SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF THE KOREAN WAVE

HALLYU AND SOFT POWER

NORA SAMOSIR
AND LIONEL WEE

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Samosir and Wee examine how the immensely popular Korean Wave ("K-wave") also known as Hallyu is wielded as soft power through the use of communication for persuasion and attraction on the global stage. The Korean Wave refers to the global spread and popularity of South Korean culture, particularly its pop music ("K-pop"), serialised dramas ("K-dramas"), and films ("K-films"). Given the South Korean government's involvement in providing funding and publicity, the Korean Wave raises interesting sociolinguistic questions about the relationship between artistry and citizenship, the use of social media in facilitating the consumption of cultural products, and, ultimately, the nature of soft power itself.

Studies of soft power have tended to come from the field of international relations. This book shows that sociolinguistics actually has a number of tools in its conceptual arsenal – such as indexicality, stancetaking, affect, and styling – that can shed light on the Korean Wave as a form of soft power. As the first book-length sociolinguistic analysis of the Korean Wave and soft power, this book demonstrates how K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films have been able to encourage in consumers an anthropological stance towards all things Korean.

This volume will be of particular interest to students and scholars in sociolinguistics, political science, cultural studies, and Korean studies.

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1

THE KOREAN WAVE AS A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PHENOMENON

Introduction

The Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu, refers primarily to the global spread and popularity of South Korean pop music ("K-pop"), serialised dramas ("K-dramas"), and movies ("K-films"), though other aspects of Korean culture such as the language, the locales, the cuisine, the clothes, and the cosmetics may also be implicated. However, because it is the exposure to K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films that oftentimes serves to foster international interest in these other aspects of the culture, these three Ks can be treated as the primary channels by which Korean popular culture in its many different forms comes to be globally appreciated and pursued with enthusiasm. Indeed, it is worth noting that the global popularity of Korean culture has even influenced the English lexicon, with more than twenty words that are either of Korean origin or that feature the "K-" prefix having been added to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, such as "K-beauty", "Hallyu", and "bulgogi" (thin slices of beef or pork) (McCurry 2021).

The spread of Hallyu first gained momentum in the 1990s, due in no small part to the success of the broadcast in 1997 on China Central Television of the K-drama *What Is Love?* (first produced in 1991) and, latterly, the 2000 Beijing concert of the Korean boy band H.O.T. The 1999 Korean action film *Shiri*, about attempts by South Korean security agents to stop North Korean sleepers, was the first Hollywood-style big-budget production from the then-nascent Korean film industry. *Shiri*'s main success was domestic, doing extremely well with South Korean audiences and critics, and winning a number of film awards. In contrast, both the television drama and the concert gained success in China. Nevertheless, these initial successes encouraged South Korea to take the view that its cultural products could indeed find purchase in overseas markets. And it was, in particular, the early

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success in China that apparently led to the term "Hallyu" being used. The term was first coined by Beijing journalists to describe this overseas interest in Korean popular culture (Elite Asia 2017). In 2000, another Korean film, *Joint Security Area*, about the security and political ramifications when two North Korean soldiers are killed in the Korean Demilitarized Zone, did very well both domestically as well as in Japan. It even went on to win the Lotus d'Or ("Jury Prize") at the 2001 Deauville Asian Film Festival and was also nominated for the Golden Berlin Bear at the 2001 Berlin International Film Festival. The spread of Hallyu continued further in 2002, again also in Japan, with the drama series *Winter Sonata*. The success of *Winter Sonata* even spawned a tourism boom as Japanese fans made their way to the various locations that were featured in the drama.[1]

Today, there can be no doubt that Hallyu has made tremendous inroads into many different countries, both in Asia and beyond. Consider, for example, two highly regarded films from South Korea. Bong Joon-ho's 2019 film *Parasite*, a comedic thriller that highlighted class inequalities in South Korean society, became the first South Korean film to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The film went on to win Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Film at the 92nd Academy Awards. And another Korean film, the romantic mystery *Decision to Leave* by Park Chan-wook, won the Best Director Award at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival.

In the case of K-dramas, Leong (2014) notes that "the Korean historical costume drama *The Jewel in the Palace* is so popular that Iranians reportedly organize their mealtimes around the show". Moosa and Ebrahim (2019) point out that interest in K-dramas has steadily increased in South Africa:

> In 2019, the web searches for Korean dramas in South Africa are at the highest they've ever been. Western Cape has searched the term "Korean dramas" the most, followed by KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng. It's interesting that the fourth and fifth most searched terms are "Healer" and "Pinocchio" which are both names of popular Korean dramas.

And Jin (2018) makes the interesting point that Hallyu's popularity in Canada is facilitated by the use of social media rather than more traditional media platforms such as television or movie theatres. Thus, Jin (2018, 406) notes that even though "Hallyu had conquered Asia long before the proliferation of global social networks":

> YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter make it easier for Kpop bands to reach a wider audience in the West, and those fans are turning to the same social networking tools to proclaim their devotion.

We discuss the role of social media later (see Chapter 4, for example). For now, we move on to note the enormous success and popularity enjoyed by the K-drama

Crash Landing on You, not just in South Korea but in Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and the USA, among many countries. As one media report (So-Young Park 2020) points out:

> Moreover, in many countries in Southeast Asia, South America, etc., fans also set up fan pages on social networks to share photos and videos. Meanwhile, the 4 videos posted on Netflix's SNS also quickly hit 6.08 million views. This figure is absolutely overwhelming compared to the number of views of other shows. The popularity of the drama "Crash Landing on You" has reached out of Asia and spread to other continents such as North America, South America, Europe, etc.

As for K-pop, Yoon, Min, and Jin (2020) describe its popularity in Spain and they emphasise that this popularity is a noteworthy exception given that there is a tendency otherwise for many non-Western cultural forms to be stigmatised. As well, the K-pop groups Blackpink and BTS have been ranked by Bloomberg as being among the biggest pop bands in the world (Lim 2020).

However, it has also been widely acknowledged that Hallyu's global success is not due simply to mere luck or happenstance, or even to the individual efforts and artistic merits of the performers – though the fact that these are also contributing factors obviously cannot and should not be denied. Rather, Hallyu is often described as the South Korean state's soft power strategy (Roll 2021; Suntikul 2019). The concept of soft power (Nye 1990a, b; 2004a, b) originates from the field of international politics, where it refers to a state's use of attraction and appeal – as opposed to coercion, military might or sanctions – so as to shape the preferences of other international actors.

As a form of soft power that is orchestrated at the national level, Hallyu should therefore not simply be mistaken for an umbrella term that refers to a collection of films, songs, and dramas coming out of South Korea, and that happen to be popular beyond the domestic market. The performers, entertainment agencies and production companies are of course competing with each other for consumer attention, awards, sales, and advertising revenue, and this means it is important not to lose sight of the heterogeneous and even competitive nature of Hallyu. Nevertheless, because there is also state involvement and oversight, this serves to give Hallyu a more cohesive and strategic character as well. As Youna Kim (2013, 3–4) points out, the South Korean state "targeted the export of popular media culture as a new economic initiative, one of the major sources of foreign revenue vital for the country's economic survival and advancement". To achieve this, the state decided to provide subsidies and funding for start-ups. According to Leong (2014):

> By 2012, Korea's ministry of culture, sport and tourism estimated Hallyu's economic asset value at US$83.2 billion, of which US$5.26 billion was thought to be attributable to its music industry.

> …
>
> [In 2014] The Korean government transformed its focus, earmarking 1% of the national budget to spending on subsidies and low-interest loans to cultural industries, launching agencies to promote and expand K-pop exports, and setting up more cultural departments at universities.
>
> …
>
> Today, the government has a US$1 billion investment fund to nurture popular culture.

At the same time – and this is a point that is crucial to the arguments we will present in this book – the South Korean state's role should not be over-emphasised. There is no doubt that the state does play an important role by funding and publicising Hallyu as part of the programmes featured in embassies and consulates across the world, by honouring successful Hallyu artists, and by making available its premises (various state-owned buildings located domestically as well as overseas) for the promotion of Hallyu. A good example is the *Hallyu! The Korean Wave* exhibition at the V&A South Kensington from 24 September 2022 till 25 June 2023. Billed as a showcase of "the colourful and dynamic popular culture of South Korea" (V&A, n.d.), the exhibition is supported by the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism along with the South Korean luxury car manufacturer Genesis. The exhibition features costumes from the popular series *Squid Game*, a sculpture of the Korean rapper G-Dragon, a set and props from the movie *Parasite*, and the jacket worn by the singer Psy when he performed his global hit "Gangnam Style". Visitors can even participate in an interactive K-pop dance challenge.

Here, it is clear that one important aspect of the South Korean state's role is to provide the resources for publicising the country's pop culture. The state does not directly lead the development of Hallyu, especially when compared to how it actively plans the rest of the economy, for instance, by selecting and promoting specific industries for national economic development. The actual production of music videos, drama series, and movies still lies with the creative industries themselves. Instead, the state typically appropriates Hallyu's success after the fact, actively using the filmmakers, actors or singers to bolster the nation's image. That being said, it is nevertheless relevant to note that if the promotion of Hallyu were left to the creative industries themselves, it is quite likely that the K-pop industry would focus on its own products and be less concerned with K-dramas or K-films. The same would apply to the other two channels of Hallyu. Therefore, what the state also contributes when it promotes Hallyu, as seen in the V&A example, is a more multidimensional approach, one that focuses on K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films, as well as other aspects of Korean culture. We say more about this point in Chapter 7.

Hallyu in the creative industries is therefore not something that the state actively intervenes in, as might be the case, say, with the information technology or semiconductor industries. The specific planning and design of individual aspects of Hallyu still lies primarily in the hands of the industry players who actively employ various media platforms for the circulation of content of various sorts, who perform acts of identities at the national and global scales, and who are actively involved in the creation and sustaining of fan-based communities that possess varying degrees of ephemerality. It is this relatively loose relationship between the state and the creative industries that makes Hallyu a particularly interesting case of soft power at work. Indeed, a key point that we emphasise is that this loose relationship between the state and the creative industries is critical to Hallyu's global success.

In a narrow economic sense, Hallyu is obviously big business since this enthusiastic pursuit of things Korean contributes in no small way to the country's GDP (Roll 2021). But in a broader sense, this consumption of Korean culture – both by Koreans themselves and by non-Koreans – is one important manifestation of the culture of consumerism (Bauman 1998; Baudrillard 1988), where material culture, specifically, the ways in which it is acquired and appropriated, are all seen as integral parts of how social roles and identities are constructed and negotiated (Amin and Thrift 2004, 267; Giddens 1991). As Benwell and Stokoe (2006, 167) observe, "consumption becomes a means of articulating a sense of identity and, perhaps even more crucially, distinction from others". In this regard, it is no exaggeration to say that Hallyu is the commodification of Korean culture writ large – in this case, writ globally.

This commodification of Korean culture has undoubtedly helped to create a sense of pride among many Koreans themselves. As noted in a recent documentary, *Deciphering South Korea* (*CNA* 2021), the popularity of their cultural products in global markets has made not just Koreans who are Korean citizens but even Korean Americans become proud of their Korean identity and heritage. This is not surprising, of course. As Koreans themselves become aware of the success of Hallyu and the consumption of Korean culture by non-Koreans, one likely consequence is a greater assuredness of the value in being identified as Korean on the global stage. Of course, it is not as though there was no sense of national pride prior to the success of Hallyu. Korean citizens, as with other nationalities, have taken enormous pride in the sporting or scientific success of their compatriots, sometimes elevating them to national icons who are then appropriated in state discourses about national identity.[2] The emergence of Hallyu, however, raises particularly interesting questions about its role in South Korea's nation branding and how this compares with other attempts at regulating nation brands such as Switzerland's "Swissness act" (Del Percio 2016) – an issue that we also explore in this book (see Chapter 8).

The success of Hallyu has most certainly not gone unnoticed in academia. MacDonald (2020) reports that:

> Sage Journal lists at least 100 research papers on aspects of the Hallyu, while academia.edu has over 1,600 and JSTOR has 276. Such works discuss the Hallyu from socio-cultural as well as economic perspectives, touching on topics that range from foreign policy to the finer aspects of fandom.

As a state-level soft power strategy, it is perhaps only natural that the Hallyu phenomenon finds interest among foreign policy scholars and economists. Thus, Dhawan (2017, 559) made the interesting argument that despite its undeniable global success, among the countries least affected by the Korean Wave was India, and this mainly because much of the country "largely remains unaware of this phenomenon". Dhawan (2017) then focuses on the various strategies employed by the South Korean state to redress this gap (for details, see the discussion in Chapter 4). However, some years later, Korean became part of the language curriculum in India. And Walsh (2014, 13) draws attention to the economic dimensions of Hallyu, noting that state involvement results in the "decoupling of the cost of production and retail price". As a result, there is a widening of the gap between production costs and retail prices; the former can be kept relatively low while the latter can be allowed to rise and contribute more significantly to the country's GDP.

From a socio-cultural perspective, scholars have taken note of how Hallyu derives much of its success from non-traditional forms of media. Jin and Yoon (2014; see also Jin 2018, mentioned above), for example, draw on interviews with North American fans of Hallyu to argue that social media platforms facilitate not just the spread of Hallyu content but also allow for fans to socially engage with each other. This sociality between fans is an important aspect of how the Hallyu momentum is sustained. It is a reminder that social media is not merely a medium for the transmission of prefabricated content, it can also shape the very nature of that content, in this case, the Korean Wave, by encouraging interactions between artist and fans as well as between fans themselves. There is a sense of community and sociality in Hallyu that makes it interesting to scholars of cultural studies. And Kim, Unger, and Wagner (2017, 321) emphasise the multi-directionality of Hallyu, highlighting that there are also "transnational exchanges of cultural content to and from Korea". These authors note that one aspect of Hallyu involves remaking popular Japanese and American television programmes for a Korean audience, such as the Korean version of the American television series *Suits*. And conversely, there are also remakes of Korean originals such as the Japanese version of the K-drama *Signal*. Thus, even as scholarly attention is given to how the Korean Wave serves to present Korea to the world, it cannot be ignored that the same phenomenon also involves adapting non-Korean cultural products for both domestic and global markets, and in reverse, Korean products adapted for non-Korean markets. The implications of Hallyu's multi-directionality and global circulation, in its varied forms, surely merit further discussion and investigation.

Hallyu in Sociolinguistics

We have seen that, as a cultural and economic phenomenon of global proportions, Hallyu involves the use of various media platforms, the circulation of texts of various sorts, acts of identities at the national and global scales, and the creation and sustaining of fan-based communities that possess varying degrees of ephemerality. And as a form of soft power that enjoys state-level support, Hallyu raises additional interesting questions regarding the ways in which tourism can be developed, the relationship between performer and nation, and the "inward" or domestic implications of a successful soft power strategy (which is otherwise usually analysed in terms of its "outward" or international effects).

It is therefore undeniable that there are many aspects of Hallyu which are clearly of great relevance to the field of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics has, after all, long taken an interest in studies that pertain to identity, communication, media, citizenship, and tourism (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Extra, Spotti, and Van Avermaet 2011; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Tagliamonte 2014; Jaworski, Thurlow, and Heller 2014; among many others). Despite this, however, neither Hallyu nor soft power – either individually or as a joint phenomenon – has figured prominently in sociolinguistic studies, though there are some exceptions.

Consider the case where the focus is primarily on Hallyu and less so on its nature as a form of state-supported soft power. Chun (2017), for example, looks at how the dominant ideology of linguistic absolutism has affected fans' reaction to the pronunciation of names. Specifically, her study focuses on the pronunciation of Korean names by two English-speaking fans on YouTube, and she argues that, from the metalinguistic comments posted in response to the video, the pronunciations were heard as acts of hybridisation. But interestingly, this hybridisation relied on, rather than challenged, an ideology of linguistic purity or linguistic absolutism. As another example, Ryoo (2009) is a study of the Korean Wave as a form of cultural positioning amidst global economic transformations. The article treats Hallyu from a regional perspective and argues that, as a form of cultural hybridisation, the Korean Wave "signifies a regionalization of transnational cultural flows as it entails Asian countries' increasing acceptance of cultural production and consumption from neighbouring countries that share similar historical and cultural backgrounds, rather than from politically and economically powerful others" (Ryoo 2009, 137). Finally, in a special issue of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* that focuses on Korean transnationalism, the only contribution that is somewhat related to Hallyu comes from Lo and Kim's (2012) discussion of how multilingualism is portrayed in Korean television dramas, comedy skits, and popular music. But even here, it has to be said that the discussion in this article centres on the ways in which multilingualism is seen to index global and South Korean citizenship rather than Hallyu per se.

But if Hallyu has not been given much attention in sociolinguistics, even less attention appears to have been paid to the notion of soft power. While the study of

soft power quite naturally involves investigating the use of communication (given that soft power is oftentimes characterised as involving attraction and persuasion), most of such work has instead tended to come from the field of international relations, where the concept originated. Most of these works tend to problematise the concept while not actually dismissing it completely. For example, in an early and influential paper, Mattern (2005, 583, italics in original) critiques the reliance on "attraction" as an explanation for what constitutes soft power, and argues instead that, in the context of world politics,

> it makes far more sense to model attraction as a relationship that is constructed through *representational* force – a nonphysical but nevertheless coercive form of power that is exercised through language … soft power should not be understood in juxtaposition to hard power but as a continuation of it by different means.

Thus, even as she acknowledges the important role that language plays in the manifestation of soft power, Mattern's goal is to question the validity of the concept, whether it is something that is truly distinct from the more common understanding in international politics of power as coercion.

And a recent edited volume, Lee and Melissen (2011), focuses on the relationship between soft power and cultural diplomacy, particularly in East Asian settings. Lee and Melissen (2011, 1) begin their volume by acknowledging that soft power remains "an elusive concept for most officials and indeed also for many academics":

> References to soft power in the policy discourse in Asia and in the West rarely run very deep, since it is not sufficiently clear how soft power actually works in specific international relationships …
>
> Almost twenty years after Joseph S. Nye coined the term, empirical measurements of soft power and a more critical examination and theorizing of this analytical concept are therefore still much needed.

Even more recently, Winkler (2019) has noted that there continue to be problems with the concept and that a common criticism is its vagueness. This is because what exactly constitutes soft power remains widely debated. Given this continuing conceptual controversy, Winkler's response is to instead adopt a more empirical tack and he chooses to analyse Japan's utilisation of the concept. The goal here is to describe how the concept has been materialised in Japan, thus shifting the focus from "what (if anything) soft power 'really is', to *how* the concept becomes imbued with different meanings, how actors accept, challenge or amend these meanings and how such conceptual choices manifest themselves in the material world" (Winkler 2019, 484, italics in original).

But if sociolinguistic studies of Hallyu and soft power as separate phenomena are already hard to come by, it is then altogether unsurprising that there would be an even greater paucity of sociolinguistic studies that cover both Hallyu and soft power, that is, the relationship between the two. This is regrettable because sociolinguistics actually has a number of tools in its conceptual arsenal that could not only shed light on Hallyu and soft power as individual concepts but could, in so doing, contribute also towards a better understanding of the Hallyu–soft power nexus. Some of the conceptual tools that could be relevant in this regard include stance (Jaffe 2009), scripting (Cameron 2000), styling (Coupland 2007; Wee 2014), and affect (Wee 2016; Wee and Goh 2019). The chapters that follow will demonstrate the utility of these and other concepts to this endeavour.

What is needed, therefore, is a detailed sociolinguistic analysis of the multidimensional richness of Hallyu as a form of soft power, something that is long overdue. The following are just some of the questions that would benefit from an in-depth sociolinguistic treatment:

(i) much has been said about the manufactured identities of Hallyu artists, especially of those in K-pop. The gruelling training regimes are intended to allow talent agencies to identify promising performers and to also decide on combinations of individual performers so as to create pop groups that might have market appeal. The lives and activities of the individual performers are thus tightly monitored and controlled by their respective talent agencies. What might the sociolinguistic notions of style and scripting have to say about such practices and their effects on identity construction? And given that Hallyu is a form of soft power, how are the manufactured identities and highly demanding training programmes reconciled (if at all) with the goal of making Korean culture as globally attractive as possible?

(ii) it has been noted on more than one occasion that social media plays a key role in the continued success of Hallyu. How are we to understand the kinds of communications that take place via the specific kinds of media platforms (YouTube, streaming services, blogs posted by fans) that are involved? For example, what implications might such an inquiry have for the ways in which we understand (a) the relationship between communication and agency, and (b) the transmission, circulation, and recirculation of texts? Attending to questions such as these will also help to better clarify the material conditions under which Hallyu *qua* soft power comes to take effect

(iii) Hallyu performers are acutely aware that they are not merely artists but artists representing South Korea. This awareness is no doubt heightened by the fact that the South Korean state continues to support Hallyu as part of its soft power strategy. How does this soft power strategy materialise itself in the relationship between Hallyu, the Korean identity, and Korean citizenship? For example, a key benefit of the soft power strategy – and one reason why that strategy continues to be pursued – is the boost to Korean tourism and

Korean goods such as cosmetics, cuisine, and fashion. How does the pursuit of soft power impact the ways in which the South Korean state and the Hallyu performers market themselves and their products to the world at large?

Organisation of the Book

In this book, we make the argument that Hallyu works as soft power because of the involvement of both the state and the creative industries and where, crucially, the latter enjoy artistic autonomy from the former.

To explicate the role of the creative industries, we draw on the notion of artistic citizenship (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016), which we argue is not just about the artistic visions and political commitments of individuals or groups but, in the case of Hallyu, also about national obligation and responsibility. Hallyu works as soft power because it is a form of artistic citizenship where an awareness of the need to enhance the country's image is always present. Exactly how Hallyu's artistic citizenship manifests itself as a form of soft power is something that a sociolinguistic approach is well placed to analyse. We show that the relationship between soft power and artistic citizenship manifests in the cultivation of *an anthropological stance* (see below). Specifically, artistic activities and products help to increase global interest in the country's culture and history, and this interest is appropriated by the state to boost tourism, the economy, and international relations.

Various scholars have noted that soft power involves attraction and persuasion. Attraction and persuasion help to ensure that Hallyu products, activities, and artists are all perceived as, at the very least, being non-threatening. Of course, there is more than just being non-threatening that is involved. How the products, activities, and artists are accessed is also highly relevant, as are the ways in which fans are able to interact among themselves so as to create a cycle of positive affective feedback about their various Hallyu experiences. We demonstrate how the Hallyu products, activities, and artists are bound to the South Korean national identity in ways that obligate the various manifestations of Hallyu to positively promote – or, at the very least, avoid denigrating – Korean culture.

We show that an understanding of attraction and persuasion requires attention to indexicality, styling, affect, and stancetaking – concepts drawn from sociolinguistics. We also demonstrate that these concepts explain how K-pop, K-drama, and K-films have been able to encourage in consumers a deeper fascination with Korean culture.

We call such a fascination an anthropological stance towards Korea. This is a metastance, that is, it is a general stance that informs the more situation-specific stances and affect towards particular Korean practices and objects. A key feature of Hallyu that facilitates this anthropological stance is that Hallyu remains proudly and identifiably Korean. For example, where language and identity are concerned, the K-pop songs are (with few exceptions) in Korean and the majority

of the performers are also Korean. In this regard, captioning technology helps to make the content of K-pop more comprehensible and, crucially, in sufficiently small and easily digestible portions that fans, if they so wish, can become invested in learning more about Korean culture, including its language.

In the case of K-dramas and K-films, the anthropological stance is arguably even more relevant. While K-pop music videos can give some insights into wider aspects of Korean culture and society, this is constrained by the relatively short length of the music video genre. K-dramas and K-films, on the other hand, are much longer in length and they allow for much more nuanced presentations and, indeed, deeper explorations of various societal and cultural issues. Because of this, the latter are even more effective in fostering the anthropological stance. A simple illustration of this can be taken from the K-drama *My Mister* (2018), which is about the relationship between two unhappy workers, a salaryman and a part-time employee, as both come to slowly develop a friendship that helps each other in dealing with their respective emotional scars. In one scene, the salaryman and his equally disgruntled two brothers are expressing dissatisfaction with the state of their lives – a common enough theme in many films and dramas. As the conversation continues, the brothers discuss whether they are being punished for transgressions in past lives and whether they might hope to be reincarnated into better lives. The matter-of-fact discussions of the stresses of urban living and working life, especially viewed through the lens of reincarnation, provide international viewers with a relatable theme but one that is given an unapologetically Korean perspective.

Yet another theme in the same K-drama has to do with the fact that the salaryman's senior in the company is someone who was his junior in university. There are constant expressions of concern from the salaryman's wife, his mother, his brothers, and his colleagues about this socially unacceptable and even downright embarrassing situation. Such a situation is of course by no means unique to South Korea – which, again, allows the themes presented in K-films and K-dramas to be relatable to a global audience. However, the particular emphasis given by the many supporting characters on how intolerable such a situation must be to the salaryman is very much a trait of South Korean society. For those viewers who are already enjoying specific Hallyu products such as individual songs, dramas, or films, sustained consumption then exposes them to various other aspects of Korean society and culture, thus beguiling them further. And in fact, the interest in things Korean has even developed to the point where the term "Koreaboo" has come to be used to describe someone who has an unhealthy and obsessive interest in things Korean (see Chapter 7).

The relationship between soft power, artistic citizenship, and the anthropological stance, we argue, is as follows:

(i) Hallyu works as soft power because it is a form of artistic citizenship where an awareness of the need to enhance the country's image is always present

(ii) the artistic activities and products (music videos, serialised dramas, films) help to increase interest in the country's culture and history. This is the fostering of "an anthropological stance"
(iii) this interest in things Korean is appropriated by the state to boost tourism, the economy, and international relations
(iv) an important component of this relationship is that the creative industries are seen to be acting autonomously, driven by profit, artistic excellence, and a sense of national pride rather than as agents of the state. If they are seen as propaganda arms of the state, this risks undermining the appeal of the artistic activities and products and, in turn, the global appeal of Hallyu

To develop our argument, in Chapter 2, "Soft Power beyond the State", we provide a critical overview of soft power studies and develop the implications of Hallyu for the study of soft power. Two important implications are emphasised. One, an understanding of the soft power of a nation has to take into account how the state acts in concert with other entities such as organisations and industries. Two, in the case of Hallyu, this means looking into how the state works with the creative industries, which brings us to the notion of artistic citizenship. Artistic citizenship serves as an important reminder that the processes of artmaking and the ways in which art is received are inextricably linked to the communities in which the artist and their art are situated. However, there is an assumption that artistic citizenship can and should be unproblematically attributed to the artist having a clear sociopolitical intent. This underestimates the complexity involved in identifying and attributing intention. We critique this assumption with discussions of two K-pop examples, Psy and BTS.

In Chapter 3, "The Soft Power of Hallyu: The State and the Creative Industries", we explain the relatively loose working relationship between the South Korean state and the creative industries. The chapter begins by explaining the sociolinguistic concepts of indexicality, styling, affect, and stancetaking. It then discusses the role of the state in supporting and appropriating the artistic efforts of the creative industries. Drawing on the reactions to BTS's acceptance of the James A. Van Fleet Award, the chapter also presents an example of how there can be backlash against South Korean artists because of their national affiliation. The chapter closes with a consideration of the relationship between state, nation, and Hallyu, making the point that the state's "arm's-length principle" gives Hallyu products the benefit of being perceived as having artistic integrity or, at the very least, not having the taint of nationalistic propaganda. The discussion here brings into relief the importance of the state respecting the autonomy of artists and the creative industries.

The creative industries are by no means monolithic. K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films deal with different kinds of creative products, face different forms of competition, and contribute to the success of Hallyu in different ways. Nevertheless,

the next three chapters show that one common strand running through all three "K"s is their ability to foster an anthropological stance in consumers.

Chapter 4, "K-Pop: Product and Process", organises the discussion into, on the one hand, the songs, music videos, and performers that fans consume and, on the other hand, the gruelling training regimes and selection processes by which talent agencies come to create K-pop stars. Regarding the products, through an examination of how these are marketed and consumed, we show how this leads to an interest in and further consumption of yet other aspects of Korean culture. In the case of the process, we explain why, despite the very public awareness of the human toll that it extracts, there has so far not been any significant negative impact on Hallyu's soft power. Instead, we show that the process has been marketed as a formula to be replicated as part of K-pop's formula for success. In line with our conceptual emphasis on the importance of stancetaking and affect, we make the point that K-Pop is particularly effective in cultivating interest in and fascination with Korean culture because it has been able to encourage in consumers an anthropological stance towards Korea.

Chapter 5 continues the investigation into specific Hallyu industries. In "K-Dramas: Serialising Korean Culture", we analyse the themes across the various genres and tropes found in K-dramas. Once again, the anthropological stance plays an important part in the discussion. There are also important differences between K-pop and K-dramas that are worth attending to and we discuss these in the latter half of the chapter. One difference is this: while K-pop music videos can give some insights into wider aspects of Korean culture and society, this is constrained by the relatively short length of the music video genre. K-dramas, on the other hand, are much longer in length and they allow for much more complex presentations and, indeed, in-depth explorations of various societal and cultural issues. Because of this, we argue that K-dramas are actually even more effective than K-pop in fostering the anthropological stance. We demonstrate how Korean culture is portrayed in ways that serve to increase interest or evoke intrigue in viewers, as opposed to alienating them. Our discussion also covers K-dramas that are Korean versions of series originating from the West, such as *Suits* (which is based on the American series of the same name) and *The World of the Married* (which is based on the British series *Doctor Foster*). Conversely, it also gives attention to how K-dramas have been adapted for Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and Indonesian audiences. Such a discussion is especially illuminating as it exemplifies how a series originating outside of Korea can be adapted to further the cause of Hallyu and Korean soft power, and vice versa.

Chapter 6 continues the focus on cultivating interest in Korean culture. A discussion of filmic themes would not be complete without a consideration of Korean films such as *Old Boy*, *Train to Busan*, and *Parasite*, all of which have contributed to the rise of "Hallyuwood" (Balmont 2020). This chapter, "K-Films: Korean Culture as Movie Spectacle", then looks at the ways in which various Korean films contribute to Hallyu's soft power success by furthering interest in things Korean.

The contribution of K-films is also in no small way facilitated by the symbolic capital enjoyed by award-winning filmmakers, such as Bong Joon-ho and Park Chan-wook. Here, we discuss the possibility that these Korean filmmakers should be considered auteurs and what this might mean for Hallyu, especially given that some of the works from these individuals may be becoming more internationalised in terms of casting and partnerships with movie studios. Another important factor in the internationalisation of K-films is the involvement of American filmmakers such as Lee Isaac Chung whose parents are South Korean and the rise of co-productions with filmmakers from other countries such as Japan and Singapore.

The arguments in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 show how K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films can serve to foster general interest in Korean culture. We take up this point in greater detail in Chapter 7, "Beyond the Three Ks: Consuming Korea". Interest in Korean cosmetics, cuisine, tourism, and the language has been attributed to Hallyu's success (Bae et al. 2017). We show how social media plays a critical role in popularising other aspects of Korean culture, so that there is "active uptake". That is, rather than simply watching a film or television drama where particular Korean dishes happen to be featured, for example, viewers may be motivated to seek out opportunities to taste the dishes themselves. There is a form of chain consumption where initial interest in music or dramas leads to interest in food, locales, fashion, and even the language itself. We draw on Stroud and Wee's (2007) framework for understanding sociolinguistic consumption, which distinguishes between the direct consumption of languages as denotational codes (e.g. "I want to learn the French language") and the indirect consumption of linguistic repertoires as a result of being engaged in various activities such as listening to K-pop or having an interest in wine (e.g. "I picked up some French words because I enjoy tasting different kinds of wine"). We show that social media plays a critical role in popularising other aspects of Korean culture, so that there is "active uptake".

