



A Superpower Between Superpowers: How Post-Cold War South Korea Leveraged Pop Culture Into Soft Power

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A Superpower between Superpowers:
How Post-Cold War South Korea Leveraged Pop Culture into Soft Power

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Abstract

Understandings of soft power usually focus on its role in a relationship between larger, more militarily and economically powerful countries towards their less powerful counterparts. This thesis explores the inverse by asking: what does soft power look like when deployed by a less powerful state, towards more powerful states? Post-Cold War South Korea presents a useful case study: placed geopolitically between military and economic superpowers, it has consciously transformed itself into a cultural superpower through K-Pop as its government pursued its long-standing security interests of immediate peninsula stability, denuclearization in North Korea, and eventual peninsula reunification.

In this thesis, I consider the role of K-Pop in South Korea's three most significant security relationships: its ally and security guarantor, the United States; a nearby growing superpower, China; and its most pressing security liability, a North Korea in rapid pursuit of becoming a nuclear power. I also consider South Korea's notable global influence as an internationally trusted leader of multilateral institutions. The results of this review support that post-Cold War South Korea's government-supported growth into a cultural superpower through K-Pop does indeed play an important role in the dynamic of its security relationships with the United States and China, positively supporting its national security goals, and helping to position the post-Cold War republic into a key leader in multilateral institutions.

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Chapter I:

Introduction

Soft power is understood as the ability of State A to get State B to do what it wants with attraction, without using coercion or force. The emergence of discourse around soft power, which originated with Professor Joseph Nye, who coined this term at the end of the twentieth century, launched a discipline that transcended traditional understandings of how power is leveraged -- moving beyond a “carrot or stick” binary, where “carrots” are positive incentives, like trade agreements or delivery of goods, and “the stick” refers to coercive force, which typically include military engagements or economic sanctions -- or the threat of them.¹ This is a dynamic typically observed between more powerful states, towards less powerful states. The study of soft power is typically focused on the relationship between states thought to be more militarily and economically powerful towards states less powerful in those respects. In this thesis, I explore the inverse of this relationship: how does -- or can -- a state less powerful exert or leverage soft power towards a state more powerful? How do middle power states use soft power to try to influence the behavior of the larger, more power states -- and to what degree can we determine these efforts to be successful?

A useful case study through which to consider this question is South Korea, placed between the United States vis-a-vis its role as security guarantor, neighboring

¹Nye, Joseph. "Global Power Shifts." TEDGlobal100. Video. July 2010. 4:43-6:20.
https://www.ted.com/talks/joseph_nye_on_global_power_shifts/transcript?language=en

China, and North Korea. This review of South Korea's important security relationships supports that South Korea's intentional use of K-Pop as a soft power tool reflects a meaningful pathway for middle power states to exert influence towards their more powerful counterparts.

First, we must clarify the difference between what it means to be influential and what it means to be attractive as a means to exert influence: in his book, "Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics," Nye is careful to distinguish between the concept of influence and attraction, arguing that democratic states are uniquely well-positioned to leverage this tool:

Whereas leaders in authoritarian countries can use coercion and issue commands politicians in democracies have to rely more on a combination of inducement and attraction. Soft power is a staple of daily democratic politics. The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality culture political values and institutions and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority. If a leader represents values that others want to follow it will cost less to lead.²

Since the world order was reconfigured after the fall of the Berlin Wall, South Korea, too, was emerging as a new democracy in a part of the world that had few of them. And its geopolitical challenges and significant success as a global player, in the context of the dramatic growth and global success of one of its most notable exports -- K-Pop -- make it especially well-suited for a case review on the role that middle power states can play in leveraging soft power towards more powerful states -- in this case, the United States and China -- and by virtue of the geopolitical threat it poses, North Korea; the contrast between the political systems of these three states (democratic, authoritarian,

²Nye, Joseph. "Soft Power The Means To Success In World Politics." Public Affairs Books. 2005. https://www.academia.edu/30939110/Joseph_S._Nye,_Jr._Soft_Power_The_Means_To_Success_In_World_Politics_Public_Affairs_2005.

and totalitarian, respectively) creates a comparison that will be useful for us to consider in the South Korean context. By evaluating post-Cold War South Korea's leveraging of K-Pop as a soft power tool, we also expand our understanding of soft power as hardly remaining within the traditional confines of being leveraged by a militarily and economically more powerful country towards one that is less powerful.

To address the question of how post-Cold War South Korea has effectively used soft power to advance its foreign policy objectives, it is critical to first assess the immediate geopolitical landscape and foreseeable future that the Korean peninsula grappled with immediately post-Cold War. What kind of hard or soft power resources did South Korea already possess? And by applying understandings of soft power relationships-- particularly as they especially relate to middle power states -- to considering the short-term and long-term breadth of South Korea's foreign policy goals is an essential component of this research -- in addition to evaluating the level of institutional support and nature of and range of the ideological messages incorporated in these cultural products. The second phase of research considers individually of South Korea's most critical foreign policy relationships: its relationship with North Korea, China, the United States, in addition to its standing globally, particularly with respect to its role leading multilateral institutions. Looking at favorability polling, the reach of its cultural products -- and the strategic benefits of that reach, and notable foreign policy events will help give us a sense of any efficacy to South Korea's soft power apparatus.

Research Limitations

My research limitations have mainly to do with limits within the known landscape of academic research that exists in the context of examining more closely -- and more uniquely -- how soft power might be leveraged by middle power states to secure positive foreign policy outcomes. The bulk of current research focuses on how larger, more powerful states exert soft power influence on less powerful, smaller states; this thesis will, in part, explore the inverse.

My current lack of fluency in the Korean language represents a research limitation. But most sources were written in English, or had credible English translations.

Another research challenge is that this is a contemporary issue. At the time of writing this thesis, the security challenges that South Korea faces are ongoing, with new developments that occur often.

Chapter II:

Fertile Ground for Soft Power: The Post-Cold War Landscape on the Korean Peninsula

In 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall widely marked the conclusion of the Cold War and cemented the global dominance of the United States as a unipolar superpower, a Cold War-era border persisted: the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) -- which continues to, through the threat -- and occasional practice -- of force, divide the Korean peninsula. With North Korea maintaining close allyships with formerly communist states like the former Soviet Union, in what would become Russia, and engaging in what would become a meaningful trade relationship with China, South Korea enjoyed the military support of the United States, had a limited set of tools from which to draw upon in terms to balancing its security interests against a hostile northern state, in the face of necessary reckoning with major players whose interests did not always come any assurance or guarantee of correlating with their own.

Following the end of the Cold War, at a critical juncture as the world order shifted beyond a bipolar landscape between the United States and the then-Soviet Union, towards one where the United States would operate globally as the undisputed unipole -- and where China projected a future of what would become immense growth as regional -- and soon, global -- economic and military power, South Korea faced a critical question of how best to leverage its then-limited resources to optimize the necessary security relationships it would need to rely on in the face of a new, uncertain landscape.

But one objective seemed clear: a positive, if not exceptionally close, relationship would position strengthening its relationship with the United States represented a key, if not the key foreign policy priority for South Korea's post-Cold War security calculations. In arguing that the Cold War -- in which it is argued that Korea served as a proxy between the United States and the Soviet Union³, shaped South Korea's political and security relations, Choong-Nam Kim, in *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, describes the post-Cold War relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea as "...hardly equal -- it was more likely to be a patron-client relationship. South Korea accepted the American dominance because its survival had been dependent upon the American military and economic support."⁴ And U.S. President Trump's comment in October 2018 that South Korea "...does nothing without our approval" represented a realpolitik, if not blunt, assessment of what he understood power relationship between South Korea and the United States to be -- that, certainly when it comes to security issues on the peninsula, particularly with respect to diplomatic engagements and military movements concerning North Korea, implied at least is that the United States, as South Korea's effective security guarantor as its primary military ally, would have informal veto power over South Korean foreign policy behavior it disagreed with on a significant enough level.

³Micalizio, Caryl-Sue. "Jun 27, 1950 CE: U.S. Enters Korean War." *National Geographic Society*. May 30, 2014.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/jun27/us-enters-korean-war/>

⁴Kim, Choong-nam. "The Management of the ROK-U.S. Relations in the Post-Cold War Era." *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2003): 52-92.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23257228>.

More formally, the United States' veto power as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council also offers another weight in its favor in power balance within the U.S.-South Korean relationship. Such an imbalance is, on a concrete level, unlikely to change in any foreseeable future, considering the existential necessity of the United States' military support amidst the security concerns that South Korea has, but it is within this framework that we can explore the subversive nature of South-Korean-led soft power within the ROK-US relationship.

And China, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, with its immense geopolitical weight (and ambition), and support for North Korea, was positioning itself to be a competitive regional player. As China became a critical, existential economic partner to North Korea, South Korea's security interests remained at risk -- particularly as China neared closer to superpower status entering the 21st century. As it increasingly asserted its economic and military hegemony in the region, South Korea would not foreseeably be able to totally match it on these fronts: but through soft power, becoming a cultural giant both in China and in areas where Mainland China seeks greater influence (for example, in Taiwan) or in regions where it seeks greater influence, "locally" in the South China Sea, or globally -- as far in African and Middle Eastern regions, offers paths for South Korea to mitigate the totality of Chinese attempts to establish hegemony.

Post-Cold War South Korea has had three primary broad security objectives: first, stability through de-escalation, to continue to stabilize and maintain the stabilization of the peninsula -- this is, in other words, conflict risk reduction; second, to move towards the denuclearization of North Korea, a major source of tension and instability risk -- a North Korea armed with nuclear weapons raises the potential costs of conflict to

unacceptable levels; and third, moving towards peninsula reunification -- South Korea's penultimate foreign policy strategy for long-term peace and stability. But compared to fellow players in the region, South Korea had few resources immediately following the end of Cold War. Positioned at critical turning point for its system of governance, as South Korea faced a dramatic reconfiguration of power dynamics in its multilateral relationships with states with immediate geopolitical interests, it lacked the economic or military prowess at the time to be meaningfully competitive within those areas. Joseph Nye described South Korea as being placed "within giants":

If geography is destiny, South Korea was dealt a weak hand. Wedged into an area where three giants — China, Japan, and Russia — confront each other, Korea has had a difficult history of developing sufficient "hard" military power to defend itself. Indeed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, such efforts failed and Korea became a colony of Japan.⁵

Economically, it had yet to reach a meaningfully competitive status as a trade partner, nor did it have the military resources it needed to fend off an attack from the North without incurring serious and existential domestic costs -- costs that a meaningfully productive relationship with China could avoid.

