰ In his 2008 Liberation Day speech, President Lee Myung-bak stated,

It is also especially important for Koreans to win respect in the international community. The value of Korea’s national brand only accounts for approximately 30 percent of the nation’s economic power...Korea is now one of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of manufacturing semiconductors. Nevertheless, the very first images that come to foreigners’ minds are labor-management disputes and street rallies. In this context, if the nation wants to be labeled as an advanced country, it will be necessary to improve its image and reputation significantly.²⁰¹

A year after this speech, the Lee administration established the Presidential Council on Nation Branding on January 22, 2009. The council was dissolved after Park Geun-hye’s government came to power in 2013, but until then the council carried out many activities. Lee Doo-hee (as cited in Schwak, 2016), a member of the Presidential Council on Nation Branding, explained Korea was the first country that has taken systematic measures to improve its nation brand, “particularly by establishing a separate organization and by creating its own tool for international comparison.”²⁰²

Korea’s intense interest in nation branding mainly stemmed from the government’s goal to raise the country’s status in the global arena. As it is stated in

¹⁹⁹ Elfving-Hwang, “South Korean Cultural Diplomacy and Brokering ‘K-Culture’ outside Asia,” 15.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Lee, A Great People with New Dreams, (Presidential Speech for the South Korean Independence Day)

²⁰² Schwak, “Branding South Korea in a Competitive World Order: Discourses and Dispositives in Neoliberal Governmentality,” 11.

the former website of the Presidential Council on Nation Branding (as cited in Schwak, 2016), “nation brand is the dignity of a country. Korea must raise its global status by making efforts to gain credibility and likability in the international arena.”²⁰³ And according to this statement, the council’s main objectives were “to increase Korea’s commitment and contribution to the international community; to help Koreans become responsible, respectful global citizens; and to promote Korean products and services.”²⁰⁴

The council served to deal with issues related to nation branding, including working in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which in 2010 published its first *Cultural Diplomacy Manual*. In the manual (as cited in Lee, 2021), it was stated that “along with diplomatic efforts focused on national defense in the 1980s and the economy and trade in the 1990s, culture will be the third pillar of diplomatic power in the twenty-first century.”²⁰⁵ Besides the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (MCST) is a major driver in Korean public diplomacy. MCST’s main objectives are to promote tourism as a national strategic industry, accelerate the growth of the sports industry, and improve Korea’s reputation as a global cultural power.²⁰⁶

In addition to bureaucratic acts, the government has sponsored numerous K-pop concerts, K-pop talent shows, and Korean food festivals around the world through Korean cultural centers and Korean embassies. As of 2022, there are 33 Korean Cultural Centers in 28 countries that carry out cultural activities to promote Korean culture. Some of these cultural festivals were the “Fashion and Passion” festival in Brazil, the K-pop festival in Mexico, the “Korea-Iran One Heart Festival”

²⁰³ Schwak, “Branding South Korea in a Competitive World Order: Discourses and Dispositives in Neoliberal Governmentality,” 11.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Lee, “Film as Cultural Diplomacy: South Korea’s Nation Branding Through *Parasite* (2019),” 5.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

in Iran, and “KCON Paris” in France.²⁰⁷ The K-pop festival that was held in Paris in 2016 was attended by former President Park Geun-hye and it attracted around 13,500 fans, presenting the visibility of Korean culture.²⁰⁸ Moreover, Korea’s national TV broadcaster KBS has been sponsoring K-pop concerts overseas including both Korean and host nation’s musicians.

When it comes to the private sector, chaebols played a major part in the nation branding strategy. Mnet Asian Music Awards, more known as, MAMA, held annually by a Korean company, CJ E&M, and aired through its cable music channel, Mnet, brings K-pop to a global audience of 2.4 billion people around the world.²⁰⁹ In 2014 MAMA, President Park Geun-hye gave a speech through a video message to celebrate the cultural event. According to MCST (as cited in Kim and Jin, 2016), it was the first major popular cultural event in which the President had appeared. The event was broadcasted live across 16 countries, therefore, in a way her speech indicated “the ostentation of the nation’s cultural industries and their leverage to regional communities.”²¹⁰

Presidential Council on Nation Branding launched the “Global Korea” campaign, in collaboration with major chaebols such as Samsung, LG, Hyundai, and entertainment companies such as SM, YG, and JYP, to incorporate the success of Korean popular culture into the governmental agenda.²¹¹ The council also sought to attract talented foreign students and strengthen academic relations between Korean and foreign universities through the Global Korea Scholarship Program.²¹²

²⁰⁷ Kim, “When public diplomacy faces trade barriers and diplomatic frictions: The case of the Korean Wave,” 3.

