

Analysis on South Korean Soft Power— Taking BTS, Parasite and Squid Game as Examples

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ABSTRACT

South Korea's soft power is a potential factor that can help the country achieve more. It can increase economic developments, technological advancements, and current policies. Effective implementation of soft power in South Korea will result in a democratic political system. This paper describes the movie parasite, the boy band BTS and the Netflix show Squid Game and how the world received them. An analysis of how Asian culture has grown since the colonization of South Korea by the US and Japan is also evaluated. This paper describes how social media has affected the popularity of South Korean's culture content through the archival research method. A qualitative approach was used to collect secondary data from the literature. This study's applied research method uncovered solutions to common problems like economic instability that innovative technologies can solve. Lastly, the paper ends with a conclusion about the South Korea's soft power and how it can be improved. From the conclusion of this research, the Koreans have shifted their focus to their culture instead of Western modernity. This move has been enhanced by lifting the ban on foreign travel for Korean people, restructuring Korean chaebols, putting emphasis on infrastructure, and banning the censor laws.

Keywords: *Soft power, South Korea, Korean Culture, BTS, Parasite, Squid Game*

1. INTRODUCTION

Korea's culture has recently gotten a lot more attention. It is wonderful to see how people worldwide recognize and enjoy different facets of Korean culture. In the past, Korean media was seldom seen in many locations. It is amazing to see Korean culture reflected so beautifully for the first time. Korean culture, like Asian culture in general, is only getting started on the road to be accepted and respected. Korean culture is growing and exporting internationally, as evidenced by the successful Netflix comedy Squid Game, the chart-topping boy band BTS, and the Academy Award-winning Film Movie Parasite.

Soft power was introduced in the 1990s by Joseph Nye, who was an American political scientist. According to Joseph Nye, soft power brought a new perspective about Korean culture. Joseph Nye defined soft power as an influencer affecting other states in the global political process. It is achieved through the attraction force of the other state's culture, political beliefs, and foreign policies.

Culture, political beliefs, and foreign policy are key components of "soft power." J. Nye's concept and

conceptual structure have firmly established themselves in world science, and research into this concept is becoming increasingly essential, both domestically and internationally [3]. East Asia, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, interpreted soft power differently [3]. Each interpretation was based on different settings, attitudes of the West, and the theory of origin. Soft power is important in shaping the attractiveness of a country's culture, such as South Korea. In a paper by the Centre for Statistics and International Studies, the researchers argue that South Korea, which is not as large as China and Japan, has turned into an economic powerhouse because of its soft power. The Korean Wave, called Hallyu, has taken the planet by storm through pop music, film, sports, education, food, gaming, TV, and Drama [2]. In another study, Srinivas argues that Hallyu became a solution to the country's issues and crucial to the new identity, ensuring that it is out of its isolationist cocoon [9]. Hallyu has generated various economic benefits and other indirect impacts on tourism and sales of products promoted by Hallyu stars [10].

This study generates new knowledge through intensive research by maintaining that South Korean

people are shifting from Western-centered into East Asian-based popular culture as they are no longer subjects to western modernity. A qualitative method was used to collect the secondary data available on the internet, public libraries, educational websites, and commercial information sources. The process was carried out by checking for previous data related to the research topic. Once the information was collected, the researcher combined and compared the data for duplication and assembled the information into a usable format. An applied research method was also used to determine how soft power in innovative technologies can bring economical solutions. Findings from this research are significant because it acknowledges the strength of "soft power" in the form of East Asia culture instead of the Western's economic and military power in countries such as the United States and Europe.

2. INTRODUCTION OF BTS, FILM PARASITE, SQUID GAME

2.1. BTS

BTS's success was realized after many struggles. Before squid games became a popular film on Netflix, BTS performed in other areas. For instance, BTS participated in Korean TV shows aired in the US, such as "Winter Sonata". However, the group could not achieve a global audience [8]. Many Korean elements may be found in BTS songs, including photos of the members dressed in hanbok, stories about Korean schools, bewilderment, and adolescent development. The incorporation of Korean traits into pop music has grown in popularity among fans, in the global pop music market, and on social media, assisting in spreading Korean culture.