And at the close of the Cold War, South Korea did not possess obvious geographic or economic advantages that would allow it to immediately leverage geopolitical influence in the region, a dilemma that increased the attractiveness of investing in soft power as a foreign policy priority. The concept, as articulated by Joseph Nye, describes soft power as an ability to attract and co-opt and ultimately shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. So, instead of investing in military

⁵Nye, Joseph. "South Korea's Growing Soft Power" Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. November 11, 2009.
<https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/south-koreas-growing-soft-power>.

force, or economic infrastructure, investing in the development and exportation of cultural products would be a critical tool for establishing leverage in a region with competing spheres of influence over the Korean peninsula. Beginning with the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, South Korea set out on a course that would ultimately bring it to the top tier of cultural superpowers in the early 21st century. At the same time, conversely, its northern and closest neighbor, North Korea, took an (extreme) opposite track, choosing instead to boost its investments in hard power by aggressively, in defiance of the global community, pursuing the development of nuclear weapons -- pursuing a geopolitical stance of isolation, essentially precluding it from developing soft power tools on meaningfully comparable levels.

But cultivating soft power requires a long view: a state is not usually positioned to decide to quickly invest in and develop cultural exports that see quick return on investment, in this case, to produce desired security outcomes quickly. A carrot or stick offer -- to borrow an analogy used by Nye -- intimates an expectation of a variation of a quick return, or turnaround time-frame for a response. But leveraging soft power requires a longer-term timeline -- one that lends itself well to being part of a security strategy that can withstand -- and evolve with -- changing administrations and evolving security calculations. In this vein, South Korea, from the start of the post-Cold War era, seems to have been well-positioned to leverage soft power -- and perhaps has no choice but to -- towards larger, more powerful states, all of which have hegemonic stakes and aspirations in the region -- with areas of mutual benefit and competition.

Questions to Consider

With the South Korean government involved at the highest levels in support of promoting South Korean cultural exports, can we understand that these efforts are ultimately effective as a foreign policy strategy for a middle power in this context? More broadly, how can we best assess the nature of how this behavior functions as a soft power diplomatic tool for a middle power state -- and to which ends? It will be useful to consider the following:

1. How has South Korea's bilateral soft power behavior with North Korea impacted the state of the ongoing Korean peninsula conflict? To what degree can we explore a relationship between South Korea attempts to export its cultural products to North Korea and positive, neutral, or negative development in the South Korea - North Korea relationship?
2. On a multilateral basis, how does a middle power like South Korea engage these tools in its security relationships with more powerful states -- in this case, the United States and China? In other words, how has South Korean institutional support for the development of soft power tools affected its relationships with these two superpowers, particularly respect to securing South Korean security interests in the region?
3. What insights do we gain from assessing institutional support for South Korea's global soft power reach? As a middle power, South Korea has few, if any, immediate geopolitical considerations beyond its immediate region -- why then, is institutional support for the exportation of cultural products occupy such a large global platform -- namely in regions like the South China Sea, where China is seeking greater hegemony?

4. What ideological products are being exported through South Korean cultural products like K-Pop, K-Dramas, and K-Cosmetics -- and what purpose do these serve? Can we understand these ideological concepts supportive, or meant to be supportive, of South Korean foreign policy objectives? How do we distinguish these from Joseph Nye's understanding of propaganda in this respect?

Chapter III:

Middle Powers and the Soft Power Pedagogy: A natural fit?

To fully understand the implications of South Korea's soft power strategy -- and to assess its strength -- it is also necessary to establish and evaluate it through an appropriate pedagogical framework. And when it comes to the relatively recently developed concept and framework of soft power, Harvard academic Joseph Nye offers an ideal foundation.

The framework first articulated and developed by Nye moved mainstream understandings of power dynamics beyond hard power -- a more straightforwardly calculable dynamic that could readily utilize game theory scenarios based on costs and gains -- an analysis more suited for measurement through statistical models. But the power to influence others through attraction is less quantifiable in that its measurements are not linearly articulated within the context of costs and gains -- unlike perhaps the threat of a military strike might be in a cost-benefit game theory scenario.

This difference in evaluative structure presents a challenge: how then do we assess a middle power's ability to attract? Here we will hardly argue that soft power exists alone, operating in a vacuum unaffected by military assets or economic strength -- part of a challenge of considering soft power's role in a state's foreign policy successes -- or perhaps lack of spectacular failures (indeed, the lack of a crisis may sometimes support that the state has pursued a certain foreign policy strategy that we might consider as having had a successful outcome), is that its successes are closely tied with its other

policies -- policies that in South Korea's case would include forms of hard power, found in its close military alliance with the United States, or its contemporary global economic prowess. Fundamentally arguing that neither of these aspects operate in silos, Nye writes:

The soft power of a country rests heavily on three basic resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority).⁶

Geun Lee, in *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, has expanded on Nye's concept of soft power, particularly as it pertains to middle power nations that lack the coercive hard power that more powerful nations possess, arguing that different forms of soft power exist:

(1) soft power to improve the external security environment by projecting peaceful and attractive images of a country; (2) soft power to mobilize other countries' support for one's foreign and security policies; (3) soft power to manipulate other countries' thinking and preferences; (4) soft power to maintain the unity of a community or community of countries; and (5) soft power to increase the approval ratings of a leader or domestic support for a government.

Lee was careful to illustrate the important distinction between soft power that can be leveraged by a superpower like the United States and soft power leveraged by a country that lacks hegemonic power:

The categorization of different types of soft power is important because it enables us to think more in strategic terms, and to be goal-oriented. A goal of simply "becoming attractive" is meaningless unless a country is an empire or hegemon like the United States, with its goal to maintain its preponderance or unipolarity without paying huge costs in terms of hard resources. As noted earlier, Nye's works on soft power are therefore very hegemonic, and should not be mechanically copied and imported by lesser powers. Otherwise, lesser powers will only increase soft resources, without knowing what they really want from

⁶Keck, Zachary. "The Hard Side of Soft Power" *The Diplomat*. July 24, 2013. <https://thediplomat.com/2013/07/the-hard-side-of-soft-power/>.

those soft resources. It should be repeated again that “attractiveness” in international affairs always goes together with international leadership.⁷

The Challenge of Soft Power for South Korea’s Government

But unlike hard power engagements that deliver through force, such as a military campaign or economic sanctions, or enticements through trade deals or military support, leveraging soft power requires leaving a lot of control outside of the government -- leaving the government to perhaps, provide the necessary conditions and support through which soft power tools can emerge. Nye, in 2004, wrote:

Soft power is more difficult, because many of its crucial resources are outside the control of governments, and their effects depend heavily on acceptance by the receiving audiences. Moreover, soft power resources often work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and sometimes take years to produce the desired outcomes.⁸

This represented a challenge for South Korea -- a challenge that perhaps, following the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, that its leaders may have seen fit to meet -- given the soft power success of those Olympics.⁹ And considering that soft power thrives more from liberal democracies than authoritarian regimes, South Korea’s move toward

⁷Lee, Geun. "A Theory of Soft Power and Korea's Soft Power Strategy." *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 21, no. 2 (2009). 215-216
https://hollis.harvard.edu/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_proquest59987064&context=PC&vid=HVD2&search_scope=everything&tab=everything&lang=en_US

⁸Nye, Joseph. “‘Wielding Soft Power’ Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics.” (April 5, 2004)
https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/joe_nye_wielding_soft_power.pdf

⁹Fryer, Martin. “South Korea’s Soft Power Strategy” British Council. March 2018. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/south-korea-soft-power>.

liberalism might have offered a practical path towards increasing its soft power apparatus.

Another question emerges: every political state or nation-state arguably has its own distinct culture, or an assortment of cultural products -- what makes South Korea different? And in the context of this study of how a middle power leverages soft power -- how do we adequately assess any geopolitical significance here?

While soft power is in essence an extra-governmental resource, it is shaped by political and economic factors. China, for example, has no shortage of culture or a desire to export cultural products. But China is not a democracy -- is it that being a democratic state gives South Korea necessary fuel to grow and export cultural products that enhance its soft power standing?

The ideology in these cultural products is important to consider. Using the framework of our understanding of South Korea's post-Cold War geopolitical objectives, what message is K-Pop sending to the international community? What ideology -- or statement -- is South Korea's government so intent on fostering? Under the country's liberal system of governance, we understand that South Korea's prominent status as a liberal democracy that allows for the free expression of ideas is in of itself a powerful idea that K-Pop, being the international phenomenon it is, is able to convey authentically.

Ostensibly for South Korea, a probable competitor, based on superpower status and economic and military gravitas, in the East Asian soft power landscape includes China. But in "The Information Revolution and Soft Power," Nye writes,

In 2009, Beijing announced plans to spend billions to develop global media giants to compete with Bloomberg, Time Warner and Viacom to use soft power rather than military might to win friends abroad. As David Shambaugh has documented, China has invested billions in external publicity work including a 24 hour Xinhua

cable news channel designed to imitate Al Jazeera. But for all its efforts, China has had a limited return on its investment. A recent BBC poll shows that opinions of China's influence are positive in much of Africa and Latin America, but predominantly negative in the United States, everywhere in Europe, as well as India, Japan and South Korea. Similarly, a poll taken in Asia after the Beijing Olympics found that China's charm offensive had not been effective. Great powers try to use culture and narrative to create soft power that promotes their advantage, but it is not an easy sell when it is inconsistent with their domestic realities.¹⁰

Nye's description of the disparity between China's investments and return on soft power capital-building for us underscores the necessity of, in the superpower example, of consistency between domestic politics and ideas communicated globally through soft power tools. To study South Korea, which has seen its global soft power reach grow as it grew from a closed, authoritarian Cold War-era state to an open, consolidated democracy, within this understanding of how soft power is institutionally supported and leveraged makes for a fertile landscape in which to understand more deeply how a middle power state like South Korea might find opportunities to occupy space within the soft power landscape.

South Korea's role as a liberal democracy has provided a counter to Chinese soft power initiatives -- but not for, on China's part, a lack of trying. Despite the Chinese government's efforts to promote state-designed cultural products, consumption of South Korean pop culture products is widespread -- and shows no sign of slowing. Even a ban on Korean cultural imports over the THAAD dispute did little to slow down any consumption. China is an exceptionally large country, with a rich cultural history. Why then, have South Korean cultural imports so dramatically outpaced their Chinese peers in

¹⁰Nye, Joseph S. "The Information Revolution and Soft Power." *Current History*. 19-22. 2014. <https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/11738398/nye-informationrevolution.pdf?sequence=1>

consumption? Maybe the answer boils down to the political systems from which these products have emerged -- and promote. Nye argued that for soft power to exist -- or be effective -- it likely must come - authentically - from a liberal society with freedom of expression.