Chapter 8, "Towards a Better Understanding of Soft Power", summarises the key points from the preceding chapters before elaborating on the implications of our arguments about Hallyu for a broader understanding of the nature of soft power. We highlight three important points. One, though studies of soft power have focused primarily on the state, our Hallyu study shows that it is important to take into account the role of other actors, in this case, artists and the creative industries. Soft power accrues to the nation, and while the state may play an important role, its effectiveness is limited or enhanced (as the case may be) depending on the activities of other institutions associated with the nation. Two, once the contributions of other actors are taken into account, then soft power need not always be an extension of hard power – a claim that some scholars have made when expressing scepticism about whether soft power represents something really new. For these scholars, the claim results in a state-centric understanding of soft power. But the Hallyu case demonstrates clearly that soft power success can come about when the state works with the creative industries to promote a positive image of the country. Three, the Hallyu case also demonstrates that the relationship between

the state and these other institutions in fostering soft power cannot be too close, especially when creativity is involved. It is important that the state respects artistic autonomy. A state that co-opts other institutions to the point where the latter are perceived as nothing more than agents of the state returns us to the lesson of the first point: that soft power success rests on states working with other actors rather than subsuming them. In elaborating on these points, we will briefly draw on comparisons with Japan, North Korea, China, and the US.

Notes

1 The "number of visitors to Nami Island in Chuncheon, Gangwon Province, in particular, shot up from about 270,000 in 2001 to 650,000 in 2002, right after the drama was broadcast" (M. Park 2012).
2 We thank Joseph Park for this point.

2

SOFT POWER BEYOND THE STATE

Introduction

A proper understanding of Nye's (1990a, b; 2004a, b) concept of soft power – and therefore the reason why it has been so influential, why it continues to provoke so much discussion – requires that it first be contextualised in relation to realist international politics. In realist international politics, states are understood as the primary actors, each concerned with its own security and with the pursuit of its own national interest (Korab-Karpowicz 2018). In such a context, the default relationship among states is assumed to be one of conflict and competition as each state tries to protect or expand its territory, as each tries to encroach into the markets or undercut the economic advantages enjoyed by other states. Recognised modes of interaction may then involve the presentation of threats, the exercise of military might, or the imposition of economic sanctions. Arms treaties, trade agreements, and military alliances may consequently be pursued as the established means by which individual states attempt to maximise their own self-interests or, at the very least, neutralise the threats posed by other states.

Against such a backdrop, it is no wonder then that Nye's observation and claim that there is such a thing as soft power stands out as controversial, dramatic, and provocative even. This is because, by drawing attention to the use of attraction and persuasion (rather than coercion, military might, or sanctions) as the means by which the preferences of other international actors might be shaped, the concept of soft power highlights a mode of interaction that seems to have gone unnoticed. It suggests that the interactions among states may not be exhaustively described if the focus is on established "hard power" mechanisms. There is something else that seems to have been overlooked and neglected: a mode of interaction that relies instead on being liked and non-threatening.

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The qualification "seems" is necessary here because the question has sometimes been raised as to whether Nye has, in fact, identified something that is really new. Li (2018, italics added) provides a useful description of the main issues that surround the concept of soft power:

> Hard power was easy to measure, of course. We can count the number of missiles and tanks and troops. (As Soviet leader Joseph Stalin is famously said to have asked, "How many divisions does the Pope have?") But what was the content of America's soft power? … For Nye, the basis of U.S. soft power was liberal democratic politics, free market economics, and fundamental values such as human rights—in essence, liberalism …
>
> *… the hubris of soft power led to the illusion that soft power could somehow exist on its own. But even Nye never said that. In reality, soft power is and always will be an extension of hard power.*

There are, then, questions about the actual distinctiveness of soft power. Can soft power be measured? Can the basis of American soft power, which, according to Nye, is liberalism, be generalisable to other countries? Are there yet other bases of soft power than liberalism that would need to be recognised and, if so, what might these be?

As the next section shows, the questions can be usefully categorised into two types: ontological and methodological, but we point out that there is also a third category that needs to be added: presuppositional.

Soft Power Controversies

The ontological question has to do with whether the concept of soft power actually describes anything significantly different than the "hard power" or coercive tactics already well noted in realist international politics. For example, Mattern (2005) has argued that soft power, too, is in fact coercive in nature; it is really, according to Mattern, "a continuation" of hard power in a nonphysical form (2005, 583, see preceding chapter also). This is obviously the line taken by Li (2018) as well when he characterises soft power as "an extension" of hard power. But even if soft power is indeed an extension or continuation of hard power, there are further questions that need to be addressed, such as whether soft power is proportionally related to hard power and what might be the specific ways in which hard power enables or facilitates soft power. For example, as regards the first question, while New Zealand may not have the same military might as China, it is generally perceived as a more likeable and trustworthy international actor, and New Zealand's tourism appeal arguably compares well with that of China. And this has implications for the second question because being considered trustworthy or having tourism appeal is not the same as being likeable or persuasive. So, soft power is far

from monolithic and there are different facets to soft power of which any analysis will need to be cognisant.

The methodological question, on the other hand, concerns how soft power might be studied. Li (2018) perhaps overstates the case when he suggests that hard power is “easy to measure”, by simply counting missiles, tanks, and troops. Nevertheless, it is true that there are significantly greater challenges involved in trying to measure soft power. For example, it is unclear if soft power can be quantified (Anguelov and Kaschel 2017) – though this has not stopped institutions from ranking countries according to some kind of soft power index (see Chapter 3) – or if qualitative approaches are better suited instead (Ohnesorge 2020). Related to the methodological question is the issue of whether the same criteria for identifying soft power (assuming some such criteria are arrived at) can be applied consistently across all state actors. Or is it the case that what counts as soft power changes depending on the actor in question? For example, if, as Nye suggests, American soft power is about liberalism, then what might be the basis of soft power in the case of South Korea’s Hallyu strategy? And furthermore, what undergirds the soft power, if any, of China and Japan? The lack of any consistent criteria for identifying what constitutes soft power returns us to the ontological question of whether there is really anything substantially new or different about the concept.[1]

However, in addition to the ontological and methodological questions, there is actually a third that might be described as presuppositional. This is because there are good reasons for thinking that the very premises that underpin realist international politics also need to be reconsidered. Recall that Nye’s soft power concept is provocative and intriguing mainly because it is understood in the context of realist international politics. But there are questions about the validity of according primacy to states as international actors and assuming as a default a competitive and conflict-ridden relationship between them (Mangalvedhekar 2019; Wieclawski 2020; among others). Especially in the face of globalisation, it has sometimes been argued that this global interconnectedness signals the “demise” of the state (Ohmae 1996). Such a strong position, one that asserts the state’s irrelevance and obsolescence as a result of globalisation, is clearly an exaggeration since states do continue to play important and influential roles in international politics. Nevertheless, they do not remain unchanged because, as Sassen observes, “global systems insert themselves in national domains where they once were nonexistent” (2006, 227).

Globalisation is first and foremost about change – a change that results from the development of new technologies, from the movements of peoples and ideas, and from the apparent weakening of some institutions (such as, arguably, the state) and the strengthening of others, possibly at the subnational (such as cities) or transnational levels (such as nongovernmental organisations or free trade blocs). As one example, consider that the city-state of Singapore is responding to globalisation by attempting to transform itself into a global city (Wee 2013; Wee and Bokhorst-Heng 2005). The measures that the Singapore state undertakes to effect

this transformation do not always sit easily with its attempts to also maintain the country's identity as an "Asian nation-state". The need to manage potential conflicts between the global city and Asian nation-state narratives leads to a variety of negotiations between state and society. Thus, the state is not simply going to fade away or wilt as a result of globalisation. But it is going to be increasingly interwoven with institutions, policies, and systems that point to a more global outlook.

Jacobson (1997) makes a similar point in his argument that transnational migration has had a significant effect on the individual's relationship to the state. The state's ability to govern is initially questioned by the difficulties it faces in controlling transnational migration. As the presence of these immigrants becomes increasingly pronounced and tensions with nationalist groups start to rise, the state's traditional basis of legitimacy has had to be reshaped (Jacobson 1997, 72, italics added):

> Populated by bodies of people it cannot absorb in the conventional sense, *the state adopts international legal codes that can account for such transnational actors*. Those actors themselves turn to such codes in making demands on the state. *The character and role of state, society, and international institutions are, consequently, being transformed.* Those codes, namely international human rights instruments, have become progressively more salient.

Crucially, this appeal to international human rights instruments is focused on the interpretation of such rights as individual rights rather than the formal citizenship-based rights bestowed by the state. And this in turn weakens the value and appeal of citizenship[2] for both extant citizens as well as migrants. The contours of the relationship between the state and its heterogeneous collection of residents will of course vary, depending on the constraints of how nationalism has been historically imagined and associated with a given state. However, Jacobson (1997, 10–11) suggests that while such constraints may influence the pace of the shift, the direction of the shift is itself quite clear: the momentum is increasingly towards the use of international human rights codes in managing state–resident relationships.

The presuppositional question is thus about whether too much emphasis has been given to the state as the primary locus of agency, as is the case in the field of realist international relations and, relatedly, in the study of soft power. It is about whether realist international politics constitutes the appropriate precept for the study of soft power. This is a point that needs to be seriously considered because there are international, transnational, and non-state actors such as the United Nations, the European Union, Facebook, and Google, as well as social movements such as Extinction Rebellion, that also act on and act with states to achieve various goals. These other actors can often counter or facilitate the states' activities by encouraging behaviours that go towards the construction of identities (e.g., "liberal states") and values (e.g., "eco-friendly states"). A study of soft power has to recognise the presence and effects of these other actors, and it has to confront

the question of whether it makes sense to accord soft power to these other actors as well.

Prima facie, if soft power is about shaping the preferences of others through attraction and appeal, then it seems highly implausible that only states should be accorded soft power. Even expanding the group of entities to include non-state actors such as regional groupings or tech companies would be insufficient. This is because even individuals and communities cannot be excluded from possessing qualities of attractiveness and appeal, and on the basis of these qualities, from being able to influence the preferences of other actors. Thus, rather than treating the soft power of states as *sui generis*, it is more plausible to ask what kinds of characteristics or features an actor (be this a state, an organisation, or an individual) might have that would then constitute soft power, while keeping in mind that the activities of the actor would have to be refracted through different domains and discourses.[3] States, for example, occupy different scales of interaction than individuals; they are also typically concerned with different kinds of matters than individuals; and they can of course marshal different sets of resources. Nevertheless, one implication of the presuppositional question is that the notion of soft power should not be restricted to states.

However, given that states are typically involved, where relevant, in the development of soft power strategies for their respective nations, a further implication of the presuppositional question is this: we need to look into how the state works with other actors in promulgating a soft power strategy. This is in fact a key factor if we are to understand Hallyu's success as a form of soft power. In the case of Hallyu, the state works with the creative industries to ensure that the various cultural products (music videos, serialised dramas, films, among others) are given funding and promotions. But, as we emphasised in the preceding chapter, it is important to appreciate that the state does not directly lead the development of Hallyu, especially when compared to how it actively plans the rest of the economy, for instance, by selecting and promoting specific industries for national economic development. Instead, the state typically appropriates specific cases of Hallyu success, actively using, for example, the filmmakers, actors, or singers to help bolster the nation's image. This is actually a relatively common practice, and it is not just limited to Hallyu.

Consider, for example, the professional success of the South Korean soccer player Son Heung-min, who plays for the English club Tottenham Hotspur and who captains the South Korean national team. Son is viewed by many Koreans as a symbol of national pride and in June 2022, he was given the Cheongnyong Medal by President Yoon Suk-yeol (Tottenham Hotspur 2022). This is the highest order of merit awarded to a South Korean citizen for sporting achievement. Son's recognition by the state exemplifies how the latter takes note of the successes enjoyed by its citizens and capitalises on these successes to foster national pride.

Indeed, Koreans often take enormous pride in the global successes of their compatriots, elevating them to national icon status (see Chapter 7), and these

successes may in turn be appropriated by the state to further enhance national identity and cohesiveness. The difference in the case of Hallyu is that the state is investing in an entire industry, which for expositional convenience we will refer to as “the creative industries”, and the goal here is not just to foster domestic cohesiveness but to enhance the country’s international image.

Keeping the foregoing in mind, we turn in the next section to the role of the artist as citizen. The concept of artistic citizenship provides a critical bridge that links the creative industries to the wider community, such as the nation. It is this link that the South Korean state has been able to appropriate in the case of Hallyu. Once that link has been made clear, it then becomes easier to appreciate the specific nature of Hallyu soft power.

The Artist as Citizen

The concept of artistic citizenship is intended as a contrast and corrective to the notion that art should ideally exist in a realm that is somehow divorced from the practicalities and concerns of everyday life. As Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016, 3) point out, this is a problematic assumption, one that is based on the:

> misguided idea (which for many has unfortunately become something more akin to doctrine) that the true or legitimate values of art are “intrinsic” – residing exclusively in supposedly internal or aesthetic properties of entities considered to be “works of art”. On this view, values that relate to concerns outside the work are “extrinsic”: of merely subsidiary or subordinate value. Their significance is extra-artistic, perhaps even nonartistic.
>
> Unfortunately, this relegates many of art’s most powerful social, political, ethical, and moral values to residual or extra-artistic status.

By drawing attention to artistic citizenship, Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman aim to highlight and argue for the proposition that “the arts can and should be ‘put to work’ toward the positive transformation of people’s lives in local, regional, and international contexts” (2016, 3).

In order to flesh out the concept of artistic citizenship, the authors (2016, 5) offer three premises. One: that the arts are made by and for people. This means that social considerations are as a consequence neither incidental nor extrinsic. They are inextricable parts of the factors that make art even possible in the first place. Two: artmaking and art taking need to be integrated with personal and community life. That is, rather than viewing art as something that should be hermetically sealed in museums, concert halls, or galleries, art needs to instead be recognised as something that is necessarily connected to “everyday experience or ordinary life” (2016, 6). In this regard, even museums, concert halls, and galleries have to be understood as ways of experiencing life. To see these venues as

allowing for the divorcing of art from lived experiences is to misunderstand their natures. Museums, concert halls, and galleries are themselves some of the socially and politically constructed ways in which art may be presented and experienced, even if they are often used to sustain the cultural misrecognition (Bourdieu 1977) that they are somehow unaffected by or insulated from the practical concerns that inform and influence the creation and reception of art. Three, the arts are "inherently social practices" and therefore "they should be viewed, studied, and practised as forms of *ethically guided citizenship*" (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016, 6, italics in original). Accordingly, artistic practice must "be guided by the important ethical question: What kind of artist is it good to be given my current set of circumstances?" (2016, 7). These three premises, taken together, serve to emphasise that art and artmaking are fundamentally political processes in that they have social effects that can change over time, depending on how the works are positioned by the artists and by those who experience them.

The idea of citizenship, broadly speaking, refers to the rights and responsibilities that accrue from membership in a community (Ciprut 2008). It is nevertheless useful to distinguish between a formal and a less formal conception of citizenship. While both conceptions are relevant to artistic citizenship, there has been a tendency to focus on the less formal version.

The formal conception of citizenship refers to the official status as a citizen of a polity, a status that is granted to an individual by the state, usually on the basis of residency or birth. Where formal citizenship is concerned, the difference between being a noncitizen and an official citizen can be quite consequential. The noncitizen is allowed to be present in the polity because permissions for entry and residence have been authorised by the state, and permission may be denied or revoked should the noncitizen at some point come to be considered an "undesirable". In such cases, the noncitizen may be deported back to their home society. In contrast, deportation is not an option in the case of the official citizen. And the official citizen's status is not easily revoked even upon the commission of a serious crime. In fact, rendering someone stateless constitutes a violation of the UN's 1961 Convention. On the other hand, depending on the particularities of the polity, the official citizen may be obligated by the state to discharge specific responsibilities such as performing military service.

Globalisation, however, has led to a necessary reimagining of what it means to be a citizen, giving greater import to the less formal conception. As Ciprut (2008, 17–18) observes, globalisation has:

> created a mosaic of social, economic, and political spaces that transcend and weaken the political boundaries of physical space. That very force of change goes up against today's idea of citizenship based on the moral and legal claims of the Westphalian territorial state … Today, with the advent of globalization, it is becoming possible for a person to be a "citizen" without therefore having to depend exclusively on a single country.

In the case of artistic citizenship, it is this less formal conception that is usually highlighted or assumed as being of greater relevance. This is because even though the artist may be formally a citizen of a particular polity, the impact of the works produced, their intent, and their reception obviously are not restricted by the polity's socio-political and geographical boundaries. And of course, even stateless individuals may produce works of art that could well speak to, among other issues, the plight of migrants or the abusive power of the state.

Indeed, in the course of presenting a work of art, the artist may even run into trouble with the national polity to which they formally belong. In such a situation, the artist may actually rely on the less formal conception of citizenship in order to mitigate or override the penalties that might be imposed as concomitants of the artist's formal citizen status. This has been the case with the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, whose photographs, sculptures, and paintings are often intended as criticisms of the Chinese government's record on human rights and democracy. When he was arrested in 2011 for alleged economic crimes and described by the state media as a "deviant" (Bandurski 2011), it was international human rights groups, other governments, and various art institutions that called for his release. Ai's run-ins with the Chinese government have in fact made it prudent for him to reside outside China. Currently living in Portugal, he maintains a base in Cambridge, UK.

Not all cases of artistic citizenship need involve dissent, of course. But artistic citizenship does involve establishing connections between the artistic work and the community of which the artist is a member, and showing (with varying degrees of explicitness) just how the work is intended to effect a positive transformation. What is pertinent, then, is that the artist qua citizen is engaged in an artistic practice because of his or her "sense of belonging in a community" (Urban 2008). The community can range in scale from the local to the regional to the global and, depending on the nature and scope of the work, the artist may attempt to address issues at each or all of these scales.

Regardless of the specific community or communities with which an artist may be concerned, it is important, as Joseph (2002) reminds us, not to romanticise the idea of community. Even as one may evoke community belonging as a way of rallying for change, the concept of community has also often been used to legitimise the status quo, arguing against disruptions to tradition and instead entrenching hierarchies of gender, race, and sexuality. Community, then, is not necessarily or always a good thing. And in the case of artistic citizenship, while community membership is undoubtedly relevant (since we are after all talking about a form of citizenship), this means that artist qua citizen can at times be working in the service of values and principles that we as scholars are not necessarily comfortable with. It is important to keep this in mind as we move to the next point in our discussion. This is because it is this romanticisation of community – especially if "community" is uncritically equated with any informal grouping that aims to work against institutionalised bodies, including the state – that accounts for a curious gap in the discussions about artistic citizenship.

The gap is this: despite an appreciation that what counts as artistic citizenship has to be construed as widely as possible, there is nevertheless a tendency to dismiss or discount artistic citizenship works that happen to be in the service of institutions and governments. But artists who represent their countries or even their governments are not uncommon, and it would be a fallacy to assume that the integrity of their artistic works is in some fundamental way compromised simply because of this. There nevertheless remains a persistent assumption that artistic citizenship should be focused on "troubling the hegemony", which seems to be equated with working *against* governments or the mainstream in order to reduce oppression (Diverlus 2016, 190, 202).

What this way of positioning artistic citizenship leaves out and thus fails to recognise is the possibility of artists working against oppression but also working with governments or established organisations such as the United Nations. Of course, art has been most infamously used as propaganda by Nazi Germany. But art has also been used by the US government (consider the images of Uncle Sam or Rosie the Riveter) and in more recent times, the iconic Barack Obama "Hope" poster created by Shepard Fairey was widely used in Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. As another illustration, consider the Venice Biennale. The Venice Biennale, sometimes described as "The Olympics of the Arts World" (Meier 2019), presents many different works by artists representing their home countries. Each participating nation has a pavilion. The pavilions are managed by the countries themselves, and they choose an artist to represent them. Thus, in 2017, the National Arts Council of Singapore selected multidisciplinary artist Zai Kuning to represent the country. The work, *Dapunta Hyang: Transmission of Knowledge*, featured a ship that took the artist and his team over three weeks to construct in-situ in the Singapore Pavilion (Lau 2017). The ship is an imagined vessel of the first Malay king of the 7th-century Srivijaya Empire, and the work aims to evoke a combination of forgotten histories and traditions. Whether or not the work itself is read as having a political agenda, the very participation of Zai Kuning as a Singaporean artist who is himself a Malay exhibiting in the Singapore Pavilion of the Biennale constitutes a case of artistic citizenship.

We would argue that, much as it might cause discomfort to scholars interested in artistic citizenship, all these cases – even including Leni Riefenstahl's work as a film director for the Nazi regime – must count as artistic citizenship. Artistic citizenship is necessarily embedded in community belonging. But there are different kinds of communities, some with values and goals more controversial than others. Regardless, if an artist wishes to utilise his or her talents to support a community of his or her choice, then that artist has to be accepted as being engaged in artistic citizenship. In other words, artistic citizenship as a coherent and analytically useful concept for understanding the place of art in social lives cannot by fiat dismiss the works of artists whose ideas and values one might consider repugnant. To say this is not to suggest that there is no place for considering the repugnance of some artistic endeavours. By insisting on artistic citizenship as inextricably tied

to the social lives of artists and the many changing communities that their works can impact, there is also a built-in conceptual space for how such works may be received or rejected, as the case may be. But there is no principled *prima facie* basis for discounting particular artistic works or practices as artistic citizenship if that basis is that these are works/practices that the analyst or scholar happens to consider abhorrent.

A reason why this gap exists, as we have suggested above, is an uncritical romanticisation of community and, by implication, citizenship in its less formal version. Here, there is an assumption that artistic citizenship speaks to those values that grassroots communities hold dear, perhaps as counters to the oppressive institutionalised systems and values sanctioned by the state, as in the example of Ai Weiwei (above). However, there is no guarantee that the values and principles cherished by grassroots communities are any less oppressive or brutal. And, at least where a Hobbesian view of political structure is concerned, institutional systems of government are in fact useful and perhaps even necessary checks on the otherwise brutish tendencies of humankind.

In addition to the gap, there also seems to be an unexamined assumption that artistic citizenship necessarily involves the artist having a clear socio-political artistic intent. Thus, Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016, 7, italics in original) emphasise that the artist should have:

> *the primary intent of making positive differences in people's lives* … Artistic citizens are committed to engaging in artistic actions in ways that can bring people together, enhance communal well-being, and contribute substantially to human thriving.

Such an assumption underestimates the complexity involved in identifying and attributing intention. It has long been known that "the intentional fallacy" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946) – where a creator's intention is treated as paramount in arriving at the "correct/proper" interpretation of that person's work – problematically forces the art critic or cultural historian into making claims about an artist's mental and physical state during the act of creation. Dykstra (1996) revisits the problems with "the intentional fallacy" in the context of art conservation, noting that if the goal of conservation is to present the artwork as the artist intended it to be seen, there are difficulties involved in trying to interpret the artist's intent.

The complex nature of intention and its close relative, agency, remains an issue even in much more recent scholarly discussions (Wee 2021a, b). To wit, consider the following comments from Ahearn (2001) and Bennett (2010):

> Can agency only be the property of an individual? What types of supra-individual agency might exist? … Similarly, we might also be able to talk about

> agency at the sub-individual level … thereby shedding light on things like internal dialogues and fragmented subjectivities?
>
> *(Ahearn 2001, 8)*

> No one really knows what human agency is, or what humans are doing when they are said to perform as agents. In the face of every analysis, human agency remains something of a mystery.
>
> *(Bennett 2010, 34)*

These comments make clear that there are problems isolating agency and attributing intention. This is because even a body such as "the government", "the ministry", or "the community" is really an abstraction over multiple sub-entities (themselves potentially recursively sub-dividable) so that "internal dialogues and fragmented subjectivities" apply no less to organisations and groups than they do to individuals (Wee 2018a).

Artistic citizenship, then, is a more complicated and interesting beast than it has been taken to be. In addition to the complexities surrounding the notion of citizenship, it cannot be simply assumed that all artistic citizenship is anti-hegemonic or resistant to the establishment; it cannot be taken for granted that artistic intent suffices to guarantee artistic citizenship, not least because intent and agency are typically distributed across multiple actors, and these can dynamically change over time.

In fact, precisely because intent is not easy to pin down, this actually makes it easier for the state to appropriate the artistic successes of Hallyu performers as part of its soft power strategy. The focus can instead be on the markers of success itself (global recognition, record sales, strong fanbase) rather than the highly nebulous and controversial question of what the artist actually intended.

Hallyu: State Support and State Appropriation

In 1999, the newly formed Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism[4] "produced a music CD to improve public relations by bringing pop music to China" (Jin and Yoon 2017, 2244). K-pop is, of course, only one component of Hallyu, which also includes K-dramas and K-films. Indeed, Walsh notes that "[e]ffective use of government policy has assisted the creative industries as a whole and has contributed to the success of the Hallyu internationally as part of deliberate strategy" (2014, 16; cited in Dhawan 2017, 562).

But while the state may have provided financial, regulatory, and infrastructural support to the creative industries, it cannot take credit for the artistic products themselves or the artistic processes that lead to the creation of the products. The state's support for K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films is nevertheless something that both artists and the talent and production agencies that train and recruit the performers are very much aware of. There is a clear understanding that what is at

stake is a national goal of contributing to how South Korea may be perceived internationally. Thus, the chief executive of a dance studio that trains potential K-pop stars has been quoted as saying, "One of the things we tell [new talent] is that they are representing our country" (Adams 2022).

With this understanding, it is only natural that the activities of the creative industries – even if this is not explicit or even if this is not the "actual intent" of any particular individual performer – have to be seen in the light of artistic citizenship. Let us now consider some specific examples.

Psy, Artistic Intent, and Footing

Psy, as in "psycho", is a South Korean rapper and songwriter, most well-known internationally for his single "Gangnam Style" released in July 2012. By December 2012, the music video for "Gangnam Style" had more than one billion views on YouTube, the first video to ever achieve this. By 2014, it had garnered two billion views and as of 2020, had almost four billion views, making it the eighth most viewed video on YouTube.

Gangnam is a district in Seoul, where the wealthiest 1% of Korea live. And in an interview, Psy explained that the song, dance, and his own looks were actually intended as parodies of the Gangnam lifestyle, to mock those individuals who aspired towards "Gangnam Style" but who instead ended up as "posers and wannabes" (F. Cha 2012):

> People who are actually from Gangnam never proclaim that they are – it's only the posers and wannabes that put on these airs and say that they are "Gangnam Style" – so this song is actually poking fun at those kinds of people who are trying very hard to be something that they're not.

However, the song's global appeal rested mainly on its catchy beat and Psy's dancing style, which had political leaders such as British Prime Minister David Cameron, US President Barack Obama, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon all attempting to perform it. Psy's artistic intent (he co-wrote the song with Yoo Gun-hyung), then, in wanting to satirise the "posers and wannabes" of the Gangnam style, has been largely lost.

Goffman's (1981) concept of footing provides a useful way of understanding the complexities involved in this example. Goffman defines footing as "the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (1981, 128). Goffman's purpose in introducing the concept of footing is to highlight how, in the course of a communicative event, the participants involved may adopt a variety of roles vis-à-vis the messages that are being conveyed.

Goffman's (1981, 130) reason for introducing the notion of footing is that terms such as "speaker" and "hearer" are too simplistic. "Hearer", for example, skirts

over the fact that a ratified participant may not be paying attention despite being the intended recipient of the message (as happens, for example, in the case of a someone who is daydreaming or who is just not interested in following the conversation). Likewise, "hearer" also fails to give due cognisance to those situations where a non-ratified participant may in fact be listening very carefully (e.g., an eavesdropper). And this dyadic conception does not account for an "audience", that is, a group of individuals who are ratified participants in the sense of being allowed to be present at a communicative event but who are not actually expected to be actively involved in the event's production. Goffman also deconstructs what it means to be a "speaker", pointing out that the person who is delivering a message (i.e., the person who actually speaks) may not necessarily be the one who composed the message or even the one whose views and ideas are being represented by the message. The "principal" is the entity whose ideas and views are being conveyed via the language that is being used or produced. The "author" is the entity who composes the text and who is thus responsible for the specific choice of words or, more broadly, the design of the message. The "animator" is the entity through which the message is actually emitted or conveyed.

In the case where all three roles converge, the entity that speaks or writes the message is also responsible for the actual words being used in the message and the message also happens to reflect that very same entity's point of view. This is the default assumption in communication, where, for example, if Speaker A says, "I am cold", the words are chosen by the speaker herself and they reflect her actual state of being cold. Speaker A is, in this case, simultaneously author, principal, and animator. The roles can diverge, however, as when, for example, a pop singer performs a song composed by someone else. In that case, the singer is the animator, the composer is the author, and (given that the song would typically represent a fictionalised scenario) the principal would be the fictional persona from the "song-world". Goffman's point is intended as a cautionary one that, in looking at a single source of production, we have to be careful not to conflate the different roles involved.

While Goffman seems to treat the principal, author, and animator as single entities, it is important, given the complex and collaborative nature of modern communication, to acknowledge that it is more typical for principals, authors, and, in particular, animators to be working in complexes (Wee 2021a).

Consider the case of the animator. Modern mass communication can be a hugely complex affair. For example, a CNN report on the summit preparations for the 2019 meeting between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un in Hanoi featured a conversation between a news anchor based in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, and a reporter located in Hanoi, Vietnam. In this case, the reporter in Hanoi is the primary animator (as well as principal and author). But the global transmission of the report, including the live conversation with the anchor, was made possible via an array of other animators, such as the various broadcasting technologies that allowed both audio and video content to be dispersed not just between the two

conversationalists but to a worldwide audience of viewers. Indeed, one might posit that *all* forms of mediated communication necessarily involve sets of animators working together. Thus, the idea of multiple animators working as a complex is not at all controversial. Examples are easily attested. In the case of artmaking, even an apparently simple solo dance performance relies on backstage and other technical support (such as costume and set designers, lighting specialists, and musicians) – so that while we may credit the dancer as the primary animator, the dance qua spectacle is the result of a complex series of animators working collaboratively. Similar arguments *mutatis mutandis* can be made for principal and author (e.g., the writer of a book is the primary principal but those that the writer credits with providing inputs and feedback on the drafts are also principals; and while the writer is the primary author, the copyeditors and those involved in formatting the book for publication are also authors – in Goffman's sense of the term). What this means is that we need to appreciate that there are complexes of principals, authors, and animators working in concert even as we recognise a primary principal, primary author, and primary animator.

In the case of Psy's "Gangnam Style", he is part of a principal and authorial complex (since the song was co-written). And as the main performer of the dance in the video, he is also the animator. What has happened in this case is that the international focus has been on his performance qua animator of the song such that the contents that were intended to be conveyed by his other roles (i.e., principal and author) have been largely lost or ignored. This is perhaps not altogether surprising. Since the song is performed in Korean and references a local district, its lyric content would not have been obvious to those outside Korea. And even foreigners who are aware that Gangnam is an actual location may not have appreciated the satirical intent.