²⁰⁸ Kim and Nye, “Soft power and the Korean Wave,” 45.

²⁰⁹ Kim and Jin, “Cultural policy in the Korean wave: An analysis of cultural diplomacy embedded in presidential speeches,” 5514.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5515.

²¹¹ Schwak, “Branding South Korea in a Competitive World Order: Discourses and Dispositives in Neoliberal Governmentality,” 12.

²¹² *Ibid.*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) has been promoting Korea through “Visit Korea” campaigns and the official tourism website provides information about popular dramas and movies’ filming locations in order to attract the audience to the country. Besides, the government has also appointed the stars of the Korean Wave as tourism ambassadors, while hosting events for overseas fan clubs of the Korean Wave.²¹³ For example, fans of *Jewel in the Palace* can visit the historical drama’s shooting site, Jeju Folk Village, and experience traditional culture with *hanbok* (traditional clothes), *hanok* (traditional house), and *hansik* (traditional food).

The government also wanted to globalize traditional cultural contents such as *hansik*, *hanji* (mulberry paper), *hanbok*, and *hanok* to enhance Korea’s cultural image and support globalization of the *Han*²¹⁴ brand, so that Korean culture will be eventually integrated into the everyday lives of overseas consumers.²¹⁵ Korea’s branding drive has also included the creation of a string of catchphrases. The government started emphasizing the term “K-Culture,” and the letter “K” began to be officially used in multiple ways in the industry. Adding the letter “K” turned into a trend, such as K-Drama, K-Beauty, K-Fashion, and K- Musical.²¹⁶

It is important to state that all of these sectors; music, film, dramas, cuisine, cosmetics, and much more, complement and promote each other. In a way, all of them are linked to each other and for the consumers; they arouse curiosity for one another. As is often seen among fans of Korean cultural content, their journey begins

²¹³ Kim and Nye, “Soft power and the Korean Wave,” 46.

²¹⁴ South Koreans mostly refer to themselves as *Hanguk-in* (한국인), *Hanguk* meaning “the country of Han” and *Hanguk-in* meaning “people of the country of Han,” therefore the meaning of Han has great importance for Koreans. Also the word “Han” which is written with Chinese character 恨 is often used to describe an emotional burden or a deep sorrow that many Koreans believe that they carry inside themselves.

²¹⁵ Kim, “Korean Culture Key to Promoting Positive National Image”; Elfving-Hwang, “South Korean Cultural Diplomacy and Brokering ‘K-Culture’ outside Asia,” 15.

²¹⁶ Park, “Bigdata Review Analysis of Media Reports on Hallyu Policy Issues by Regime”

by watching dramas, and then through the songs they hear in dramas they either get interested in Korean music or through product placements that can be seen plenty on television shows, they get curious about either the technology or the beauty products, or even the Korean language. So, when we look at the broader picture, all the branches that promote each other are being used to promote Korea overseas. Through a single production, Korea manages to penetrate many areas of interest, and exert its influence over consumers' perception of the country. Through the cultural content that is produced and well-known celebrities who gain the adoration of people from all around the world, Korea manages to change the views on the country and create a favorable image that in return boosts the national image, economy, and security of the country.²¹⁷

In addition to all of these, there have been several important events that have positively affected Korea's image overseas in the past 20 years. The first one is the 2002 World Cup. Presented by Korea and Japan, this event contributed a lot to the foreigners' view of Korea in a better light and the country's opening up to the world, as it did in the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. The 2002 World Cup helped change the generally negative image of Korea by one that portrays Korea as a dynamic, technologically advanced country flowing with history and rich culture.²¹⁸ Besides, it was an important step in the relations between Korea and Japan. The other one is the G-20 summit held in Seoul in 2010. According to Nye and Kim, this summit alone “increased awareness of South Korea by almost 17%” thus, making it one of the country's most successful marketing events.²¹⁹ And the 2018 Winter Olympics once again promoted the country's soft power push.