But not all students of soft power agree that effective soft power most often springs from liberal systems - and in fact have argued that soft power tools may also be effectively wielded by authoritarian, nondemocratic regimes. Vincent Charles Keating and Katarzyna Kaczmarek look to Russia as an effective leverager of soft power, arguing,

...Russia's conservative values and illiberal governance models generate admiration and followership, even outside of what Russia claims to be its post-Soviet sphere of influence. Crucially, this admiration and followership perform the traditional function of soft power: generating support for controversial Russian foreign policy decisions.¹¹

But this is problematic in that the illiberal governance models that Keating and Kaczmarek refer to as generating admiration and followership are operated and sustained by force -- in other words, hard power. While it certainly merits discussion whether at very fundamental level that liberal systems of governance are also ultimately enforced through hard power (at the the end of the day an undemocratic challenge even to a liberal system, i.e. through a coup, is countered by hard power), it misses the opportunity to address the concerns underlying the fundamental question of why K-Pop has been so successful as a commodity and cultural force throughout Chinese culture --

¹¹Keating, Vincent Charles & Kaczmarek, Katarzyna Conservative soft power: liberal soft power bias and the 'hidden' attraction of Russia." *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2019) 22: 1. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0100-6>

and across the world, especially in areas where China is seeking greater influence and hegemony.

A Fine Line: Soft Power or Propaganda?

A critic of K-Pop as a soft power tool might argue that the level of domestic government support for Korean cultural products is significant -- and acts more like propaganda instead. With North Korea's current iron grip on its media, the peninsula is no stranger to the meaning of propaganda. This critique might cite the South Korean government's Popular Culture Industry Division, which has a budget of USD 500 million, with goals to build a cultural industry worth USD 10 billion by 2019, or the investment fund built to support the growth and exportation of Korean cultural products is worth USD 1 billion, of which 20-30% is sponsored by the South Korean government; the rest is funded by private companies and investment banks, and managed by the Korean Venture Investment Corporation.¹² Or the involvement of the South Korean Ministry of National Defense, which is listed as a supporter of internationally popular television series, "Descendants of the Sun" in the show's closing credits; according to Kyungjae Jang,

The extent of the support is unclear, but military equipment including helicopters appeared in the drama, and military facilities such as Camp Greaves (an American military base after the Korean War which was returned to Korea in 2007) were used as shooting locations...the Ministry of National Defense conducts content

¹²Roll, Martin. "Korean Wave (Hallyu) - The Rise of Korea's Cultural Economy & Pop Culture." The Martin Roll Company. January, 2018.
<https://martinroll.com/resources/articles/asia/korean-wave-hallyu-the-rise-of-koreas-cultural-economy-pop-culture/>

checks and then supports works deemed to enhance the image of the Korean military.¹³

Considering the level of institutional support for promoting Korean cultural products, it is not outlandish to question its role as a propaganda tool. But evidence to support that K-Pop is a product of coercive force, rather than a products of private enterprises within a free and democratic society, remains to be found. However, in studying the notably high level of institutional support of this soft power tool, it is important to consider this question as we consider the messages conveyed by these products and their funding.

And consider it we must, in the face of notable security challenges for South Korea: with China poised to grow in its ability to compete with the United States as a global economic and military superpower in the 21st century, South Korea faces the prospect of an increasingly globally powerful neighbor. For South Korea, the United States currently provides a useful check on China's ability to dictate terms geopolitically, both with respect to trade routes in the sea and its close relationship with North Korea, albeit with concerns that U.S. could be retreating from norms for its role on the world stage under the presidency of Donald Trump. Indeed, at the same time, a more powerful China could very well include a more powerful, or emboldened, North Korea. Increasingly, soft power offers South Korea a useful tool with which it can counter -- or limit -- China's global influence.

¹³Jang, Kyungjae: *Between Soft Power and Propaganda: The Korean Military Drama Descendants of the Sun* , *Journal of War & Culture Studies*. March 3, 2018. Page 7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2018.1426209>

Chapter IV:

State-sponsored soft power? Assessing Institutional Support for K-Pop

Initially, President Kim Young-sam, who served from 1993 to 1998 as South Korea's first civilian president after its democratic transition, oversaw the launch of a concerted effort to globally engage in a promotion of Korean culture. As internet technology developed and became more widespread, and South Korea's economic growth expanded to new levels, perceptions of South Korea as a third-world country lingered. Kim's *seguehwa* (globalization) agenda reflected a recognition of the reshifting of the world power balance structure and embraced a more interconnected world via globalization as a means of applying post-Cold War external pressure on states. But more broadly, the South Korean *seguehwa* agenda was a tool ultimately used to assert South Korea as a cultural state¹⁴ on the world stage. Perhaps, the thinking seemed to be at the time, if South Korea was at an inherent disadvantage economically or militarily, it could leverage its cultural resources to leverage influence to reach desired foreign policy outcomes.

In 1994, South Korea's Ministry of Culture established the Bureau of Cultural Industries, and three years later, in 1997, President Kim Dae-jung's administration published the New Cultural Policy, which stressed the importance of "internationalizing"

¹⁴Kang, Hyungseok. "Contemporary cultural diplomacy in South Korea: explicit and implicit approaches." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. Sep. 2015, Vol. 21 Issue 4. p. 436. (2015) <http://ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=103417127&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

South Korea's international cultural image by expanding exports of cultural products. By focusing on a "industrial and scientific" approach to culture, this policy paved the way for a new law that would pass in 1999, called "Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion." Stipulating that the government should take an active role in supporting and promoting the development of cultural industries, twenty-two more laws were subsequently passed through to the mid-2000s that, in using the term "international exchange" promoted cultural sector and content development as an integral part of nation-branding in a broader global strategy.

Decentralization in government support of these cultural products occurred in the mid-2000s, notably with the creation of the Korea Foundation for Cultural Industries Exchange (KOFICE). This was an autonomously operated, non-governmental organization with a goal of "foster[ing] mutual understanding between Korea and other countries through various international programs of cultural industries and establishing cooperative foundation through acting as a channel for private cooperation" (Kang, 441). Rooted in a practical motivation to harness the competency and creativity of the private sector in producing popular cultural products, it also served to distance the government from appearing to be so closely tied to its development and exportation.

The effort to reshape international perceptions of South Korea ramped up under the administration of President Roh Moo-hyun, who, in his 2003 inauguration speech, called for cultural content to become a core aspect of South Korea's economy -- an initiative leading Roh's Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT) to release a plan in 2005 entitled "Culture Strong Nation (C-Korea)" that outlined the government's goal to reach a "top 5 cultural content nation" status by 2010, (Kang, 440) which would join South

Korea with the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, and France as a leading global exporter of culture. More broadly, these initiatives under Roh represented an energetic agenda that sought to establish South Korea internationally as a cultural state.

Consistently, at the highest levels of South Korea's government after the Cold War, developing and leveraging soft power appears to have been an important, if not critical, foreign policy objective. Former President Lee Myung-bak's expression of a vision for a "Global Korea"¹⁵ offers a useful look into an increasing government interest in cultural diplomacy as a component of a broader Korean foreign policy strategy. According to its diplomatic white paper at the time, goals towards "enhancing the national image" in a range of functional areas of international cooperation such as terrorism, multilateral system reform, and cultural diplomacy" were expressed as a top-level foreign policy objective.¹⁶ When in 2013, President Park Geun-Hye exclaimed that "In the 21st century, culture is power" in her inauguration speech¹⁷, she put front and center a public declaration of an institutional understanding of cultural exports being a valuable and viable foreign policy priority, going as far as using her state visits to foreign countries in the Americas (Mexico, Peru, and Brazil) and in Eastern Europe (Czech

¹⁵Snyder, Scott. "Lee Myung-bak's Foreign Policy: A 250-Day Assessment." Korean Journal of Defense Analysis, Volume 21, Issue 1. March 2009. Page 2. <https://www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/SnyderLMBForeignPolicyKJDA.pdf>

¹⁶Snyder, p. 24

¹⁷Park, Guen-Hye. Text of Presidential Inauguration Speech, February 25, 2013. Yonhap News Agency. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2013/02/25/95/0301000000AEN20130225001500315F.HTML>

Republic) to promote Korean Culture by not only personally attending but organizing cultural events that would feature K-Pop.¹⁸

And most recently, under the leadership of President Moon Jae-in, South Korean pop music artists traveled across the border to Pyongyang on April 2, 2018 to perform for an audience that included North Korean leader Kim Jong Un himself -- an especially notable event, considering that consuming South Korean cultural products in North Korea is a punishable crime.¹⁹

A strong indicator of the increased value the South Korean government placed on its K-Pop industry could be seen after the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, when its decision to devote millions of dollars into forming a Ministry of Culture with a K-Pop-focused department reflected an emulation of how the United States perceived its signature industries at the time (automobile and banking) as industries that should be protected. And while South Korea's cultural exports have occurred within the economic marketplace space, we see less institutional focus on K-Pop, K-Dramas, and K-Cosmetics as economic drivers, but rather as bolsters of a globally attractive national brand. And this desire did not operate in a historical vacuum -- as Euny Hong, the author of "The Birth of Korean Cool" has noted: "They wanted Korea of the 21st century to be like America of

¹⁸Kim, Steven. "Korea's Cultural Juggernaut is a Soft-Power Strategy Worth Copying." *The National Interest*. August 4, 2016. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/koreas-cultural-juggernaut-soft-power-strategy-worth-copying-17246?page=0%2C1>

¹⁹Seo, Yoonjung; Levenson, Eric; and McKirdy, Euan. "Kim Jong Un 'Deeply Moved' By K-Pop Concert in Pyongyang." *CNN*. April 3, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/01/world/kim-jong-un-concert-kpop/index.html>

the 20th century where America was just considered so universally cool that anything made in America would automatically be bought."²⁰

The global success of South Korean cultural exports like K-Pop, K-Dramas, and K-Cosmetics became known as Hallyu, or the “Korean Wave” became, in the early 2000s, more than just an economic powerhouse for South Korea -- they became a national brand, and, as I will argue here, an essential, successful, component of its foreign policy muscle. The nature of bilateral relationships in which one state is more powerful is usually predictable in that decisions are usually made in the favor of the more powerful, larger state with --naturally-- more leverage. Becoming a top-ranking “cultural content nation” represents a necessary step to maximizing the diplomatic utility out of these cultural exports in an increasingly connected global marketplace. South Korean exports like K-Pop and K-Dramas and K-Cosmetics are conducive to South Korean efforts to become a global cultural leader in their seemingly inherent compatibility with the early tools of the 21st Century - more specifically, an internet-connected world in which music, tv shows, and cosmetic products, all of which help make up a thriving K-Pop industry have seen exceptional success in a competitive global marketplace.

