

ANALYZING K-POP (KOREAN) CULTURE AS A SOFT POWER

Sonal Singh¹ & Dr. Shilpi Bhattacharya²

¹Research Scholar, Kalinga University, Raipur, India

²Professor and Dean (Arts & Humanities), Department of English, Kalinga University, Raipur, India

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explain that how k-pop became a global phenomenon and emerged as a soft power of South Korean nation by realizing and combating with the hurdles. And further it explains that how k-pop has helped in soaring South Korea's declining economy which was due to the past traumatic history caused due to political turmoil as well as slavery.

KEYWORDS: *Division of Korea, Korean War, Dictatorship, Censorship, Hallyu (Korean Wave)*

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INTRODUCTION

What is K-Pop? K-pop is an acronym of Korean popular music. It's a South Korean music industry. South Korea gave birth to the popular music genre. On top of its traditional Korean music roots, it incorporates styles and genres from all over the world, including pop, hip hop, R&B, rock, jazz, gospel, reggae, electronic dance, folk, country, disco, and classical. In the 2000s, the phrase "K-pop" gained popularity, particularly on a global scale. Gayo is a Korean term that is still often used in South Korea to refer to local pop music. Although the term "K-pop" can be used to describe any popular music or pop music from South Korea, it is frequently used to describe musicians connected to the nation's entertainment and idol industries, regardless of the type of music they produce.

And now in the present time, K-Pop has become the soft power of South Korean nation. It has played a very vital role in showcasing or representing the exquisite and authentic cultural image of South Korea and showered its nation with economic benefits. So, what soft power is? Soft power is a non-coercive strategy that uses foreign policy, political values, and culture to bring about a change of any state or nation by its strong appeal unlike hard power which is being coercive in nature and employs militaristic strength to influence people and achieve its goal. An American political scientist, Joseph Samuel Nye born on 19th January, 1937, introduced the concept of soft power. He first introduced this term in his book "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power" which was published during 1990. Three elements of power were recognized in the book: the ability to coerce other nations through the use of military force, influence through the provision of financial incentives, and, lastly, the capacity to co-opt other states through the attraction of the nation's culture and ideals.

Prior South Korea was not a well established nation due its past traumatic histories. It was very poor. But now it has become not only a well developed nation economically but as a cultural soft power too. South Korea is also known as the 'Asian Tiger' due to its fastest growing economy. South Korea's popularity arose with its popular iconic song

'Gangnam Style' sung by PSY and popular series known as 'Squid Game' which gave the nation a global fame. PSY's 'Gangnam Style' became the first video on YouTube that earned one billion views by the viewers. Even the South Korean movies: 'Oldboy' and 'Parasite' received huge global praise especially 'Parasite' for winning an Oscar for the best film. It became the first non-English film to win an Oscar. Now currently in the present time, there is a huge craze of K-Dramas and K-Pop band globally. But now, the k-pop stars have become the brand ambassadors of the South Korea's cultural soft power especially the k-pop bands BTS (world's biggest boy band) and Blackpink have got a significant global fame.

The Guinness World Records book, the Grammys, the radio, the Billboard charts have not only been dominated by BTS but also they soared and marked the influence over the White House too. The American President Joe Biden invited BTS to have a discussion on the surge of anti-Asian hate crimes on May 31, 2022 which made them the first Korean artist to have a discussion on that topic. During their conversation, Biden applauded them and said *"People care a lot about what you say, and what you're doing is good for all people. "It's not just your great talent, it's the message you're communicating. It matters."* (Jenny Regan & Hannah Dailey, Billboard)

BTS gave a stirring and impactful address during the 76th United Nations General Assembly after being named the "Special Presidential Envoy for Future Generations and Culture." President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea introduced BTS, who spoke as the youth delegates or representatives during the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) Moment. Even they performed their lovely track 'Permission to Dance' at the United Nations General Assembly. Even on Spotify, their song "Dynamite" surpassed one billion streams, making it the first K-pop song.

Due to the excessive global popularity of BTS, South Korea earns the economic benefit of 27,000 crore every year. Their popularity made South Korea a major tourist destination hub and due to them every year 8 lakh people visit South Korea. And whenever their new album gets released, even the products related to BTS sold very fast. Hence, this band has become South Korean nation's biggest soft power. BTS's songs always have a message behind. Globally, people not only have obsession of k-pop but also they are obsessed with the Korean attires, their skin hence they buy lots of Korean cosmetic products as well as people go for Korean skin treatment and last but not the least people are fond of Korean cuisines.