²¹⁷ Lee, “A Soft Power Approach to the “Korean Wave,”” 134.

²¹⁸ Kim, “Korean Culture Key to Promoting Positive National Image”

²¹⁹ Kim and Nye, “Soft Power and the Korean Wave,” 45.



Figure 8. Closing ceremony of the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics
Source: AFP-JJI

Apart from cultural activities, there are some steps that have been taken by the Korean government to increase the country's visibility and influence in the global arena. For instance, Korea has been using its resources for international contributions in the fields of peacekeeping activities and development assistance. In addition, the government and civil society organizations have also undertaken advocacy roles on human rights and environmental issues.²²⁰ And as stated in Chapter 3, Korea has adopted middle power diplomacy as foreign policy.

Although the descriptions of middle power are complex to explain simply and they differ a lot from one another, in the shortest form it can be defined as follows;

When values such as geographical location and economic and military power are examined, countries that do not fall into the category of “great” or “small” are depicted as “middle power.” Carsten Holbraad defines middle power as “a state occupying an intermediate position in a hierarchy based on power, a country much stronger than small nations though considerably weaker than the principle members

²²⁰ Lee, “South Korea’s Middle Power Activism and the Retooling of its Public Diplomacy,” 107.

of the state system.”²²¹ However, when we go beyond the material capabilities, and soft power or foreign policy gets involved, the definition becomes focused on capacity, cooperation, creativity, coalition building, and credibility.²²² As Evans and Grant state, the middle powers' foreign policy has a tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, embrace compromise positions in international disputes, and their tendency to embrace notions of good international citizenship to guide their diplomacy.²²³

Therefore, as a middle power, the Korean government seeks to contribute to the peace and development of the world beyond the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.²²⁴ In 2013, Korea held a foreign ministers' meeting with four other middle powers, including Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey, and Australia. These five middle powers (abridged to MIKTA) agreed to seek creative and constructive solutions to common global problems such as poverty, climate change, and terrorism.²²⁵ Moreover, throughout Park's administration, Korea hosted a series of global conferences in addition to G-20, such as the second Nuclear Summit, and the fourth High-Level Aid Effectiveness Forum as a way of organized and effective public diplomacy moves.²²⁶

4.3 Anti – Hallyu sentiments

Korea has achieved great cultural successes, thus strengthening its soft power and raising its country's image with meticulously planned nation branding strategies.

However, of course, not every country likes the expansion of Korean culture and

²²¹ Holbraad, “The Role of Middle Powers,” 78.

²²² Ravenhill, “Cycles of Middle Power Activism: Constraint and Choice in Australian and Canadian Foreign Policies.”

²²³ Evans and Grant, *Australia's foreign relations*, 19.

²²⁴ Lee, “South Korea's Middle Power Activism and the Retooling of its Public Diplomacy,” 107.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

Korean products all around the world. In the end, the relevance and effectiveness of soft power depend on the target audience's perception of it and response to it. And as Fan states, soft power is still power, therefore, countries in this power relationship should mutually benefit from this relationship so that it can continue.²²⁷

Over the years, the Korean Wave has faced negative sentiments coming from various countries, mainly Asian countries such as Japan, China, Taiwan, and Thailand. The rise of Hallyu has caused uneasiness in these countries about non-reciprocal cross-cultural exchanges. The Asian media have argued that this one-sided Korean popular culture current has destabilized the cultural industries of the countries in the region. Some even stated this influx of cultural content borders on cultural invasion.²²⁸ Chinese newspapers reported the increasing number of Korean dramas on Chinese channels and the discontent stemming from Korean companies entering the Chinese market.²²⁹ And on top of that Korean Wave was partially banned in China due to Korea's declaration of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system deployment in 2016. China showed its dissatisfaction with this situation by banning travel agencies to sell tours to Korea, putting a halt on K-Pop activities.²³⁰

As mentioned in Chapter 2, due to Japanese colonialism, Korea and Japan have rather difficult relations; and only after 1998, cultural exchange between the two countries began. As the Korean Wave became more prevalent, some Japanese people began to voice out their disturbance toward the rising amount of Korean content in the Japanese media.