South Korea, like many other states, exports a wide variety of products in large quantities all over the world. But more specifically, in a less immediately tangible way than a Samsung television, and most notably, K-Pop, K-Dramas, and K-Cosmetics serve more narrowly as a state branding effort that seems to behave more classically as a soft

²⁰Chow, Kat. "How The South Korean Government Made K-Pop A Thing." NPR Code Switch. April 16, 2015.
<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/04/13/399414351/how-the-south-korean-government-made-k-pop-a-thing>

power tool in that their exportation is associated with changing perceptions of the cultural state of the Korean peninsula. Arguably, compared with international perceptions of South Korea immediately following the conclusion of the Cold War, to today, the contrast is stark- - both in terms of its economic growth and international reputation. At the same time, the stakes of a break out of military conflict on the peninsula have risen increasingly -- both in terms of North Korea's increased nuclear capability and the increased economic -- and cultural -- costs of military engagement on the peninsula. But increasing the stakes, or costs, potentially behaves as a effective strategy in which soft power can play an important role.

Chapter V:

In Pursuit of One Korea: Pan-Koreanism and Nation-Branding

The Korean peninsula is thought of as one nation with two republics -- but if South Korea's soft power apparatus has its way, that may be changing. More than a half-century since the armistice was signed, ending combat engagements in the Korean War, and establishing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), out of a physical divide, a cultural divide has emerged. Every year, the numbers of citizens who remember the pre-war peninsula dwindle further, and, culturally, the two Koreas continue to diverge. Even a significant divergence in dialects in their shared Korean language has emerged -- a change that largely reflects the degree of engagement with certain parts of the world:

...languages in the two Koreas have diverged further since, with the South assimilating more English and foreign words in its spoken language as well as evolving its particular pop references in the past two decades, and the North using more Russian loanwords and developing a North Korea-specific vocabulary.²¹

This growing cultural chasm represents a major challenge to the South's eventual hope of peninsula reunification. In what we can see as an effort to counter this, towards its closest neighbor, and greatest adversary, North Korea, the effect of South Korea's soft power apparatus has been driven by the cultivation of a brand that embraces an ideology - or goal -- of pan-Korean nationalism.

²¹Tai, Crystal. "Hang on, what language is Kim Jong-un speaking?" South China Morning Post. April 27, 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2143760/hang-what-language-kim-jong-un-speaking>

Certainly, there is an element of communication that the story cultivated by these pop culture exports that communicates a South Korea that is prosperous economically -- which, indeed it is, as the world's 11th largest economy²² -- an effective tool that proponents of regime change in North Korea have sought to use by sending flash drives with pop culture content up to the north in the hopes that North Korean citizens would, in noting the economic contrast across the DMZ, put pressure on the regime to move towards moving out of isolation towards a stronger economy through taking steps that would reduce sanctions (i.e. denuclearization). Up until 2018, South Korea's blasting of K-Pop music across the DMZ was similarly a move that asserted, overtly, its soft power strength. But more broadly, asserting -- or embracing -- a "One Korea" messaging strategy that, through embracing a 21st century brand of Korean culture, is stirring up a nationalism that embraces a peaceful resolution to the Korean War through denuclearization and perhaps reunification.

Under the presidential administration of Lee Myung-bak (2008-2012), the Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB) was established to explicitly promote the "Korean brand on the international stage."²³ This served two purposes: 1) it boosted global perceptions of Korea meaningfully and 2) it established, for the time being, until it was dismantled by President Moon Jae-in, a formalized tool through which South

²²Santacreu, Ana Maria. "How Did South Korea's Economy Develop So Quickly?" On the Economy Blog, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. March 20, 2018. <https://www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2018/march/how-south-korea-economy-develop-quickly>.

²³Lee, Kil-ho. "Nation branding in South Korea: Public-private Cooperation and Invention of a Participatory Policy of Economic Development." *Gouvernement et action publique*. 2016. https://www.cairn-int.info/abstract-E_GAP_162_0101--nation-branding-in-south-korea.htm

Korea's government could leverage its pop culture assets into multilateral diplomacy through soft power.

Ironically, while the Presidential Council on Nation Branding is open to criticism for being illiberal as it could be perceived as a form of government interference in private cultural industry, it served as an effective means for boosting South Korea's regional and global brand as a cultural powerhouse and exporter of liberal democratic values, particularly within the context of its proximity to totalitarian North Korea and authoritarian China.

But there is a generational aspect to nation-branding that is important to consider: the generation that has a living memory of the military engagements of the Korean War is aging, having lived more than a half-century since the armistice began. And later generations have less of an appetite for reunification efforts, in large part because they have little-to-no tangible relationships to the North.²⁴ For the government, this may serve as an impetus for the urgency of deeply investing in and promoting pan-Korean nationalist concepts through soft power -- in this case, creating the conditions necessary to foster and develop cultural content that would serve these ends.

In a reflection of the high level of support for the value of these cultural exports in South Korea, groups like Red Velvet, which had performed in North Korea during a special diplomatic trip, and Gucckkasten, of whom Ha Hyun-woo performed at the 2018 Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony in Pyongyang, joined BTS in receiving

²⁴Carney, Matthew. "In South Korea, young and old have very different views on the possibility of peace with the North." ABC News Australia. April 26, 2018. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-26/the-resistance-to-reuniting-two-koreas-could-come-from-youth/9697976>

commendations from the Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism -- with BTS receiving the Hwagwan Orders of Cultural Merit by Cultural Minister Do Jong-hwan, to "honor their efforts at spreading South Korean culture and language throughout the world."²⁵ This reflects a strong level of recognition and support for this industry as at the highest levels of South Korea's government.

In addition to serving to increase multilateral affinities for Korean culture, the government's efforts to bolster the country's brand also serves to increase the perceived costs of potential conflict. The economic costs aside, as a cultural leader and key exporter of democratic values, it is to South Korea's benefit for the United States to see it as a leader among "Western-style democracies" -- namely, South Korea's most critical military ally, the United States, might see it more viable to prevent conflict in countries that represent democratic ideals. Through the framework of Democratic Peace Theory²⁶, we can understand that promoting South Korea as a liberal democracy could yield benefits that minimize the risk of military conflict on the long-war-torn peninsula. Or, in line with Thomas Friedman's "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention" that, in 1996, while South Korea was emerging from the Cold War, pointed to the lack of conflict between states with McDonald's restaurants in them -- an indicator of openness to

²⁵Herman, Tamar. "BTS Awarded Order of Cultural Merit by South Korean Government." *Billboard*. October 25, 2018. <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/bts/8481640/bts-awarded-order-of-cultural-merit-by-south-korean-government>.

²⁶Mintz, Alex and Geva, Nehemia. "Why Don't Democracies Fight Each Other? An Experimental Study." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 37, No. 3, pages 484-503. September 1993. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/174265>.

foreign investment for Friedman, but more largely, perhaps some recognition of the soft power wielded through this powerful American corporation.²⁷

The world that Korean cultural products have managed to penetrate, and find enormous success in, have encouraged more of the world to want to be Korean -- at least judging by the international impact that K-Cosmetics have had on the beauty industry, influenced by K-Pop music and dramas. This presents a parallel to the United States: in the 20th Century, Hollywood was a vessel for enormous cultural exportation that sought to bolster the American brand -- and perhaps played a large role in helping the world want to be American.

K-Pop

A comprehensive understanding of the unique nature of South Korea's soft power reach would be incomplete without fully considering the nature of K-Pop, its immensely popular and most distinctive cultural export. K-Pop, which encompasses the pop music exports and often related television and cosmetic products (often referred to as k-dramas and k-cosmetics), is a global cultural force and ambassador for a 21st century Korea that has been embraced by the South Korean government, reflected in its institutional support for the genre.

And not only does it enjoy strong institutional support from its government, it is uniquely export-oriented. According to Dr. John Lie, author of *Han Unbound: The*

²⁷Friedman, Thomas L. "Foreign Affairs Big Mac I." *The New York Times*. December 8, 1996. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/08/opinion/foreign-affairs-big-mac-i.html>

Political Economy of South Korea, and a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley,

South Korea had its own tradition of popular music. But K-Pop is a distinct genre wrought by several producers and entrepreneurs intent on generating an export-oriented popular music. That is, there are genres of popular music in South Korea that look like those in the US... .. but K-pop emerged almost de novo in the 1990s.²⁸

But we can also hardly claim that South Korea is totally unique a state that is exporting cultural products -- or has a government that supports this exportation. But three aspects make South Korea's embrace of K-Pop as a soft power tool uniquely advantageous to furthering its security interests:

- 1) It is organic. While the government's role in promoting and facilitating the conditions necessary to generate content is clear, it lacks the state coercion that would prevent a meaningful generation of content that reflect -- in this case -- a freedom of expression.
- 2) It is Korean. K-Pop has inspired people across the world to learn Korean²⁹ and consume Korean pop culture -- even in areas with no oer meaningful day-to-day relationship to the Korean peninsula beyond the geopolitical boundaries of the Korean peninsula.

²⁸ O'Flynn, Brian. "The K-pop phenomenon: 'it's pop music on crack.'" The Irish Times. October 27, 2018. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/the-k-pop-phenomenon-it-s-pop-music-on-crack-1.3669060>.

²⁹ Sang-hun, Choe. "South Korea's Latest Export: Its Alphabet." The New York Times. September 11, 2009. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/12/world/asia/12script.html>

- 3) It is contemporary. Cultural exports can function as cultural emissaries for a cultural past - or messengers for the present. K-Pop uniquely is an assertion of a 21st century pan-Korean identity that, as a soft power tool, exerts influence, rather than reflects it.

The success of South Korea's Hallyu, or Korean Wave, exporting K-Pop globally rests in a central soft power tenant -- it is successful not only because the product is successful, but that it represents an ideal -- or set of ideals -- that by embracing the product, one becomes closer to. In ways similar to how the United States was, and in many cases, still is, perceived as a beacon for freedom and democratic values, so, too, increasingly is Korea. The Economist's 2018 Democracy Index, which scores countries on electoral processes and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties, considers South Korea a flawed democracy, albeit the 21st strongest democracy in the world, and the strongest in Asia. With a score of 8 out of 10 total points, South Korea is ahead of the United States (ranked 25th internationally with a score of 7.96 points) and China (ranked 130 internationally, with a score of 3.32 out of 10 points). North Korea holds the last spot on this list, ranked at 167 with a score of 1.08 out of 10 points.³⁰ We may consider the ideals of its democratic state to be an asset to South Korea's soft power reach towards these three countries with whom it has critical security relationships -- indeed, out of all three, it has the strongest democracy according to this index.