However, because of its global success, the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism awarded Psy, whose real name is Park Jae-sang, with a 4th Class Order of Cultural Merit (*Toronto Sun* 2012):

> The award is given to those who give "outstanding meritorious services" to the arts. A representative from the Culture Ministry says, "Psy has been chosen to be decorated for not only being a long-term artist, but also for advertising Gangnam widely and increasing the world's interest in Korea."

At this point, it is worth recalling that the traditional understanding of artistic citizenship focuses on artistic intent. Such a traditional understanding would insist on the artist being at least principal, if not author as well. And it would imply that an artist who was only an animator (e.g., a singer who neither composes nor produces their songs, but merely provides the vocals) could not be considered to be engaged in artistic citizenship. This is the reason why the concept of artistic citizenship cannot be too wedded to the artist's intent, nor should the concept be too obsessed with only focusing on the artist as working against the mainstream to

resist hegemonic forces. South Korea's recognition of Psy, in particular, "advertising Gangnam widely and increasing the world's interest in Korea", is predicated on neither of these criteria.

BTS: From Music Performers to Global Ambassadors

We move on to consider our next example, BTS. BTS is today one of the most successful pop music acts globally. The music of BTS has hit the number-one spot in the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, etc. It has been estimated that BTS's contribution to South Korea's GDP is almost comparable with Korean Air (Buchholz 2019). Their last three concerts in 2019 raked in a total of US$860.7 million (Yonhap 2019).

It may seem odd to think of a boy band as exemplifying artistic citizenship, especially when K-pop groups have been widely stereotyped as highly polished performers who are known less for their engagement with social issues than for their manufactured personas. However, BTS was formed by Bang Si-hyuk, a highly successful songwriter and music producer, as a deliberate response to the industry's emphasis on polish where addressing serious social issues is less of a priority. It was Bang who brought together the group of teens who would go on to become BTS, and it was he who "wanted the band to be able to be sincere and genuine – not immaculate idols groomed amid studio culture, but real boys who shared their authentic personalities and talents with the world" (Romano 2020). In a 2018 interview, Bang was quoted as saying:

> I didn't want them to be false idols … I wanted to create a BTS that could become a close friend … When we were forming BTS, we resolved to make a group that had a positive influence … An idol that has a negative influence is a false idol. We thought that there shouldn't be any glorification of delinquent behaviour or tolerance of social injustice in their songs, even if it's only implied. We resolved not to do anything like that, even if it might look cool at the time.
>
> *(E. Cha 2018)*

The name BTS comes from the Korean expression *Bangtan Sonyeondan*, which translates as "Bulletproof Boy Scouts". According to one of the members, J-Hope, the name signifies the group's desire "to block out stereotypes, criticisms, and expectations that aim on adolescents like bullets" (Trabasso 2016). In 2017, BTS announced that their name would also stand for "Beyond the Scene". The objective of the move was to expand their group identity to also encompass "youth who don't settle for their current reality and instead open the door and go forward to achieve growth" (Herman 2017).

It is clear that from their inception, BTS's intent was for their music to address the various social issues that many youths are facing. In this regard, the group

writes and produces much of their music. Since their debut in 2013, many of their songs have dealt with themes such as mental health, individualism, and being comfortable with oneself, issues that the group feels are especially pertinent among youths of today. For example, their 2017 album *Love Yourself: Tear* dealt with the sorrows of separation. This led to a collaboration with UNICEF on a Love Myself campaign, with the slogan #ENDviolence. The campaign focused on protecting children and teenagers from violence and raised about $1.4 million. BTS also addressed the United Nations in September 2020, having been invited by the Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security to talk about the difficulties that future generations will face due to COVID-19 (Hong 2020b). This was their second time speaking at the United Nations. In 2018, they spoke at the launch ceremony of UNICEF's Generation Unlimited at the 73rd UN General Assembly.

In a recent interview (Hwang 2019), RM, the group's leader, was quoted as saying:

> As BTS our slogan is to tell the story of youths in our generation in an easy way to understand. One of our songs is called "I Like It", which is really about the symbolic meaning of the "Like" button in Facebook and the feelings behind it. So it's also a topic that anyone in the younger generation can relate to.

BTS's activities show all the hallmarks of artistic citizenship. Their group identity and music are guided by ethical considerations, answering the question posed by Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman about what kind of artist "is it good to be given my current set of circumstances?" (2016, 7; see above). As young men who are very much aware that their audience is likely to comprise other youths, BTS have striven to be the kind of artist that provides a voice and support to these youths. While they have relied mainly on their music to speak to and for their audience, they have also taken advantage of other platforms such as the United Nations in order to expand the scope of their influence.

Like Psy, BTS are the principals, authors, and animators of their music as well as various accompanying statements such as the speeches they delivered at the UN. They communicate regularly with their fans via live online chats, Twitter, and Instagram expressing their individual as well as shared views on life as a young person in the world today, much to the appreciation of their worldwide audience. The values and viewpoints in BTS's music convey the values and viewpoints that they themselves espouse. And the specific forms of expressions in which these are conveyed represent (at least ostensibly) the artistic sensibilities of BTS.[5] This highlights the relevance of epitexts in analysing artistic citizenship. Artistic citizenship challenges the idea of art ideally existing in a realm hermetically sealed from the practicalities and concerns of everyday life. This idealised view of art is not only unfeasible but incoherent. Art is unavoidably produced, received, and interpreted in multiple and changing social, political, and cultural contexts. Once this is understood, then a further implication has to be accepted. There is of course

an identifiable object of artistic scrutiny or contemplation, such as a painting, an installation piece, or, as in the case of BTS, a specific single or an entire album. But the activity of artistic citizenship also includes the accompanying discourses that are produced by critics, curators, and members of the public, among many others; these are essential contributors that weigh in on how the merits and impact of the object of scrutiny are, over time, to be (re-)evaluated. It cannot simply refer to some recognised artistic product but has to include "epitexts", that is, the kinds of discourses that are produced to accompany the works themselves. Such epitexts can include interviews given by the artists themselves, curatorial notes, and reviews by critics. Indeed, without taking into account epitexts, Psy's satirical intent vis-à-vis "Gangnam Style" would not have been at all appreciated since it was only in interviews that he was able to articulate his motivation in writing the song.

The importance of epitexts also pertains to the works of BTS. In an interview with BTS, Chakraborty (2020) provides the following statements from two of the members, Suga and RM:

SUGA: Hearing our fans saying that we changed their lives changes our lives in turn. We got to know about the weight that our words and music carry, and we're truly thankful for that. We've realized that despite our love for music, the most important thing about this job is to have people who listen to you. We thank our fans for listening to our messages and music.

RM: We have always wanted to be a positive influence in the world whether it may be through our music or our actions. We're grateful that we're able to take that further through partnership opportunities like the UNICEF Love Myself campaign. We're also thankful to our ARMY[6] who are involved in many charitable works.

Pieces such as the above extracts, where interviews with BTS are framed by music and pop culture critics, serve to influence the reception and interpretations of BTS's music, further enhancing the group's global popularity. The resulting accolades for BTS – commercial as well as political, such as being asked to speak at the United Nations – have meant that even the South Korean state has had to acknowledge that the band deserves recognition beyond the usual official congratulations. This is, after all, artistic citizenship of a high international order. As a consequence, the state recently even took the unusual step of passing a law that would allow K-pop stars to defer military service, which is a deeply held obligation in South Korea for young men (*BBC* 2020c):

> **South Korea's parliament has passed a bill allowing the biggest K-pop stars, such as BTS, to delay their compulsory military service until the age of 30.**

> All able-bodied Korean men aged between 18 and 28 are required to serve in the country's military for about 20 months.
>
> But under the revised law, certain pop stars can defer their service if recommended by the culture minister.
>
> The move will come as an early birthday present to BTS's oldest member, Jin, who is just days away from turning 28.
>
> Prior to the revision on Tuesday, **military service exemptions or deferrals had been given to high-profile athletes and classical musicians**.
>
> Under the revised Military Service Act, "a pop culture artist who was recommended by the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism to have greatly enhanced the image of Korea both within the nation and throughout the world" is allowed to postpone service until the age of 30.

Note that the deferment does not apply automatically to any K-pop star but only to those who are recommended by the culture minister. Presumably, the star or stars in question would have to have been particularly successful which, in this context, equates to having brought a sufficiently significant amount of prestige and pride to the country to warrant ministerial support.

It is important to keep in mind that for the members of BTS, the obligation to perform military service has only been deferred rather than removed. And the decision ultimately made has been that the group will indeed fulfil their military duties (*BBC* 2022). In the official announcement from the group's parent company, it is no surprise that the decision is expressed as one of pride (Hybe Corporation 2022):

> As part of the HYBE family, we support and encourage our artists and are beyond proud that they will each now have time to explore their unique interests and do their duty by being of service to the country they call home.

Consider what happened in the case of the K-pop star Steve Yoo, who avoided conscription by becoming an American citizen. He was deported from South Korea as a result and since been denied entry into the country (*The Straits Times* 2019):

> When he visited South Korea, he was rapidly deported to the United States – he had spent much of his teenage years in California – and has been refused South Korean visas ever since …
>
> Yoo, 42, has apologised repeatedly, but a survey this year showed that almost 70 per cent of South Koreans believe he should continue to be banned.

The obligation to perform military service, and concomitantly, the reward of deferment for selected stars as well as the penalty of deportation for those who

have tried to avoid it, are important and significant indicators of just how deeply tied Hallyu is to the formalised notion of citizenship.[7]

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the need to move away from a state-centric perspective on soft power and, instead, to recognise that other entities, too, can possess soft power. An important implication of this is the following: understanding the soft power that accrues to a nation requires asking to what extent the state works with other institutions, individuals, or industries.

In the case of Hallyu, the South Korean state relies on and, in fact, rides on the appeal of the cultural products and activities that come from the creative industries. Hallyu works as soft power because it is a form of artistic citizenship where members of the creative industries are aware and supportive of the need to enhance the country's image. The actual contribution of the state, then, involves appropriating these cultural products and activities to highlight their "Koreanness", which it does via various funding, regulatory, and promotional initiatives to boost tourism, the economy, and international relations (see Chapter 3 for details).

Another implication, one arising from the specific involvement of the creative industries, is that state control over and micro-management of creative endeavours should be minimal. In other words, where Hallyu's success is concerned, an important factor in the relationship between the state and the creative industries is that the latter enjoy creative autonomy – driven by profit, artistic excellence, and a sense of national pride rather than acting as agents of the state. Tight control by the state runs the risk of undermining the authenticity and appeal of the cultural products and activities when these are seen as little more than state-sanctioned propaganda. We discuss this further in the following chapter.

Notes

1 We return to these questions in Chapter 8.
2 We are here referring only to the traditional understanding of citizenship as a formal status that is conferred by states. There are less formal interpretations as well (see Chapter 3).
3 We thank Joseph Park for making this point, "Gamsahapnida".
4 The Ministry of Culture and Tourism was inaugurated in 1998 (see Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, n.d.). It was subsequently renamed the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2008.
5 Indeed, the complex and collaborative efforts that go into modern music making are in fact not much different from the artmaking of Ai Wei Wei, where the latter may employ a team of photographers, craftsmen, and engineers to help realise his particular artistic vision.
6 ARMY or "Adorable Representative MC for Youth" is the name of the legion of BTS fans.

7 In saying this, we are certainly not suggesting that formal citizenship is a *sine qua non* for being a K-pop star. There are non-Koreans who are also successful in the K-pop industry. However, they are in the minority because the general expectation remains that the performers should be Koreans or at least Asians. This raises the interesting question of whether the global spread and success of Hallyu might lead to a change in these expectations, especially if the presence of non-Korean performers becomes harder to ignore. We discuss this in Chapters 5 and 6.

3

THE SOFT POWER OF HALLYU

The State and the Creative Industries

Introduction

The discussion in the preceding chapter has established that soft power is a phenomenon best studied qualitatively, that it cannot be seen as simply an extension of hard power, and that it should not be restricted to just states. It has also shown that, where the Korean Wave or Hallyu is concerned, the concept of artistic citizenship is highly relevant because it is the cultural products and activities of the creative industries that are appropriated by the South Korean state for the promotion of a positive image for the country.

With these points established, it is now appropriate to give greater attention to Hallyu as a relationship between the state and the creative industries, and how this relationship succeeds as a form of soft power. To understand this relationship, we first identify four sociolinguistic concepts – indexicality, style, affect, stancetaking – that are relevant to the study of soft power. The advantage of focusing on these concepts is that they apply not only to states but also to organisations of various sorts as well as individuals.

Theorising Soft Power from a Sociolinguistic Perspective[1]

There is perhaps no better place to begin a discussion of the sociolinguistics of soft power than with the concept of indexicality (Eckert 2008; Silverstein 2003). Indexicality highlights the fact that the meanings of specific features, linguistic as well as non-linguistic, are always tied to specific contexts of usage. Indexical meanings are not static but are instead fluid, and the growth in indexical meanings leads Eckert (2008) to posit the idea of an indexical field to highlight that a

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feature can be associated with "a constellation of ideologically linked meanings, any region of which can be invoked in context" (2012, 94).

As an example, Campbell-Kibler (2007) shows that the velar variant of (ing) tends to be associated with intelligence, formality, and sophistication whereas the non-velar version tends to be associated with the absence of these attributes. Another example comes from Eckert (2008, 469), who notes that the indexical field of /t/ release can include meanings such as "being a school teacher", "being British", "being formal", "being emphatic", "being exasperated", "being educated", "being elegant", and "being a gay diva". Some of these are social types ("British", "school teacher", "gay diva"), others are relatively stable attributes ("educated", "articulate"), while yet others are stances that can change quite quickly and easily ("exasperated", "emphatic"). A non-linguistic example is also given by Eckert (2008), who describes the 1985 adolescent scene in Palo Alto, California, where high school girls used the cut of their jeans to index autonomy (as opposed to rebellion or sluttiness), "ultimately making a claim to being both preppy and independent" (2008, 457).

Indexicality means that signs, linguistic and otherwise, are never meaning-free. They always come already indexing something or other, and it is because of indexicality that various semiotic resources can be used by individuals and organisations to style themselves. Style refers to the active mobilisation of linguistic and non-linguistic resources by actors in their attempts at identity construction and relationship management (Coupland 2007; Eckert 2008). Style has been productively viewed as performance (Bauman and Briggs 1990), enacted by speakers with varying degrees of reflexive awareness and practised ease. So, while it is still useful on occasion to speak of "style" as a stable production, it is important to bear in mind that any such notion is really a reference to some temporarily sedimented conglomeration of semiotic resources that are in fact continually being (re-)deployed and (re-)interpreted by various speakers as they engage in ongoing interactions. As such, it is more appropriate to speak in general of the processual nature of "styling" (Coupland 2007, 2).

This shift towards styling as agentive, deliberate, and strategic has typically focused on the activities of individuals as they engage in identity work. But as shown in Wee (2014), in addition to individuals, organisations also partake in styling as part of how they brand themselves, including their formulation of mission and vision statements and their claims to corporate social responsibility. Consider, for example, the Banyan Tree Group, which is best known for its world-class hotels and resorts located in Bali, Thailand, the Maldives, and Mexico. But the Banyan Tree Group is also concerned with environmental protection so its Banyan Tree Maldives Marine Lab provides nursery facilities for baby green sea turtles. And its Banyan Tree Gallery in Thailand aims to support local businesses by commissioning craftworks from the village of Yasothon in northern Thailand. Thus, other than simply providing luxurious accommodations for travellers, the Banyan

Tree is clearly also positioning itself as part of ongoing active discourses about the environment and community development. That is, it seems clear that the Banyan Tree is attempting to style itself:

> Committed to our founding ethos of embracing the environment and empowering people, we care not only for our associates and guests who pass through our doors, but for all the communities in which we operate.
>
> *(Banyan Tree Holdings, n.d.)*

These involvements are aimed at assuring consumers that to patronise the Banyan Tree's hotels and resorts is to also support a company that has a "conscience". This is a company that embraces the same sets of values that its consumers putatively also support. And these activities must be presented as being consistent with, rather than compromising, the Banyan Tree's primary purpose of providing luxury travel experiences.

This leads us to the notion of affect. We can think of affect as how styling is projected, received, and interpreted so as to create an evaluative response. Because affect is relational, an affect-analytic perspective helps to shift the focus from questions about the internal states of individuals or groups (as would tend to be the case if the focus was on emotions instead) towards how an actor (such as an individual or an organisation) aims to style itself so as to manage the kinds of responses it is likely to receive. For example, Wee (2016) shows how the Arlington National Cemetery represents a site where a specific kind of affective regime is cultivated, namely, one where honour and respect are to be accorded to the servicemen who died for their country. There are signs on the cemetery grounds that request "Silence and Respect", as well as visitors' rules that explain that because the cemetery is "a shrine to the honored dead … disorderly conduct … boisterous language", among others, are prohibited (2016, 111–113).

Wee (2016, 109) defines an affective regime in the following manner:

> the set of conditions that govern with varying degrees of hegemonic status the ways in which particular kinds of affect can be appropriately materialized in the context of a given site…
>
> Because an affective regime operates at the level of the site, even in the absence of any particular individual, that is, even when a given site happens to be uninhabited or unoccupied, it is still meaningful to speak of an affective regime associated with that environment. This is because the site itself can be structured in ways that are intended to evoke particular dispositions regardless of whether anyone happens to be present.

Some affective regimes may be explicitly concerned with encouraging particular affects (as in signs at memorials that request respect from visitors). Other affective

regimes may be less directly concerned with specific affects, but they nonetheless have the effect, intended or otherwise, of encouraging some affects while discouraging others. The presence of CCTV, for example, typically alerts individuals that they are in an area that is under surveillance but leaves unspecified – and hence up to the individuals to infer for themselves – just what kinds of behaviours are to be considered appropriate or inappropriate to that specific area.

The signs in the Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) – such as a plaque with the words "Silence and Respect" that sits near the tomb of the Unknown Soldier (Wee 2016, 111) – show that there are very explicit attempts by the cemetery's management to regulate the kinds of affect considered appropriate to the site. The ANC is a burial ground for memorialising members of the US military, and it stresses the kind of affective regime it wants to foster in its mission statement, which emphasises the importance of showing dignity and honour for the dead, respect and compassion for their families, and situating these concerns in relation to a larger sense of gratitude for the sacrifices made to the nation (Wee 2016, 110). These concerns are also reflected in the structuring of the physical landscape of the cemetery. Its austere and well-maintained headstones surrounded by well-tended greenery are aimed at evoking a sense of sombre remembrance and appreciation for those who died for their country. The ANC's affective regime is therefore already well emplaced in terms of its physical layout even in the absence of any actual visitors. The same plaque is both directive (Mautner 2012) and affective in nature. The sign is directive in that it aims to exercise control over the site; it is in this sense a tool of social management and moreover, one that draws upon the legal institution for its backing (Mautner 2012, 190–191). That is, the ANC makes it very clear that its rules regarding proper conduct have the legal backing of the US government so that violators may be barred from conducting memorial services and ceremonies within the cemetery for two years. But of course, the specific reason why the sign has the particular directive that it does is because it is concerned with the governance of affect, where silence and respect are considered normatively appropriate to the site of the ANC and its particular mission of demonstrating gratitude to those who served their country.

Here, we have a clear example of how styling and affect intersect. Both the ANC's legalistic-instructional stance and the degree of control it tries to exercise over the conduct of visitors and the ways plaques are inscribed are indicative of the organisation's commitment to ensuring that the desired affective regime is effectively maintained at the site. This serves to demonstrate how very seriously the ANC tries to discharge its responsibility, as seen in the following message from its "leadership":

> We believe that caring for our nation's heroes and their families during their time of need is a sacred duty entrusted to us. It is important for the American public to know that our nation's veterans are laid to rest with dignity and honor at Arlington National Cemetery by a compassionate and dedicated work force.

> Each day, we strive for excellence. We are committed to ensuring America's confidence in the cemetery's operation. It is with distinct honor that we carry out our duties to make certain Arlington National Cemetery is maintained with the honor and respect that our nation's heroes deserve.
>
> *(Arlington National Cemetery, n.d.)*

The above extract contains many uses of the first-person plural followed by verbs intended to convey the organisation's sincerity ("we believe …", "we strive…", "we are committed to …"). The organisation's descriptions of itself as a "dedicated work force" and its own responsibility in overseeing the cemetery as "a sacred duty entrusted to us" are further intended to underscore the seriousness with which it views its work. This reflexivity is also set against the background of a national-level audience that is positioned as the referee (Bell 1984) to whom the ANC is answerable, as evidenced in statements such as "It is important for the American public to know that …" and "ensuring America's confidence in the cemetery's operation". The extract is therefore rich with custodial reflexivity, where the goal here is to assure the American public of the ANC's own sincere commitment in carrying out its responsibility.

At this point, it is worth considering the arguments of Ahmed (2004a, b), who aims to provide a theorisation of affect in terms of a circulating affective economy. Ahmed points out that emotions cannot be treated as a private matter of individual feelings (2004b, 117), emphasising instead that:

> emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation … Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an affect of the circulation between objects and signs … Some signs, that is, increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more they circulate, the more affective they become, and the more they appear to "contain" affect.
>
> *(Ahmed 2004b, 120–121)*

Ahmed's main claim is that emotions circulate by adhering to specific cultural stereotypes or figures such as the asylum-seeker, the international terrorist, or the chav. This is because emotions are necessarily always "about" something, "they involve a stance on the world, or a way of apprehending the world" (Ahmed 2004a, 7), and such cultural stereotypes or figures are the kinds of things that emotions tend to be about. In her discussion of hate (racist) speech, for example, Ahmed (2004b, 119) suggests that "[h]ate is economic; it circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement", and specifically, this circulation is possible because of the evocation of figures such as "mixed-race couplings" and "the damaged bodies of the white woman and child". In this way, Ahmed suggests that emotions serve to bind the individual reader/viewer who apprehends the figure while also imbuing that figure with a correlative emotion.[2] For example,

the reader/viewer may feel hate or indignation when perceiving someone else categorised under the figure of "terrorist". Finally, there are material consequences, as when the reader/viewer is moved to produce texts or engage in social practices that might be considered "hate speech" or discriminatory in other ways. And as these material consequences get repeated over time, the emotions that relationally bind the reader/viewer to the cultural stereotype are intensified or strengthened, thus increasing in affective value.

Ahmed's treatment of the circulation of affect has been criticised for leaving out the interpretations that human actors bring to the affective economy. Thus, Wetherell (2015, 155) remarks that "the place and the power given to 'emotion' in her [Ahmed's] work, defined as untethered movement, is hard to understand and justify". Wetherell elaborates on her criticism of Ahmed as follows:

> Emotion has fled the problematic locations of "inside" and "outside" for sure, but what has also disappeared is the practical human relational work involved in an episode of affect ... *Affect, once more, seems to swirl, move, and "land" like a plastic bag blowing in the wind*. Once again, affect becomes uncanny. *What human social actors (always in the process of formation) do to themselves, to their objects, and to each other fades from view as the movement of affect becomes the dominant actor* … The negotiation and parsing of affects as complex, live, often highly troubled, ongoing categorizations of human action disappears once again.
>
> *(2015, 159, italics added)*

There is, as Wetherell observes and emphasises, a need to ground the analysis of emotions and affect in the concrete activities of human actors and their environments. Wetherell suggests that it may be more productive to think in terms of affective practice, which is intended to focus our attention on "particular lines of activity" that culminate in "a moment of recruitment, articulation, or enlistment when many complicated flows across bodies, subjectivities, relations, histories, and contexts entangle and intertwine together to form just this affective moment, episode, or atmosphere with its particular possible classifications" (2015, 160).

One way to address Wetherell's concerns is to ground the analysis of style and affect in concrete communicative activities, such as giving attention to stancetaking. Stance refers to the attitude or position that speakers take up towards the messages they produce, which includes the relationship they are expressing towards their interlocutors (Jaffe 2009). Du Bois's (2007) "stance triangle" provides a way of understanding the interactional dynamics of stancetaking. It crucially treats stance as an intersubjective achievement, one that arises from the alignments produced by multiple subjects as they evaluate the target of the stance. For Du Bois (2007, 163):

> Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects

> (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field.

Du Bois's account of stancetaking is a sophisticated treatment that acknowledges that stances can change in degrees over time, and that such changes have to be understood in relation to ongoing, past, and future or anticipated contexts. Du Bois emphasises that "[s]peakers do not just perform generic stance *types*, they perform specific stance acts, which have specific content and are located in a particular dialogic and sequential context" (2007, 145, italics in original). That is, the analysis of stancetaking has to be consistently situated in relation to specific contexts:

> To make sense of a given stance we need to know not only who is speaking, but what they are speaking about. Among other things, we need to know the referential object or target toward which the stance is being directed – for example, what is claimed to be incredible or great, where the speaker displays a desire to go, and so on.
>
> *(Du Bois 2007, 147)*

The speaker who is taking a stance vis-à-vis the object of the stance is also at the same time responding to earlier stances that have been taken, perhaps by the same speaker or by other speakers. In this regard, the idea of a stance differential is able "to capture the subtle, shifting and sometimes ambiguous calibrations of stance that take place between interactants" (Jaffe 2010, 400). As Du Bois explains:

> In contrast to common usage which forces a binary choice between a positive pole (referred to as aligned) vs. a negative pole (disaligned), the approach I favor treats *alignment as continuously variable in principle*. By recognizing the variability of scalar alignment we can take into account the fact that stances are aligned by subtle degrees, so that stance alignment can be relatively positive or negative – or, more precisely speaking, convergent or divergent to some degree. Alignment is in play whether the direction is convergent, divergent, or as often happens, ambiguous between the two. Thus two participants in dialogic interaction should be understood as engaging in the alignment process when they converge to varying degrees, and, by the same token, when they diverge to varying degrees.
>
> *(2007, 162, italics added)*

Du Bois's discussion of stancetaking is focused on conversational exchanges between individual speakers. But there is no reason why the stance triangle – like the notions of styling and affect – cannot also apply to organisations. While the stance triangle shows how stance develops and changes over the course of multiple interactions, it does not of course address the issue of attraction, that is,

the positive evaluation towards the object. It is stance combined with the socio-linguistic understanding of indexicality, style, and affect, including the affective economy, that then gives us the necessary conceptual grip on what it means to say that soft power is being exercised. We demonstrate this in the next section.

Perceptions of South Korea

A key factor in the global success of Hallyu lies in how South Korea is perceived internationally. In an analysis of attitudes towards member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), Sung-Mi Kim notes that in contrast to many other members, "South Korea has received an almost unqualified welcome as a provider of international assistance" (S. Kim 2017, 1086).

The DAC's mandate is to promote policies that contribute to "sustainable economic growth [and] poverty eradication" (OECD, n.d.). And as Kim goes on to point out:

> South Korea is successfully punching over its weight, by staking out an attractive niche as a provider of experience-based knowledge on development, and as an important diplomatic actor with significant convening power to keep various international stakeholders on board in some of the most contentious multilateral discussions on foreign aid.
>
> *(S. Kim 2017, 1086)*

Kim (2017) suggests various reasons why South Korea tends to enjoy a more positive reception in the DAC than other countries, such as Japan and China. For one, South Korea has made clear its commitment to combatting poverty, to improving the rights of women and children, and, with the launch of the Global Green Growth Institute, and to emphasising environmental concerns (S. Kim 2017, 1091). These are values that few countries would disagree with. Relatedly, as a relatively large economy but one that is "not (yet) quite in the league of Japan, China or other BRICs economies, which are more likely to be regarded as a rival or threat to Western dominance", the country "does not generate geopolitical fear among traditional DAC donors" (S. Kim 2017, 1093). And South Korea's size as a "middle power" also means it can "act as a non-threatening partner to convince cautious or uninterested parties into multilateral dialogue" (S. Kim 2017, 1093).

In general, then, South Korea's relatively positive international image is due in part to its willingness to play a contributory role to issues that many countries consider important (poverty eradication, gender equality, the environment), and to do so in a manner that is neither heavy-handed nor threatening. And this is facilitated by the size of the South Korean economy which, as Goldilocks might put it, is "just right". South Korea is not so small that the country cannot contribute substantively to international aid and development. Neither is South Korea so large

that other countries might feel it is using its economic size as a way of trying to influence the policies of recipient countries – as China has been accused of trying to do with its involvement in the African continent (Sun 2014).

In another study, conducted in 2015 – this time a comprehensive Pew Research Center survey of how Asia-Pacific countries tend to perceive one another – it was found that:

> A median of 57% voice a favorable opinion of China. Roughly half (51%) see India in a positive light. And just under half (47%) give South Korea a thumbs-up, in part *due to a higher proportion of those surveyed who express no opinion. Nevertheless, favorable views of South Korea outweigh negative sentiment by two-to-one*.
>
> *(Stokes 2015, italics added)*

The 2015 Pew survey shows that South Korea does in fact enjoy a generally favourable image among its Asia-Pacific neighbours. And while it may not rank as highly as some of the other countries, there are interesting reasons for this. In some cases, the lower ranking has less to do with a negative perception than with the respondents having no strong opinion. For example, Pakistanis and Indians "expressed no view of South Korea" (Stokes 2015). This is a situation that the South Korean state is well aware of. In this regard, Dhawan (2017; see below) notes that the South Korean state is taking active steps to address the situation. It is also noteworthy that South Korea is especially popular among younger Asians (Stokes 2015). This is a mark of the success of the Hallyu strategy, given that K-pop, in particular, tends to enjoy a younger demographic.

How it conducts itself, linguistically and non-linguistically (e.g., through its OECD-DAC interactions and how it respects the rights of its own citizens), serves to index the South Korean state as generally non-threatening and good-intentioned, thus contributing to the positive image that the country enjoys internationally. This in turn bestows beneficial effects on its Hallyu strategy given that the state plays an active role in supporting and promoting the country's cultural products. In other words, the international image that South Korea enjoys and the Hallyu strategy that it pursues are part of the same indexical field.

This kind of indexicality, where the image of an organisation can affect the appeal of its products, is by no means uncommon, of course. Wee's (2014) discussion of organisational styling shows how the sincerity of an organisation (or lack thereof) can become a consideration when there is a perceived mismatch between an organisation's actual behaviour and its espoused commitment to particular values. Starbucks, for example, via various statements made in its promotional materials and website, has expressed its commitment to fair trade, among other ethical regimes. Thus, consider the following extract, taken from pamphlets distributed at some of the Starbucks outlets (1):

> We've always believed in a better cup of coffee.
>
> Starbucks^tm Shared Planet^tm. It's our commitment to doing business in ways that are good to each other and the planet. From the way we buy our coffee, to minimizing our environmental footprint, to being involved in local communities …
>
> And because you support us, Starbucks Shared Planet is what you are a part of too.

Starbucks's commitment to "doing business in ways that are good to each other" came into question when, despite its claims to being committed to fair trade and sustainability, it decided that the Ethiopian coffee names *Sidamo* and *Harrar* "are 'generic' names for coffee rather than distinctive and valued trademarks" (Richey and Ponte 2011, 168). This move went against the claims made by the Ethiopian intellectual property rights office, and thus denied that country significant royalties. According to Richey and Ponte (2011, 168–169):

> But Starbucks' brand equity is partly based on its ethical sourcing guidelines and an image of a sophisticated, well-meaning business catering to educating consumers … The Ethiopia saga was certainly a contributing factor in the Starbucks stock-price fall of 2007.