²²⁷ Fan, "Soft power: Power of Attraction or Confusion," 156.

²²⁸ Lee, "The Korean Wave : The Seoul of Asia," 90.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Huang, "China Is Trying to Punish South Korea by Keeping Its Tourists Away."

In 2011, more than 6,000 people gathered at the headquarters of Fuji TV to express their discontent with airing too many Korean dramas.²³¹ With the participation of right-wing organizations and conservative politicians in this anti-Hallyu rhetoric, the amount of Korean popular cultural content on Japanese national broadcasting networks dropped considerably.²³² K-pop also got its share from this situation, according to *The Korea Times*; in 2013, SM Entertainment alone had a 70 percent drop in their sales in Japan.²³³

Upon the complaints, Korean policymakers decided to take some measures both to maintain order in the region and to continue the cultural exchange. Accordingly, an official of the Korea Foundation for Asian Culture Exchange stated that they know that each country has its own unique culture and that these cultures should be preserved, and in the future, they need to be more aware of this situation.²³⁴

And yet, because the majority of Korean cultural content is consumed through digital media, Japanese people who enjoy Korean content continue reaching them through digital platforms. According to the 2019 Whitepaper on Korean Wave (as cited in Ahn and Yoon, 2020) Japan is one of the largest Korean popular culture consumers.²³⁵

Anti-Hallyu sentiments seem to be closely linked to a country's political standpoint towards Korea rather than the Korean cultural content itself. However, as seen in the case of Japan, due to digital media prevalence, fans of Hallyu can still consume Korean content even though national broadcasting channels impose restrictions unless the governments will not take large-scale precautions as in the

²³¹ Ahn and Yoon, "Between Love and Hate: The New Korean Wave, Japanese Female Fans, and Anti-Korean Sentiment in Japan," 183.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Chung, "Hallyu Sparks Cultural Rivalry in Asia's Big 3."

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ahn and Yoon, "Between Love and Hate: The New Korean Wave, Japanese Female Fans, and Anti-Korean Sentiment in Japan," 181.

example of China. In an environment where neoliberal order and free market economy prevail, whoever produces the product or content that will attract the consumer will be preferred.

In the case of K-pop, in order to avoid backlash, it has become a common practice for Korean entertainment companies to recruit talented young people from foreign countries such as Japan, China, or Thailand. After recruitment, entertainment companies put foreign trainees through idol training where they are taught to sing, dance, or act, and if successful at the end of the training, the foreign trainees become members of an all-Korean K-pop group. Thus, in addition to ensuring that foreign members receive the support of their own countries, the entertainment companies also create a hybrid structure that will prevent the backlash that may occur.

4.4 Overhaul of the national image

In the past two decades, aside from being one of the core components of the Korean economy, Korean popular culture has become the focal point of cultural influence and cultural diplomacy. Especially at a time when digitalization has developed so much and global communication and intercultural interaction have become easier than ever before.

Alongside its contribution to the economy, Hallyu's greatest contribution, and impact has been the overhaul of the overall national image. The wave increased Korea's visibility and created affinity towards the country, and changed the approach of foreigners to the country. The spread of Korean popular culture around the world has reshaped the national brand image. The improvement of the national image also had a positive effect on the political, social, and economic factors that make up the image of a nation as a whole.