It promotes the consumption of Korean culture. According to a study published by the Hyundai Economic Research Institute in December 2018, BTS generates an annual economic advantage of 4 billion to 5 billion dollars for South Korean tourist, fashion, cosmetics, food, and consumer goods exports. As their popularity develops, so will the consumption of related industries. The desire to completely learn and examine the knowledge, history, and culture behind something is bound to arouse when one loves it with all one's heart. BTS fans must also collect and seek related materials and websites to understand more about their favorite pop singers. Contact, comprehension, and deepening are essential aspects of this process.

Fans' "active conduct" is the cheapest and most effective form of cultural communication. It provided a new avenue for Korean culture to reach a larger audience. Many talented filmmakers are dedicated to demonstrating the allure of fusing Korean great national culture with modern society in their films [6]. Because of the influence of traditional historical and cultural

concepts, Koreans have a strong sense of national responsibility and development. The South Korean movie development is subconscious to provide a solid people-based. Still, it also makes south Korean filmmakers stick to their cultural values in the film production process, thus promoting Korean culture to the rest of the world.

2.2. Film Parasite

Over the past few years, South Korea has gone through a drastic change in film production. It shocked the world with Parasite film, which was produced in a foreign language. The film was rated to have the best pictures in the Academy Awards. It was directed by Bong Joon-ho and premiered at the 2019 Cannes Film festival, becoming the first South Korean film to win the Palme d'Or. More than 80 Korean movies have been introduced by Netflix so far, which was not seen when the company began to work with South Korea in 2016. South Korean films place a greater emphasis on national traditional culture exploration and performance.

Korea's production culture has blossomed since the turn of the century. It is the consequence of efforts to promote the integration and communication of traditional and modern cultures in multi-cultural development. South Korean films have a unique cultural affinity in substance, fearlessly accepting modern civilization and retaining the nation's cultural tradition, which has furthered the development of the South Korean film industry. The nurturing and development of the humanistic spirit and national culture are more prominent in South Korean cinema. Many talented filmmakers are dedicated to demonstrating the allure of fusing Korean great national culture with modern society in their films [5]. Because of the influence of traditional historical and cultural concepts, Koreans have a strong sense of national responsibility and development. The South Korean movie development is subconscious to provide a solid people-based. Still, it also makes south Korean filmmakers stick to their cultural values in the film production process, thus further promoting Korean culture to the world's pace.

2.3. Squid Game

Squid Game is a Korean drama series created by Hwang Dong-hyuk for Netflix. This series covers a contest involving 456 players in a financial crisis. Squid Game is the newest South Korean cultural craze to go global, combining a tight plot, social metaphor, and severe violence. Critics claim that regardless of its Korean location, the show's themes, as well as its critique of the problems of capitalism, are pertinent everywhere; South Korea's history is scarred by war, poverty, and totalitarian regimes, which artists had responded to by examining power, brutality, and societal problems. It has

resulted in a thriving cultural environment, whose various manifestations have attracted ever-larger international audiences throughout the year [1]. K-dramas were once enormously popular among Asian television viewers. After the pain of rising inequality in 1997, social mobility had become considerably less attainable. Foreign media has long been associated with images of poverty in Western media, which has become a form of looking down on the rest of the world.

The work *Squid Game* is unique in that it highlights poverty and class inequality while also demonstrating Korea's technological and cinematic modernity. *Squid Game* shows a broader concern about South Korea's place in the world and what it took to transform it from an impoverished Third World country to one of the world's most prosperous economies [8]. The show is about globalization peculiarly, but it has cleverly hidden its critical message to reach a global audience. It has underscored the terrible economic situation in which many Koreans find themselves. Property is costly, and stable employment is limited. Competition is stiff, and inequality has become a key issue in Korean culture.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. Reasons Behind the Growth of Korean Popular Culture

The growth period of the South Korean culture is referred to as Hallyu or Korean wave. This wave has increased popular pop culture, music, television, dreams, entertainment, and films. Hallyu started in China and Japan. It then spread in Southern Asia in 2000, as the ban on cultural exchange between Korea and Japan was removed [7]. It resulted in increased growth in Korean culture. Korean businesses and national image benefited from the increased growth of Korean culture. South Korea has gained more wealth in the last two decades, and its per capita GDP is now among the top countries in the world. However, the growth of the Korean culture was not planned but influenced by two main factors.