³⁰Economist Intelligence Unit. "Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy." The Economist. 2018. http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2018.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=Democracy2018

But Japan also ranks high on this list -- just one-tenth of a point lower than South Korea in 2018. Japan too, in the 1990s through early 2000s, saw success in its cultural exports. But there's a difference: the world did not seem to want to be Japanese in the same sense that much of the world has come to see South Korea as global influencer of culture. Why? Euny Hong, author of "The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture," argues that there are six principal reasons why Japan's pop culture products have not caught on internationally to the same degree as South Korea's: first, that Japanese cultural products, perhaps by virtue of the large domestic market demand, appear designed specifically for a Japanese market; second, that South Korean pop culture is much more sexually conservative and more in-line with Confucian elements, making it more widely palatable for different cultures -- especially those with socially conservative norms, for example, in the Muslim-majority countries -- if anything, it certainly eases the ability for K-Pop to be broadcast to mass audiences; third, that its musical elements are much more influenced by American pop music, a positive affinity stemming from the U.S.'s role as South Korea's ally during the Korean War, a more positive relationship from the start than Japan-U.S. security relationship, which emerged out of Japan's defeat; fourth, that K-Pop's success in Europe preempted Japan's; fifth, that the institutional support for Korean pop products, through corporate conglomerates called chaebols, are unique to South Korea and a key to the industry's success, and sixth, that South Korea has always been more eager and proactive in promoting its cultural products abroad via using the Internet on platforms like YouTube -

- whereas Japan’s promotion has been much more insular and less aggressive in its exports.³¹

Japan is also a state that retains historical baggage from its time as an imperial power. Despite this, K-Pop has resonated in Japan as well as in China. Part of this has to do with the “Cultural Proximity Theory,” which supports that, due to shared histories that incorporate Confucian ideals of social order, which are reflected in K-Pop’s content, have resonated at higher levels with audiences in China and even Japan as shown in Figure 1³².

Figure 1

(Unit: 1,000 US\$, %)						
Destination	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Japan	65,511 (61.9)	47,632 (48.2)	53,494 (57.4)	79,113 (68.7)	74,791 (63.1)	81,615 (53.9)
China	12,822 (12.1)	12,442 (12.6)	8,328 (8.9)	9,300 (8.0)	12,171 (10.0)	18,216 (12.0)
Taiwan	11,942 (11.3)	20,473 (20.7)	17,131 (18.4)	7,769 (6.7)	11,616 (9.9)	20,011 (13.2)
Southeast Asia*	8,584 (8.1)	12,686 (12.8)	8,271 (8.9)	4,533 (8.2)	11,857 (10.6)	13,771 (9.1)
U.S.A.	2,281 (2.2)	733 (0.7)	792 (0.8)	6,025 (4.8)	3,996 (3.4)	1,996 (1.3)
Others	4,745 (4.5)	4,878 (4.9)	5,249 (5.6)	3,954 (3.4)	4,065 (3.4)	15,789 (10.4)
Total	105,885 (100.0)	98,844 (100.0)	93,265 (100.0)	115,694 (100.0)	118,496 (100.0)	151,398 (100.0)

Exports of Korean Broadcasting Programs by Destination from 2005-2010 (Yang 126)

But is South Korea embracing and exporting western values or are these a uniquely Korean brand of ideas and messaging that is carrying through it’s k-dramas and k-pop products? One could argue that this modern conception of cultural exports acting as a soft power tool started in the American context, with the global success of

³¹Hong, Euny. “Why it was so easy for Korea to overtake Japan in the pop culture wars.” Quartz. November 16, 2012. <https://qz.com/21468/why-it-was-so-easy-for-korea-to-take-over-japan-in-the-pop-culture-wars/>

³²Jackson, Brianna. "Confucianism and Korean Dramas: How Cultural and Social Proximity, Hybridization of Modernity and Tradition, and Dissimilar Confucian Trajectories Affect Importation Rates of Korean Broadcasting Programs between Japan and China." Virginia Commonwealth University's Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creativity. May 2017. Page 4. https://auctus.vcu.edu/PDF/SOSCI_BJ.pdf

Hollywood. But the key similarity? American pop culture, in many respects, helped people in other countries aspire to be American by embracing American beauty ideals and cultural products. Very similarly, Korean pop culture has made key parts of the world aspire to be Korean by embracing Korean beauty standards and cultural concepts. This is a key signifier of soft power reach that neither Japan nor China, arguably South Korea's largest pop culture rivals in the region (that both dwarf ROK in their economic weight) have yet been able to cultivate.

A core tenant of soft power is authenticity. Unlike hard power, through economic sanctions, or military engagements, soft power cannot be forced or manufactured. And what makes K-Pop such an effective soft power tool? It is undeniably Korean. According to Cedarbough Seiji, a post-doctoral research fellow at the Korea Foundation at the University of British Columbia,

...K-pop is the ultimate soft power tool for Korea because it is performed in Korean, and is quintessentially Korean in many ways. It has the power to make fans want to learn more about the music, about the industry, and about the country it came from.

We tend to think of soft power as coming from larger, more powerful states in part due to the large portions of the world stage that they occupy in terms of global military and economic influence, but we might consider how a large economic or military might detract -- or even weaken -- one's soft power reach. Seiji goes further, arguing:

K-pop comes from a small country that most countries in the world know little about, a country that was never a coloniser and never waged wars on neighbouring countries. It can win or lose on its own merits and attract young people not because they know about Korea, but because the Korean elements in K-pop are new, fresh, and -- in a way American pop culture never can be -- neutral.³³

³³Tai, Crystal. "Girls' Generation to BTS: how K-pop swept the world -- and the UN." The South China Morning Post. September 29, 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/lifestyle-culture/article/2166059/girls-generation-bts-how-k-pop-swept-world-and-un>

South Korea's third most important foreign policy objective for long-term security stability, in last order of immediacy after short-term de-escalation of conflict and denuclearization in the North, has been, throughout its separation, unified peninsula. Whereas the Pan-Korean messages relayed through K-Pop have been largely subversive in the indirectness of this policy goals reflected in its ideological content, prominent members of the South Korean government and the K-Pop industry did come together in a music video organized by the One K Global Committee called "One Dream for One Korea" in 2015. Participants in the video³⁴ included members from K-Pop groups that included Exo, BTS, Got7, and Red Velvet, in addition to future Prime Minister Moon Jae-in, the leader at the time of the New Politics Alliance for Democracy.³⁵ The lyrics, which include lines like, "...one dream for one Korea, have we ever cried out, our hope, that hope is unification."³⁶ represented an overt government and industry embrace of K-Pop as a vessel for building domestic and global support for reunification efforts. This video, as part of the One Korea Global Campaign, was, according to Seo In-teck, the campaign's co-chairman, "...designed to form a national consensus and expand the global support by spreading the 'Korean Dream' through the power of culture."³⁷

³⁴One Korea Global Campaign. "One Dream One Korea." Video. September 24, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYgwPDzDMCg>

³⁵ Sung, Ji-Eun. "Artists come together for unification : The 2019 One K Global Campaign will feature songs, art and a concert." Korea JoongAng Daily. August 15, 2018. <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3051924>

³⁶ One Korea Global Campaign. "One Dream One Korea with English Subtitles." Global Peace Foundation. September 25, 2015. <https://www.globalpeace.org/blog/one-dream-one-korea-english-subtitles>

³⁷ Sung, Ji-Eun. "Artists come together for unification : The 2019 One K Global Campaign will feature songs, art and a concert." Korea JoongAng Daily. August 15, 2018. <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3051924>

Chapter VI:

South Korea's Primary Security Concern: North Korea

The Korean peninsula is said to be a nation with two republics, a product of the Korean war, a conflict that despite an armistice, continues to divide the nation for more than a half-century later. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has represented the Republic of Korea (ROK)'s most immediate and persistent post-Cold War challenge. The DPRK plays an essential role in each of ROK's foreign policy three primary security goals, being the source of the immediate risk of instability that ROK seeks to resolve, in addition to developing a nuclear weapon program that poses a grave, even existential threat to ROK, and a key partner in any sort of a peaceful peninsula reunification.

In most discourse, and to a large extent still, North Korea has dominated global perceptions of the peninsula -- a reflection of the persistent but also growing threat to peninsula stability that it posed -- in addition to burgeoning nuclear risk it might pose to the region and as far as the United States, as the Kim regimes pursued nuclearization. With respect to soft power, as the Cold War ended, each Korea tacked sharply to diverge from each other in how they interacted with the world. Where ROK reached out, DPRK retreated. North Korea chased hard power, pursuing a path towards joining an elite club of states with nuclear weapons -- rendering it virtually -- and practically -- immune to coerced regime change via traditional channels. South Korea pursued the opposite by engaging the world and investing heavily what has become a global pop culture apparatus.

But, for much of the time following the end of the Cold War, North Korea dominated conversations about the Korean peninsula for foreigners. South Korea's existence has often been discussed within the framework of its relationship with its northern neighbor, which has pursued-- largely out of necessity-- a path to hard power that has so far served to maintain a stable regime. Despite the closed nature of the North Korean state, where consumption of K-Pop is illegal, and punished harshly, it has been a significant component of the South Korean government's overtures to its northern neighbor.

But some argue that South Korea isn't just nation-branding for the sake of nation-branding -- but that it is actively seeking to counteract North Korea's portrayal of the Korean peninsula. For outsiders, the Korean peninsula for a long time conjured up images of poverty and a peninsula torn by war. In extolling the importance of soft power, in support of South Korea's hosting of a G-20 summit, Euh Yoon-dae, Chairman of the Presidential Council on National Branding, wrote in 2010:

South Korea is the world's 13th largest economy, but outside of the Asian region, the country's public presence remains somewhat underwhelming. In fact, many Westerners who take pride of being knowledgeable about Korea would often start their conversations with North Korea and Kim Jong-il.³⁸

If soft power represents the ability to attract, through creating a well-communicated national image, North Korea has at least done well with the latter in that it has, in large part, been able to set the narrative that is told about the Korean peninsula.

³⁸ Euh, Yoon-dae. "From 'Korea discount' to Korea premium." The Korea Times. June 4, 2010. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2011/12/300_67073.html

Chapter VII:

Strengthening the Allyship: The Role of K-Pop in the ROK-US Relationship

The United States is South Korea's most critical foreign policy partner. Between the rising and increasingly dominant China, historical tension with its former colonizer, Japan, and the ongoing, albeit to varying degrees of severity, threat of regional destabilization from North Korea, the United States presents South Korea with its best hard power resources for securing favorable security outcomes in the region.