DISCUSSION

There is a deep history behind South Korean nation's immense success worldwide. It wasn't just a coincidence that South Korean pop culture was considered as their soft power but rather it was a well planned strategy of the South Korean government to earn economic benefits but it took time for the government to realize its cultural super power. Historically, Korea has always been a vassal state. Before the division of North and South, Korea was ruled and dominated by China. China made Korea its tributary state. Then after gaining freedom from China after 1000 years, Korea was colonized by Japan in 1910. Then after the end of World War II, Japan lost its control from Korea. Hence, the day 15th August is celebrated as the National Liberation Day in both the Koreas because prior both the Koreas were unified. At that time they weren't separate entities. Korea gained independence from Japan after 35 years on Aug 15, 1945.

Just after the end of World War II, the Soviet Union and United States planned to capture Korea. The Soviet Union controlled Northern Korea by following the policy of communism whereas United States controlled Southern Korea by following the policy of capitalism. Negotiation was being done prior splitting both the Koreas that they would rule for only five years under the trusteeship to evaluate their progress and later after the completion of five years they would

handover back the power to both the Koreans. But unfortunately the tension erupted between the Soviet Union and United States which gave rise to the Cold War. Elections conducted by the Soviet Union in North Korea were gone in vain whereas the elections conducted by United Nations in South Korea was successful which gave rise to new constitution. Hence, South Korea formally proclaimed itself "The Republic of Korea" on August 15, 1948, and North Korea formally proclaimed itself "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea" on September 9, 1948. And finally the Soviets and US left the Korean peninsula on 1948. Even after gaining freedom, North Korea adopted the Soviet system of government, while South Korea adopted the capitalist system of the United States.

North Korea made an invasion of South Korea in 1950, two years later, in an effort to reunite the two Koreas without signing a peaceful treaty. This led to a conflict known as the Korean War. In 1950, the Korean War started on June 25. It continued for over three years, from 1951 to 1953, but ultimately the war had to cease with an armistice negotiation and consent. South Korea consequently fell into extreme poverty. Its GDP per capita was equal to that of Haiti and Somalia, the two poorest countries in the world at the moment. President Syngman Rhee of South Korea has taken an authoritarian approach as a result of the severe poverty that undermines democracy. He did amendments in the constitution, and the nation began to descend into dictatorship. When it was discovered that the 1960 elections had been manipulated, there were protests all over the country. Therefore, Syngman Rhee fled from the country which gave rise to the new elections but soon after, the military coup came to power. The government was overthrown by General Park Chung Hee, who established a military dictatorship. But soon after the assassination of Park Chung Hee in 1979, another military coup came to power known as Major General Chun Doo-Hwan who on May 1980 declared martial law which gave rise to the resurgence of democracy in South Korea.

South Korean culture and censorship were impacted for a long time by the protracted dictatorship regime. Park Chung Hee established 'Motion Picture Law' in 1962. This law adhered to strict rules and underwent four revisions. Whenever the films got released in South Korea, they had to pass through the government approval. The scripts were planned according to government's stance. The films which were allowed by the government were violent films, martial art films, melodrama films, the obscene films and propaganda films. Often the propaganda films were financed by the government. The movies related to socio-political issues, the movies which criticizing the government or the film which was made on any issue which the South Korean nation had faced weren't allowed by the government. Even the South Korean government banned all the foreign songs due to dictatorship. Every foreign song without a higher level was banned, resulting in the development of two blacklists with over 260 or 261 tracks on them. They featured folk, rock, and protest music, as well as well-known songs like Bob Dylan's renowned "Blowing in the Wind," which was outlawed in South Korea. Until the 1990s, when democracy was restored, the prohibitions remained in place, which was a watershed.