Managing a brand therefore has a lot in common with organisational styling (Richey and Ponte 2011, 166–167):

> it is about "managing the affective dimension of social interaction, making sure that a desired modality of interacting and relating arises" (Arvidsson 2007: 10). This includes the way a brand's image, as a set of symbolic meanings and affective relations, is portrayed in the media.

In the case of South Korea and its Hallyu strategy, it helps that the state has undergone major changes in its attitudes towards and management of the cultural industries. This has helped to improve the image of the state and, concomitantly, made its appropriation of cultural products more palatable to international consumers.

Dhawan (2017, 560) points out that historically, strict and authoritarian dominance over Korea's cultural industries was the norm, especially under General Chun Doo-hwan's presidency (1980–8), where the goal was to ensure the population was carefully controlled and distracted from taking part in protest movements and "Nationalism and anti-communist ideology were promoted and were distributed through the mass media channels". The subsequent shift towards democracy led to a different state perspective on the cultural industries, one which was more outward-looking. In other words, this more globalised outlook did not mean that the state no longer took any interest in the cultural industries. Instead, the state's

involvement was aimed at exporting Korean culture internationally rather than focusing on domestic control of the Korean populace:

> Under President Kim Young-sam (1993–98), there was adoption of the Segyehwa policy, which refers to Korean interpretation of globalisation. His administration was considered the first "civilian government" after the end of the authoritarian rule in Korea, and one of its strategies was to globalise the Korean economy.
>
> *(Dhawan 2017, 560)*

Presidential involvement and interest in the cultural industries continued but with this new focus in mind. President Lee Myung-bak (2008–13) and President Park Geun-hye (2013–17) both focused on globalising the cultural industries by emphasising the importance of creativity (Dhawan 2017, 562). In 2001, the South Korean government launched the Korean Culture and Content Agency – which comes under the ambit of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism – and provided it with an annual budget of $90 million (J. Y. Kim 2007, 89).

Some of the specific initiatives taken by the South Korean state include (Dhawan 2017, 563–564):

- the Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), which operates about 29 Korean cultural centres across 25 countries. Among its objectives is "to promote the spread of Hallyu and to expand cultural exchanges" between Korea and other countries
- the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Korea has also been involved in promoting Hallyu. The Korean embassies actively organise events, such as performances, screenings, and talks, so as to promote the Korean Wave and foster greater interest in Korean cultural products. The MOFA also does statistical research on the status of Hallyu in different countries, and will provide support for local Hallyu fan clubs
- Korean language institutes, known as Sejong Hakdang (or King Sejong Institutes) are located worldwide, and also play important roles in the promotion of the Korean language. The language institutes come under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. According to a 2011 Ministry press release, "Since Korean language study is both the start and end point of Hallyu, or the boom of Korean pop culture, we have set aside more budget next year to strategically and intensively support globalization of the language" (Yonhap News Agency 2011)

The Korea Foundation (KF), which also comes under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is yet another institution involved in the promotion of Hallyu. It disburses various scholarships and organises programmes in order to facilitate academic and cultural exchanges. A key activity of the KF is to oversee the broadcasting of

K-dramas overseas. The items represent just some of the state-supported activities organised for the general promotion of Korean culture; they are not necessarily Hallyu-specific. Thus, the Korean cultural centres are "dedicated to providing insights into the rich cultural heritage of Korea" (KCCLA, n.d.) and some of their events include an exhibition of Korean pottery and a lecture on Korean dance, which are not necessarily activities associated with Hallyu.

For example, the Korean Cultural Centre in Rome, Italy, showcases historical Korean artefacts and architecture, as well as the Korean alphabet, known as Hangul. A major highlight is a reproduction of a traditional Korean home, where visitors are encouraged to enter and even pose for photographs in the recreated home setting. The Korean Cultural Centre in Paris, France, has a looped video featuring the preparation of various Korean dishes and an interactive room where visitors can better understand Hangul, as well as a wardrobe of traditional Korean garb for men and women, complete with headgear and footwear. These are in different sizes so visitors can dress themselves up in traditional Korean costume. As a much bigger establishment than its Rome counterpart, the centre in Paris also showcased in 2021 an art exhibition by Korean artists from the SONAMOU[3] Artists Association to celebrate 30 years of artistic creativity.

Initiatives such as these rely on the positive indexical associations on which the South Korean state is capitalising. Simply trying the cuisine or learning the language of a people is not evidence of soft power at work. One may, for example, learn a foreign language so as to facilitate the conduct of diplomatic or economic transactions. One may enjoy a particular ethnic cuisine while still holding negative perceptions of that ethnic group. In the case of the activities and exhibitions organised by the Korea Foundation and its various cultural centres, the operative effects of soft power can be discerned to the extent that visitors to the events do so out of a desire and curiosity to better understand a culture that they are already positively predisposed towards, or at the very least, neutral about.

This is the case with the cultural centres. The cultural centre in Rome, for example, highlights as part of its promotional video display classes featuring foreign students learning Korean musical instruments, learning how to cook Korean dishes, and learning taekwondo, among others. That being said, the cultural centres are also very much aware of the significant role that Hallyu plays in developing South Korea's soft power. This is why the centre in Los Angeles, for example, also organises "various K-pop events every year to further develop the skills and interests of local dancers and singers interested in K-pop and its culture" (KCCLA, n.d.). In this regard, it is worth noting that the K-pop events section contains the following advisory, which points towards its popularity:

> Given the growing popularity of K-Pop, we anticipate that more people will be able to take the class this year. Please Sign up for our newsletter to receive monthly notifications of K-Pop events which include:
>
> K-Pop Academy

K-pop World Festival

K-pop Cover Dance

K-Pop Workshop

Recall also that one of the reasons for South Korea's relatively low ranking in the Pew Research Center survey of how Asia-Pacific countries perceive one another (Stokes 2015, see above) was that Indians and Pakistanis tended not to have any strong views about the country. This is a point corroborated by Dhawan (2017, 564, italics added), who notes:

> Barring some areas in the north-eastern part of India where Korean Wave has made some impact, *the rest of the country largely remains unaware of this phenomenon … Although Korean brands have become popular in India, they are often mistaken for Japanese and Chinese brands*. In a recent survey conducted by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), about 42 per cent of the Indians polled believed Samsung to be a Japanese company.

Because of this, South Korea has developed specific initiatives targeting India (Dhawan 2017, 565–567):

- the Korean government established the Korean Cultural Centre in New Delhi in 2012. The KCC partners with schools to raise awareness of Korean culture among Indian school children
- because there are also greater employment prospects in India for speakers of Korean (due to an increased number of Korean tourists and greater investments by Korean companies), the Korean language has also become an important aspect of the Indian Hallyu initiative. The King Sejong Institute has branches in New Delhi, Chennai and Patna. In particular, the New Delhi branch has actively promoted Korean studies in a number of Indian universities, including Jamia Millia Islamia, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Manipur Central University, Sikkim Manipal University, Gauhati University, University of Delhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru University
- finally, it is worth noting the role played by developments in information technology and telecommunications. India is one of the world's fastest-emerging smartphone markets. Together with increased broadband connectivity, this has made it easier for Indians to access Hallyu content

It is worth pointing out that its efforts are bearing fruit; *Femina*, the premier women's magazine in India, noted:

> The Hallyu wave, or the rise in global popularity of South Korean culture, had taken over India a few years ago, but it exploded during the pandemic … The

> Korean Cultural Centre in Delhi has also been noticing this boom. In 2020, 814 students registered with them for 23 classes, whereas, in 2021, 4,680 students registered for 37 classes.
>
> *(K. Saxena 2022)*

And in a similar vein, the South Korean Embassy in Sri Lanka organised a Korea Week in December 2020 (Embassy of the Republic of Korea 2020). Notably, activities included a webinar on the future of Hallyu in Sri Lanka and inviting suggestions about K-Wave from Sri Lankans with “gifts bag related to K-Wave” handed out to lucky individuals.

If the South Korean initiatives in South Asia, particularly in India and Sri Lanka, are to gain traction, then at the very least, they have to be clearly recognised as originating from South Korea rather than being confused with Japan or China. Once again, indexicality is highly relevant and important here. This is because a (mistaken) indexical association with Japan or China would be unhelpful to South Korea. For South Asians who are positively inclined towards Japan or China, credit and enthusiastic support for the cultural products will go towards these other countries instead. For those who are negatively inclined towards Japan or China, a desire to avoid the cultural products will stem from the wrong assumption that doing otherwise might be construed as a show of support for these two countries. And as the next section shows, this can be highly consequential especially when netizens take opposing sides in highlighting the nationalistic dimensions of Hallyu.

Citizenship Obligations and Hallyu Backlash

The indexical relationship between the South Korean state and Hallyu can at times lead to a backlash, as the following incident demonstrates all too clearly. In 2020, the K-pop group BTS was given the James A. Van Fleet Award, a prize awarded by the US-based non-profit Korea Society to “one or more distinguished Koreans or Americans in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the promotion of US-Korea relations” (Korea Society, n.d.). Past awardees have been mainly political and military leaders, as well as captains of industry. They include US President George Bush, Chairman of CJ Group Sohn Kyung-Shik, General Colin Powell, and General Paik Sun Yup. BTS is the first pop group to be honoured with the award.

In accepting the award, RM, one of the group members and its de facto leader whose real name is Kim Nam-joon, made the following remarks, which were intended as a tribute to South Korean and US war veterans (Lam 2020):

> This year’s Korea Society 2020 Annual Gala is especially meaningful as this year marks the 70th Anniversary of the Korean War. We will always remember the history of pain that our two nations [US and South Korea] shared together,

> and the sacrifices of countless men and women … As members of the global community, we should build deeper understanding and solidarity to be happier together.

While the pronoun "we" obviously refers to BTS, there is the important question of whether that reference is limited to just BTS or whether it extends to include others, such as other South Koreans and the Americans as well. This extension of reference cannot be dismissed since RM goes on to talk about "our two nations" and being "members of the global community". The actual scope of reference, of course, expands and contracts accordingly, depending on just how one wishes to specifically interpret RM's remarks. But if we assume that the "we" pronoun includes others and not just BTS, then the pronoun would presumably include South Koreans and Americans who may have fought in the war against the North Koreans – with the latter aided by China. In such a case, RM's remarks would be interpreted as sharing the sentiments of the war veterans or at least supporting the activities of the veterans who fought against their North Korean and Chinese opponents.

However, even if "we" is taken to refer only to BTS, there is the further question of whether it is BTS qua pop group that happens to be the relevant identity or whether it is BTS qua South Korean citizens that is of pertinence. The answer is of course "both". As South Korean citizens who are part of Hallyu, BTS is being recognised by the Korea Society specifically for how their global artistic success has helped to forge stronger ties between South Korea and the US. RM's acceptance speech, in this regard, adopts an appropriately (appropriate because of the occasion and nature of the award) appreciative stance by expressing gratitude for the sacrifices made by Americans and South Koreans in the war.

On either the broader or more restricted interpretation of "we", however, there is no escaping the fact that BTS is adopting a particular stance regarding the Korean War, one that is more sympathetic towards one set of combatants (in this case, South Koreans and Americans) than another set (in this case, North Koreans and the Chinese). RM's comments led to a strong negative reaction from Chinese netizens, who were angry that BTS failed to recognise the losses on the opposing side. As Lam (2020) notes:

> Chinese netizens were angry that Nam-joon did not acknowledge the sacrifices made by Chinese people. Comments such as "BTS get out of China" have flooded Weibo and, on October 11, BTS became the top search result on the social media platform … Such accusations have been widely reported in South Korea, triggering a backlash — including from BTS fans. Some Korean columnists even suggested that South Korea and its allies in the Korean War launch a counter-boycott against China.

A BBC report (*BBC* 2020b) also noted the "angry response" from Chinese fans:

> "They [BTS] should not make any money from China," one user commented on Weibo, reported Reuters news agency. "If you want to make money from Chinese fans you have to consider Chinese feelings."
>
> According to the Global Times, a state-run newspaper with a nationalistic perspective, "Chinese netizens said the band's totally one-sided attitude to the Korean War hurts their feelings and negates history", adding that the comments were designed to "play up" to US audiences.

Likewise, the following is from Juwon Park (2020):

> "Before, I thought some BTS songs were pretty good. Now, they seem to be covered in excrement," said a commenter on the microblog service Sina Weibo. "Insulting China is absolutely not allowed."
>
> A hashtag "BTS Insults China" had been viewed more than 4.5 million times, according to Sina Weibo.

The stance triangle is helpful here in clarifying the nature of the controversy. Because we are looking at unfolding discourses, there are of course multiple stance targets. But one of the stance targets, and arguably the one that sparked the controversy over RM's comments, is the Korean War. The Korea Society focuses on the cultivation and promotion of relations between South Korea and the US. Its stance towards the war, unsurprisingly, is that of South Korea and the US fighting together against North Korea and China. BTS, by accepting the James A. Van Fleet award and by the content of RM's speech, cannot help but be seen as aligning its stance towards the war with that of the Korea Society. The angry protest from Chinese netizens highlights Du Bois's (2007, 166) stance differential at work, in this case, a highly divergent stance is adopted by these Chinese netizens in response to the one that they attribute to BTS. There is great irony here, of course. The angry Chinese netizens were attempting to deny BTS the right to be loyal South Koreans while at the same time playing up their very own status as highly patriotic Chinese nationalists.

BTS was defended by many South Korean fans (Juwon Park 2020). In addition, the Korean Military Manpower Administration Commissioner Mo Jong Hwa (Lam 2020) also chimed in:

> The fact that BTS mentioned Korea's alliance with the US is an encouraging thing. Chinese netizens should be ashamed to talk about this issue. I think they are 100% wrong when they claim that BTS should've recognized the harm the allies of North Korea suffered as well.

However, a statement of support for BTS from a South Korean military representative is not likely to have any impact on the Chinese netizens since the speaker

would be considered to already necessarily be taking a partisan view of the war. Rather, what was more relevant was that BTS garnered support from other members of ARMY. That is, the Chinese backlash had little to no adverse impact on BTS in light of the group's worldwide popularity and support from South Korean fans as well as fans from many other countries (Juwon Park 2020). In other words, the stance differential was not merely between the Chinese netizens and BTS. It was also an intra-ARMY stance differential, between Chinese members of ARMY and the other members of ARMY.

The following three observations are worth making about this episode. First, social media plays an important role in mobilising affect, in this case, making public the anger from Chinese netizens as well as galvanising support, in response, for BTS from ARMY. As noted in Chapter 1, there have been arguments made that social media plays an important role in the global spread of Hallyu, and this episode is further confirmation of this.

The second observation is the following. The award and the subsequent backlash may have put BTS in a difficult position, but it was one that the group could have hardly avoided. BTS is not just another K-pop group but one of the most successful. This arguably makes them a Hallyu poster child. Recall that it was this success that led to the South Korean government agreeing to defer military service for the group members. However, this support from the state also means that BTS, in turn, has some obligation to show themselves to be good/loyal/patriotic Koreans. The acceptance of the James A. Van Fleet award and RM's appreciative remarks were ways in which the group could play this role. But as we have seen, this led to some very angry Chinese reactions. Nevertheless, declining the award may have sparked its own political backlash, perhaps from fellow South Koreans. The issue that we want to highlight here is simply this: Hallyu is inextricably tied up with South Korean citizenship and soft power. Concomitantly, Hallyu performers are, whether they like it or not, implicated in South Korean politics, especially when issues of nationalism are involved.

This leads to our third and final observation, which is that indexicality impacts stancetaking and affect. This is clear from the BTS saga, where the indexical association that BTS (and more broadly, Hallyu) has with South Korean nationalism led to anger from Chinese netizens as well as a swell of support from fellow Koreans and other members of ARMY across the globe. The different stances adopted by the various parties that weighed in on the controversy were linked to the perceived indexical associations that the parties constructed. While the association with South Korean nationalism has always been a part of BTS's identity,[4] it remained relatively unimportant until the award ceremony and RM's acceptance speech. At that point, South Korean nationalism and, specifically, its association with the Korean War became prominently activated. This is because, as noted above, the indexical field is fluid and dynamic, with various meanings potentially relevant in particular contexts of use. Moreover, "each new activation has the potential to change the field by building on ideological connections" (Eckert

2008, 453). In the BTS case, the Chinese backlash and the supportive response from ARMY, at least for a period of time, transformed the indexical field from one where discussions involving BTS revolved around (the merits of) their music to one where the topic had shifted to focus on their patriotism and (apparent) lack of respect for their Chinese fans.

Here, we can see that changes in indexicality led to a shift in topic and focus, with concomitant consequences for stancetaking. These changes in stancetaking have implications for the affective economy. As we saw, Chinese netizens, angered by what they saw as a lack of respect, called for a boycott of not just BTS, but also South Korean companies such as Hyundai and Samsung for which BTS were brand ambassadors (further indications of indexicality at work). The battle between BTS's ARMY and the angry Chinese netizens was conducted mainly over social media, with the former ultimately prevailing. As S. Nathan Park (2020) points out:

> But China's media offensive against the kings of K-pop barely lasted two days. *Global Times* quietly deleted some of its articles criticizing BTS, and the negativity against the group in Chinese social media also faded quickly. Some Chinese fans' call for a boycott hardly made a dent on BTS, supported by their worldwide fan club "ARMY".

Further evidence of the link between indexicality and stancetaking comes from the following example. Because nationalist politics is never far away in discussions of Hallyu (that is, nationalist politics always has the potential to be activated), the topic can work in the opposite direction than what we saw in the BTS situation. That is, South Koreans themselves may question or criticise the presence of Chinese products in their K-dramas. This was the case with the K-drama *True Beauty*, which featured Chinese products. Citing a report from *Allkpop*, Gong (2021) notes that "Chinese products and brand names appearing in *True Beauty* have sparked controversy in South Korea, with some netizens complaining that 'I don't know if this is a Chinese drama or a South Korean drama'".

The criticism from South Koreans about the presence of Chinese products appears to be part of an ongoing and highly contested series of arguments between China and South Korea about the provenance of various cultural products and practices. The traditional Korean dress known as *Hanbok* and the Korean pickled vegetable dish *kimchi* have also been subjected to debates about whether these are "truly" Korean or whether they owe their existence to China (Gong 2021). The provenance and historical authenticity of cultural products, especially when these products gain in popularity and appreciation, tend to be tied up with stances that can be highly nationalistic and even jingoistic. In this regard, as South Korea's Hallyu soft power grows, it would not be surprising if further challenges to the authenticity and origins of different aspects of the country's culture were to emerge occasionally with fervour.

State, Nation, and Hallyu

We saw in the preceding section that the BTS episode raises the question of how beholden Hallyu performers might be to the state. As the episode illustrates, Hallyu performers are sometimes obligated to demonstrate their fidelity to the nation. But nation and state are two different beasts, even if agents of the state oftentimes try to conflate the two. While the state refers to the government body that exercises control over a given territory (the country), the nation refers to the group of people who view themselves as having a shared culture and history. In this section, then, the differences between state and nation, and how these are played out in relation to Hallyu, are discussed.

One important thing to note about the state in South Korea, and a significant factor in Hallyu's overall success, is its relatively hands-off approach to the content of K-pop, K-drama, and K-films. South Korea's "arm's-length principle" – which, unsurprisingly, has not always been observed by the state (see Chapter 6) – means that there can be content that is critical of either the state or Korean society. As regards the former, the plot of the K-drama *Designated Survivor: 60 Days*[5] revolves around the assassination of the president as well as all those in the line of succession such that a relatively inexperienced Minister of Environment is sworn in as president. Essentially a thriller that involves an investigation into the assassination, the series also contrasts the existence of political cynicism and corruption at the highest levels of office with the more idealised worldview of the protagonist. In the case of the latter, the K-drama series *Misaeng* focuses on a *baduk* (Go) player who fails to achieve his dream of becoming a professional and must, as a result, try to achieve success in the corporate world despite having only a high school diploma. The series highlights the stresses of Korean corporate culture, the long hours and fierce competition, the snobbery from those with better educational qualifications, and the extremely sexist work environment.

Other K-dramas such as *Sky Castle* and *Itaewon Class* also serve to highlight other less-than-flattering aspects of Korean society. *Sky Castle* focuses on the stress placed on children by their materialistic upper-class parents to do well in the highly competitive college entrance examination. Wealthy doctors and professors, and their wives, spend billions of won and do their ruthless best to ensure that their offspring gain admission into top universities. In *Itaewon Class*, an ex-con and his friends (a biracial Korean, a transgender chef, an ex-gangster, and a genius sociopath) work to make a success of their restaurant in the face of competition from a corporate giant. Among its many themes is the highlighting of discrimination faced by individuals whose life experiences and identities diverge from traditional Korean expectations.

And perhaps most famously, the Oscar-winning film *Parasite* highlights class inequalities in Korean society. By bringing into contact the privileged and affluent Parks with the Kims, who live hand-to-mouth, the film succeeds in dramatically and satirically contrasting the different priorities, resources, and strategies that the two families are concerned with.

Of course, many of the critical themes highlighted in these examples are not unknown about South Korea. The country is notorious for having a highly demanding work culture, often brutal in requiring long hours at the cost of a work-life balance. The expectation of total obedience to companies where strict hierarchical structures abound has been widely discussed (Juwon Park 2017). As well, stories of teen suicide in the face of examination pressures are also not unfamiliar (Hu 2015). Also known are the country's sexism (Haas 2018), racial discrimination (D. Lee 2020), and discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community (Choo and Kang 2021). The issue, then, is not whether these less-than-flattering aspects of South Korea exist. Rather, it is that they have been allowed to be portrayed (albeit fictionalised and dramatised) for local and international consumption, especially given that the state provides significant funding and other resources to promote Hallyu products. It is hard to imagine China or North Korea funding cultural activities and products while at the same time making a deliberate decision not to micro-manage or censor the creative processes involved.

In saying this, we are not suggesting that there is no domestic banning or censoring of Korean cultural products at all. Korean television networks, for example, have been known to ban K-pop videos that are deemed offensive or too risqué, although there are also times when the reasons for a ban appear to be quite frivolous (Staff Writer 2014):

> In September 2012, it was revealed that KBS, MBC, and SBS had banned over 1,300 songs in the previous three years alone. Since then, fans have become more vocal about the confusing standards, but the broadcasting agencies continue to ban songs.
>
> … VIXX was banned from performing their live dance for "Voodoo Doll," because it was too violent, while B.A.P's "Warrior" had a member shot on stage but didn't face the same ban.

K-pop tends to be more subjected than K-dramas and K-films to bans by domestic networks because the former is more likely to make use of controversial imagery in its videos. Nevertheless, because South Korea has a relatively free media environment, with harsh penalties mainly reserved, on security grounds, for the dissemination of sensitive information involving North Korea (Reporters Without Borders, n.d.), this means that individual networks have a lot of freedom to decide for themselves what would constitute appropriate content. Consequently, while K-pop videos do get banned for a variety of reasons, which can at times appear baffling and contradictory, these reasons have less to do with state control than with the vagaries of individual networks' changing and inconsistent ideas about what should be considered suitable for broadcast.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the utility of four sociolinguistic concepts – indexicality, style, affect, stancetaking – for the study of soft power. The chapter also noted that Hallyu succeeds as a loose working relationship between the South Korean state and the creative industries. The role of the state is largely limited to the provision of funds, publicity, and infrastructure. The state wisely respects the artistic autonomy of the creative industries, choosing instead to capitalise on those cultural contents and activities that have garnered global acclaim and success. This is critical because the state's "arm's-length principle" gives Hallyu products the benefit of being perceived as having artistic integrity or, at the very least, not having the taint of nationalistic propaganda.

Of course, the creative industries are by no means monolithic. K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films deal with different kinds of creative products, face different forms of competition, and contribute to the success of Hallyu in different ways. Nevertheless, we will see over the next three chapters that one common strand running through all three "K"s is their ability to foster an anthropological stance in consumers. The next chapter, then, continues our sociolinguistic analysis of Hallyu by focusing on K-pop.

Notes

1 The discussions of style and affect in this section draw, respectively, on Wee (2014) and Wee and Goh (2018).
2 While Ahmed does not make distinction between emotion and affect, it is clear that she is actually talking about the latter.
3 Sonamou is the name of a Korean pine, and the association takes its inspiration from the pine's ability to withstand the passing of seasons (Centre Culturel Coréen en France, n.d.).
4 For example, BTS once performed in Paris at the Korea-France Friendship concert at the request of the office of President Moon (Dong 2019a). Since 2016, BTS has been honorary ambassador for tourism in Seoul (Jian Lee 2022).
5 This is a remake of the American series *Designated Survivor*. For a discussion of remakes in Hallyu, see Chapter 6.

4

K-POP

Product and Process

Introduction

We noted in Chapter 1 that the three main channels by which interest in South Korean culture and its products is fostered are K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films. That is, these are the key channels responsible for the success of South Korea's Hallyu strategy, serving as important gateways into other aspects of Korean culture. In this chapter, we focus on K-pop, leaving the discussion of the other two channels for later.

We organise our discussion of K-pop into two parts: the products of K-pop, which include the songs, music videos, and performers; and the process, which refers to the gruelling training regime by which performers are scouted and potential stars identified. As regards the products, we will see how these are marketed and consumed, and how they also help contribute to the further consumption of yet other products, including the Korean language. We will see as well how K-pop performers have even inspired their fans to engage in activism, further attesting to the power of Hallyu.

In the case of the process, we give attention to the adversity that aspiring K-pop stars must undergo and the toll that it takes on these aspirants. However, rather than there being concerns raised or negative publicity resulting from awareness of the demanding and harsh nature of the process, what is interesting is that the process itself has been marketed, to places like the US and China, as part of the K-pop formula for success. Such a development, we argue, stems from the intersection of K-pop with an already globally prevalent neoliberal ideology. This intersection helps to mitigate any criticism that might otherwise be levelled against the highly demanding process by which K-pop stars are identified and groomed.

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In line with our argument that indexicality, style, stancetaking, and affect are crucial to understanding the nature of soft power, we make the point that K-pop is effective in cultivating interest in Korean culture because it has been able to encourage in consumers an anthropological stance towards Korea.

The Products of K-Pop: Fan Accessibility and Participation

Sherman (2020) suggests that the development of K-pop can be traced back to the early 1990s, particularly in 1992, when the hit song "Nan Arayo" (I Know) by Seo Taiji and Boys gained popularity among South Korean youths. This is not the same, of course, as Hallyu *per se* since the success was primarily domestic. Nevertheless, this embrace of locally produced pop was quickly followed in 1996 and 1997 by H.O.T. and S.E.S., both of which were early idol groups, that is, groups whose members were brought together by a company with the specific goal of creating a marketable pop commodity. In both of these cases, the groups were created by Lee Soo-man, founder of SM Entertainment.

Sherman (2020) notes that H.O.T. and S.E.S. were, perhaps understandably at the time, both also very much modelled on American boy bands, J-pop, and R&B pop. The latter types of models, after all, contained many examples of successful commercial group acts. Since then, the idol formula of a talent agency first auditioning applicants, then putting them through a training regime, and subsequently selecting individuals that the agency feels can work together as a pop act has come to dominate the K-pop scene, with groups such as Wonder Girls and BIGBANG enjoying overseas success, particularly in the US. However, no doubt inspired by their growing domestic and global successes, K-pop gradually found the confidence to work in distinction to pop trends that might have happened to be prevalent in the US rather than, as in the early days, attempt to emulate such trends. Thus, Sherman (2020) notes that while from around 2015 onwards, US pop seemed to prefer the more introspective sounds of Billie Eilish and Lana Del Rey, K-pop idol music "was the opposite":

> a maximalist dreamland full of color, high concept performances and videos, a plethora of performers and unrivaled choreography. If Top 40 in America wanted solo singers so soft every breath was caught on mic over a mid-tempo chorus, K-Pop appeared to offer a genre-less alternative: constant stimulation, euphoria delivered in eight to 10 melodies and fantastical harmonies in a single track.

K-pop, Sherman emphasises, is intended to be enjoyed visually as well as aurally. This is a point echoed elsewhere (Lawrenson 2019):

> K-pop groups are designed for success, satisfying not just musically, but visually too. Perfectly performed dance routines, larger-than-life music videos,

> colourful outfits, and catchy hooks in the songs themselves are the perfect recipe to appeal to a wider audience – especially teens.

But while the catchy music and slick production values helped to make the K-pop products attractive, especially to younger consumers, what really propelled K-pop as one component of the Hallyu strategy into a global phenomenon are two factors: accessibility and participation. The first factor refers to the ease of access that fans have to the K-pop products. The second refers to the active participation that fans enjoy with regards to how they might interact with their K-pop idols. Both factors are very much facilitated by the widespread adoption of social media and digital technologies (Lawrenson 2019, italics added):

> Korea fully embraced popular social media networks like Facebook (unlike other Asian nations like China, who have their own networks and rarely use international social feeds). *This meant K-pop could quite easily be shared online and make its way around the world, with little effort involved.*
>
> …
>
> Where would K-pop be without the Internet? In the last few years, fandoms have rapidly grown across the globe, with almost every K-pop group now having their own special set of followers, *keen to push their favourite artist to the number one top spot on web streaming platforms and break records left, right, and centre.*

There is perhaps no better demonstration of how K-pop has made use of social media and digital platforms to engage its fans than Soompi, an international online K-pop community. According to Wang (2018):

> But its users — 22 million and growing fast — spend hours translating lyrics and analyzing K-pop's notoriously intricate music videos, which are crammed full of plots including but not limited to murder, familial betrayal, dream sequences, heartbreak and time travel. "A lot of it is very visual," says Kristine Ortiz, a community manager at the company that owns Soompi. "They're able to create a sensory experience through clothes and music videos with elaborate story lines. That's not seen a lot in Western music."

In other words, a major reason for K-pop's global reach is its use of social media and digital technologies, which allow audiences (which include those who are already fans as well as those who are merely curious) to easily access the music and the accompanying videos. The video content is usually in Korean (an important point that we return to below) though captioning options make what might otherwise be completely incomprehensible song lyrics or conversations (in cases where the video features conversations and interviews with K-pop performers)

easier to follow. For example, Genius English Translations (https://genius.com/artists/Genius-english-translations/) is an online community of users who provide voluntary translations of song lyrics. The English translation of the lyrics of K-pop songs is categorised under "Genius Korea" (https://genius.com/Genius-korea-2019-k-pop-songs-alphabetically-lyrics/).

Social media and digital platforms are, however, also key enablers of participation, allowing fans to not only watch music videos or other K-pop related content but to also interact with one another, thus further enhancing the sense of community and shared values among the consumers of K-pop. Consider the case of Blackpink, a K-pop girl group whose debut album *Square One* was released in 2016. The group's singles "Boombayah" and "Whistle" topped the Billboard World Digitals chart at number one and number two, respectively. The group is managed by YG Entertainment. Blackpink's inception is quite typical of most K-pop groups. It was formed when global tryouts were conducted by YG Entertainment, with the goal of forming a second girl group after 2NE1. Selected individuals were taken on as trainees and one of Blackpink's members, Jennie, has even described the experience as being "more strict than school" (quoted in Jennie's World 2019).[1]

The official YouTube channel of Blackpink (https://www.youtube.com/@BLACKPINK) has 62.7 million subscribers as of 5 July 2021. A music video by one of the group's members, Rosé, "On the Ground", premiered on 12 March 2021. It has more than 197 million views. Particularly interesting is that it has more than 2 million comments, such as the following ("Blinks" is the collective name for fans of Blackpink):

(i) This song fits best on rosé, it def. made for her. only queen rosé can sing it perfectly.
(ii) ROSÈ is being herself through the lyrics
(iii) Blinks let's make this song reach 200M, Rosé very hard work deserves it
(iv) This masterpiece deserves getting 200M. GO BLINKS!
(v) Rosé, you've always been shining.