While explaining the contribution of the Korean Wave to the country in general, it is necessary to mention its contribution to individuals. With the development of the culture industry, new markets and jobs were created and many people were employed. The overall number of employees in the cultural industries increased from 575,060 in 2005 to 644,847 in 2017. It constituted three percent of the entire job market and was bigger than the sizes of the semiconductor, computer, and telecommunications sectors in 2017.²³⁶ Apart from its economic effects, the effect of Hallyu on the image of the country was also reflected in the public. The way how Korea is perceived reflects Koreans' national pride. Through Hallyu, the "underdeveloped" tag surrounding the nation was replaced by the prestige of the "developed" country.²³⁷

As Fan states "nation branding, in essence, is to align the nation's image to the reality. This is particularly imperative for those countries that have undertaken dramatic changes in their political, economic, and social systems, as the external images almost always lag behind the reality."²³⁸

Korean people had to establish their country almost from scratch due to the tragedies they experienced, and they achieved it with determination, but they could not show it to the world. Hallyu gave them the opportunity to showcase their achievements. Choi explains the effect of Hallyu on the national psyche as follows,

Hallyu is taken, deep in the national psyche of Korea, as a holy vehicle to exit the long, dark tunnel of postcolonial and Cold War adversities fraught with war, underdevelopment, tyranny, corruption, international obscurity, and indignity; a vehicle motored by the nation's determination to sprint to the stage of wealth, autonomy, and pride. Hallyu-hwa is a crystallization of the people's collective yearning in the form of state-initiated, media-and corporate-supported policy campaigns passionately espoused by the great

²³⁶ Jin, "The Korean Wave"

²³⁷ Choi, "Hallyu versus Hallyu-Hwa Cultural Phenomenon versus Institutional Campaign," 49.

²³⁸ Fan, "Branding the Nation: Towards a Better Understanding," 101.

majority of the nation. Entrenched in the trope of Hallyu-hwa, therefore, is the undertone of retribution, sublimation, and redemption.²³⁹

²³⁹ Choi, "Hallyu versus Hallyu-Hwa Cultural Phenomenon versus Institutional Campaign," 50; with Hallyu-hwa, the author refers to the final form of Hallyu.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to investigate, how Korea, a small country surrounded by great powers, which has gone through many difficulties in its recent history, in a world dominated by Western cultural hegemony, has developed so much in such a short time and ended up becoming one of the popular culture powerhouses of the world. In this regard, Chapter 2 has delineated the historical developments of modern Korea and how Hallyu was developed. Chapter 3 has examined the different periods of Hallyu and the cultural policies that have been implemented by the Korean government for the growth of the culture industry, as well as the role of chaebols and emerging digital media. And Chapter 4 looked into Hallyu's effect on the country and how the government used Hallyu as a tool of cultural diplomacy.

As we have seen, Korea faced Japanese colonialism and the national division by the United States and the Soviet Union that led each side to completely different paths. Not only that, the country went through the Korean War, in which great losses were incurred and almost nothing remained of the country. Korea then came under military rule and successive authoritarian regimes, where great economic developments were experienced but socio-political turmoil and violations of rights and freedoms as well.

The transition to democracy has not been easy for Koreans. In the period up to 1987, the people spent tremendous effort and gave losses for their civil rights, and freedom, also to elect their own rulers, and for better living and working conditions. When the authoritarian regime ended, a new page full of possibilities opened for Korea. Culture, which served as a tool for the government to instill its own ideals in

the people before the transition to democracy, became an important contributor to the economic development of the country and it was also used to elevate the national image after the transition to democracy. The cultural policies that were once created to preserve Korean culture gave their place to the cultural policies created to ensure the growth and development of the cultural sector.

The state-led developmental model behind the country's economic success continued to be influential in the cultural industry as well. In other words, the government has shown the same attention to the culture industry that it has shown to the development of the light industries or Heavy Chemical Industry. Even though the government has completely adopted neoliberalism since the early 1990s and therefore the government's intervention was reduced in many areas, the government still played a crucial role in the development of the cultural industries.

As we have seen, whereas the popularity of Hallyu was mostly limited to Asia until the end of the 2000s, it started to spread all over the world since the early 2010s and moved from niche cultural trend status to steadily becoming a global phenomenon. The focal point of this thesis was to examine the reasons behind the spread of Hallyu; therefore in the following part, I will do an overview of my findings throughout this thesis.

First and foremost, the underlying cause of Hallyu's global spread is Korea's transition to democracy. Freedom of expression is crucial to foster artistic creativity. Under the authoritarian regime, culture was regulated and controlled in many ways therefore; there was no room for creative freedom. In this regard, only after the transition to democracy, Korea had the opportunity to display and spread its popular culture to the rest of the world.