The Hollywood production film 'Jurassic Park' made a lot of money at the box office in 1993 after becoming incredibly popular all around the world. The South Korean president received a report from the South Korean Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology that highlighted the financial success of the Hollywood movie Jurassic Park and compared it to the sales of 1.5 million Hyundai vehicles. Therefore, As a result, South Korea made the strategic decision to support the media sector. A Korean film 'Seopyeonje' was released in 1993. The film was based on traditional folk called pansori. The film gained immense popularity, out of expectation by the Korean spectators. It was the first movie to sell more than one million tickets in capital city of Seoul alone. Due to the success of the film, the government realized the potential of their media industry. Since then, the government took deliberate steps to support the flourishing of Korean culture and made the decision to bring it into a global framework. The Korean economy must be taken into account in

order to comprehend this emphasis on exports. South Korea's nominal GDP per capita grew fifty times between 1962 and 1989, from \$104 in 1962 to \$5438 in 1989. Many private banks nationwide were nationalized by General Park Chung Hee. Park ruled over nearly everything as a result of the dictatorship, including import/export permits, tax breaks, interest rates, and foreign exchange distribution. Park was in charge of everything. 'Chaebols', the Korean word for big family enterprises, are what Park controlled to promote. These organizations were protected from international competition, and the government allowed them to take advantage of domestic labor. South Korea planned to accelerate its growth through international exports. In an effort to spur growth, South Korea added a variety of manufactured goods to its export list, including wigs, plush toys, shipyards, cars, home electronics, appliances, chemicals, and semi-conductors. Then since then, they decided to export their Korean culture too.

The South Korean Cultural Industry Bureau was founded by the government in 1994. In 1996, a new "Film Promotion Law" was introduced by the government, replacing the "Motion Picture Law." In contrast to the former regulation, which used censorship to regulate the substance of films. Filmmakers and artists were encouraged to freely express themselves by the new law. The government received a media policy study that addressed issues of small enterprises and individuals competing with big, international corporations. The government received a media policy study that addressed issues of small enterprises and individuals competing with big, international corporations. They were concerned. Hence, big businesses like Samsung, Hyundai, and Daewoo chaebols began to enter the media sector. These businesses assumed a variety of responsibilities in the production, distribution, and exhibition of domestic and international motion pictures. Everything was influenced by these chaebols.

With the support of these chaebols allowed the smooth flow of film production without any hurdles. To learn about the preferences of the audience, market research was done. The skills of MBAs and recent graduates from prominent universities were employed by film firms. The chaebols helped in making big budget films. For instance, 'Shiri' was the first big budget hollywood style film of the South Korean industry produced by Samsung. The film followed hollywood style storytelling but the content was purely Korean. Samsung produced this film with the total budget of around 2.4 billion won and the film was a massive hit and additionally it became the highest grossing film in South Korea. Gradually due to the success of such films grew and influenced the interest among the Korean spectators. The Korean spectators took interest in watching their own local films rather than showing inclination towards foreign films. The South Korean film production companies planned to showcase their film globally. Later in 1997, South Korea faced an acute financial crisis. Then South Korea took help from IMF (International Monetary Fund). However, IMF placed numerous conditions towards South Korea if it want to get rid of from the financial downfall. Chaebols and crony capitalism were blamed for the South Korean economic disaster. Indirect cross-ownership, tax avoidance, and unlawful insider trading were exposed by the economic crisis. Before receiving assistance, the IMF advised the South Korean government to address these issues. Hence, South Korean government introduced 8 rules regarding chaebols. The most important rule was that he chaebols shouldn't entering into all the sectors due to which Samsung and Hyundai were being removed from the film production company.

The global view of Korea was impacted by the financial crisis, even though it had a negative effect on the Korean economy. The president of South Korea, Kim Dae-Jung, then realized that culture had the power to rebrand the nation in addition to aiding in economic recovery. Known as the "Culture President," Kim Dae-Jung is today highly recognized in South Korea. It was thanks to him and his successor, Roh Moo-Hyun, that the country's cultural revolution got underway. Even Kim was awarded with the Nobel Prize too. But what made him in soaring success and being highly praised. Kim did

lots of amendments for developing his nation. Firstly, he began with fund allocation. He introduced 'Basic Laws for Cultural Industries' promotion in 1999. For its implementation, he set aside \$148.5 million. The Ministry of Culture established a specialized department with a focus on Korean pop music. Second, infrastructure development: Universities across the country established departments dedicated to the culture industry, and multimillion-dollar concert halls were built. Noraebangs are also becoming popular around the nation. In essence, noraebangs are karaoke bars where patrons can sing and have a drink. Third was taking the initiative of Digital Korea. He provided South Korea the facility of broadband services in 1998 nearly in every household. The demand for broadband connections was so great that by 2004, almost 12 million households had access to it, making Korea the most connected country in the world. And fourthly, he outlawed censorship because. Prior those who produced serious films that addressed socioeconomic issues in the country were accused of being anti-national. Under the National Security Act, filmmakers may be arrested on charges of endorsing the enemy state, North Korea. Kim, however, believed in and supported artistic and creative independence. He instituted an American-style age rating system and eliminated the board review procedure. This made it possible for filmmakers to candidly depict the difficulties that regular people experience. That's why movies like "Parasite" became so successful. The film showcases the extreme inequality in South Korea as well as the social division between the poor and the rich.