(i–v) garnered, respectively, 146 likes, 2,600 likes, 15 likes, 14 likes, and 9,500 likes. Additionally, (i) garnered 4 replies such as "yes!!! the voice her is perfect" and "Exactly"; (ii) garnered 33 replies, including "Yeah", "True", and "Yes"; (iii) and (iv) had no replies but (v) had 298 replies, such as "Yes she is cause she is Rosé", "So true", "Rose my queen", and "Shining and beautiful angel".

These are obviously not in-depth critiques or reviews of the video, nor are they expected to be. They are primarily succinct expressions of affect, in this case, positive affect (though negative comments are also occasionally observed). The opportunity for a fan to "like" or "dislike" a video, the ability to post a comment (such as the ones in (i–v)) that might elicit reactions from other fans, and the opportunity to reply to specific comments (where oftentimes the replies are

further supporting comments) – these are facilities that serve to materialise in no trivial way the affective economy (Ahmed 2004a, b).

Recall that affect works as a form of capital when it circulates, gaining in value. In the case of K-pop, as illustrated in the Blackpink website, as more fans post likes and positive comments that in turn receive supportive replies, this creates among the Blinks (the same of course applies to other K-pop groups and by extension, to the K-pop phenomena as a whole) a group ethos where the members share an appreciation of their idols' artistic products. More importantly, there is a reflexive awareness of being a part of such a group, a community of, in this case, supporters of Blackpink, as evidenced by the self-referential use of "Blinks" as a form of salutation ("Blinks, let's make …" and "GO BLINKS!"). This reflexive awareness can even go from expressions of support and appreciation to active attempts at contributing to the K-pop group's success. Hence, the exhortation in (iii) and (iv) by fans to deliberately help push the video towards having 200 million views.

Consider a second example, from yet another globally successful K-pop group, BTS. BTS is part of Hybe Corporation, which created Weverse, a mobile app and web platform for the presentation of multimedia content as well as the facilitation of communications between Hybe artists and their fans. While much of the content is free, an accompanying app, Weverse Shop, is the e-commerce arm where merchandise and paid subscriptions are available. In 2020, it was reported that Weverse Shop has 1.8 million users from 200 countries while Weverse has 1.4 million daily users (Mehta 2020).

In the specific case of BTS, Weverse is where the group's music videos can be found as well as posts by the individual members. For example, the BTS 2019 documentary *Bring the Soul: Docu-Series* was launched on Weverse. And one year later, Hybe Corporation launched the video series "Learn Korean with BTS" also on Weverse. According to Delgado (2020):

> "*Learn Korean with BTS* is a short-form content designed to make it easy and fun for global fans who have difficulty enjoying BTS' music and contents due to the language barrier," the company wrote in its press email. "We hope that through learning Korean, global fans will be able to deeply empathize with the music of artists and enjoy a wide range of contents." …
>
> If you are wondering exactly what type of content you can expect, Big Hit disclosed the program would focus on moments from already beloved BTS series such as the weekly reality show *Run BTS!* as well as YouTube-only series like *Bangtan Bombs* and *BTS Episodes*. Snippets from these shows will be "reassembled so that one can learn Korean by listening to expressions used frequently by the members."…
>
> "We are preparing Korean language education content for our fans," Bang Si-Hyuk, Big Hit's founder, said at the conference. "There are many fans who can't enjoy Big Hit content to the fullest due to the language barrier. Foreign

> media point out that there is 'more demand for learning Korean thanks to K-pop,' but there are only limited ways our fans could learn Korean with ease."

What the Blackpink and BTS examples demonstrate is just how much careful attention and consideration is given by their respective talent agencies to the issue of fostering and encouraging fandom. This is done by using various apps and social media platforms to make sure that fans can view the music videos with ease. In addition to the music videos, K-pop groups also produce other content that gives fans the chance to experience other aspects of their favourite performers. *Run BTS!* (mentioned above) is a web series freely available in which the band members play games or take on activities where they are rewarded with prizes or given punishments. The members tackle their challenges either individually or as a group. And Bangtan Bombs (also mentioned above) are short behind-the-scenes videos, available on the group's YouTube channel, Bangtantv. These videos show the members having fun during award shows, rehearsal sessions, or live performances. Content such as this that is provided in addition to the official music videos encourages fans to view their K-pop idols as more than just performers. Fans get to see them as individuals with quirks and lives beyond the polished performances.

As well, fans are not positioned as mere passive consumers of the products. Their active participation is fostered via the opportunity to share comments as members of a community with a shared identity – such as "Blinks" (in the case of Blackpink) or "ARMY" (in the case of BTS). In this way, fans not only enjoy the successes of their favourite K-pop group, they also come to be quite deeply invested in the success and in some cases (as seen in (iii) and (iv) above), they may even feel that they have contributed significantly to that success.

While this accessibility and participation is good for the overall success of Hallyu, it also has a darker side. We next discuss how this accessibility and participation have contributed to the success of Hallyu, leaving a discussion of the darker side to the section after.

Sociolinguistic Consumption and the Anthropological Stance

It is well known that fans of K-pop avidly keep track of the kinds of products that their idols may use or endorse, and these fans therefore contribute significantly to the demand for these products. As June Park (2021) observes:

> In Korea, it is common — and almost desired, by both the public and companies — for celebrities, including K-pop stars like BTS, to be the face of endorsements and collaborations. One only needs to walk down the streets of Seoul to be surrounded by advertisements featuring Korean celebrities promoting all different products from fried chicken to makeup brands to mattresses.

The power of K-pop endorsement, even when it is unofficial and unintentional, is such that fans may even purchase an item simply because it happens to be something that a K-pop idol uses (June Park 2021):

> It has long been known that anything BTS touches will immediately sell out, even items they do not intentionally promote; a fabric softener sold out for two months after Jungkook mentioned once that he used it.

Products that are officially endorsed include fashion labels since "K-fashion is somethings (sic) that cannot be separated from K-pop or K-drama since many fans are always curious about what their favorite artists are wearing" (*Trazy* 2020). Thus, Bateman (2017) notes both the influence of K-pop stars and also the global scope of that influence given the widespread adoption of social media. Official collaborations between K-pop stars and brands are of course not uncommon. Judy Kim (2020) notes the multiple times that K-pop and K-beauty have come together, including, of course, BTS and its various lines of cosmetics. And BTS has even collaborated with McDonald's on a "BTS Meal" (June Park 2021). K-pop, therefore, as we have already emphasised, is an important channel of success for Hallyu. The K-pop idols are valuable Hallyu commodities in and of themselves, attracting fans and retaining their loyalty. But as ambassadors of particular brands or as collaborators with specific labels, these idols also, with varying degrees of explicitness, encourage their fans to purchase and show their support for and interest in other products (some of which are Korean and some of which are international).

This is, of course, style and indexicality at work. The accessories or products are part of the styles of specific K-pop idols. As part of those styles, the accessories and products become indexed as particularly fashionable or trendy to the idols' respective fans, who then become enthused to purchase these items (if affordable) or replicas (if the originals are too pricey), or at the very least, become aware of the brands that produced the items. One good example can be gleaned from the website inkistyle.com. After BTS's live "Permission to Dance" concert, the website provided details on the sunglasses, bomber jackets, sneakers, suits, and bucket hats worn by the individual members of the group (*InkiStyle* 2022). Another example can be found on Twitter, where Bangtan Style (@Bangtan_Style07) provides similar information on the group's fashion accessories, with appreciative comments from fans.

The effects of style and indexicality on consumption are not limited to sunglasses or jackets. They can also impact language learning. This leads us to the notion of sociolinguistic consumption (Stroud and Wee 2007). Stroud and Wee (2007) point out that it is important to distinguish between the direct consumption of languages as denotational codes (e.g. "I want to learn the French language") and the indirect consumption of linguistic repertoires as a result of being engaged in various activities such as listening to K-pop, being conscripted into the army for National Service (e.g. "I picked up some Singlish phrases during my time as an

infantryman"), or having an interest in wine (e.g. "I picked up some French words because I enjoy tasting different kinds of wine").

In the case of K-pop, in the course of consuming the music, the videos, and the fashion, food, and cosmetics that may be endorsed by different groups and idols, K-pop fans either pick up particular lexical items or they are enjoined to do so – the latter being rationalised on the grounds these are "slang terms" that "true fans" ought to be familiar with (*Koreaboo* 2018). Some of these lexical items are reproduced below (italics and bold in original):

(i) *aegyo*: "Acting really cute … can be performed by both male and females (sic). It is often expected from idols"
(ii) *jeongmal*: "The Korean way for (sic) expressing disbelief and annoyance"
(iii) *maknae*: "The youngest member of each K-Pop group"
(iv) *sunbae* and *hoobae*: "A *sunbae* is a senior with more experience within the industry, having debuted before the *hoobae* groups. In other words, *hoobaes* have less experience and have great respect for their *sunbaes*"
(v) All-Kill: "All-Kill is when a song ranks #1 across all of Korea's major real-time music charts like **Melon** or **Naver Music**"
(vi) body roll: "A sexy dance move used by K-Pop idols that looks exactly (sic) how it sounds"

Yet other lexical items include:

(vii) visual: the member in a K-pop group that fulfils the role of "best looking" who serves as the face of the group (Lisa, n.d.)
(viii) hwaiting: Korean equivalent to "fighting" that is said to show support for oneself or for others (Touhami and al-Haq 2017)

Some of these are Korean words (i–iv). Others are English words but with meanings specific to K-pop (v–viii). Becoming acquainted with these lexical items is one important way in which fans establish their "credentials" as "true fans" of K-pop in general or, as in the use of "purple" as a verb (see (ix) below; Borabora-Tae 2019; see also Wee 2021b, 33), as a member of ARMY, that is, a true fan of the group BTS.

(ix) I purple you

This specific usage has been credited to Kim Tae Hyung, also known as V, a member of BTS, who says it means that "I will trust and love you for a long time" (Urban Dictionary 2017; Williams 2019). V explicitly decided to give a new meaning and new syntactic category to the colour (Murphy 2019):

> At BTS's 3rd Muster in November 2016, V coined the phrase "I purple you."

> "Do you know what purple means?" He asked the audience. "Purple is the last colour of the rainbow colours. Purple means I will trust and love you for a long time. I just made it up." …
>
> Fans also thanked V for creating the phrase about the special connection BTS and ARMY share. "I don't know how much we have to thank to Taehyung for making this lovely and fresh expression. It's been 3 years since our genius, Taehyung made 'I Purple you'. He literally invented a new meaning and culture of purple colour," one fan wrote on Twitter.

The verb "purple" is therefore used mainly by BTS to express its appreciation to ARMY. It has since also been used by ARMY to express their devotion to BTS, and by individual fans to signal their shared membership in ARMY. In these contexts, it is not uncommon for the phrase "I/we purple you" to be accompanied by a purple heart emoji or even for the emoji itself to completely replace the verb, as shown below:

(x) I purple you BTS
(xi) I will purple you forever
(xii) we are purpling each other
(xiii) I 💜 you
(xiv) 💜💜💜

Fans are therefore engaged in the indirect consumption of linguistic repertoires as a result of being engaged in various K-pop related activities. But through this indirect consumption of linguistic repertoires, fans not only become familiar with individual lexical items, they also become aware of particular aspects of Korean culture, such as the emphasis on respect for seniors, and the value placed on cuteness regardless of gender (see also the discussion in the next chapter). This leads at least some of them to become more interested in Korean culture in general.[2] For example, a 2019 survey about Hallyu conducted by the Korea Tourism Organization found that (Hong 2020a):

> Hallyu-related tourism made up 7.4 percent of all inbound tourism (i.e. foreign tourists) in 2019, a percentage that roughly equals 1,116,422 people.
>
> … The survey found that K-pop was a major influence on Hallyu-related tourism.
>
> … Some of the K-pop related experiences in which respondents said they participated included buying merchandise related to K-pop stars, visiting subway ads for K-pop stars, visiting K-pop agency merchandise stores, visiting music video filming sites, and visiting cafés owned by K-pop stars.

Of particular interest from the perspective of sociolinguistic consumption is the wider adoption of Korean words on the internet. Ji-won Park (2020) notes the increasing use of Romanised Korean in fans' comments and suggests that "non-Koreans'" use of it in their online musings, albeit imperfect, is a point of interest for Koreans as it is a kind of validation of the country's soft power". Ji-won Park (2020) provides the following illustrations:

> For K-pop fans, using simple and common Korean words in English is a novelty. Along with the ultra-common "oppa," (a simultaneously innocent and intimate girlish address to a boy or man who is older than the speaker – often translated as "older brother") words like "daebak" (an exclamation meaning "awesome!" or "jackpot!") and phrases like "saranghae" (I love you) are some of the most commonly used by K-pop fans on websites.

The anthropological stance is facilitated because K-pop products do not attempt to mask or downplay their Korean-ness. The use of the Korean language is one clear indicator of this.[3] This contrasts with, say, the Singapore government's discomfort with the use of Singlish and its failure to realise that, when it comes to cultural products, the use of localised features and languages will serve to present these products as being more culturally interesting to international consumers (Wee 2018b). Brown-Saracino (2009) suggests that there appears to be a relatively widespread interest in the consumption of cultural products that provide the consumer with some "insight experience" into the culture of others. Brown-Saracino (2009, 192) calls such individuals "cultural omnivores", referencing Peterson and Kern (1996). The cultural omnivore embraces an "inclusionist orientation", which results in "an ethos that values a sort of cultural democracy that embraces a familiarity with low-, middle-, and highbrow cultural objects alike – that celebrates the idiosyncratic character of people and place" (Brown-Saracino 2009, 192). Bearing this in mind, we can see how K-pop is able to hold an attraction from a cultural omnivore's perspective. It is positioned as a celebration of Korean pop culture that is also global in orientation. And it is presented in sufficiently small doses (music videos, chats) that are accompanied by translations that, as we have already noted, make the act of cultural consumption both easy to access and highly participatory.

The Lexicalisation of Fandom: A Darker Side

Other lexical items that K-pop fans are at some point likely to acquire point to a darker side of fandom as these indicate varying degrees of positive affect towards their idols, at times moving into unhealthy obsession. The following examples are from Morin (2019):

(xv) Anti-Fan

Often shortened to "anti," this is the exact opposite of a fan. They despise a group or artist so much that they devote time to mocking, criticizing, or making derivative works about it.

(xvi) Bias

Most simply, having a bias means having a favorite member within a group. But in K-pop, the word is a bit more nuanced than that, and can mean different things to different people. For some, it's the person you're most romantically attracted to – for others, the person who stands out to you or who you simply become attached to. Fans may sometimes even develop an *ultimate bias*, who is their favorite not only among a single group but among all K-pop idol groups.

(xvii) *Sasaeng*

Meaning "stalker fans," these are fans who will stop at nothing to get close to their biases or favorite groups. Many have been known to break into idols' homes, steal their personal information, cause traffic accidents, and in the worst cases, even assault them.

"Anti-fan" (xv) indicates the kind of rivalry that can result when, usually in order to ensure that the group they favour succeeds, fans may deliberately try to denigrate other groups. "Bias" indicates that even within a group, fans may favour one particular individual member over another. This is perhaps a natural development but the fact that the preferential singling out of an individual member has been lexicalised suggests that this is both a conventionalised K-pop practice and, moreover, one that is deliberately cultivated since fans may ask of each other "Who's your bias?"

"*Sasaeng*" is perhaps particularly interesting because it is an acknowledgement that fans can go to extremes in trying to get close to their idols, even committing criminal acts. According to Williams and Ho (2015), *sasaeng* behaviour results from a desire to be recognised as a specific individual by their idols, to stand out from the mass of fans. This desire has led *sasaeng* fans to hack into their idols' accounts, to steal their personal belongings, and to even slap one idol's face on the reasoning that this would make her memorable. Such extreme behaviours obviously go beyond the anthropological stance. The motivation is no longer about appreciating or understanding a culture (whether this be K-pop specifically or Korean culture in general). It is about satisfying the *sasaeng* fan's need to be individually recognised and remembered by a specific idol or idol group, even if laws are broken or psychological distress caused.

While *sasaeng* fans should definitely take responsibility for their transgressions, it nevertheless has to be said that there are mechanisms in K-pop that aim to encourage "competitive fandom", often intertwining this with access to the more private moments in an idol's life. That is, these mechanisms encourage fans

to prove their devotion by getting them to show that they are more dedicated than other fans while engaging with their idols in more personal situations.

VLIVE (https://m.vlive.tv), for example, was a live streaming app where idols can chat with fans.[4] It had more than 1,400 channels for different K-pop stars. The contents on VLIVE included BTS's Jungkook practicing his guitar playing and getting slightly drunk, WOODZ eating chicken and falling off his chair, Stray Kids' Bang Chan chatting about global topics, and Shuhua being a "supportive *unnie* when needed and a whiny and playful friend at other times" (Sarkar 2020). Furthermore, the app allowed fans to send hearts, which the idols could see in real time. The app also had chemi-beat, which claims to track a user's chemistry with an idol. The more often a user tuned in, the more frequently they shared a video, the more regularly they turned on notifications – the higher their chemi-beat. And the reward for having a high chemi-beat was that they had the chance to be part of an event hosted by the idol. Consequently, the combination of having access to an idol's intimate moments plus the competitive need to demonstrate one's dedication to that idol can spur some fans to become less respectful of the boundary between an idol's personal and professional personae, not least because that boundary is being blurred by the idols and their management companies themselves.

Fan Activism

While K-pop fandom undoubtedly has its darker side, the devotion of fans to their idols has also done some good in that it has led fans to be more politically active with respect to issues that they feel are important to their idols. In this sense, the artistic citizenship of K-pop extends beyond what the performers do (in their artistic works) or who they are (as representatives of South Korean culture). By articulating their stances regarding issues such as racism or homophobia, some K-pop artists have motivated their fans to take on supporting action.

For example, when the #WhiteLivesMatter hashtag appeared on Twitter as a response to the Black Lives Matter movement, youths across the globe "united by their love of South Korean pop music" began flooding Twitter with "video clips and memes of their favourite artists, many accompanied by anti-racist messages" (McCurry 2020). Significantly, these activities were noted and commented upon approvingly by BTS (McCurry 2020):

> Their efforts met with approval from the world's best-known K-pop band, BTS. "We stand against racial discrimination. We condemn violence. You, I and we all have the right to be respected. We will stand together. #BlackLivesMatter," the band told their 26 million followers on Twitter.
>
> …
>
> K-pop fans' optimism mirrors a social awareness among the artists themselves. After BTS donated $1m to Black Lives Matter, a fan collective charity known

> as One in An ARMY after the name adopted by the group's followers matched the sum.
>
> BTS and other groups have also donated to other social and humanitarian causes, including Syrian refugees and campaigns to end violence against children.

K-pop fans and, again, BTS fans in particular, were also widely credited with sabotaging a Trump rally (Hollingsworth 2020):

> Ahead of his Saturday night rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Trump bragged that he had about 1 million RSVPs. But when the arena didn't even reach its 19,000-person capacity, many people online were quick to give K-pop fans and TikTok users at least partial credit for the low turnout.
>
> … Prior to the rally, people on social media platforms TikTok and Twitter encouraged people to register to attend Trump's event – and not attend. One video, with more than 300,000 views, called on fans of South Korean mega group BTS in particular to join the trolling campaign.

Jiyoung Lee (2018, 34) points out that BTS's songs tend to carry socially conscious message:

> Domestically and internationally, many media sources claim that the socially conscious message in BTS' lyrics is a critical point of empathy. US magazines have also attributed BTS' success in the seemingly impenetrable US market to the message conveyed through their lyrics.

According to CedarBough Saeji, a visiting assistant professor in East Asian Languages and Cultures at Indiana University (quoted in Hollingsworth 2020), it was the K-pop groups themselves that took the initiative to ask their fans to focus their energies and efforts on charitable and social causes:

> Around two decades ago, K-pop groups began asking their fans to stop sending gifts and instead give to charity, she said.
>
> Since then, K-pop fandoms in South Korea have done volunteer work and donated to charity in their idol's name. Super Junior's fans donated bags of rice to the Salvation Army, for instance, while Block B fans raised money to build a well in Cambodia, CNN affiliate SBS reported …
>
> Even now, members of BTS's ARMY are told not to give any gifts to the pop stars, aside from handwritten letters. At BTS concerts, there are often bins for donating goods to local charities, Saeji said.
>
> And as K-pop has gone global, international fanbases have continued that spirit of donating or doing good work in their idol's name …

> In March 2018, BTS fan Erika Overton, a Brooklyn native in her late 30s, co-founded One In An ARMY, a fan collective which partners with non-profits to encourage the fandom to make small donations to a chosen cause.
>
> According to its website, the group has helped raise money to fund meals for Syrian refugees and formula for babies in Venezuela.

Likewise, in Thailand, fans of K-pop decided to place banners of their favourite idols on the transport vehicles known as tuk-tuks, thus providing the drivers – struggling with a drop in income due to the pandemic – with a financial lifeline (Tanakasempipat 2021):

> Samran and many others now drive their empty tuk tuks around Bangkok with a banner of a different K-pop sensation each month, stopping for young Thai fans to take pictures and use their service, often with tips …
>
> "It's a political expression that we don't support capitalists. This marked a change from us competing to book skytrain and subway billboards, but now it's tuk tuks," said Pichaya Prachathomrong, 27.
>
> Pichaya herself raised 18,000 baht ($565) among Thai fans of boy band Super Junior to promote member Yesung's new album, before recruiting 13 tuk tuks via a new booking service on popular messaging application LINE.

The kinds of activism that fans of K-pop engage in can thus be broadly categorised as charity-based and politically driven (Andini and Akhni 2021). A further illustration of the former is the donation of mangrove trees to a village in Central Java by fans of BTS, where "this charity-based activism was conducted as a birthday project for one of BTS's members named Jimin" (Andini and Akhni 2021, 43). The latter is further exemplified by the efforts of K-pop fans, in particular, fans of groups such as Super Junior, Girls' Generation, EXO, and BTS, to fund the purchase of protection gear for pro-democracy protestors working against the Thai military regime (Andini and Akhni 2021, 50).

Importantly, the fans' willingness to participate in these various causes cannot be divorced from their dedication to their K-pop idols. This is much the same as the phenomenon of fans' investment in learning the Korean language. These are all potent examples of soft power at work. According to Sun Jung, "Fans practice such activities not only for local charities, but also as a way of promoting their stars" (quoted in Hollingsworth 2020). With soft power, it is not always necessary to stipulate or request that particular things be done. Those who are drawn to an entity's soft power, in this case, the soft power of K-pop groups, will, as the fans have done, sometimes try to anticipate the kinds of activities that would be met with approval from the idols. In this case, fans may do good works because their idols have asked them to do so. But more often than not, they also are willing to

take on activist roles simply because they believe this will serve to enhance the image of their idols.

The Process of K-Pop

As a global Hallyu strategy, part of K-pop's international success must be credited to the support provided by the state. However, it also must be noted that the artists and talent agencies have played a major role in this success by focusing on the level of discipline and training that have helped make the idols such polished performers. And as briefly mentioned by Blackpink's Jennie (above), the regimes are intensive and demanding.

In this section, we therefore focus on the process of identifying, training, and grooming K-pop idols.

It has been generally observed that South Korean society is very competitive, characterised by an intensive, highly disciplined, and hierarchical workforce (90 Day Languages LLC 2023; Suzuki 2020). In their discussion of the desire to learn English language, Piller and Cho (2013) observe how the ideology of neoliberalism elevates competitiveness – materialised as doing well in rankings, assessments, tests – to a key social value, resulting in high stress levels and even suicides. It is therefore perhaps not at all surprising that this hard-driving work ethos would also find its way into K-pop, influencing how the individual members are trained and identified, and how the group itself is constructed.

As Jackson (2016) observes:

> It is certainly no secret in Korea that the training process to debut as a K-pop star is no quick or simple venture. Often referred to as music "boot camp," K-pop training among some of the nation's biggest talent agencies is intense, to say the least.
>
> And with only a fraction of trainees able to become K-pop stars, the atmosphere among trainees can be fiercely competitive and cutthroat.
>
> With popular K-pop reality shows such as "WIN: Who Is Next?" and "Sixteen," the public eye has been given a rare behind-the-scenes glance at the extreme late hours, stressful pressure and sheer competitive nature of the local music industry.
>
> Many ex-K-pop trainees go on to share their various experiences online through various blog postings such as "Confessions of an EX-SM Trainee" and "K-pop Secrets!," further shedding more light on all the gritty, cut-throat reality of life as a K-pop trainee.

An idea of what such training for K-pop aspirants might entail is given by Dong (2019b), reporting on a detailed description provided by one former trainee, Kong Yoo-jin:

> You have your mobile phone confiscated. Your parents' visit is timed. An extreme diet is part of your life that comes with a 10 daily weigh-ins. On top of this, you practice dancing and singing for hours on end. Even when you are sick, you have to go on stage and perform in exactly the manner your agent wants. There is no freedom or privacy.
>
> This was the life of Kong Yoo-jin, 19, former lead vocalist for K-pop girl band BONUSbaby. At 17, Kong debuted with the album "Urikiri" – meaning "all by ourselves" in Korean – in January 2017. But she left the six-piece group in September 2018, to devote herself to "studies." The band has stopped performing since then.
>
> …
>
> "All members had their cellphones and electronic devices confiscated," Kong said. "During free time, we just made small talk or wrote letters to each other because we had nothing else to do. I could only get my phone back after I left the agency."
>
> The singers could not even meet their parents, due to "weight control."
>
> "At first the company let us see our parents but later they banned this, as we gained weight after going out and having meals with them. It was difficult to control our appetite," she said. "We had to be weighed whenever we returned. Sometimes, we weighed ourselves up to 10 times a day."
>
> …
>
> The members also were banned from dating. The female idol trainees were secluded from male companions, so that they could not even make eye contact.
>
> "We had to leave the room whenever male trainees came," Kong said.
>
> … "I had to change my singing style to make more nasal sounds, although this hurt my vocal cords. I was also asked to make more adorable facial expressions on stage."
>
> …
>
> But since leaving, Kong has been suffering mentally and physically.
>
> "I even trembled when I saw the vehicles that celebrities use," Kong said. "I was afraid of going out and meeting people. I think I suffered from depression and social phobia."

Kong's description of what she underwent shows the level of control that is exercised over trainees' looks, weight, and even private lives. No dating is allowed because talent agencies are concerned that this would diminish the appeal of the group's members since K-pop fans often like to imagine themselves in romantic

relationships with their idols. This apparently is also the reason why most K-pop groups do not have mixed genders. They are either all males or all females. The few mixed-gender groups, such as Play the Siren and Co-Ed, were not successful. The hope is that having a group with just one gender reduces the possibility of romantic attachments forming within a group, which might otherwise, again, have adverse consequences for a group's appeal (Sivasubramanian 2017).

While the training is clearly demanding, even those who are living the post-training life, that is, after they have "debuted", still face huge demands due to the busy schedules, the need to be available to fans, and the pressure to maintain their looks. Thus, Jackson (2016) notes that a number of idols have been known to suffer from exhaustion, stress, and various mental health issues:

> In the past, Girls' Generation member YoonA went public about her ongoing battles with depression, as well as other famous stars including Park Bom of 2NE1 and Hee-chul of Super Junior, Epik High's Tablo, who all claim to suffer from depression. Singer-songwriter IU has also gone public with her struggles with bulimia, while f(x)'s Amber, SHINee's Jong-hyun and MBLAQ's Lee Joon have all been diagnosed with insomnia.

As a consequence of the intense demands that are being made of idols – both during their time as trainees as well after their debuts – there have been three interesting outcomes. The first is revelation, where some K-pop idols are opening up more about their insecurities and struggles. One K-pop group that has decided upon revelation as a deliberate strategy is BTS. This is consistent with BTS's deliberate positioning of itself as a group that aims to speak to social issues (see Chapter 3). Thus, in an interview with BTS (Chakraborty 2020), some of the members explained how talking about their insecurities was even encouraged by the group's chairman and producer. The revelation strategy is a departure from the carefully crafted and managed image that many K-pop groups have worked so hard to attain. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is not a widespread practice.

The second outcome is redemption, where former trainees and failed idols are given the opportunity to make a comeback (*The Star* 2020):

> [In a new television show, *Miss Back*] Hosted by K-pop queen Baek Ji-young, who has eight studio albums under her belt in a career still going strong after 21 years, it offers former female idols a new showcase – some who never made it and others who were once famous but then faded away.
>
> Around 200 were interviewed for only seven slots on the programme.
>
> But among the chosen few, no-one will be eliminated.
>
> Each week, all seven perform the same song, and the one the judges score highest is released as a single, with the performer sharing in the profits.

In the process, the cast members share the pains and struggles they endured in the hidden shadows of the glamorous industry.

And there will be no overall winner.

Of course, even the redemption program has to be entertaining and interesting enough to sustain a viewership. In this case, a clear draw for the audience is the chance to see "former idols and trainees" getting a second chance at stardom, as well as the opportunity to hear about their experiences and travails first hand. While many were interviewed for the programme, only seven were chosen because of the limited slots – which means, if one wanted to be cynical, that 193 applicants "failed again" because they weren't selected in the end. And because the show is only open to females, this indicates that there is a gendered aspect even to redemption. Opening up about struggles and stress is by comparison still less acceptable for males. It should also be noted that even the programme itself has retained a competitive format since all were judged and awarded points based on their performance of the same song. Whether the programme is truly redemptive and therapeutic for the performers or whether it instead ends up becoming yet another vehicle for commercial aspirations and disappointments is, at this point, an open question.

The third strategy is replication, and of the three, it is the one that is most pertinent to the focus of the present book, soft power and the global spread of Hallyu. This is because the idol formula, despite the acknowledged stresses and intrusions into the personal lives of trainees and performers, has itself become an object of global emulation. E. Cha (2021, italics added) reports of Big Hit Entertainment and Universal Music Group collaborating on a "global artist debut project" involving a "global audition":

He [Lenzo Yoon, Big Hit Entertainment CEO] went on to specify that Big Hit would be tasked with training the artists, while Universal Music Group would be producing the audition program with American media partners.

"In this project, Big Hit Entertainment will be in charge of discovering and training artists, fan content production, and communication with fans through Weverse," explained Lenzo Yoon. "Making use of their powerful local network, Universal Music Group will be in charge of music production, global distribution, and producing the audition program with U.S. media partners." …

"As you well know, Universal Music Group showcases a wide spectrum of music," said Lenzo Yoon. It has a robust network of the world's best producers and composers, production capabilities, and marketing expertise. Likewise, *Big Hit is the company that can best realize the "K-pop style" that is loved by music fans all over the world*. These two companies will maximize our synergy by each focusing on our areas of excellence. Music fans all over the world will

> be able to experience the birth of an unprecedented group that brings together world-leading capabilities.

The involvement of the American company, with its stable of producers, composers, and marketing personnel, demonstrates that its contribution will be towards the production aspect. As is clear from the statement by Big Hit Entertainment's CEO, the Korean company will be contributing its experience in realising the "K-pop style", in this case, its successful track record in the process of identifying and training performers.