First, the rising popularity of Korean brands has contributed significantly to the growth of Korean culture. Korean production is now competing with Japanese and American brands simultaneously [8]. In the electronic companies, Samsung and LG are the top world-class brands. LG has moved from a low-cost manufacturer to a well-established brand. Hyundai, which was first initially established in the US, is not a high-quality perceived brand in the market. South Korea has adopted this top company in the worldwide market. As a result, the overall perception of South Korea with the brands has been improved. Hallyu has enabled Korea to evolve most of its sectors, leading to general cultural growth.

The continued culture growth in South Korea has also been affected by increased R & D designs. Recently,

South Korea has had successful brands, leading to superior quality, modern products and services, and well-cut designs. Most companies worldwide are imitating South Korean brands [7]. As a result, Korea has researched and developed entertainment products such as music, dramas, and movies. The aim is to produce high-quality products continuously. The film production sector in South Korea values quality compared to Hollywood productions. The new emphasis on quality in South Korean production has attracted many film producers. Consequently, this has helped to maintain the quality appeal of Korean products. The popularity of Korean film is due to creativity in the production sector.

3.2. Blending Eastern and Western Cultures

Absorption and hybridization are two significant ways in the growth of the culture. There has been a long history in the cultural exchange between the east and the West. Korean culture has grown due to the assimilation of western culture. Chinese culture, Indian culture, Persian culture, Arab culture, and ancient Greek and Roman civilization are linked through ancient international networks. Communication between eastern and western societies has improved because of international channels. Silk, jade, and porcelain from China are cultural carriers. They have helped to propagate oriental culture over the world. South Korea adopted some of the Japanese and United States production methods [8]. Most of its directors have experience from Hollywood and other entertainment industries. The use of streaming services such as Netflix removed the geographical barriers. It transformed South Korea from the consumption of Western culture into a significant cultural exporter of its kind.

3.3. Historical Side

3.3.1. Colonial History by Japan and USA

Korean society was shattered during the Korean War in the mid-twentieth century. South Korea was among the poorest nation in the 1960s. On the road to poverty recovery, Korean culture required material assistance from the US [7]. However, an approach to social development was needed. To propagate third-world countries, the US was reconstructing South Korea. After the war, the American intellectuals applied the modernization theory that would transform the third world countries on track. The modernization theory aimed to challenge the Marxist Leninist arguments on the historical development context of communism. Following this, the US administrators forced the Korean intellectuals to study and understand the modernization theory. As the US colonized South Korea and adopted modernization theory, other US policies were also implemented in Korea, which impacted its culture.

In addition, the Japanese seized Korea until 1945. The Japanese rulers fought to influence the Korean culture to gain total control. Korean schools and universities were prohibited from speaking Korean by Japanese administrators. The Japanese also imposed forced labor on the Korean people. Additionally, the Japanese took over all public places and mandated all the productions film to operate under specific regulations. It was perceived as illegal to teach history from non-approved textbooks. The Japanese destroyed over 200,000 textbooks on Korean history to erase any track of its history. The Japanese colonial government demolished over a third of the complex's historic buildings shortly after taking power, and the remaining structures were converted into Japanese tourist attractions.

With the rise of Hallyu, all of that has begun to change. Hallyu has given Korea a fantastic opportunity to display to the rest of the world its rich culture, people, unique entertainment items, exotic locales, and own Pan-Asian celebrities, resulting in the creation of a very powerful brand Korea. With Korean movies and dramas gaining in popularity, the focus appears to have switched to Korean ideals, society, emotions, and the gorgeous landscapes depicted in these films. As a result, Korea has had a good opportunity to build fresh impressions and images worldwide. These aspects have received unwavering support from the Korean government, artists, business people, and the general public. Due to this collective effort, Hallyu has evolved into a long-term cultural phenomenon rather than a passing trend. President Kim Dae-Jung has advocated for information technology and popular culture to drive future Korean development.

3.3.2. "The 1-inch-tall Barrier of Subtitles" as a way of Eliminating the Barrier.