Another reason that plays a role in the global expansion of Hallyu is its hybridity aspect, which makes Hallyu globally attractive. Hallyu is a blend of unique Korean culture with distinct traces of American and Japanese cultures. This characteristic makes it easier for foreigners to digest Hallyu, either because they recognize their own culture within Hallyu or because they are familiar with the culture due to Western cultural hegemony.

The other main reason is most definitely the government's support of the cultural industries. After understanding the importance of the cultural industry for the country's economy and image, the Korean government began giving attention to this industry. This attention was manifested by providing comprehensive support to develop the industry by, prioritizing the growth of related industries such as ICT, electronics, and multimedia; producing a series of developmental plans, providing financial assistance, opening investment for private actors, and training a skilled workforce. On top of these, the government established institutions and organizations such as the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE) and the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) to support the cultural industry.

It is important to emphasize that the government is not solely responsible for the success of Hallyu. The role of the government has not been more than building the necessary infrastructure for the development of cultural industries. What the Korean government has done was to remove the obstacles that could stand in the way of culture creators. On the other hand, chaebols have played a major role in the growth of Hallyu through capital investments and by developing digital technologies and high-quality cultural content.

The expansion of Hallyu also depends heavily on the quality of the cultural product, and therefore on culture creators. Like in the examples of Lee Soo-man or

Miky Lee, culture creators include directors, producers, singers, songwriters, and many more. Without the creation of high-quality content, no matter how much the government supports the cultural industries or chaebols finance cultural initiatives, the cultural sector could not flourish. In order to produce high-quality content, creativity and education are necessary.

Even though creativity can be considered as a talent or natural gift, still even the most talented individuals should be trained in order to reach their full potential. This is where the importance of education comes into play. As mentioned, education has great importance for the Korean nation. Education had been one of the main focuses of the government since the establishment of the Republic of Korea and many steps were taken to develop this area and to make the public as educated as possible. Whether it is directors, screenwriters, game developers; or idols that have to go through idol training or the workforce needed for technical development, education plays a key role in the development of the cultural industries.

And lastly, progress in digital technologies and social media platforms plays an important role in spreading Korean cultural content globally. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Spotify, and Netflix have made Korean cultural content available to a wider range of consumers. These platforms not only increase the number of Korean cultural content consumers but also establish and secure a tremendous amount of fan engagement that nourishes the cultural industry.

All of these factors come together and let Hallyu flourish and spread throughout the world. As a result, Hallyu makes a significant financial contribution to the economy, and besides, this phenomenon enhances the overall national image. In a way, Hallyu put Korea on the map and increased its visibility. To achieve this, the government has been taking many steps to improve the nation's brand. Since the

end of the 2000s, great efforts have been made to convert the soft power resources of Korea into active soft power to brand the country in the global society. Therefore, the Korean Wave has been developed as a soft power in parallel with the national economy. Thus, the growth of Hallyu not only increases the consumption of Korean cultural content but also contributes to the economy by promoting all export goods produced by Korea in the world market.

The Korean Wave presents us a great example of “the crossover of culture and economy, and the commercialization of culture through nation branding.”²⁴⁰ Many developing countries can follow the path of Korea and turn their own unique culture to contribute to their countries both in terms of economy and soft power. For example, when the growing popularity of Turkish television shows is taken into consideration, it seems like Türkiye can be a candidate that can go on a journey as Korea did with Hallyu.²⁴¹

Through immense hard work, and accumulation of educational and cultural capacity, as well as meticulous planning, Korea has reached this point in its cultural industry. The war-torn country is long gone, and in its place, there is a cultural powerhouse. The *hermit kingdom* is no longer *hermit* or the *shrimp among the whales* is no longer a *shrimp*. Today, Korea is a country that attracts attention from all around the world, a country that is highly advanced economically, socially, and technologically, and in the past 10 years, it has managed to change the direction of popular culture.

²⁴⁰ Kim and Nye, “Soft Power and the Korean Wave,” 49.

²⁴¹ Turkish television dramas reach more than 150 countries and expected to make more than \$600m in 2022. Kılınç, “Türk dizisi ihracatında bu yılki hedef 600 milyon dolar.”

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