In yet another example, the Hong Kong actor and producer, Louis Koo, has formed a four-member girl group Skyle (*Straits Times* 2021b):

> The members, who are from China and South Korea, have not been unveiled, although the group shared a teaser of their logo on social media platforms on Tuesday.
>
> Skyle stands for "Show the Kinetic and Youth Leading a new Episode". The average age of the women is 20 and the average height, 1.7m.
>
> Selected from auditions held all over Asia, the quartet have been undergoing training for three to four years, with one member reportedly having trained for seven years.

What these two examples show is this. Rather than there being an indictment of K-pop's gruelling process of auditioning and intensively training potential stars, the process has become a commodity in its own right, gaining acceptance in not just South Korea but in China and the USA. The reason for this lack of indictment and, instead, an acceptance if not lauding of the K-pop idol process has to do with the already pervasive ideology of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism asserts that organisations and individuals perform their best within the demands of the free market economy. Harvey puts it thus:

> In so far as neoliberalism values market exchange as "an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs", it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, *and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market.*
>
> *(2005, 3, quoting Treanor, n.d., italics added)*

One notable offshoot of neoliberal ideology has been the emergence of enterprise culture, where qualities such as autonomy, innovation, creativity, strategy, and the ability to respond quickly to competition are highly valued (du Gay 1996, 56). In the context of neoliberalism and enterprise culture, emphasis is given to the

ability to "optimize choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions" (Ong 2006, 6). As a result, individuals as well as organisations are all increasingly expected to demonstrate enterprising qualities or, at the very least, show that they are attempting to cultivate these qualities. The absence of such qualities would constitute social failures or even transgressions (du Gay 1996, 60).

In the case of the K-pop process, trainees are seen as entering into the process through their own volition. Especially with the highly publicised descriptions of what the process entails, aspiring idols can no longer claim to be unaware of what will be asked of them. The trainees, then, are understood to be willingly subjecting themselves to a process that tests their enterprising qualities. In this context, such qualities (the basic ability to sing and dance aside) include self-discipline, determination, and the ability to withstand the constant stress of competing with other trainees for ultimate selection.

The organisations that are responsible for overseeing the process (such as Big Hit Entertainment), too, are seen as being enterprising, since they are playing their part in making sure the process is properly implemented. The process, despite or perhaps because of its brutally competitive nature, is identified as one that serves to identify the very best or the most deserving of the trainees. Under neoliberalism and enterprise culture, "best" and "most deserving" are treated as equivalent. As Sandel (2020, 13–14) points out:

> In an unequal society, those who land on top want to believe their success is morally justified. In a meritocratic society, this means the winners must believe they have earned their success through their own talent and hard work …
>
> Those who, by dint of effort and talent, prevail in a competitive meritocracy are indebted in ways the competition obscures. As the meritocracy intensifies, the striving so absorbs us that our indebtedness recedes from view. In this way, even a fair meritocracy, one without cheating or bribery or special privileges for the wealthy, induces a mistaken impression – that we have made it on our own.

And it is the market that decides who is "best" and "most deserving". During the traineeship, it is the organisation that makes these decisions. After the debut, when the group has gone public, it is the organisation, taking into consideration public acceptance, popularity among fans, and commercial success, that continues to make the decisions. Thus, the already prevalent hegemonic status of neoliberal ideology and enterprise culture help to foster a much more positive affect towards the K-pop idol process, leading to its adoption even outside of Korea. In this way, K-pop's contribution to the spread of Hallyu involves not just its various musical products but, interestingly, its formula for identifying commercial talents too.

By way of closing this discussion, we should note, importantly, that even the other two strategies discussed earlier do not challenge the ideology of neoliberalism

and enterprise culture, and most pertinently, do not indict or condemn the highly demanding process of identifying and training K-pop idols. Revelation is presented as an honest appraisal that competition can take its toll, that all of us do suffer from insecurities and anxieties. However, we can find ways to cope, perhaps by getting support from friends and family or by going for therapy. Whatever the coping mechanism, revelation as a strategy is not intended as a critique of the K-pop idol process.

Neither is redemption intended as such. The redemption strategy gives former idols and failed trainees yet another chance at fame and stardom. This is described as "a new showcase" (see above), that is, a different route to a different kind of fame. The participants in *Miss Back* are not being identified as possible members of some to-be-formed new K-pop idol group. That time has passed. For these participants, it is precisely their history as failed trainees and idols that qualifies them for the show. The show, therefore, capitalises on the continued existence of the K-pop idol process. It would not be inaccurate to say that the very premise of the show makes it parasitic upon the gruelling and demanding idol process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on one of the main channels responsible for Hallyu's remarkable global success, K-pop. Through fostering an anthropological stance, K-pop is able to encourage consumer interest not only in its various products but even in other aspects of Korean culture, notably, its language. Another result of this success is activism, with many fans of K-pop idols taking active roles in social issues. Finally, we also saw that the success of K-pop and its global reach extends beyond its products to include the process by which aspiring idols are identified and trained. In this regard, despite the process being widely acknowledged as exacting a high cost on the physical and mental health of the candidates, its acceptance is facilitated by the pervasive hegemonic status of neoliberalism and enterprise culture.

Notes

1 We return to this issue of K-pop training in our discussion of process (below).
2 This is something that is further reinforced if these fans also consume K-drama and K-films, since similar themes are likely to recur (see the next two chapters).
3 Though BTS have also begun releasing singles such as "Dynamite" and "Butter", which are in English, this is after their Korean identity had already been firmly established. Moreover, there is no indication that they are moving completely to releasing only English songs. Rather, the English songs appear to be ventures that sit alongside Korean ones. BTS released a song "My Universe" as a collaboration with the British band Coldplay in August 2020 with lyrics in both Korean and English.
4 Effective 31 December 2022, V LIVE was unified with the Weverse platform.

5

K-DRAMAS

Serialising Korean Culture

Introduction

We saw in the preceding chapter how K-pop is able to contribute to the Hallyu strategy in no small part due to its fostering of an anthropological stance. A key feature of this anthropological stance is that K-pop remains proudly and identifiably Korean. For example, linguistically, with few exceptions, the songs are sung in Korean and the majority of the performers are also Korean. But with captioning technology, the content of K-pop is made more comprehensible and, crucially, in sufficiently small portions that fans, if they so wish, can become invested in learning more about Korean culture, including its language.

Keeping the foregoing in mind, we focus in this chapter on another major channel that contributes to the global spread of Hallyu, K-dramas. Once again, the anthropological stance plays an important part in the discussion. However, there are also important differences between K-pop and K-dramas that we will emphasise. One difference is this: because of their serialised nature, K-dramas are arguably even more effective than K-pop in fostering the anthropological stance. This is because the serialisation allows scriptwriters to provide much more nuanced and detailed depictions of Korean culture, which can draw viewers – over many weeks or hours (if there is bingeing) – into the fictionalised worlds that have been created.

Another difference is the following: while the process of producing K-pop idols has travelled globally, the process of producing K-dramas has not. There are various reasons why this is so. For example, K-dramas are not in the business of creating groups of performers. They rely instead on the more unpredictable star power of individual actors and this, in turn, depends very much on the particular dramas that the actors star in as well as their individual charisma and audience appeal. As a result, there is no recognised formulaic K-drama process for identifying stars

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that can be exported. This will prove instructive for our understanding of the soft power of Hallyu.

We organise the chapter as follows. We first describe a number of themes that are highlighted in various K-dramas. This provides a sense of just how K-dramas draw their audiences into slowly becoming more interested in various aspects of Korean culture and society. In this regard, we note that the audiences for K-dramas also include consumers from North Korea. These are consumers who risk imprisonment and even execution for accessing media content from South Korea since K-dramas have even been blamed by the North for encouraging defections as well as posing a threat to its own cultural identity. Following this, we then shift our focus to look at how K-dramas have adapted content originating from elsewhere and, conversely, how other cultures have been adapting original K-dramas. We discuss how these adaptation processes are consistent with the Hallyu mission.

Themes within and across K-Dramas

K-dramas often have somewhat fantastical and even unrealistic premises in order to hook their audiences. These are obviously not intended to be reflective of Korean society in general. But they are valuable in getting audiences interested in the K-dramas in the first place. And the serialised nature of the dramas – they typically last for only one season and often comprise 16 episodes (dramas that have more than one season are less common) – gradually allows audiences to be exposed to less fantastical elements. In this way, beyond the initial hook or premise, audiences also begin to absorb elements of Korean society that are more conventionalised, mundane, and, relatively speaking, realistic. This is how the anthropological stance comes to be cultivated.

Consider the following examples:

- *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* (2014) is about a young man who fails to become a professional *baduk*[1] player and, as a consequence, becomes an intern in a large trading company. He has to overcome his own inexperience with the demands of corporate life as well as his lack of relevant educational qualifications, drawing on *baduk* strategies to guide him.
- *Sky Castle* (2018–19) focuses on the highly materialistic lifestyles and values of upper-class families in Seoul. It revolves mainly around the activities of affluent housewives, married to doctors and university professors, who ruthlessly plot to ensure their husbands' continued professional success as well as to get their children into the top universities.
- *Crash Landing on You* (2019–20), arguably one of the most successful K-dramas ever produced, is about a successful businesswoman, who also happens to be the heiress to a family-run conglomerate or *chaebol*. While paragliding, she is blown off course, lands in the North Korean portion of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and meets a captain from the North Korean army. They fall in love

and, in addition to dealing with assassination attempts and espionage practices, they have to overcome their own cultural and political differences.

- *Itaewon Class* (2020) is a tale about an ex-convict who seeks revenge on the CEO of a food company for the death of his father. The protagonist begins by opening a bar-restaurant upon his release from prison and shortly after, is aided by various other characters from the margins of Korean society, including a reformed gangster, a sociopathic genius, a transgender cook, and a Korean of mixed (Korean-Guinean) ethnicity.

Examples such as these can be multiplied indefinitely. However, of greater relevance to the point we are making is that these K-dramas expose their audiences to more general features of Korean society, albeit in a fictionalised manner. But for some individuals, this only spurs them to better understand just how different Korean society might actually be when compared to how it has been portrayed in the dramas.

In the case of *Misaeng*, its corporate setting allows for rich and detailed scenes where lower-level workers constantly have to respond to demands from their seniors, where female employees have to deal with sexual harassment and gender discrimination, where a person's lack of educational qualifications can lead to denigration from those with more elitist attitudes, and where workplace expectations can easily spill over into and override personal lives so that the notion of a work-life balance is little more than a pipe dream. *Misaeng* was a cultural sensation in South Korea, where many office workers identified with the corporate culture that was being portrayed (Ahn 2014):

> Unlike previous office-themed dramas peppered with romance and success, "Misaeng" director Kim Won-seok has shunned painting a rosy picture of office workers and highlighted the tough realities of Korean employees including contract workers and working moms.

Misaeng's ratings success within South Korea is not irrelevant to its global Hallyu influence. The former benefits the latter by getting international streaming services such as Netflix interested in acquiring the distribution rights. And this domestic success no doubt also serves to raise the curiosity of audiences worldwide.

While the desire for socio-economic mobility and success is by no means uncommon, this desire is portrayed in *Sky Castle* in ultra-competitive terms, something which South Korean society is already known for. Like *Misaeng*, *Sky Castle* was a ratings success and it too has been lauded as shedding light on some of the less savoury aspects of South Korean society (Jin-hai Park 2018):

> Education and the ardor for success remain constants in Korean society, and the JTBC drama "SKY Castle" mocks Korea's elite parents' obsession with competitive education. It is enjoying an explosive response from viewers …

> Culture critic Jung Duk-hyun says the drama has received attention from viewers, because it successfully strikes two things – the curiosity and uneasiness of looking at those rich elite families' education obsession.

In the case of *Crash Landing on You*, audiences are exposed to the cultural differences between South Koreans and North Koreans. In fact, *Crash Landing on You* has even been lauded for its humorous, sympathetic, and fairly realistic portrayal of the lives of North Koreans, relying on advice from a North Korean defector. And because the female lead is the heiress to a *chaebol*, audiences also begin to learn more about the intra-familial politics of *chaebols* as well as the abuses of power and privilege that the employees and underlings have to endure. Finally, the scenes set in South Korea (as opposed to those in the North) recurrently have characters meeting for beer and fried chicken, making it clear that (in the world of *Crash Landing on You*, at least) this meal is a favourite of South Koreans.

In *Itaewon Class*, the issue of *chaebol* privilege and abuse of power is the main motivation for the male protagonist's desire for revenge. Because the power struggle is between a lowly bar-restaurant owner and the CEO of a food company, food also surfaces as a theme, in this case, involving "*sundubu-jjigae*", or tofu stew. And because the underdogs represent marginalised characters in South Korean society, the drama also serves to "challenge discrimination and old-fashioned thinking" (Sunio 2020). As MC Chang (2020) puts it:

> A sociopath. An ex-convict. A transgender. A high school dropout. And a guy of half Korean, half African descent.
>
> These characters come together in Itaewon Class, a South Korean drama that celebrates diversity and the underdogs in a country widely seen as homogenous, conservative and conformist.
>
> Set against the backdrop of Seoul's "most international" neighbourhood of Itaewon, the drama has won praise for its realistic portrayal of subjects such as prejudice against foreigners, misbehaving scions of the chaebol (Korean for conglomerate), and discrimination against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

Finally, as an actual location in Seoul, one that is popular with locals, expatriates, and tourists, Itaewon has inspired fans to visit some of the specific places featured in the drama series (Seoul Tourism Organization 2020).

Some of the recurrent themes, even when these may not necessarily be the direct focus of the specific K-drama, involve:

- food and drink:
  drinking alcohol such as beer and soju, and eating dishes such as tofu stew, army stew, and fried chicken are regularly featured

- seniority:
  alongside the consumption of food and drink, audiences also become privy to social conventions governing interactions between older and younger individuals. Younger Koreans, for example, are expected to serve their elders, as are junior employees in the workplace
- gender:
  Korea is a highly patriarchal society. Women are expected to serve the guests their husbands bring home, to entertain and look after their relatives. Gender discrimination and sexual harassment are all too common in the workplace
- *chaebol* politics:
  Korea is also a highly elitist society. The power and privilege enjoyed by *chaebols* have at times come in for public criticism over alleged cases of corruption and misconduct
- education and workplace competition:
  the reliance on paper qualifications and the patronage of influential individuals results in an extremely competitive and stressful society. Korea is unfortunately known to have a high suicide rate, often attributed to stress

Many of these themes are also found in other K-dramas and therefore gain prominence and resonance among audiences, stoking further interest in what Korean society might actually be like. Though the themes are by no means unique to Korea, it is the fact that in K-dramas, these are presented in ways that demonstrate how they are specifically realised in Korean society that makes them interesting. There is no attempt to dilute or internationalise the themes. Instead, K-dramas are unapologetically Korean, making it a point that audiences should view and understand them through the lens of Korean history, culture, and social mores. This applies particularly to the streaming of K-dramas on a service such as Netflix, which allows audiences to watch the serials in the original Korean but accompanied by their choice of subtitles, such as subtitles in English, Traditional Chinese, or Simplified Chinese. Depending on the audience's location and language settings, Netflix will typically offer between five and seven languages as subtitle options (Netflix, n.d.). Careful subtitling and translation make for better viewing experiences as opposed to dubbing. The latter faces difficulty in trying to match the mouth movements of dialogue articulated in the original language with the words from the dubbing language, and this mismatch can be visually disruptive for the viewer. In contrast, a streaming service like Netflix has made it a point to give careful attention to the quality of translation and subtitling. Translators are individuals hired for their fluency in multiple languages, often doing this in addition to a full-time job such as being a university professor (Netflix Partner Help Center, n.d.). Netflix "may reject a file for containing translations that are grammatically correct, but are simply phrases and colloquialisms that are not natural to the viewer" (Netflix Partner Help Center, n.d.).

Subtitling is the technical aspect of ensuring that the translations appear onscreen in a manner that the streaming service considers appropriate. In this regard, Netflix has a list of “preferred vendors” and also provides detailed guidelines on subtitling and captioning (*Rev* 2018):

> According to Netflix, “We need to change the way we think about subtitles and closed captions. They are no longer secondary assets in a world where content knows no physical borders.”
>
> Netflix Preferred Vendors (NPVs) for assets such as subtitles and closed captioning …
>
> Captions need a “duration” in order to be shown at the correct time. For Netflix, the minimum duration is 5/6 (five-sixths) of a second per subtitle event (e.g. 20 frames for 24fps). The maximum duration is 7 seconds per subtitle event …
>
> Text should usually be kept to one line, unless it exceeds the character limitation. Netflix wants captioners to follow these basic principles when the text has to be broken into 2 lines:
>
> The line should be broken:
>
> - after punctuation marks
> - before conjunctions
> - before prepositions
>
> The line break should not separate:
>
> - a noun from an article
> - a noun from an adjective
> - a first name from a last name
> - a verb from a subject pronoun
> - a prepositional verb from its preposition
> - a verb from an auxiliary, reflexive pronoun or negation.

Strict requirements on the duration of a caption, on the number of lines a text should occupy, and on where line breaks should occur are all aimed at optimising the viewing experience so that the subtitles are fairly easy to understand while also not visually interfering with what is being shown onscreen. As a testament to the importance that Netflix places on subtitling and translation, it has even recently developed an AI model to automate the translation and subtitling process, although this remains at the proof-of-concept stage (Alarcon 2020).

Good translating and subtitling do not necessarily mean that the audience will completely ignore the Korean dialogue. Rather, as a form of sociolinguistic consumption (see Chapter 4), it allows audiences to pick up occasional Korean lexical

items such as *gamsahabnida* ("Thank you") and *annyeonghaseyo* ("Hello"), thus helping (as with K-pop) to spark some interest in the language itself. More importantly, K-dramas (unlike K-pop videos) allow for the greater contextualisation of scenes as characters interact with each other over longer stretches of time and even evolve their relationships. This situatedness benefits the fostering of the anthropological stance because audiences can be further intrigued by how similar cultural practices and social mores that recur in different contexts may garner varied responses.

As one example, in various K-dramas, it is not uncommon to find characters commending or reproaching one another for speaking "casually" or "informally", depending on how senior or respectful a person is expected to be. And not surprisingly, this has roused the interest of K-drama fans. So, in response to the question posted on Quora "In Korean dramas, why is it wrong or bad to speak informally or casually to someone? What does it mean?", Han gives the following explanation (15 September 2020, comment on Amron):

> Not only in kdramas in every inch of Korea you cant (sic) speak informal with strangers/bosses/ public servants/elders etc. This is cultural thing of course …
>
> You only can speak informal with your friends but not all the time. These friends also must be okay with that … You can use informal language with somebody younger than you this is the rule but still many Korean people prefers (sic) formal language. But if that people (sic) is a kid like 0-10 years old you can use informal language
>
> … also many Koreans uses (sic) formal language eventhough (sic) they are dating or even married. It'"s kinda strange but if your husband/boyfriend is your colleague/older colleague or your boss/boss at some firm even it's not where you work at you probably should use formal language. This is how Koreans doing (sic).

And Choe (15 September 2020, comment on Amron) provides the following:

> There're two speech styles in Korean: Banmal and Jondaemal.
>
> Banmal is used between friends or to kids. Sometimes it's used to your subordinates, but it's case by case …
>
> Juniors (those who entered the school later) should use jondaemal to their seniors (those who entered the school earlier) no matter how they're close enough like friends. If a junior speaks in banmal to their senior, then the junior highly would be scolded by the senior …
>
> In real life, it's 99.99% banmal from adults to kids. Kids or non-adults, of course, should speak in jondaemal.

Recurrent exposure across various K-dramas to situations where characters berate one another for speaking "casually" cannot but help audiences become aware of and sensitised to the issue of language speaking style as something that is significant in Korean culture. Whether this leads some audience members to further inquire into Korean culture is not of course predictable. But discussions on online sites such as Quora make it clear that for a number of audience members, it is indeed something that they are interested in learning more about.

Another example involves Korean cultural expectations about drinking etiquette. In South Korea, when person A serves an alcoholic drink to person B, A is generally expected to offer the drink with two hands so as to show respect. Likewise, B's reception of the offered drink needs to be respectful too. Once again, it is not surprising that a discussion of Korean drinking culture should start by acknowledging the influence of K-drama (Chew 2020), and in this regard, it is also worth noting that its description of the social rules is interspersed with images taken from different K-dramas:

> Connoisseurs of Korean dramas and movies will be familiar with that huge red tent, where the characters frequent to drink *soju* for everything from a breakup to a celebration. Known as *pojangmacha*, these tents are permanent fixtures where locals go for the second round of drinks, also known as *i-cha*.
>
> While tourists may want to try the *pojangmacha* experience for themselves, there are unspoken Korean drinking rules that you should take note of, just so you don't get disapproving glances from the *ahjussi* sitting at the next table. From pouring and receiving drinks with both hands to not refilling your own empty glass, here are some etiquette rules you should know before you decide to shout "*keonbae*" and down a shot.
>
> 1. Senior should do the honour of pouring the first glass
> 2. Pour drinks with both hands
> 3. Receive the drinks with two hands
> 4. Clink your glass below your senior
> 5. Turn away and cover your mouth when drinking
> 6. Down the first glass in one go
> 7. Fill everyone's cup but your own
> 8. Don't fill the glass if it's still partially filled.

Two things are worth emphasising pertaining to our argument about K-dramas and the anthropological stance. The first is that of sustained exposure to various "ancillary" themes. As noted, viewers of K-dramas, in addition to following the key plot points, are also along the way likely to be intermittently exposed to themes that harken to aspects of Korean culture and society. These include ways of using language and social drinking that indicate respect, especially for one's seniors. They may also include portrayals of the highly competitive and

often elitist nature of Korean society, where there is an obsession with having the right background or credentials since these are often seen as necessary for upward socio-economic mobility.

The second concerns the concept of stancetaking, specifically, the stances that are taken towards the themes. For example, when the issue of demonstrating respect to seniors via appropriate language use or drinking behaviour is portrayed and even discussed in the K-dramas, the stance adopted is usually one of positive affect. That is, scenes typically accept the importance of respecting seniors, and the ways in which this can be done, rather than criticising or rejecting this particular cultural value. This is not to suggest that K-dramas blindly aim to propagate the status quo. *Itaewon Class*, as we mentioned, follows the travails of a former ex-convict as he seeks revenge against the leader of a *chaebol*. In addition to the revenge plot, a theme that comes across is that there needs to be greater support for and recognition of non-establishment or unconventional characters in Korean society – including the transgender character who works as a cook in the protagonist's bar-restaurant. This has in fact resonated with Koreans who identify as non-binary and who feel marginalised in Korean society as well as raised awareness of the need for greater acceptance in what is still a highly traditional society (Sta. Maria 2020).

Sustained exposure and stancetaking, taken together, form a potent combination that, unsurprisingly, creates, especially for international audiences who may not know much about South Korea, intrigue and interest in a society that is simultaneously familiar yet foreign enough to be considered exotic. And of course, although for expositional convenience, we have discussed K-pop and K-dramas in separate chapters, there are people who consume both. This means that the exposure to similar aspects of Korean culture can easily recur, strengthening the sustained exposure and, especially if the stance taken is also similar, further reinforcing specific Korean cultural values. As a case in point, consider that on Amino, an app that brings together communities with shared interests, a post by emberxfae (dated 6 July 2018) notes how RM of the K-pop group BTS is respectful to his elders during a drinking session:

> In South Korea the younger generations are taught that they must honor the older generations without expressing any criticism or demanding any conditions.

The specifics of South Korean drinking etiquette are such that the younger individual must turn away from and not face the elder while drinking. In the television reality show, RM was seen doing his best to observe the etiquette despite being in a quandary since he was surrounded by elders on all sides so that no matter where he turned, he would still be facing someone senior. In this case, we have a video clip showing a K-pop idol in a context that is strictly not related to the performance of their music. But exposure to this video on a social media app has the potential to stoke interest, especially from BTS fans, about drinking etiquette in Korean

culture – an interest that would be positively reinforced if a similar theme was also encountered via K-drama.

At this point, we have talked about the stance taken towards drinking etiquette within the world of K-pop or K-drama. Recall, however, that the stance triangle (Chapter 2) treats stance as an intersubjective achievement, involving alignments from multiple subjects as they evaluate the target of the stance, in this instance, Korean drinking etiquette. In this regard, we can factor in the stance of the viewers of K-dramas or fans of BTS watching the video clip of RM drinking with seniors. And here, we can reasonably assume that many of these viewers will be positively aligned in their stances or are at least prepared to be so aligned. That is, these viewers are likely to be sympathetic to, or at the very least empathise with the stances presented to them. This assumption is particularly reasonable for K-dramas because, as already mentioned, these usually consist of 16 episodes and viewers who are not interested in a particular K-drama would have probably stopped watching after the first or second episode. Viewers who are prepared to continue following a K-drama, perhaps up to the tenth episode or even up to the finale – and hence our earlier remarks on the importance of sustained exposure – can be said to have become emotionally invested in the characters and plot.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that watching an "emotionally arousing drama" can trigger an endorphin response, specifically, increased pain thresholds as well as the sense of bonding with fellow viewers (Dunbar et al. 2016). This supports the idea that K-dramas are likely to be more effective than K-pop at cultivating the anthropological stance vis-à-vis Korean culture and society, given that the dramas are scripted specifically to evoke strong emotions in their viewers, usually in the form of cliff-hanger endings for the episodes as well as increasingly elaborate flashbacks that can reveal unexpected details about the experiences and motivations of individual characters. In terms of the stance triangle, whether or not viewers agree with the stances presented in the K-dramas becomes less important than the fact that they are emotionally engaged. And in relation to Dunbar et al.'s (2016) point about bonding, even if viewers are not watching the K-drama episode at the same time, their common experiences can be recounted and shared via social media, which also serves to create a bond among fellow viewers – a phenomenon we also noted with K-pop. Consider, for example, the extremely popular K-drama about an autistic lawyer, *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*. In one of the later episodes, Woo and her fellow attorneys visit Jeju Island and are told about a famous noodle stall. As the following comments on Reddit (GodJihyo7983, 11 August 2022) demonstrate, viewers' reactions to the episode combine emotional responses to the plot developments but also include responses to the food and the island:

(i) when myeongseok was enjoying his meal and fondly watched everyone eat then you see youngwoo just observing him happily .. i was in tears 😭
(ii) Yes, this was the best scene of this episode for me, too. Jung to the Rookies to the Ramen 🎉

(iii) It's almost midnight and I want to eat some noodles. Best part for me was me realizing where the restaurant owner at the same time that Young Woo did. LOL

(iv) Attorney Yung is my favorite and I loved this! I couldn't help but laugh that despite the underlying message that obsession with work can be detrimental to personal relationships, it didn't stop the whole crew from fully lawyering out on the noodle guy on how he could revive his restaurant. You can take the lawyer out of Seoul and to Jeju, but you can't take the lawyer out of the lawyer (is that how that goes?). 🤔

(v) Me too. This episode made me want a big bowl of delicious noodles. Where are the offshoot foodie websites for this show.? I need recipes STAT!

These four extracts from a Reddit thread about an episode of *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* nicely demonstrate the points connecting the emotional engagements of K-drama viewers, their sense of bonding, and the cultivation of the anthropological stance – all of which are explicable in terms of the stance triangle. All four extracts involve food references, specifically, to noodles – since that happened to be a key focus of the episode. There are references to specific scenes (the senior attorney Jung bringing the junior "rookies" to eat ramen, the lead character Woo happily watching the senior attorney, Myeongseok, enjoying his noodles). But there are descriptions from the viewers about their own stances towards individual scenes as well as the episode as a whole. Some of the stances are food-related ("It's almost midnight and I want to eat some noodles", "This episode made me want a big bowl of delicious noodles"). Others are more general ("Attorney Yung is my favorite and I loved this!", "i was in tears 😭"). But the point to keep in mind here is that the bonding that Dunbar et al. (2016) describe can be asynchronous in that the viewers need not be watching the episode in question at the same time. This is because the use of social media allows viewers from different parts of the world to each share their emotional reactions, thus creating a sense of community that may be ephemeral insofar as an individual episode or even a particular K-drama is concerned. However, the recurrence of food in scenes across many episodes and many different K-dramas can be quite effective in gradually cultivating an interest in Korean noodles or Korean cuisine more generally or, even more broadly, Korean eating habits and dining etiquette.

The producers of K-dramas are in fact fully aware – even if they may not articulate this awareness in the socio-psychological and sociolinguistic terms that are being presented in this book – of the potent effects that engaging viewers emotionally can have in fostering interest in products that are not necessarily the foci of a plot. It is this awareness that leads to the practice of product placement in K-dramas. Product placement is by no means unique to K-dramas but as we see in the following section, it is practised to a much more explicit and consistent degree than might be the case elsewhere.

Product Placements in K-Dramas

Product placement is an important aspect of K-dramas. It has been observed that, in contrast to the relatively subtler way in which it is practised in Hollywood movies (which are themselves not always particularly subtle), K-drama product placement is usually much more prominent and overt, sanctioned in part by audience expectations (Lim 2021). As in the case of K-pop, audiences are often on the lookout for specific brands and items worn by major characters or locations talked about or visited by the same.

Thus, in their study of Taiwanese tourism to South Korea, Su et al. (2011, 805) note that in 2004, Taiwan was both the largest importer of South Korean TV dramas as well as the second largest group of foreign visitors. They note that "Korean TV dramas have successfully promoted on-location tourist spots such as Incheon International Airport, Korean architecture and street scenes, historic sites, memorials and cultural landscapes" (Su et al. 2011, 806). And Lim (2021) points out:

> In K-dramas, product placements are truly ubiquitous. In fact, some K-dramas incorporate an excessive amount of brands that it starts to feel like watching an hour-long commercial. Most phones, cars, sunglasses, coffee shops, and beverages that appear in K-dramas are all product placements …
>
> Here is a list of just *some* of the product placements in the hottest K-dramas:
>
> 1. Range Rover – "Crash Landing on You"
> 2. Laneige – "Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok Joo"
> 3. Nespresso – "The Penthouse"
> 4. Samsung – "The Heirs"
> 5. Swarovski – "Because This Is My First Life"
> 6. Tiffany & Co – "Itaewon Class"
> 7. Mercedes Benz – "Start-Up"
> 8. Montbell – "Secret Garden"
> 9. Subway – "Memories of Alhambra"

The anthropological stance isn't, of course, just limited to cultural and societal aspects that may be considered unique to Korea. Rather, it encourages in a broad sense an interest in the country's various facets, and this includes a fascination with the lives of its upper middle class and elites, their international outlooks, their purchasing power, and their consumption of global brands (which encompasses global brands of Korean origin such as Samsung and Laneige as well as non-Korean brands such as Tiffany & Co and Mercedes Benz).

The placement of various global brands and their products in K-dramas is often not merely incidental but instead can even play important parts in the unfolding of the onscreen events. There is little doubt that giving the products prominent and,

on some occasions, critical roles in K-dramas can add significantly to audience interest and commercial successes of the brands and their products (Lim 2021):

> Brands are not subtly introduced, instead many of their products become integral parts within the plot: a Subway sandwich saved the life of a suicidal man, a robot vacuum cleaner tampered with the crime scene, and a Breitling watch stopped time to save the protagonist from evil villains.