The subtitles have enabled western countries to embrace the Korean culture. Western viewers could follow Korean movies and drama series by reading the subtitles because they do not speak Korean. Unlike traditional media outlets, new tools such as Youtube and Twitter enabled the artist to reach a wide audience. For instance, BTS reached a worldwide audience via its social media networks. Other South Korean megastars had the same experience. However, another important factor in South Korean culture's success is its emphasis on universal issues.

It is important to understand the honorifics of the Squid game and Parasite to understand the nature of human interactions. Adding 26 Korean words in the Oxford English Dictionary is a significant factor in overcoming the barriers of untranslatable. Some of the recently added terms in the oxford dictionary were noona Oppa and unni. The addition of such terms is expected to create a way for more Korean words to be included in the English dictionary in the future. Although translation and

interpreting of cultural and linguistic tools are important, the true understanding of a culture is the only solution to bridge the gap of untranslatable concepts. It confirms the opinion of Directors Bong, who stated that overcoming the gaps created by untranslatable elements of a film leads to high-quality production.

Many western critics of subtitles argue that they do not want to read a movie but want to watch it. According to them, the subtitles are too distracting and will take away from the immersive nature of the film. Thus, dubbing could be the best option for these groups of audiences. Other critics may allege that the South Korean government "created" the Korean wave's success by providing finance and export support. However, dozens of other governments have comparable programs, but their cultural industries do not have the same global reach as South Korea's.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Technological Side

"Squid Game" and "Parasite" are two massive phenomena that have spread Korean culture worldwide. However, the production technology used to produce these films has been criticized for discriminating against the social contraction of South Korea. Both works address the same problem, demonstrating the ruthless and horrible lifestyle of the lower class and how society's wealthy and upper classes exploit them for their enjoyment. These works' sarcastic tone has a global audience, showing that economic development does not always coincide with social development [4].

4.2. Use of Social Media

South Korea continues to use propaganda to soften its negative image overseas, although it is unlikely to achieve the global success of South Korean pop culture. It raises fears of a worldwide disinformation campaign, as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un recently urged the country's propagandists to increase its abroad message efforts, suggesting a vested national interest in its soft power. Even though ordinary North Koreans are prohibited from having access to the outside world, Pyongyang uses state-run media and multilingual members of the elite class to spread propaganda in English, Chinese, Russian, and Korean via popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Weibo, and YouTube. Despite efforts to stifle these efforts, the regime constructs new social media accounts to encourage international visitors to visit the country.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper applied qualitative methods to source secondary information from existing literature. The applied research method in this study was used to

find the solutions to everyday problems such as economic turmoil, which innovative technologies can solve. This paper utilized large amounts of data to examine how social media has affected the popularity of South Korean culture content through archival research. From the findings of this study, there is a huge potential from South Korean soft power. The country is emerging slowly as a crucial middle-ranking powerhouse from a country that was disadvantaged by its geographical location. The different factors that have enhanced the popularity of Korean culture include lifting the ban on foreign travel for Korean people, restructuring Korean chaebols, emphasis on infrastructure, and banning the censor laws. Equally, the huge talent base of young and energetic citizens and a conducive environment in the country contributed to the growth and success of Hallyu. Hence the significance of this research because it acknowledges the strength of "soft power" in the form of East Asia culture instead of the Western's economic and military power in countries such as the United States and European countries. Since the findings of this study were generated from existing secondary sources, it is subject to selection bias where some studies could not represent the evidence base. Selection bias can be addressed by carefully designing a research method by an information specialist. Future research can use multiple databases, languages, and sources of grey literature to test for the possible evidence of publication and selection biases.

South Korean films, television shows, and music were mostly consumed by South Korean citizens alone for many years. However, the boy BTS, award-winning films like "Parasite" and the Netflix drama "Squid Game" have enabled the local content to achieve global success. South Korean filmmakers and producers say they have been studying Hollywood and other entertainment hubs for years, adopting and refining formulae while adding distinctly Korean touches, much like Japan and the United States did to establish their industry expertise. According to the creators, after streaming services like Netflix broke through geographical borders, the country went from being a consumer of western culture to becoming an entertainment juggernaut and big cultural exporter in its own right. Based on the global success of Parasite and the Squid Game, it is expected that the future is bright for Korean new series and movies.

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