And certainly, the United States has its motivations too for maintaining a close military and economic relationship with South Korea -- it gives them a valuable outpost in a region in which China is increasingly asserting dominance. And certainly, historically speaking, it is a valuable position from which to credibly assert a military presence towards Russia and Japan.

But Japan is also a close ally -- and protectorate -- of the United States. And, for much of the 20th century, a colonial power on the Korean peninsula. Considering the still negative perceptions of Japan, in large part due to this historical relationship, the United States' close (and older) relationship with Japan presents a security question: does a close U.S.-Japan relationship threaten -- or seek to undermine -- the strength of the U.S.-South Korean relationship?

In the early days following the end of the Cold War, as South Korea moved to consolidate its democracy, holding elections for the first time in thirty years in June

1991,³⁹ Japan had already moved forward tremendously in its development into a consolidated democracy -- further cementing political linkages that would serve to bolster its protectorate relationship with the United States. With long-lasting tension after a century that included Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula, and with territorial disputes withstanding, South Korea would find it beneficial to pursue a relationship with the United States as a counterweight to Japanese influence on American foreign policy decisions in the region (particularly if -- or when -- they concerned South Korea's security interests).

With the United States as Japan's primary military ally (and protector in a protectorate relationship), building beneficial and meaningful ties with the United States would provide a strategically useful check on Japan's regional influence. The United States considers both South Korea and Japan to be its closest allies in East Asia -- from a South Korean security perspective, that presents a potential challenge to the strength of South Korea's position with the United States, should a scenario occur where Japan and South Korea fall on opposite sides of a issue that the United States is in a position to address. Considering Japan's long history of colonization of the Korean peninsula, South Korea would have little basis to expect that Japan's interests would necessarily always align with the interests of the South Korean sovereign state.

But compared with much of the rest of the world, K-Pop has had slow, incremental success in breaking into the U.S. market. However, since the end of the Cold War, favorability towards South Korea from within the U.S. has risen remarkably -- from

³⁹Martin, Brian G. "Korea After the Cold War: The Politics of Reunification." Department of the Parliamentary Library, Australia. August 18, 1992. Page 5. <https://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/library/pubs/bp/1992/92bp17.pdf>

47% in 1991 to 77% in 2018. Notably, the biggest shift in favorability occurred in in 2014 -- going from 64% favorability and climbing 13 points in four years. Much of the growth occurred after the year 2002, but this particular climb correlates with an important phenomenon -- the (unprecedented for the U.S.), immense popularity of Psy -- a South Korean pop star whose Korean-language single, “Gangnam Style” enjoyed viral popularity starting in the second half of 2012 -- the first Korean single to do so. Since then, bands like BTS and BlackPink have enjoyed landmark success in American markets -- a success that correlates with this significant uptick in public opinion:

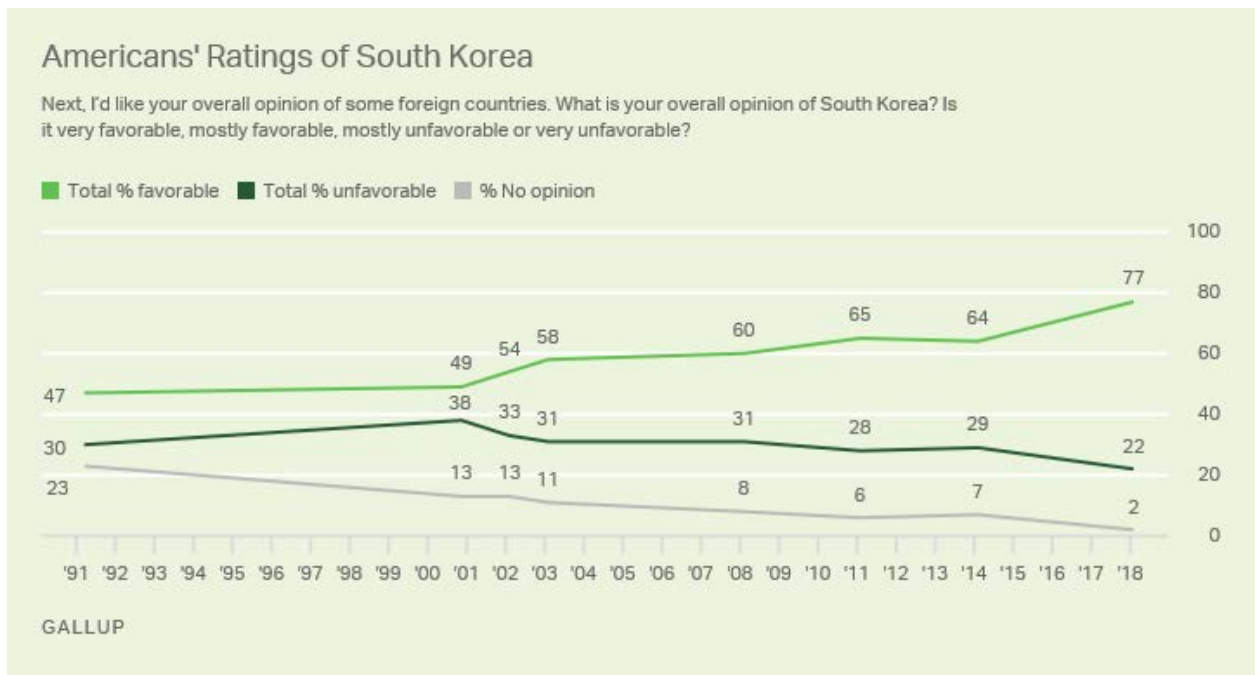


Figure 2 ⁴⁰

But it is not necessarily always imports into the U.S. that we might deem most influential for US-ROK relations -- but rather imports into areas of interest for the United

⁴⁰McCarthy, Justin. "South Korea's Image at New High in U.S." Gallup. February 20, 2018. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/228050/south-korea-image-new-high.aspx>

States' foreign policy priorities, particularly the Middle East. The nature or degree of success for this particular is difficult to assess without long-term evaluation -- but the degree to which K-Pop has entered Middle Eastern markets is significant, with Korean producers making sure that their products are compatible with conservative customs rooted in the Islamic religion:

...Korean producers keep in mind Arab customs and religious backgrounds when airing K-drama in the Arab world. Hong refers to one of the chapters in the book and points out "the importance of keeping Muslim prayer times in mind" (to avoid airing Korean TV programs during these times), as well as detailing the strict sexual/moral code that would make certain Korean dramas a bad fit for the Arab market...In the same vein, referring to the fact that American drama and music are losing ground to other global vendors (such as Korea and Turkey).⁴¹

There are no modern linkages between Korea and the Middle East, beyond a desire to improve the economic relationship -- other than that both regions deal heavily with the United States. The popularity of K-Pop in the Middle East is too recent to gain long-term inferences from, but the state-supported industry's enthusiasm about growing this market reflects a potential soft power gain, especially with respect to South Korea's relationship to the United States.

Relatedly, with the direct support of South Korea's government, Korean beauty products have found significant success entering the American market, even shifting it. K-Beauty, as these products are called, are widely popular across East Asia, an economic powerhouse that is not only generating significant revenue for Korean cosmetic industries, but also establishing and cultivating a standard of beauty that is leveraging soft power through attraction and co-option. Increasingly, the success of Korean beauty products, which follow Korean pop products, represent a new chapter for K-Pop as a soft

⁴¹Ekaskary, Mohamed. "The Korean Wave in the Middle East: Past and Present." *Journal of Open Innovation*. October 25, 2018. <https://www.mdpi.com/2199-8531/4/4/51>

power tool -- that consumers in the United States are increasingly adhering to new Korean standards of beauty, reflected in K-Pop products. This is an incredible testament to the South Korean government's efficacy in cultivating an industry that Americans have -- in large numbers -- bought into.

From 2013 to 2014, a store called "Korea Cosmetic Bliss" opened in New York City, selling Korean cosmetic products. It was opened by the Korea Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI) -- a close partner with the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare ostensibly to help grow the Korean health-care industry in foreign countries. And in 2014, according to the Korean Pharmaceutical Traders Association, South Korea, for the first time, exported more beauty products than it imported -- \$1.067 billion to \$978 million.⁴²

The building of these cultural linkages between South Korea and the United States serves to bolster American perceptions of the Korean peninsula being more than war torn or on the verge of war, but seems to work to suggest -- to the American public -- that the cultural costs of conflict would be high. With populist forces within the United States urging it to retreat from the world stage, continued engagement in Korean pop culture continues to serve as a countering force to isolationism. But, especially under the Trump Administration, hard power remains a practical if not more readily accessible commodity. With South Korea agreeing to pay more for U.S. military to be stationed on its soil⁴³, as a multilateral deal is pursued with North Korea, it appears that soft power

⁴² Schaefer, Kayleen. "What You Don't Know About the Rise of Korean Beauty." *The Cut*, New York Magazine. September 9, 2015. <https://www.thecut.com/2015/09/korean-beauty-and-the-government.html>

⁴³ Associated Press. "South Korea signs deal to pay more for U.S. troops after Trump demand." *NBC News*. February 10, 2019.

gains are an especially long-term strategy in the South Korean-American security relationship, which was initially forged through hard power during the Korean War.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/south-korea-u-s-sign-new-cost-sharing-deal-troops-n969756>

Chapter VIII:

Reckoning with the Next Superpower? A look at K-Pop's Influence on China

Evaluating K-Pop's Soft Power Effect on China

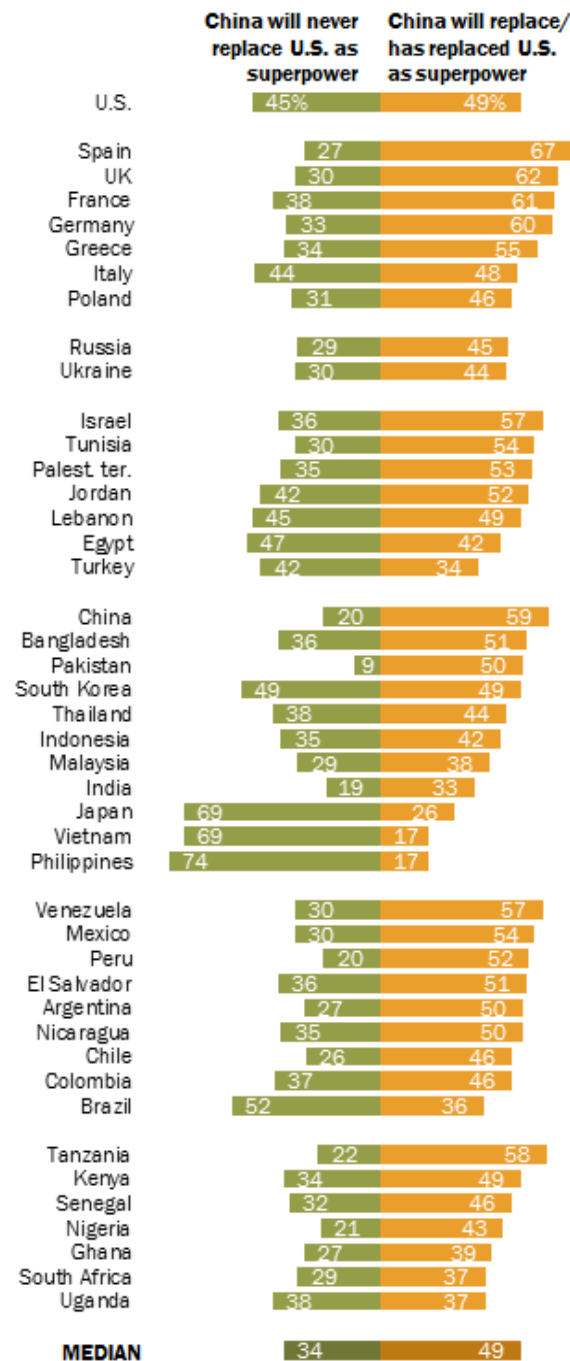
How do we meaningfully assess the role of K-Pop as a soft power tool towards China? One of South Korea's most immediate neighbors, and arguably the geopolitical hegemon in the region -- well on its way to global superpower status, if it isn't yet already there, depending on the measure you use, relations with China is an integral component of any Korean foreign policy strategy -- we see evidence of the importance of this relationship in Sino-Korean history and particularly, if not especially, in the early 21st century as China seeks to channel its economic and military growth into superpower status. As of June 2018, China had the dubious distinction of being only second to North Korea in being perceived as a top security threat to South Korea in a Genron NPP and East Asia Institute poll: according to this study, 67.4% viewed North Korea as South Korea's primary military threat, followed by China at 42.2% and Japan at 36%.⁴⁴

From South Korea's perspective, according to a 2014 Global Attitudes Pew Poll, half of South Koreans viewed China as the next global superpower to replace the United States:

⁴⁴Park, Sungtae Jacky. "Is South Korea Pro-China and Anti-Japan? It's Complicated." *The National Interest*. August 2, 2018. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/south-korea-pro-china-and-anti-japan-it%E2%80%99s-complicated-27667>

Many Say China Is/Will Be Leading Superpower

Which comes closer to your own view?



Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey, Q34.

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Figure 3 45

Arguably, China's primary reasons for acting as an economic -- and by extension, political -- lifeline for North Korea are rooted in maintaining stability in the immediate region, so as to prevent a large-scale refugee crisis on its border, and a reason of increasing importance: preventing an unstable management of nuclear weapon technology. But acting as a lifeline for North Korea gives China a tangible means for leveraging influence on the peninsula -- at minimum, excluding China from diplomatic talks on the region would be reckless but also this impact serves as a check on American influence -- a significant check against the power exertion of South Korea's most critical military ally. Despite their disproportionate influence on North Korea, compared with others, North Korean denuclearization, like South Korea and the United States, remains an important security goal for China. Fei Su, of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, writes:

“China's primary security concern is regional stability, which includes the physical safety of its border cities and maintaining the strategic balance in Northeast Asia. This means Beijing supports the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula so long as it contributes to both of these aims.”⁴⁶

But denuclearization is not the only long-term consideration in China's relationship with North Korea. And Jennifer Lynn, from Dartmouth University has argued, but rather, the fear of regime collapse:

The specter of hundreds of thousands of North Korean refugees flooding into China has been a worry for Beijing. China's promise to repatriate North Koreans escaping across the border has consistently triggered condemnation from human rights groups, and Beijing began constructing a barbed-wire fence more than a

⁴⁵ Pew Research Center. "Many Say China Is/Will Be Leading Superpower." Global Attitudes & Trends. Graphic. July 11, 2014. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/14/global-opposition-to-u-s-surveillance-and-drones-but-limited-harm-to-americas-image/pg-2014-07-14-balance-of-power-3-03/>

⁴⁶Su, Fei. "China's Potential Role as Security Guarantor for North Korea." 38 North. October 24, 2018. <https://www.38north.org/2018/10/fsu102418/>

decade ago to prevent migrants from crossing. The majority of North Korean refugees first make their way to China before moving to other parts of Asia, including South Korea.⁴⁷

China engaged with K-Pop much earlier than the U.S. did -- for China, the success of Korean pop culture started at the end of the 20th century in 1997, when the term Hallyu, or “Korean Wave” was coined to describe its growing popularity. The first Korean wave started in the early part of the 2000s, and mostly consisted of television dramas. By the mid-2000s, is when the second wave came, bringing with it the popularity of K-Pop music. And after 2010 is when K-Pop fully went mainstream, hampered only a dispute over a missile defense system in 2017⁴⁸ that would ultimately serve to cast, in useful terms, the role that K-Pop played as a diplomatic asset.

The growing international interest in learning Hangeul, the Korean language, has also increased significantly, including within China, within this timeframe. Lee Ji-hong and Kim Min-hee at the LG Economic Research Institute illustrate the significance of this growth in this graphic:

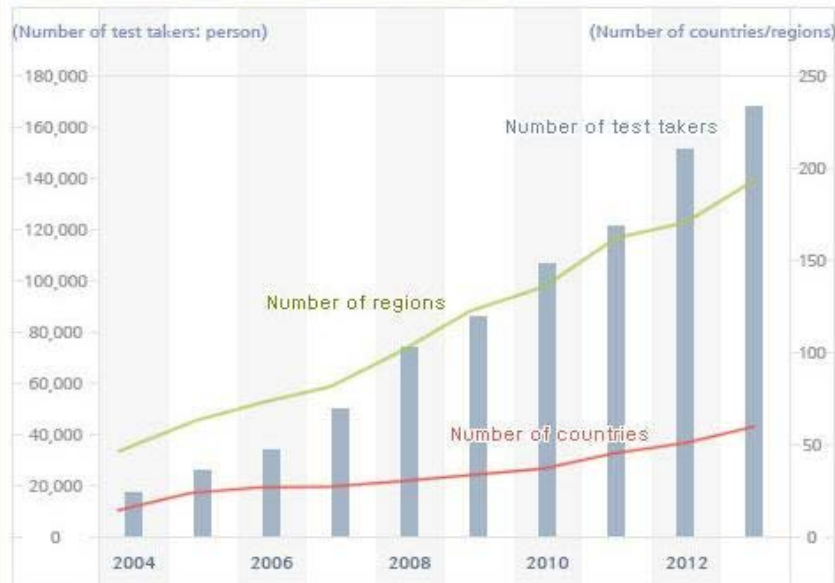
⁴⁷Albert, Eleanor. "The China-North Korea Relationship." Council on Foreign Relations. March 13, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-north-korea-relationship>

⁴⁸Koetse, Manya. "K-Pop's Recipe for Success: Why Korean Idol Groups Got So Big in China and are Conquering the World." What's On Weibo. October 12, 2018. <https://www.whatsonweibo.com/k-pops-recipe-for-success-why-korean-idol-groups-got-so-big-in-china-and-are-conquering-the-world/>

Hallyu Sparked Interest in Hangeul

Hallyu has sparked interest in Hangeul, the Korean script. The number of applicants for the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), conducted by the National Institute for International Education, has continued to increase over the past decade, reaching 168,000 in 2012. The number of countries with applicants, quadrupled from 15 in 2004 to 60 in 2013. The number of test locations also swelled to 194 around the world, including 20 in Korea. In China, the test was conducted in five regions, including Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, in 2004, but their number jumped to 32 in 2013.

<Figure 11> Growth of Interest in TOPIK Tests



Source: National Institute for International Education

Note: Estimations are based on general knowledge TOPIK tests, although practical skills tests were simultaneously conducted from 2007 to 2010.

On the assumption that interest in Hangeul and demand for TOPIK tests would rise amid the growing enthusiasm for hallyu, we examined the increase rate of interest in hallyu in each country since when TOPIK tests were first introduced. Excluding 15 countries where the tests were already being conducted in 2004, we studied the search volume for hallyu in 20 nations where the tests were first introduced in 2005 and conducted more consistently after 2010. The result showed that there were correlations between hallyu and the Korean language proficiency tests: eight countries began conducting the tests soon after searches for hallyu content dramatically increased, and three countries did when searches started rising.

Figure 4 ⁴⁹

⁴⁹Lee, Ji-hong and Kim, Min-hee. "Korean Wave Seen through K-Pop and Drama Search Trends." LG Business Insight, LG Economic Research Institute. February 19, 2014. http://www.koreafocus.or.kr/design2/layout/content_print.asp?group_id=105242

These trends increasingly gave China reason to view the increasing regional and international role of K-Pop as a factor -- or political leverage -- in diplomatic rows. A review of the effects of Korean cultural content in the United States would give China special reason to worry:

After an analysis of U.S. media frames, it is clear that these articles touch more on the historical significance of the Korean wave rather than its economic effects. The American newspapers such as the Korea Herald and the Korea Herald depict South Korea in a favorable light over neighboring countries on this specific matter. And the Korea Herald observed, "After having been colonized or overshadowed by its neighbors, Japan and China, for centuries, the country finally has a chance to outdo them on the cultural stage" (Cho, 2009, para. 14).⁵⁰

With the United States as China's most serious and powerful counterweight for hegemonic control in East Asia (and arguably, across the globe), the improvement of South Korea's reputation with the United States, at the expense of China's, posed the potential of the growth of a worrisome obstacle for China rapidly growing in power and international stature.