Lim (2021) goes on to provide examples of the success of product placements in K-dramas:

> You may be wondering, are product placements worth it for companies to expend their money on? Well, there is a scene from an iconic K-drama, "My Love From Another Star," where the main character applies a coral pink shade lipstick. After that scene aired, almost all coral shade lipsticks were sold out around the world. Although YSL's Rouge Pur Couture No 52 was not the exact lipstick used by the main character, it was sold out for months, and they were so difficult to buy that they were being sold on eBay for over $100! According to The Cut, YSL's public relations team confirmed that it was indeed the show's popularity that caused the lipsticks to sell out.
>
> In "Crash Landing on You," one of the main characters, Yoon Se-Ri, played by Son Ye-Jin, frequently wore Gentle Monster's Dreamer sunglasses. These sunglasses became all the rage. Many fans of the show started buying out these glasses; even celebrities like Anne Curtis posted an Instagram story wearing them with the caption "Yoon Se-Ri vibes." These sunglasses will now be forever known as part of the Yoon Se-Ri look!

Once again, the concept of indexicality is valuable in understanding the power of product placement. The products that are being promoted – with varying degrees of subtlety – become associated with specific K-drama characters (especially prized are the products associated with the lead actors) or, especially if these are settings or locations, become associated with the K-drama in general. As an example of the latter, consider that in two episodes of *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, Woo and her colleagues fight on behalf of a village's residents against a government plan to construct a road that would cut through the village and, in so doing, also require the chopping down of a beloved tree. The popularity of the two episodes and the series, in general, created great public interest in the setting where the tree was located. This led the Cultural Heritage Administration to designate the tree that was featured as a natural monument (Shim 2022):

> The tree, presumed to be 500 years old, is located on a hill in Dongbu Village in the southern city of Changwon. It has gained public interest since it appeared in last week's seventh and eighth episodes of the legal drama …

> "We have comprehensively confirmed the historical, academic, and scenic values of the hackberry tree, combined with the value of the intangible heritage of the village's Dangsanje," a CHA official said, referring to a ritual held by villagers once every year in front of the tree, worshipped as the guardian of the village.

Given the importance of product placement and its commercial success, when brands are not officially endorsed as part of a K-drama, their identities are usually obscured (Aziz 2021):

> If you are watching a program that is airing on one of the popular Korean networks (i.e. KBS, SBS, JBTC, tvN), you learn to spot the luxury products because the brand/logos are usually blurred out due to South Korea's stricter broadcasting regulations.

The obscuring or blurring is needed because it is not always feasible to edit them out because of locational constraints. For example, in the K-drama *Fight for My Way*, a key character works in a shopping mall and the presence of various brands helps to establish her work environment. She is therefore constantly surrounded by many different brands, many of which are needed as part of the background but are not actually endorsed by the series. In the case of *Fight for My Way*, creative attempts are sometimes made to ensure that the brands are not receiving free publicity. The series decided to consistently pixel out a portion of each brand's name, usually the first consonant (if it is a single word) or the first word as well as the first consonant of the second word (if there are two words). "Chanel" appears as "Hanel" and "Jo Malone" appears as "Alone".

The anthropological stance, however, takes on a particularly dramatic turn when we consider the influence of K-dramas in North Korea. The global scope of the Hallyu strategy, of course, means that even North Korea is not immune to the anthropological stance that is fostered by K-pop and K-drama, especially given that the two countries are supposed to have a shared history as well as an imagined future. However, North Korea's wariness of Hallyu has meant that ordinary citizens can be heavily punished or even executed if they are found to be in possession of its cultural products, as Bicker (2021) describes:

> Yoon Mi-so says she was 11 when she first saw a man executed for being caught with a South Korean drama.
>
> His entire neighbourhood was ordered to watch.
>
> "If you didn't, it would be classed as treason," she told the BBC from her home in Seoul …
>
> Anyone caught with large amounts of media from South Korea, the United States or Japan now faces the death penalty. Those caught watching face prison camp for 15 years.

> And it's not just about what people watch.
>
> Recently, Mr Kim wrote a letter in state media calling on the country's Youth League to crack down on "unsavoury, individualistic, anti-socialist behaviour" among young people. He wants to stop foreign speech, hairstyles and clothes which he described as "dangerous poisons".
>
> …
>
> Millions of people are thought to be going hungry. Mr Kim wants to ensure they are still being fed the state's carefully crafted propaganda, rather than gaining glimpses of life according to glitzy K-dramas set south of the border in Seoul, one of Asia's richest cities.

North Koreans can be quite resourceful in how they try to watch K-dramas, passing one another downloaded content on password-encrypted USB sticks and even using a car battery hooked up to a generator to power a television (Bicker 2021). Bicker (2021) even describes a defector from the North who, upon arrival in the South, immediately visited all the places she had seen in a K-drama *Stairway to Heaven*.

The influence of K-drama on North Korea is manifested in how its citizens dress, their hairstyles, their music preferences, and even their use of language (Yeung and Seo 2021):

> For instance, South Korean women often use the term "oppa" for their romantic partners – it's now forbidden in the North. Instead, North Korean women must refer to their lovers as "male comrades," said Ha … "It absolutely does pose a threat if young North Koreans are watching South Korean dramas and seeing what life is like for Koreans outside their country, because they're seeing images of Seoul, of how well they're living, how freely they're living," said Jean Lee, senior fellow at the US-based Wilson Center and the former Pyongyang bureau chief for the Associated Press.

There is perhaps no small degree of irony in the fact that the soft power of the Korean Wave is something that even South Korea's northern neighbour is extremely worried about. The "intra-Korean" effects of Hallyu are of sufficient concern to North Korea that the latter is concerned that it might undermine the legitimacy of its authoritarian rule. As Kelley (2021) points out, there are good reasons why the North is wary of the penetration of popular culture from the South:

> South Korea's very existence challenges the North's regime. Its greater success – in wealth, health, military power and global prestige – directly attack the legitimacy of North Korea.

> If the two Koreas are supposed to be unified, as both Koreas insist, and South Korea is vastly more advanced, then why does North Korea still exist? Much as East Germany gave up and joined West Germany, why does North Korea not do the same?
>
> This national threat fires North Korean obsession about the penetration of anything from South Korea. Southern pop culture brings images of a life more free, more open, wealthier and more fun than anything on offer in the North.

We have seen in the discussion thus far how K-dramas, by virtue of being able to portray aspects of Korean society and culture in greater depth and with more nuance, are highly effective in cultivating the anthropological stance. As a metastance, the anthropological stance informs and influences more specific stances, such as fostering interest in the language styles, in drinking etiquette, in how South Koreans cope with their hyper-competitive society, among others. It also helps with the success of product placement, both in the consumption of goods and services as well as tourism – often to the extent that even the North Korean regime is alarmed enough that it feels the need to take highly punitive steps in an attempt to quell the spread of the Korean Wave.

By way of closing this section, we want to take the opportunity to emphasise that the relationship between the meta-level anthropological stance and the more specific stances that audiences might adopt towards particular products and locations is not necessarily a linear one. That is, the meta-level anthropological stance does not have to pre-exist its more specific counterparts. Rather, as we have seen in this and the preceding chapter, the anthropological stance arises from specific encounters with K-pop and K-drama. Especially after multiple encounters, a stronger interest in Korean society and culture may start to emerge and this incipient anthropological stance may in turn be further strengthened or enhanced by yet other specific encounters. All of this, of course, is entirely consonant with Ahmed's (2004a, b) claims of how the affective economy works, where the circulation of images, themes, goods, products, etc., leads to an increase in affective value. While Ahmed has been criticised by Wetherell (2015) (see Chapter 3) for ignoring the role of human activity, our conjoining of her ideas with stancetaking and indexicality, especially in our discussion of the anthropological stance, serves to address that particular criticism by grounding the workings of the affective economy in the interpretations and interests of human actors.

Fan Activism

As with K-pop fandom, K-drama fandom too can lead to fan activism. However, the kind of activism among K-drama fans is not quite the same as that found among K-pop fans, and we discuss why this might be so.

For example, fans of Park Seo Joon marked his 31st birthday with a donation of about US$1,130 to a welfare foundation supporting individuals with disabilities (Dani-Dee 2019).

And Hicap (2020) reports that when Hyun Bin celebrated his 39th birthday, his fans donated about US$34,000 to "Save the Children Korea, an international non-government organization helping children around the world".

As with K-pop activism, it is clear that these are driven by the desire to enhance the images of specific actors. So, without taking anything away from the important good works that these donations enable, it is also necessary to recognise the contribution of the Hallyu effect. In these examples, the connection is especially clear given that the donations are also intended as markers of the birthdays of the celebrities in question.

These are activists insofar as we are willing to use the term "activism" to refer to charitable acts. But they are not political, and most certainly, they are far from attempts at becoming involved in highly contested and politically charged issues. Recall that in the preceding chapter, a distinction was made between two kinds of activism: charity-based and politically driven (Andini and Akhni 2021). K-pop fans are very much involved in both kinds whereas it seems that K-drama fans are more involved in the former than the latter. Of course, this does not deny that there are overlaps where the same individuals might be fans of K-pop as well as K-dramas. But importantly, it is their shared identities and, hence, their collective community mobilisation as fans of specific K-pop groups or individual K-drama stars that is pertinent here.

This raises the rather intriguing question as to why this might be so. Indeed, Andini and Akhni's (2021) distinction notwithstanding, a Google search using the terms "Korean Wave" and "fan activism" will quickly produce news reports and academic articles about politically driven fan activism and K-pop. Examples of the involvement of K-drama fans in politically charged matters are much harder to come by, and consequently, less discussed. It therefore seems that the relationship between politically driven fan activism, on the one hand, and the Korean Wave, on the other, is much more robust in the case of K-pop than in the case of K-dramas. To understand why this might be the case, it is worth keeping in mind the following.

According to CedarBough Saeji, a visiting professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Indiana University Bloomington and a scholar specialising in K-pop, many of the fan activists in the Black Lives Matter movement were Americans who were fans of the group BTS (Coscarelli 2020):

> "The English-speaking K-pop fans who are getting involved in this, who are up on these issues, these are not foreigners," said CedarBough Saeji … "These are Americans."
>
> "That these young, socially progressive, outward-looking people who are really adept at using these online platforms – who are stuck at home and online even more because of Covid-19 – that these people are doing political things is not

> surprising … These are young people who are completely willing to learn about a new culture to follow their interest in some pop-culture product. These are exactly the kind of people who are the opposite of the Trump audience that claps when he disses “Parasite” and says that “Gone With the Wind” is a real movie.”

According to Coscarelli (2020), “K-pop culture in South Korea is a largely apolitical mainstream concern, leaving fan armies to focus on boosting album sales and propping up their idols” whereas “the community’s position as a subculture in the United States may lend itself to more radical gestures, especially at a time of increased political polarization”. As well, in Indonesia, the Kpop4Planet movement was established as a platform for K-pop fans to raise awareness about the effects of climate change (*Straits Times* 2021a).

The main reason, then, why K-pop fans are more likely than their K-drama counterparts to be active in potentially politically contested matters is offered by TK Park (quoted in Coscarelli 2020, italics added):

> “*Although K-pop’s message is not necessarily political in an overt sense, they are often about empowerment and self-confidence*,” said the author of the “Ask a Korean!” blog, who uses the pen name T.K. Park. “Lots of first-time K-pop fans, for example, got into BTS because the group’s message of ‘love yourself’ strongly resonated with them.” And since such content has attracted an audience made up largely of women and people of color, Mr. Park added, “this message pushes them to be more expressive with every aspect of their lives, including politics.”

K-pop – in its lyrics, dance moves, and fashion – often emphasises the value of being self-confident and feeling empowered. This is a relatively consistent message of the genre, cutting across different groups and songs. This message is an important aspect of K-pop’s appeal for its consumers and it helps to stoke a willingness to engage in identity politics, concerns of social injustice, and calls to action about the climate. In contrast, K-dramas are much less homogeneous in their messaging. Indeed, the appeal of K-dramas lies in their variety of themes and plots. Ironically, it is the latter’s ability to explore this variety with depth that makes K-dramas, as we have emphasised, more effective than K-pop at cultivating an anthropological stance vis-à-vis Korea. But this also means that, at least when compared to K-pop, fans of K-dramas are not as likely to be involved in politically driven activism though their involvement in charities should obviously still need to be noted.

Koreanising Foreign Content and Vice Versa

Another reason why K-dramas are effective at cultivating the anthropological stance has to do with the adaptations of drama originating outside Korea and, conversely, the adaptations of K-dramas to other cultures. That is, the global

circulations of dramas – which include those that are marked as originally Korean as well as those that are not originally Korean but have since been Koreanised – still means that credit accrues to the Korean Wave. Soft power, after all, is not a zero-sum game. On the contrary, it would in fact be surprising if soft power were to be a zero-sum game since the properties that underpin soft power, such as attraction and likeability, are themselves not zero-sum attributes. Indeed, one might argue that an entity's likeability is enhanced to the extent that it makes others around it likeable as well. As Viray (2021) sagely points out:

> Why choose between your favorite American TV series and Korean dramas when you can have the best of both worlds? America has been inspired by the Korean wave, adapting shows such as *The Masked Singer* and *Train To Busan*. South Korea on the other hand had also been remaking some of the famous western TV shows and movies in recent years.

Let us first consider the adaptation of K-dramas into other cultures. The following (Lazatin 2020) are some examples:

She Was Pretty: remade in China
Signal: remade in Japan
Oh My Ghost: remade in Thailand
Discovery of Love: remade in Vietnam
Tunnel: remade in Indonesia

In addition, remakes of K-dramas are also hugely popular in Turkey. Kaptan and Tutucu (2019, 193–194) point out that, since the 2000s, a large number of original K-dramas have been broadcast on local, regional, and national Turkish television channels, and this contributed to the popularity of Turkish adaptations such that "a new type of television series emerged on Turkish TV channels: Turkish adaptations of K-dramas … Until today, more than fifteen Turkish adaptations of K-dramas have been broadcasted on Turkish TV channels".

Kaptan and Tutucu (2019) draw on the concept of cultural proximity – defined as "the tendency to prefer media products from one's own culture or the most similar possible culture" (Straubhaar 2003, 85) – and they suggest that:

> Turkish audiences discursively construct and simultaneously experience the concept of cultural proximity when they are watching K-dramas and their adaptations … The participants utilized these media texts in order to assert salient cultural commonalities between Korean and Turkish cultures. One of the findings of the study was *the inclination of participants to suppress distinctions between Korean and Turkish cultures in order to invent a consistent discourse of proximity.*
>
> *(Kaptan and Tutucu 2019, 212, italics added)*

Kaptan and Tutucu's (2019) findings are entirely consistent with the concept of soft power. That is, rather than treating cultural proximity as an objectively and independently existing metric, the proximity is itself a construct. The degree of perceived proximity or similarity is a consequence of how willing the Turkish audiences were to downplay differences and instead emphasise perceived similarities between Turkish and Korean cultures. Such an inclination stems from a positive predisposition towards Korean culture, paved by the earlier popularity of original K-dramas. Thus, at least as demonstrated by the Turkish case, the spread of Hallyu has led to localised adaptations of K-dramas which in turn have further strengthened rather than weakened or attenuated the positive affect that Turkish audiences have towards Korean culture.

Let us now consider the converse, Korean adaptations of non-Korean originals. Again, we are reminded that soft power is not a zero-sum game and here, Mazur, Meimaridis, and Albuquerque (2019) show how this, too, can benefit the spread of Hallyu. Mazur et al. (2019) describe Korean adaptations of two American series, *The Good Wife* and *Criminal Minds*, noting how the adapted versions are more melodramatic than the originals, focus more on cliff-hanger endings for each episode as is characteristic of the structure of K-dramas, and add serialised elements to tell a complete story within a single season since K-dramas seldom run for more than one season (Mazur, Meimaridis, and Albuquerque 2019, 180–181). The specific details of the adaptations need not concern us. What is particularly interesting, instead, are the authors' conclusions that (2019, 188, italics added):

> By adapting American shows to its reality, South Korea then turns the American "universal" into "particular," while at the same time, claims for itself a more relevant status as a cultural mediator in the global arena …
>
> Bringing these American shows into the South Korean reality, in modern Seoul, with Korean actors and highlighting important national cultural traces, like hierarchy, sense of collectivism and discipline, makes it easier to attract viewers, not only in Korea, *but also in the neighboring countries that also consume K-dramas on a daily basis.*

It is therefore important to note that "these products are not restricted to South Korean borders, but have been circulated overseas, first throughout East Asia, and later in other regions of the world, as a part of the Korean Wave" (Mazur, Meimaridis, and Albuquerque 2019, 175). In other words, Korean adaptations of dramas originating from outside Korea still work to the advantage of Hallyu's soft power strategy because they are now seen as Korean products and, because of this, enjoy the same cultural capital that comes with having the "K-" label attached.

The global spread of Hallyu is neither linear nor unidirectional. There are many actors involved, including various government organisations, talent agencies, production companies, and fan groups, all of which, are located in various parts of the

world. All these entities work sometimes in concert and oftentimes as autonomous entities, to create, promote, and support the music videos and serialised dramas that serve to propel the popularity of Korean cultural products. The range of actors and their activities, which are only at times coordinated, means that it is not possible to trace a neat line of activity from one actor to the next. And this is of course entirely to be expected when we are looking at a global phenomenon. The issue of adaptation highlights this with great clarity, as it makes the point that Hallyu is not just about products originating from Korea spreading outwards. Products from elsewhere can also, after having undergone the appropriate modification so as to now carry the valued "K-" indexicality, then be re-exported as part of the Korean Wave.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the other important channel for Hallyu, K-dramas, and brought out some of the key differences with K-pop. In particular, the diversity of themes and the depth of treatment that can be afforded to these themes make K-dramas even more efficacious in fostering the anthropological stance. At the same time, the absence of a more consistent and singular message means that the kind of activism from fans of K-dramas is different from that of K-pop fans.

Another important phenomenon with K-dramas is the adaptation of non-Korean dramas and conversely, the adaptation of Korean dramas by other countries. The multi-directional nature of these adaptations, rather than diluting the soft power of Hallyu, in fact strengthens it. This is because these adaptations further interest in the nuances and details of Korean society and culture, either as the source or the target of the adaptations. This, as we have also noted, is an important reminder that soft power is not a zero-sum game. On the contrary, the value of soft power is enhanced when it is seen to be benefiting as many parties as possible.

Note

1 This is an abstract strategy board game, also known as Go, between two players. The goal is to capture more territory than the opponent and it is known to be mathematically extremely complex.

6

K-FILMS

Korean Culture as Movie Spectacle

Introduction

We have seen that while K-pop and K-dramas are both important channels that have contributed significantly to the soft power success of Hallyu, there are also significant differences to be mindful of. For one, pop music videos are shorter than serialised dramas, which limits the ability of the former to present in-depth and more nuanced portrayals of Korean society, culture, and characters. At the same time, however, K-pop tends to have a more consistent and singular message that emphasises self-confidence and empowerment among its consumers. This contrasts with the more diverse set of themes that can be found in K-dramas, which is why K-pop fans are more likely than K-drama fans to intervene in politically contentious matters. That having been said, it is nevertheless the case that both K-pop and K-dramas have also been able to foster in their consumers an anthropological stance, rousing interest in and enthusiasm for things Korean.

In this chapter, we turn our attention to the third major channel for the spread of Hallyu, K-films. It is clear that K-films bear a stronger resemblance to K-dramas than to K-pop videos, given that K-films are also invested in telling a complete story albeit without having to adopt a serialised format. K-films, as is usually the case with movies, tend to range from 1 ½ hours to over 2 hours in length. This means that, like K-dramas, K-films, too, are able to explore interesting Korean themes in much greater depth than music videos. At the same time, there are significant differences between movies and serialised dramas. A common observation (Miyamoto 2021) is that television is a writer's medium while feature films are a director's medium. This is because, in television, over a number of episodes or even multiple seasons, writers are able to develop plots and characters much more thoroughly. In contrast, for a film, the attention of viewers needs to

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be maintained for a limited period of about two hours, and because of this, the director is considered more important because it is they who exercise most of the control over what ultimately gets presented. In addition, there are also particular infrastructural requirements and cultural expectations about the South Korean film industry that need to be noted. Our discussion in this chapter brings these to light and clarifies their implications for the understanding of Hallyu's soft power.

The Korean-ness of K-Films

After decades of military dictatorship, South Korea gradually transformed into a democracy, beginning with the inauguration of Roh Tae-woo as president in 1988. Despite his military background, Roh's administration focused on removing the vestiges of authoritarian rule by expanding the freedom of the press, lifting travel restrictions, and granting autonomy to the various institutions of higher learning. Roh was succeeded by Kim Young-sam in 1993, who became the country's first civilian president in 30 years. Kim's administration allowed local elections as well as parliamentary elections to be held, thus further signalling the country's move towards a democracy.

As part of this greater relaxation of authoritarian oversight, the Korean constitutional court in 1996 denounced unconstitutional censorship laws that had until then posed a significant obstacle to artistic freedom and creativity, especially because the laws prevented filmmakers and other artists from working on topics that the state might consider controversial. Youna Kim (2022, 7) describes "the New Korean Cinema of the late 1990s" as "a renaissance as filmmakers found new cultural terrains for freedom of expression, innovative forms and widely appealing commercial film culture". This meant that the South Korean film industry was able to access more funding and distribution opportunities while at the same time being less hampered by censorship laws. In this regard, it is worth noting that, in stark contrast to the days of military rule, the state nowadays

> considers the entertainment industry a key driver for the future national economy and is heavily investing in films and series from the national budget. One of its main goals is to become the world's leading exporter and importer of entertainment and media.
>
> *(A. Saxena 2022)*

The result has been that the state has not only worked to remove obstacles to creativity, it has institutionalised strong national support for locally produced films. For example, the United States of America's website on International Trade Administration (US Department of Commerce 2022) acknowledges that:

> Today, the "K-Wave" (Korean Wave or Hallyu) has gained global popularity, seen everywhere from Korean TV shows and films on media service platforms

> to pop artists' videos and games. The Korean government considers the entertainment and media industry as a key driver for the future national economy.

It goes on to note some of the specific measures that have been put in place by the South Korean state regarding the Korean film industry:

> To enter the Korean film market without complications, foreign companies must understand a number of key regulations in the market. The "Promotion of the Motion Pictures and Video Products Act" lays out the key measures governing the local film industry.
>
> - Screen Quota: In 1960, to protect the domestic film industry, the Korean government introduced the screen quota system. This quota remains in effect and stipulates that each of the country's screens must show domestic films for 73 days per year.
> - Film Rating: All films, videos and other motion picture must receive a rating from the Korean Media Rating Board (KMRB). The KMRB is the public agency that provides age-based ratings. The ratings are determined with following criteria: Theme, Sex/Nudity, Violence, Language, Horror, Drugs, and Imitable Behavior. Based on the 7 criteria, the Board rates films into 5 categories: All, PG-12, PG-15, R-18, and Restricted Rate.
>
> The Korea Communications Commission limits broadcast time for foreign films to 75 percent of all films for terrestrial television and 80 percent in cable and satellite television. Also, foreign animation may not exceed 55 percent of all animation for terrestrial television and 70 percent in cable and satellite television. OTT/VOD platforms are not subject of these quotas.

Essentially, what the South Korean state has done is impose "a screen quota" (Raymundo 2022) to protect domestic productions against the allure of foreign ones, particularly the highly popular commercial Hollywood blockbusters. Another measure is the use of film ratings, which allows the state to encourage artistic creativity and, at the same time, avoid having to censor – an important factor in the soft power of Hallyu that we return to in the latter half of this chapter.

To ensure that there is consistent national focus on supporting Korean films, the state launched the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) in 1999 and tasked it with the responsibility of "stimulating and protecting their domestic film industry" (Raymundo 2022). The KOFIC comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and the latter has the goal of supporting the South Korean film industry both nationally and internationally. In this regard, it is worth noting that the KOFIC, in response to the COVID pandemic, provided a $17.8 million (KW19.95 billion) stimulus package (Noh 2021):

> The government-funded support and promotion agency's first wave of calls for submissions will see $7.37m earmarked for special film programmes at cinemas to aid exhibitors and distributors, after a fall of almost 74% in admissions last year as a result of the virus crisis.
>
> Continuing a similar programme launched last year, $3.14m is allocated for production of new media moving images, intended to support film production

The result of these measures, among many others, as Roll (2021) points out, is that there have consequently been "immense opportunities and independence [for] the young and vibrant generation of Korea to express newer and bolder ideas through cinema and music. Many influential film makers rose during this period". Dinamarque (2021, italics added) furthermore suggests that the fuel for this creativity came from oftentimes illegal exposure to commercial as well as arthouse films during the years of military dictatorship:

> Filmmakers who grew up during the military dictatorship had long consumed American cinema and more artistic Korean films. And that mix of influences led them to create many blockbusters.
>
> *Their success was in creating films with actual Korean themes and plots*. The result was that they garnered rave reviews and top grossing.

As Dinamarque (2021) notes, the films created were not intended to downplay their "Koreanness"; on the contrary, they focused on "actual Korean themes and plots", such as *Shiri* and *JSA: Joint Security Area*, both of which focused on the often tense relationship between South and North Korea. In the late 1990s, the Korean film industry began to expand into other genres such as horror and dramas, and romantic comedies emerged in 2001 with *My Sassy Girl* (Dinamarque 2021). This led to the current diversity of themes and genres that can be found in K-films, with many of the movies enjoying critical and commercial success internationally. Some notable examples include the following:

- Park Chan-wook's *Old Boy* (2003): a mystery thriller that won the Grand Prix at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival
- Kim Ki-duk's *3-Iron* (2004): this was a romantic drama co-produced between South Korea and Japan. It was awarded the FIPRESCI Prize at the Venice International Film Festival, the Best Screenplay by the Korean Association of Film Critics Awards, and FIPRESCI Grand Prix at the San Sebastian Film Festival, among others
- Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013): a post-apocalyptic science fiction actioner that was a South Korean-Czech co-production. About 80% of the dialogue is in English. Its cast comprised Korean, British, and American actors. The film's

commercial success led to the release, in 2020, of an American television series of the same name
- Yeon Sang-ho's *Train to Busan* (2016): an action horror movie that became a global commercial success, in the United States, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. It was also the highest-grossing film of the year in South Korea
- Lee Won-tae's *The Gangster, the Cop, the Devil* (2019): an action thriller that was screened at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival as well as the 2019 Fantasia International Film Festival. An American remake from Sylvester Stallone's Balboa Productions is in the works

The international acclaim enjoyed by many Korean films is noted by Balmont (2020):

> Despite a tendency to frequently place as "runners up" at some of the world's biggest competitions, films of the South Korean New Wave, or "Hallyuwood" (with "Hallyu" roughly translating as "flow from Korea") are no stranger to global acclaim. The South Korean cinema renaissance has seen directors like Kim Jee-woon and Park Chan-wook pick up countless international awards, while native acting stars like Choi Min-sik, Ma Dong-seok and Lee Byung-hun have capitalised with successful ventures into Hollywood.

Of course, even a tendency to place "runners up" is already no mean feat. It points to the consistent quality of Korean films and the international prestige they enjoy on a regular basis. It is also worth noting that – unlike K-pop, where the songs, music videos, message of empowerment, and even the process of identifying and training pop stars are recognised as parts of the K-pop phenomenon, and unlike K-dramas, where the serialised format of 16 episodes in a single season (usually without any expectation of a second or third season) and where the themes and locales are often distinctly Korean in nature – K-films tend to be much more internationalised. That is, while there are obviously K-films that are produced, directed, and acted by Koreans, there are also films that may have many non-Korean actors, that may include a significant amount of non-Korean dialogue, and that involve co-production with non-Korean film companies. *Snowpiercer*, listed above, is just one of a growing number of examples. According to one news report (Yonhap 2021), the horror film *The Medium* is a South Korean-Thai collaboration, *Broker* is a film by the Japanese director and writer Hirozaku Kore-eda that features Korean actors and Korean dialogue, and the Korean comedy *Longdi* was produced in part by the Kazakh-Russian filmmaker Timur Bekmambetov. The same report goes on to note:

> It is not new for Korean filmmakers, especially prominent directors, to participate in big-budget film projects led by American and British film studios.

> …
>
> But in recent years, an increasing number of Korean filmmakers are playing a leading role in developing and producing film projects, recruiting foreign directors and actors.

This observable and relatively recent tendency in K-films towards international collaborations where non-Korean production companies, as well as foreign actors and directors, may all be involved in the filmmaking raises the issue of what makes K-films recognisably Korean. This is an important issue because as we saw (Chapter 3), Korean products are sometimes mistaken as Chinese or Japanese, and this means that if the products are well-received, credit goes to the wrong country, thus undermining Hallyu's soft power goal.

One might then be tempted to ask the following question: what puts the "K" in K-films? In other words, what makes K-films particularly Korean? To frame the question in such a manner, however, is problematic because it misconstrues the nature of Hallyu soft power and its success. It subscribes to an essentialism, assuming that there must be some consistently identifiable trait of "Koreanness" whose presence then makes some films, and not others, "K-films". Rather – and this again speaks to the value of a sociolinguistic perspective on soft power – the way to ask the question is in terms of indexicality: how is it that some films and not others might be indexed as part of the Korean Wave?

Recall (Chapter 3) that indexicality highlights that meanings are not static but are instead fluid. And the idea of an indexical field (Eckert 2008) is intended to capture the fact that a feature, such as "Korean", can be associated with a range of related meanings. Thinking in terms of indexicality allows us to then see that what counts as "Korean" is neither a single feature nor even necessarily a stable or consistent set of features. There is a range of features that constitute the fluid indexical field of "Korean", and this applies as well to K-films.

Let us begin with relatively clearcut and unambiguous cases, where the content of a film is Korean, that is, where the dialogue is in Korean, and themes and settings, too, are identifiably Korean. In this regard, K-films would then not be too dissimilar from K-dramas. The much-lauded *Parasite* is a good example of highlighting class inequalities in Korean society.

Another theme that is commonly found in K-films involves Korean nationalism. In addition to the aforementioned *JSA: Joint Security Area*, there is *Silmido* (2003), which is based on a true story involving Unit 684, a group of soldiers who were assigned to assassinate Kim Il-sung, the founder of North Korea. And *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* (2004) is about two brothers who are conscripted into the South Korean army when the Korean War breaks out.

Yet another common theme has to do with familial relations. Some examples include *Ode to My Father* (2014), which follows the life of young boy from the beginning of the Korean War as he attempts to look after his family, *A Brand New*

Life (2009), which tells the story of a young girl who is abandoned by her father at an orphanage, and *Family in the Bubble* (2017), which portrays the misfortunes of a once-affluent family as a result of the Asian financial crisis and shame felt by the young daughter. A more recent example would be *The Apartment with Two Women* (2022), which was funded by the Korean Academy of Film Arts. It centres around a mother-daughter relationship. Jung Bo-ram, who plays the daughter, has said of the film (A. Saxena 2022):

> "All mothers and daughters living in South Korea can relate to this story. I thought that this movie is not specific to South Korea but it contains various emotions that you can feel about the relationship of any mother-daughter," Jung told DW.
>
> "When people watch this movie, they can relate with their own lives."