During the 1990s, there was a generation called 386 in South Korea. People of this generation were born on 1960s and at the time they were politically active further by taking the part in democratization movement which erupted during 1980s. People of this generation became the first who bestowed with the opportunity to travel abroad because prior Koreans were constrained from travelling abroad because the declining foreign cash worried the government. However, when South Korea's economy surged and nation liberalized then the ban from foreign travel was removed for the citizens of Korea. Even Koreans from 386 generation were given the chance to study overseas. They even enrolled in international film schools, where they gained fresh insights into life and film making. The people from this generation even became a very prominent film directors such as Bong Joon-Ho and Kim Ki-Duk. Bong Joon-Ho directed the Oscar bestowed film called 'Parasite.' Additionally he directed the other two popular films: 'Okja' and 'Snowpiercer' and these two movies served as critiques of capitalism. And Kim Ki-Duk's Film 'Pieta' received the best film at the Venice Film Festival. But among the South Korean films, 'Oldboy' directed by Park Chan-wook, was very popular globally. The movie is of dark thriller genre. Even hollywood remade this film. Now the Korean movies shifted from dark thriller to adopting comedy and romantic genre movies such as 'Il Mare' because they didn't want to set the notion among the public internationally as of only producing dark thriller films. And 'Il Mare' was also remade by hollywood and named as 'The Lake House.'

In terms of dramas, "What is love" was the first Korean drama to be a hit in the genre. When it aired on China Central Television in 1997, it became the first TV program to be formally exported to China, marking a significant milestone. This is often seen as the first sign of Hallyu. "Hallyu" refers to the Korean Wave. Over the decades, this K-Wave grew in popularity. With 'Squid Game' becoming the most viewed online series on Netflix, K-drama soared. Now in the present time, k-dramas are highly addictive, prominent, praised and loved globally because of its emotional authenticity, strong visual appeal, and creativity. As part of their decolonization process, South Korea first outlawed Japanese music content. However, by eliminating the prohibition, Kim Dae Jung significantly contributed to bettering ties between South Korea and Japan. As a result, Japanese pop songs—known as J-Pop in South Korea—were introduced. One of the original Korean boy bands was H.O.T. They sold 1.5 million copies of their debut album, "We Hate All Kinds of Violence," in 1996. SM Entertainment formed this band. The company's founder asked students for their opinions on what

they thought the perfect pop group should be before forming this one. They then held auditions to choose the band members. After that, these people received intensive training in a formalized idol system. Although this idea originated in Japan, k-pop is now a worldwide sensation.

Through international auditions or street castings, talent agencies frequently find idol trainees and offer them extensive instruction in media communication, acting, dancing, and singing. Fan contact, stage demeanor, and stage name are all decided by the company. PSY's song 'Gangnam Style' became a massive hit by breaking the records on YouTube because of its English punchline and catchy tune and even its strong choreography. After gaining good response with this song internationally, this format has since been employed in numerous Korean songs. The hook would be in English, but the most of the lyrics would be in Korean. This made it possible for the music to be enjoyed and get connected by non-Korean speakers worldwide. Today BTS and Blackpink have paved their way and achieved outstanding recognition globally for their country. There is a huge fan base of BTS known as 'Army' and Blackpink's 'Blink.'

CONCLUSION

The major factor that played a significant role in making South Korea a cultural superpower is self realization. Being constantly remained as a vassal state for many centuries had undermined Korea's development. Consequently, it deprived South Korea from analyzing and understanding its identity of soft power it held within. After liberation, the circumstances of nation's declining economy made the South Korean government realize to represent and promote their culture on a global context for nation's economic underway. Hence, huge craze for South Korean culture, k-pop music, and k-dramas played a vital role in soaring the nation's economy as well as it also gave a significant rise to Korean tourism.

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