For most of the few decades that K-Pop has existed between South Korea and China, it has been viewed as part of a larger trade or economic relationship. But the nature of this relationship would be further clarified within a diplomatic sphere when in 2017, a dispute over a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system led to an effective standstill over state-sanctioned-importation of Korean pop culture products like K-Pop and K-Dramas into mainland China -- in other words, an outright ban. THAAD, an anti-ballistic missile defense system designed to rapidly intercept and destroy ballistic

⁵⁰ Lee, Sue Jin. "The Korean Wave: The Seoul of Asia." *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 2011. Page 89. <http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/research/vol2no1/09suejin.pdf>

missiles inside or outside the atmosphere during their final phase of flight⁵¹, is the product of a security agreement between Seoul and Washington to ensure the security of South Korean airspace -- and, by extension, effectively-American airspace (due to U.S. military presence on Korean peninsula). China, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, saw this is as an intrusion into its attempts to establish regional hegemony -- as well as a potential threat, considering its potential surveillance capabilities. So, in late 2016, China blocked clips of South Korean music and dramas from being accessed on online video sharing platforms in the country, suspended South Korean TV programs, and withheld permission for South Korean stars to appear on Chinese TV shows -- effectively blocking South Korea's access to Chinese streaming services.⁵²

Ultimately, this incentivized South Korean cultural industries to focus their efforts beyond what we might categorize as the “low hanging fruit” of nearby, populous mainland China but to new markets globally. And South Korea has seen incredible success in Southeast Asia -- particularly in Vietnam, which is locked in territorial disputes with China over trade routes in the South China Sea and Chinese island-building. The immediate soft power gain for South Korea is not immediately tangible, with respect to its cultural influence in Vietnam, but it does introduce South Korea as a major player on the sidelines in these territorial disputes. According to Forbes Magazine,

⁵¹ United States Department of Defense. "Elements: Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)." Missile Defense Agency. January 23, 2019. <https://www.mda.mil/system/thaad.html>

⁵² Yonhap News Agency. "China blocks access to streaming services of S. Korean pop culture amid THAAD row." Yonhap News Agency. February 26, 2017. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170226002700315>

“K-Pop is immensely popular throughout most of Southeast Asia and concerts in countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and The Philippines are quite common.”⁵³

So where does South Korea fit in between this necessary -- and increasingly imbalanced relationship? South Korea has the means to compete economically but, by virtue of China’s magnitude as a world economic leader, a trade war Where South Korea has potential to grow into a cultural hegemon -- and arguably, has done so, China has not replicated South Korea’s success in pop music -- and not due to a lack of industry effort. China’s government has devoted significant resources to cultivating cultural products which have not seen the same level of success as K-Pop has, with respect to in engagement beyond its domestic borders -- even in countries that share historical and cultural bounds. But this is a problem that China’s top leadership appears aware of, when, in 2015, Zhou Hong, a senior official, wrote in People’s Daily that “...without the broad participation of the people, the external propagation of culture not only loses its meaning but loses its intrinsic energy.”⁵⁴

Interestingly, K-Pop has enjoyed a large degree of funding -- by no insignificant measure -- from Chinese investors. With Chinese conglomerates like Alibaba investing in SM Entertainment, a major producer of Korean pop music, and venture firms providing capital for BigHit Entertainment, the company behind BTS -- which has found

⁵³ Herman, Tamar. "In A Post-THAAD World, K-Pop Focuses On New Markets Aside From China." *Forbes Magazine*. February 28, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tamarherman/2018/02/28/in-a-post-thaad-world-k-pop-focuses-on-new-markets-aside-from-china/#341bb5b86d81>

⁵⁴ The Economist. "The subtleties of soft power: China is spending billions to make the world love it." *The Economist*. March 23, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/china/2017/03/23/china-is-spending-billions-to-make-the-world-love-it>

exceptional international success as of 2018,⁵⁵ China's competitiveness as a cultural player has undermined from within, with strong economic support coming from Chinese industry behemoths. From the perspective of South Korean companies, this is a business strategy that makes sense -- after all, China is an enormous market.

⁵⁵Herman, Tamar. "Korean Entertainment Thrives On Beneficial But Tense Relationship With Chinese Investments." *Forbes*. February 27, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tamarherman/2018/02/27/korean-entertainment-thrives-on-beneficial-but-tense-relationship-with-chinese-investments/#ac5de786364a>

Chapter IX:

Global Korea and International Leadership

The relative political “neutrality” of K-Pop described by Seiji in Chapter 5, is unique to this cultural product in that it is not, compared with perhaps the United States’ or Japan’s, weighed down by historical baggage that might hurt the level of soft power attraction that its products cultivate. This lends itself well to the international stage, where multiple countries must work together to address problems. Beyond its bilateral relationships with greater powers, or immediate geopolitical concerns, post-Cold War South Korea has enjoyed a significant level of influence across multilateral institutions. One lens through which we can understand the impact of South Korean nation-branding through the outsize impact its officials and citizens have had in leading these institutions - - most prominently, the United Nations, under Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and as recently as in 2018, when Kim Jong-yang, a South Korean police veteran was elected head of Interpol.⁵⁶

Multilateral institutions like the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and Interpol all have one thing in common -- they have had leaders from or with strong ties to South Korea. In a testament to South Korea’s soft power reach, these institutions have all at one time or another been led by individuals with strong ties to the Korean peninsula. The outsize role that South Korea has played in multilateral institutions is indicative of a high level of trust -- or

⁵⁶ Apuzzo, Matt. "Interpol Rejects Russian as President, Electing South Korean Instead." The New York Times. November 21, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/21/world/europe/interpol-russia-south-korea.html>

perception of compatible foreign policy agendas -- by a wide spectrum of actors on the international stage. To assess the strength of South Korea's soft power apparatus is to consider the notably positive global reception to Korean leadership of these institutions as a sign of positive reception. Most prominently, former Foreign Minister Ban Ki-Moon served as Secretary General of the United Nations for two terms, between 2007 and 2016. And from 2009 to 2015, Song Sang-hyun served as president of the International Criminal Court. From 2012 to 2016, Seoul National University trade expert Chang Seung-wha served on the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body -- a powerful entity where trade disputes meet their legal conclusion.⁵⁷ Even an American, D. Jim Yong Kim, placed special emphasis on his experience growing up in South Korea during his ultimately successful nomination to the presidency of the World Bank in 2012.⁵⁸ And notably, in 2018, South Korean police officer Kim Jong Yang was elected president of Interpol, in a move largely seen as a check on the prospect of Russian leadership.⁵⁹

In 2018, the unprecedentedly popular Korean pop band BTS became the first K-Pop group to deliver a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, to help launch a

⁵⁷ Bosco, David. "South Korea's Multilateral Moment." *Foreign Policy Magazine*. May 15, 2012. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/05/15/south-koreas-multilateral-moment/>

⁵⁸ Gudmundson, Erika. "Dr. Jim Yong Kim Continues his Global Listening Tour with Stops in Belgium, Brazil and Mexico." U.S. Department of the Treasury, Treasury Notes Blog. April 10, 2012. <https://www.treasury.gov/connect/blog/Pages/Dr-Jim-Yong-Kim-Continues-his-Global-Listening-Tour-with-Stops-in-Belgium-Brazil-and-Mexico.aspx>

⁵⁹ Wax, Eddy. "Interpol elects South Korean as president over Russian rival." *Politico*. November 21, 2018. <https://www.politico.eu/article/kim-jong-yang-interpol-elects-south-korean-as-president-over-russian-rival/>

global initiative on youth education and empowerment⁶⁰-- a sign of the powerful global resonance that K-Pop group could lend to the initiative. BTS would later receive the Hwagwan Order of Cultural Merit, an award for the group's work promoting Korean culture and language. As with many decisions revolving around institutional support for K-Pop, the decision to give this award to BTS was made at the highest level of the South Korean government -- this time, in a cabinet meeting. As relayed by Cheong Wa Dae spokesperson Kim Eui-Kyeom, Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon was reported as saying "Many young people overseas are now singing Korean lyrics, one of the examples of (BTS) contributing to not only spreading Hallyu, but also Hangeul,"⁶¹ an acknowledgment of the group's impact in spreading the use of the Korean language within the context of promoting South Korean soft power internationally and a reflection that cultivating international cultural influence for South Korea has improved its standing as an international cultural leader.

⁶⁰ Hassan, Aisha. "The UN is Just Another Stop on the BTS Path to World Domination." Quartz. September 25, 2018. <https://qz.com/quartz/1401976/bts-unga-speech-is-another-k-pop-milestone/>

⁶¹ Yoon, Min-sik. "BTS to get medal for spreading Korean culture: presidential office." The Korea Herald. October 8, 2018. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181008000751>

Chapter X:

Conclusion

The reach of K-Pop spans the world, bringing South Korea to the top tier of cultural powers in 2018. This comes, despite being a nation technically still in an over-half-century war with its closest neighbor, North Korea, with military engagements limited by an armistice. And while its global cultural influence has seen dramatic improvement since the Cold War, its broader foreign policy objectives have remained consistent despite changing administrations. What does this mean for South Korea? In reminding ourselves of South Korea's three primary foreign policy objectives -- in order of immediacy: short-term stability, lowering costs of conflict, and peninsula reunification -- we see that its use of soft power is integral to reaching each of those goals.

Implications for South Korea's Foreign Policy Objectives

The first objective, to maintain immediate stability on the peninsula, has largely been met. North Korea has seen three leaders since the Cold War: Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un. We can argue that it was also to North Korea's interests to maintain stability, so as to allow it space to devote resources to developing a nuclear weapon program. China, too, has seen it fit to support stability on the peninsula to avoid an influx of refugees across its border with North Korea. Where South Korean soft power has played a role is raising the immediate costs of conflict. Its growing role as a cultural

juggernaut across Asia, and eventually the West, has improved global perceptions of the nation, and created linkages and affinities that would see damage from an outbreak of conflict on the peninsula.

The second objective, to work towards North Korean denuclearization, has seen less success. North Korea sees the development of a nuclear weapon program as essential, if not critical, to regime survival. We can speculate that North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons has raised the costs of military conflict, to the point to which nuclear attack on South Korea poses an existential threat to the cultural industry of the southern portion of the peninsula as well. It is here where we see South Korean soft power vis-a-vis K-Pop as perhaps serving to enhance the effect of North Korea's hard power-based pursuit of nuclear weapons.

But it is South Korea's third primary foreign policy objective -- peninsula reunification -- that is perhaps best served by its soft power apparatus through K-Pop. The content found in K-Pop is working to cultivate new, designed for the 21st century, pan-Korean identity that positions Korea as a unifying global cultural force. In part, this has successfully countered the narrative that depicts the Korean peninsula as impoverished and war-torn.

But soft power -- the ability to attract -- is not simply about presenting a positive image of oneself -- but rather about exporting ideas and cultivating aspiration. South Korea's role as a liberal democracy, combined with government support of private ventures to cultivate K-Pop as an international export, is the engine behind the incredible soft power success of a state still technically at war with an increasingly nuclear-capable country. After a long history of being dominated by superpowers, it is with the

enhancement brought by this significant institutional support of K-Pop that we have seen South Korea exert influence in its security relationships with the United States and China, directly and by influencing areas where they hold interests, -- and, perhaps most notably, the evidenced appeal of and international trust in its leadership across a notable spectrum of international institutions -- a reflection of South Korea's global position as a cultural force: a superpower between superpowers.

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