Jung's comment succinctly captures the reason why K-films are globally successful as a component of Hallyu. The films often deal with universalist themes. But because they present these themes through the specific lens of Korean history and culture, they are able to create interest in many different aspects of Korean life. Stancetaking is a critical aspect of presentation. There is no such thing as a completely neutral stance. Even where the stance taken is avowedly objective or dispassionate (as might be the case when judges decide on a case), such neutrality is itself an ideologically institutionalised stance. Thus, in these examples, the presentation of themes, settings, and characters is ultimately largely sympathetic to or, at the very least, not intended as damningly critical of South Korean society or culture. This, of course, is what we have been emphasising in our discussion of the anthropological stance where global interest in Korean behaviour and values is forged. There is a sense of intrigue about the kinds of competitive pressures that are common in Korean society. These include the attempts to reconcile tensions between the still deeply entrenched Confucian emphases on rank and (male) seniority with modernity's calls against sexist and patriarchal attitudes, including attitudes that stigmatise unwed mothers who may feel they have no other option but to put their babies up for adoption, and the stresses that come with living in a country that is still technically at war with its neighbour to the north. Of course, stancetaking involves a triangle so that it is not just the stance taken by the filmmaker towards the theme of their film that is important, but also the stance of the film viewers. In this regard, a skilled filmmaker is not only able to draw their viewers into the world they have created and appreciate the themes they wish to present, but the filmmaker is also able to get the viewers to empathise with the points of view that they hope to convey.

A less unambiguous case might be *Broker*, which, as already mentioned, is a film by the Japanese director and writer Hirozaku Kore-eda though it features Korean actors and Korean dialogue, is set in Korea, and even has a score by a Korean composer. Kore-eda originally researched the Japanese adoption system

of using a baby box but changed the setting of his film upon discovering that baby boxes were more popular in Korea (Brzeski 2022). In various interviews, Kore-eda also stated that he was deeply impressed by the acting of specific Korean actors, having seen their works, and wanted to work with them, including Song Kang-ho, who was cast as one of the leads (Cho 2022). This is an important and relevant point because it indicates that Kore-eda himself has been caught up in the spread of Hallyu. His involvement, then, is a testament to Hallyu's success. This is why, even if the filmmaker is not Korean, as with the case of *Broker* and its Japanese director-writer, the largely sympathetic portrayal of outcasts of Korean society comes across effectively, so much so that the film was selected to compete for the Palme d'Or at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival, where it won the Best Actor Award for the Korean lead actor Song Kang-ho and the Ecumenical Jury Award. The latter is particularly interesting because the objective of the award is to "honour works of artistic quality which witnesses to the power of film to reveal the mysterious depths of human beings through what concerns them, their hurts and failings as well as their hopes" (Ecumenical Jury 2012). In this case, then, the jury for the Ecumenical Award comprises the third component of the stance triangle, with the film itself and the filmmakers making up the other two. That is, the filmmakers are presenting a particular stance about (in this case) those who are involved in the business of selling abandoned babies, and this stance is conveyed to the jury via the film.

These considerations, too, apply to the 2020 film *Minari*, directed by the American filmmaker Lee Isaac Chung. Chung's family came to America from South Korea, and the film is a semi-autobiographical presentation of his own upbringing as it focuses on a family of South Koreans trying to make a living in the United States in the 1980s. Among the stars of the film are Steven Yeun, a South Korean-born American actor, and Youn Yuh-jung, a highly established South Korean actress. Again, to debate whether *Minari* should be categorised as a "K-film" is to be caught up in a narrow question about classification – a question that becomes even more pointless when we keep in mind that "K-film" is hardly intended as a seriously rigid theoretical concept. Rather, the more pertinent point here is that there is no doubt *Minari* has been good for the spread of Hallyu. It won the US Dramatic Grand Jury Prize and the US Dramatic Audience Award at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival. Youn became the first Korean to win an Academy Award for acting when she was named the Best Supporting Actress at the 93rd Academy Awards. Even the controversy that resulted when, at the 78th Golden Globe Awards, *Minari* won the Best Foreign Language Film as opposed to Best Motion Picture – Drama was useful. The Golden Globes made the decision on the basis that any film with more than 50% of its dialogue in a language other than English would be considered "foreign". This created fervent debates over whether, for a film to be considered "American", it must be mainly or even only English-speaking. In other words, the theme of *Minari*, about South Korean immigrants in America, the critical acclaim for the film and, in particular, for the South Korean

actress Youn, as well as the heated discussions about whether it should be considered an "American" or a "foreign" film – these all served to heighten global awareness and appreciation of South Korean filmic talents.

Finally, consider *Ajoomma* (2022), which has been described as the first Singaporean-Korean co-production. Directed by Singaporean He Shuming and starring Singaporean actress Hong Hui Fang as well as South Korean actors Kang Hyung-seok and Jung Dong-hwan, the film garnered four nominations at the 59th Golden Horse Awards, with Hong being the first Singaporean to be nominated for Best Leading Actress. *Ajoomma* made its premiere at the 2022 Busan International Film Festival and it was selected as the Singaporean entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 95th Academy Awards. So, as a film *from* a specific country in order to qualify for entry into competition, *Ajoomma* is officially a Singaporean production just as *Minari* was officially an American one. Nevertheless, this should not detract from the fact that soft power is not a zero-sum game, and that being a Singaporean production does not in any way mean that the power of Hallyu has been weakened or undermined in this instance. This is especially the case when we consider that the plot of *Ajoomma*, Korean for "middle-aged woman", centres around a Singaporean widow who is obsessed with K-dramas and whose vacation in South Korea leads to a life-changing adventure. The plot, in other words, explicitly acknowledges the power of Hallyu given that the action is based on the fact that the protagonist is a huge fan of K-dramas. There is, perhaps, no better demonstration of international soft power success than when that very same soft power becomes the plot point of productions from other countries. And that soft power of Hallyu is further enhanced when He, in an interview, explains the very personal inspiration for his film (Hidzir 2022):

> **We've read that the story of *Ajoomma* was inspired by your mom. How did that come about?**
>
> My mom is an avid fan of Korean dramas and I was also observing how she's navigating a new stage in her life when her kids are grown up and leading their own lives. I thought that was something a lot of us can relate to. The film and Auntie herself, were inspired by the mothers of my cast and crew.
>
> **Do you watch any K-Dramas yourself? If so, what are your favorites?**
>
> Of course. I just started on *Little Women*. I love *The World of The Married*, *Crash Landing On You*, and *Kingdom*.

Interviews such as these are epitexts (see Chapter 2), that is, accompanying discourses produced by artists to serve to contextualise their works. In He's case, he makes it clear that *Ajoomma* is not simply a film about a woman who is a K-drama fan. The protagonist is based on his mother and the mothers of his cast and crew, and his own interest in K-dramas. *Ajoomma*, then, is simultaneously

a Hallyu film (in the sense that it has Korean actors and a Korean setting) but it is also a film about Hallyu (since the protagonist is a fan of K-dramas who visits Korea).

We can think of terms like "Hallyu", "Korean Wave", "K-pop", "K-dramas", "K-films", and "Korean" as forming an indexical field of related meanings such as "cool", "creative", "fandom", "fashionable", as well as more negative notions such as "exploitation", "pressure", and "aggression". The meanings of these terms are

> not precise or fixed but rather constitute a field of potential meanings – an indexical field, or constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable. The field is fluid, and each new activation has the potential to change the field by building on ideological connections.
>
> *(Eckert 2008, 454)*

The fluidity and potential for change are inevitable because as the terms get used by individuals or organisations, such as fans, performers, filmmakers, journalists, and government officials, to name just a few, they will undergo shifts in meanings that are sometimes subtle and sometimes more dramatic because "there is necessarily a process of construal in context in the process of indexical change" (Eckert 2008, 463). As Eckert explains:

> It is in the links between the individual and the macrosociological category that we must seek the social practices in which people fashion their ways of speaking, moving their styles this way or that as they move their personae through situations from moment to moment, from day to day, and through the life course … In this process, they do not simply use social meaning – they produce and reproduce it.
>
> *(2008, 463)*

This is why the internationalisation of K-films means that even a film helmed by a non-Korean director can be considered part of Hallyu. The indexical field that a term like "Hallyu" participates in is not fixed: variations and changes are part and parcel of how the meanings of terms evolve as they are used in different contexts by different actors.

Korean Auteurs

In this section, we give specific focus to Korean directors because these filmmakers have, perhaps more so than Korean actors, become internationally well-known and regarded. Their role in the spread of Hallyu therefore deserves special attention, and for this, we need to consider the intersection between auteur theory and artistic citizenship.

To see why a focus on directors is appropriate, let us first note that the presence of Korean actors in Hollywood movies – however famous these actors themselves may be – does not make those movies "Korean". For example, the Korean actor Park Seo-joon has recently been cast in a superhero movie *Captain Marvel 2: The Marvels*, a movie that is part of the highly successful Marvel Cinematic Universe. His casting has led to intense speculation as to which character he might be playing, and his public relations team has issued the following statement (*Times of India* 2021):

> Park Seo Joon's team said, "We thank the many people who have shown interest and support for Park Seo Joon as he takes on this new challenge. We are well aware that many people are curious about the name of the film in which he will be appearing, his character, the filming location, and his filming schedule, but we plan to reveal the details of the movie at a later date."

And Bae Doona is expected to star in the science fiction film *Rebel Moon*, alongside Charlie Hunnam, Djimon Hounsou, and Ray Fisher. This marks her "return to Hollywood" (Conran 2022) as she had previously acted in *Cloud Atlas* (2012), *Jupiter Ascending* (2015), and *Sense8* (2015–18).

This does not mean that the presence of Korean actors in non-Korean productions is irrelevant to the spread of Hallyu. On the contrary, the success of Hallyu has opened the way for Korean actors to be part of Hollywood productions. However, it is also the case that Hollywood's appreciation of the value and impact of Hallyu means that these productions, too, are seen to benefit from casting prominent Korean actors, given their strong global presence and fanbase (Kwak 2021). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that this casting of Korean actors does not turn Hollywood productions into K-films.

To better understand what is going on here, we have to appreciate that the word "Hollywood", as a general term for American cinematic studio productions, carries a certain kind of indexicality. "Hollywood" is not necessarily associated with specific genres or even specific studios. Rather, as a label, it indexes commercially oriented and (usually) lavishly produced movies originating from the United States. Hence, Bae's "return to Hollywood" (above) describes her involvement in such productions. The entry of Korean actors into such productions is thus entry into "Hollywood". K-films, as yet, do not have that kind of indexicality, where a specific word or label conveys a globally understood film industry originating from South Korea. It is true that "Hallyuwood" is slowly becoming more commonly used (Byun 2012; Farrar 2010). However, usage of this term is still relatively nascent and it is often used as a nod to "Hollywood" – to indicate the pace with which the Korean film industry is catching up with Hollywood in terms of quality of production – rather than as a descriptor for something independent or quite different. The latter is arguably the case with "Bollywood", which not only describes the film industry that is based in Mumbai but also typically refers

to the kind of film known as "masala films", which freely mix multiple genres. This issue of the indexicality of the term "Hollywood" and the (as yet) lack of something similar or equivalent as regards "Hallyuwood" will resurface when we discuss the notion of auteurs and auteur theory.

Auteur theory is by no means uncontroversial because film critics and scholars remain divided over its merits. That having been said, we will see, however, that the label "auteur" has been used quite commonly in relation to various Korean directors, not least because it serves the marketing purpose of indexing individual directors and their works as being worthy of prestige, and this, in turn, contributes to furthering the soft power of Hallyu.

Let us first briefly note why auteur theory is controversial as a conceptual framework for understanding the artistic contributions of the director. To characterise a director as an auteur is to claim that the director has a distinctive artistic approach to filmmaking, one that may manifest itself in various ways, such as themes that recur across their films or a distinctive visual style that immediately identifies the film as being the work of that director, or both (Bazin 2018). For a director to be able to consistently manifest that kind of personal thematic focus or visual style across their oeuvre and thus be considered an auteur, a prerequisite would be a high level of control over the entire process of filmmaking. It is not unexpected for auteur directors to write, edit, and even act in their own films. Even when the story being told happens to be an adaptation, auteurs are able to infuse the script with their own personal style. In Hollywood, two directors who can be described as auteurs are Quentin Tarantino and Wes Anderson (Holshausen 2017; Das 2021). Tarantino is known to not only direct but also select the music that accompanies his films and write the screenplay. A hallmark of his dialogues is the use of lengthy discussions and social observations, all peppered with profanity. Anderson's distinctiveness lies mainly in the visual quality of his films, particularly in his use of colour and emphasis on symmetry when framing scenes. And while his stories are not necessarily fantastical in nature, he imbues them with a sense of eccentricity and whimsy, so much so that he, along with Charlie Kaufman and Spike Jonze, is seen as one of the key figures of American Eccentric Cinema.

Auteur theory is controversial because, to its critics (Kael 1963; Rohe 2018; Sellars 2007; Staples 1966), it fails to recognise the complex and highly collaborative nature of filmmaking, where many different groups of individuals such as composers, cinematographers, and crew – each with highly specialised technical and artistic skills –all contribute in various ways to the final product. By elevating a single individual to "auteur" status, auteur theory essentially dismisses the contributions of these others. Another reason is that judgements of auteur status would require a full body of work, in which case, auteurship can only be bestowed retrospectively rather than while the director is still productive. Finally, there is the problem that even poor films might be considered valuable simply because the director happened to be already recognised as an auteur. This final point suggests that auteur status might have a marketing or branding value, something that has

been noted by Brody (2014). For Brody (2014), this liberal use of the term suggests that "the auteur's name seems more like a marketing strategy, the selling of a brand, than the reflection of an artistic practice". This too common and loose use of the term is problematic for Brody because:

> every great movie changes the world and the viewer, and opens new possibilities for the art form and for life itself. Most movies aren't at that level of achievement. The notion of the auteur, of the director as creator, isn't the universal state of the art; it's an exceptional achievement. The vast fund of information and analysis that invigorates the study of movies, and the increasingly rich critical discussion that's fostered online and carries over into public events, propels directors to the fore but also obscures their individual visions. In the process, it risks undermining the conditions for their appreciation.
>
> *(Brody 2014)*

Brody is not dismissing the value of the auteur concept nor is he questioning its coherence. Rather, his concern is that the overuse of the term "auteur" undermines the fact that it should be "an exceptional achievement". This overuse risks undermining the credibility of the concept. Note that Brody is also not dismissing non-auteur works as lacking in value or artistic merit; his point is simply that good or even great filmmakers do not and should not automatically get to be called auteurs.

Keeping the foregoing in mind, we now see that when describing South Korean directors, the term "auteur" tends to be quite commonly used and in some cases, it is used quite loosely though there are uses that are also more considered. Regardless, we want to emphasise that the question of whether individual Korean directors deserve the label of "auteur" should not detract from the undisputed quality of their films. For example, Yim Soon-rye has been described as "one of the leading female auteurs to emerge in modern Korean cinema" (*Korean Screen* 2022), on the basis that her films, mainly independent films rather than commercial blockbusters, usually deal with relationships between humans and animals. In this case, the basis for her auteurism is the thematic consistency of her works, the problems with auteur theory itself notwithstanding.

Likewise, in a case study, Jeong (2016, 361) focuses on "four contemporary South Korean auteurs: Park Chan-wook (b. 1963), Kim Ki-duk (b. 1960), Lee Chang-dong (b. 1954), and Bong Joon-ho (b. 1969)" as members of a politically active student movement in the 1980s. In the discussion, Jeong (2016, 361) is careful to identify "various auteuristic themes" such as the losses faced by social minorities, class conflicts, vengeance, and the redemption of ghostly figures, that are argued to be associated with the works of the individual directors.

In contrast, an article about Park Chan-wook's newest film, *Decision to Leave*, describes him as a "South Korean auteur" (*France 24* 2022). No reason or explanation is given for ascribing auteur status to Park beyond the fact that he is a highly successful and accomplished filmmaker. Even more problematic is Brzeski

(2019), who uses the term in the title of his article, where he focuses on "South Korea's next wave of film auteurs". Brzeski does reference already established directors such as Bong Joon-ho and Park Chan-wook. But he also aims to identify "breakthrough talents" such as Na Hong-jin, who made his first entry into Cannes' main competition in 2016 with the horror movie *The Wailing*, and Yeong Sang-ho, whose zombie thriller *Train to Busan* was a commercial hit. Aside from the matter of whether being an accomplished filmmaker suffices for that individual to be called an "auteur" (as with Bong Joon-ho and Park Chan-wook), there are also questions about the coherence of making reference to a "next wave" of auteurs since this raises one of the key criticisms of auteur theory: that the label can only be used retrospectively and after a sufficiently clear body of work has been established. Nevertheless, the ready use of "auteur", notwithstanding the question of whether such a label is deserved, speaks to how well-regarded South Korean filmmakers are globally.

And it is high regard that is more pertinent to the issue of soft power, as it provides South Korean filmmakers with an important international platform for stancetaking, not just within the filmic worlds that they create, but also at, say, acceptance speeches and press conferences. One prominent example comes from the acceptance speech by Bong Joon-ho at the Golden Globes when *Parasite* won for best foreign-language film (J. Chang 2020):

> "Once you overcome the 1-inch-tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films," said "Parasite" director Bong Joon Ho as he claimed the prize for foreign-language film. In one perfectly barbed sentence (translated into English by his interpreter, filmmaker Sharon Choi), Bong called out the American moviegoing public's perceived aversion to subtitles.

Two things are worth noting about Bong's speech. One, as an epitext, Bong is obviously expressing gratitude that audiences were prepared to "overcome the 1-inch-tall barrier of subtitles" in order to appreciate and enjoy his film, thus leading to its overwhelming success. Two, in stating that subtitles can actually open audiences to "so many more amazing films", Bong is careful to not make a claim for only South Korean films to be more widely viewed and appreciated. He is speaking on behalf of all non-English language films – and this magnanimity enhances rather than dilutes the soft power of Hallyu. Bong's "crusade" to get audiences to be more appreciative of and comfortable with non-English films continued at the Academy Awards the following year when he presented the Best Director award (Rivera 2021, italics added):

> Presenting the 2021 award for Best Director, Bong, in a segment taped from a theater in Seoul, introduced the nominees in Korean. He spoke at length with no subtitles, alone in the theater for a few moments before his translator Sharon Choi appeared in frame to deliver his statement in English — in which he asked

> this year's nominees to define directing in about 20 seconds before announcing the winner of this year's Best Director trophy, Chloé Zhao.
>
> *It was a subversive moment in an experimental ceremony, a relaxed flex from Bong that furthered his quiet fight against Hollywood biases that box out foreign-language cinema as something other.*

This time, because Bong was delivering his speech from Seoul, he felt it appropriate to use Korean – and tellingly, without subtitling or translation concessions to his international audience. The portions with subtitles were in fact prerecorded sequences of photo clips of the nominees, a demonstration of the seamless editing of "live" and recorded sections. Bong's "relaxed flex" and "quiet fight" are confident expressions of a willingness to use the soft power of the Korean Wave, in this case, that of K-films and his own personal artistic success, to work against the hegemonic status enjoyed by Hollywood films, where the English language dominates to the point that non-English films often face an uphill battle in finding viewers.

Bong's emphasis on valuing non-English language cinematic experiences reinforces the point about artistic citizenship (Chapter 2). The value and acclaim enjoyed by Bong's *Parasite* are very much dependent on audiences being willing to engage with subtitles and to be open to films other than those produced by Hollywood – a point that his compatriot Park Chan-wook is also appreciative of when he "credits streaming platforms for the recent explosion of global interest in Korean culture" and notes that the "resistance to subtitles has decreased quite a lot" (Liu 2022). Bong is acutely aware and grateful for this, and hence, in the course of pursuing his crusade, he is speaking both as a South Korean filmmaker but also, more generally, as a non-Western filmmaker who wants to see a greater acceptance of films from across the globe. As Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016, 6) emphasise, artistic practices are also inescapably social practices and the artist who is conscious of their role as citizen in a community acts in a way that expresses their ethical concerns. In Bong's case, this ethical concern has to do with combatting the prejudices against non-English cinema.

Soft Power and Creative Autonomy in the Korean Film Industry

The global recognition and acclaim enjoyed by K-films is in no small part due to the high degree of creative autonomy enjoyed by the Korean film industry. And this, in turn, is largely because the state prefers not to engage in censorship. Instead, specific audiences are prohibited (usually on the basis of age) from viewing certain films, depending on the themes that may be featured (Raymundo 2022):

> Creativity is encouraged in Korea's film industry, and it shows in their approach to censorship; Kim Ki Duk's *The Isle* features sado-masochistic themes, while

> Park Chul-Soo's *The Green Chair* features explicit sex scenes. There's also examples of extremes in Kim Jee Woon's *I Saw the Devil*. And who could forget Park Chan Wook's *Oldboy*, which featured incest themes and lead actor Choi Min Sik eating a live octopus on camera. These films would have been banned or heavily censored in some countries, but not in South Korea.
>
> Their approach is that instead of censoring or cutting the scenes out, they allow it to be preserved the way the director intended, and just depend on the KMRB (Korean Media Ratings Board)'s system to ensure that they won't be seen by impressionable people of a certain age.

This is a point that O'Neill (2022) also emphasises, when he describes the global success of K-films as signalling a "modern South Korean auteur cinema". O'Neill's (2022) use of the term "auteur" aside, there is validity in his claim that South Korean filmmakers are largely allowed and even encouraged to explore ideas and themes without having to worry about the expectations of a studio system. Thus, he notes the following:

> Unburdened by a Hollywood studio system that dictates what can and can't be done, South Korean filmmakers are generally allowed to execute their own vision without heavy-handed interference.
>
> South Korea has produced some of the best and most original films made thus far in the 21st century—and Western filmmakers and audiences have started recognizing South Korea's prowess as those films increasingly break through language barriers and stiff cultural mindsets …
>
> While Western cinema is now dominated by big budgets for famous IP-driven movies, South Korean ideals have given total freedom to their filmmakers—and showcase the abilities of those who break out of it.

This is, of course, the "arm's-length" principle (see Chapter 3), where the state aims to support the creative industries but to do so without interfering in the creative processes themselves. The "arm's-length" principle is critical to the soft power success of Hallyu. It allows audiences and critics the world over to enjoy and acclaim the works of Korean filmmakers without at the same time being seen as legitimising the state – which would be the case if it were to happen that K-films were perceived as being the results of state intervention such that they were essentially government mouthpieces. It is because of the "arm's-length" principle that individual Korean directors can be held up as "auteurs" (again, the controversy over the validity of the label aside) because they are seen as artists who present very specific, individual, and personal visions in their works. This is because the principle ensures that filmmakers are given freedom of expression and their works are not subject to the dictates of the state, where the state might act as an arbiter of

taste or worse yet, as shaping the filmic contents themselves. The latter situation occurs when films and other works of art become propaganda. As Plocki (2010) points out:

> Whilst propaganda has long been synonymous with furthering ideologies through speeches, writing, and reporting, it also has a powerful history of intentionally manipulating visual art to express political sentiments.
>
> … Whilst anti-Communist propaganda was mainly embedded in movies, books and magazines, propaganda posters were nevertheless essential tools for the American government to advertise the American ideals and values that were alleged to be at risk.

As Plocki's comments make clear, once seen as propaganda, it becomes harder for the appreciation of works of art to be separated from their ideological function of promulgating the political views and values of an external agency, that is, views and values that are not necessarily those of the artist themselves.

The importance of this point for Hallyu's soft power is that, so long as the "arm's-length" principle is considered to be respected, this means that any endorsement of the works of the Korean filmmakers is not the same as endorsing the political views and activities of the South Korean state itself. This, we cannot emphasise enough, is extremely crucial to the success of Hallyu as a form of soft power. However, there has not always been respect for the principle, even after the country emerged from military dictatorship. President Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) was willing to refrain from intervening in creative endeavours, adopting the "arm's-length principle", which removed censorship and bans and disconnected funding from content (S. Nathan Park 2020):

> This "support but do not intervene" mantra came to be known as the "arm's-length principle"—the guiding doctrine for South Korea's cultural policy to this day. Under this principle, the Kim administration focused on promoting freedom in creation and exchange, establishing the legal infrastructure to protect artists' right to intellectual property, and providing financial subsidies without reference to the contents of the art. The administration abolished the approval process for movies that effectively acted as censorship. The ban on Japan's pop culture products was lifted, allowing movies, TV shows, comic books, and music to travel freely across the strait. Initially, some feared that the superior Japanese product would decimate the Korean market—but the result was the opposite, as Korean dramas and K-pop began to flourish in the Japanese market instead.

However, the "arm's-length principle" was not adhered to by Presidents Lee Myung-bak (2008–13) and Park Geun-hye (2013–17), who did blacklist and

defund artists that their respective administrations were unhappy with (S. Nathan Park 2020):

> Fortunately, however, such attempts to subjugate the arts were never normalized. When the blacklist was revealed in 2016, it became one of the flash points for the candlelight protests that brought down Park's presidency through impeachment.

Park (2020) makes the very important point that state control over artistic creativity was "never normalized" in South Korea, and that it even contributed to the downfall of one of the country's presidents. At the same time that this "arm's-length principle" made the artistic content more appealing to consumers (because it was seen as being inspired by the artists themselves rather than being commissioned or controlled by the state), it also served to make the South Korean state itself more likeable or attractive (because it was seen as demonstrating respect for artistic integrity). The significance of these two factors cannot be understated. This is because, taken together, they serve to distance Hallyu from any accusations that it is actually state propaganda being exported globally. Instead, they bolster the idea of Hallyu products as creative endeavours that have managed to successfully combine artistic values with commercial appeal.

Conclusion

Over the preceding two chapters and the present one, we have argued that K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films serve to foster not only interest in music, serialised shows, and movies, but also broader interest in Korean culture and society. We have shown that Hallyu works as soft power because it is a form of artistic citizenship where the various actors in the creative industries (singers, actors, filmmakers, and talent organisations) are consistently aware of the need to enhance the country's image. This is not the same as blindly praising the country. This is because incisive criticisms, especially when these are seen to be genuine artistic expressions of concern about problems with Korean society and its history, help products such as its films become globally appreciated. Because the creative industries are seen to be acting autonomously instead of having their works be subjected to state censorship and approval, the appeal of the artistic activities and products is enhanced.

Particularly in the case of K-films, this has even encouraged non-Korean filmmakers and production companies to enthusiastically work with the Korean film industry. The result, as this chapter has also shown, is that K-films are becoming much more internationalised and such a development, rather than weakening or diluting the soft power of Hallyu, has the opposite effect of contributing further to its success.

7

BEYOND THE THREE KS

Consuming Korea

Introduction

Thus far, we have established the effectiveness of K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films as key channels of Hallyu's soft power, creating positive affect about the quality and artistry of South Korea's creative industries, and fostering interest in Korean culture and society. And while we have had occasion to note how this interest in Korean culture and society is not limited to just the consumption of the immediate products of the three Ks (music, serials, and movies), it is now time for us to give specific attention to consumption that goes beyond these three channels.

We begin by briefly revisiting the state's role in the spread of Hallyu. While we have been careful not to over-emphasise the role of the state – after all, it is precisely the artistic freedom afforded by the state to the creative industries that make the products of the three Ks appealing – we will now see how its support goes beyond the provision of funding and infrastructure to actively contribute to the wider promotion of Korea and Korean culture.

Following this, we turn our attention to language learning, that is, interest in the Korean language. In Chapter 4, we noted that interest in K-pop can lead to an expansion of a fan's lexicon as they, with the encouragement of fellow fans, become aware of some of the more commonly used words and phrases as well as their meanings. We will see how such initial interest in specific words can lead to a more general desire to learn the Korean language. We then move on to consider the broader effects of Hallyu, giving particular attention to food, tourism, and fashion. Throughout our discussion, a recurrent theme that we will emphasise is that of consumption and how the consumption is fuelled by affect.

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The State and Soft Power: Connecting the Three Ks and More

Recall that one example of the state's support for Hallyu is the *Hallyu! The Korean Wave* exhibition at the V&A South Kensington from 24 September 2022 to 25 June 2023 (Chapter 1). The exhibition is supported by the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism as well as the South Korean luxury car manufacturer Genesis.

In the book that officially accompanies the exhibition are some remarks by Lee Soo-man about the state's Hallyu strategy. Lee is a South Korean music executive and record producer, known mainly as the founder of SM Entertainment, considered one of the pioneers responsible for K-pop's global success and listed by Billboard as among the most influential figures in the music industry (Billboard Staff 2020). Lee suggests that (Adams 2022):

> the Korean entertainment industry has created a new paradigm for cultural export. In the past he suggests, effective "soft power" – notably, the cultural exports of Britain and the US – followed on from economic empire building. The Korean model, by contrast, was "culture first, economics second": export the idea of "Korean cool" and watch Samsung and LG, Hyundai and Kia reap the benefits.

Lee's remarks cohere well with our discussions in this book. We have seen that the effectiveness of Hallyu as a form of soft power relies critically on the perception that the country's cultural products – films, videos, and serialised dramas – are artistically authentic rather than having that authenticity compromised by state interference. The government does not dictate what goes into any of these. That is, no matter how artistically flawed or meritorious these products might be, they are at least expressions of the creative industries, expressions that reflect the to-varying-degrees commercial and socio-political impulses of the performers and their affiliated organisations. They are not expressions of a state's attempt at controlling creativity in order to serve its own political agenda, short of national security concerns. It is this perception of authenticity and creative freedom that makes possible the exportation of "Korean cool",[1] with the concomitant emphasis on "culture first, economics second".

Another point worth noting is this. What the state also contributes, as seen in the V&A example, is a more multi-faceted approach, one that gives emphasis to K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films, as well as other aspects of Korean culture. The V&A Hallyu exhibition is by no means exceptional. As we already noted (Chapter 3), the Korean Cultural Centre in Rome, Italy, showcases historical Korean artefacts and architecture, as well as the Hangul alphabet. And the Korean Cultural Centre in Paris, France, displays a video featuring Korean dishes as well as traditional Korean attire for visitors to try on.[2] This is an important reminder, then, that the South Korean state's role in the spread of Hallyu should not be seen as being merely parasitic on the successes of the creative industries. Such an assessment would be unfair. The state does make a significant and active contribution

by highlighting the collective achievements of the three Ks as well as by bringing the public's attention to other facets of Korean culture. In this way, the state works to promote a much more rounded image of Korean culture than would have been the case if the Hallyu soft power strategy had been left entirely up to the various cultural industries. The latter situation would have likely meant that each of the three Ks would have focused on promoting their own products and activities. And it is questionable if aspects of Korean culture that may not have any ostensible commercial value, such as Korean orthography and Korean ancient architecture, would have been promoted as well. With the foregoing in mind, it then becomes understandable why a car manufacturer like Genesis would want to be part of the Hallyu exhibition. There is every reason for the manufacturer to believe that it can benefit from the goodwill and interest of visitors to the exhibition, even if these visitors may have had little or no familiarity with the brand.

Of course, the crossover associations between the three Ks and the forging of interests in Korean cuisine and history, among others, can take place even in the absence of the state's involvement. But the state's involvement – it actively encourages such associations through the organisation of events like the V&A Hallyu exhibition – does serve to at least ensure that such associations occur on a wider scale rather than being reliant on the chance associations that might happen if things were left purely up to the individual consumer.

And individual-level chance associations do of course take place. For example, we saw that K-pop fans do expand their knowledge of Korean words and phrases, and that watching K-dramas and K-films can also lead to an interest in the country's history, food, and drinking etiquette. As one more example, consider that one of the authors (Samosir) had attended a dance performance where the Taiwanese choreographer, Liu I-Ling, used a song by BTS, *Dynamite*, for the opening. When asked about the choice of music during the audience Q&A session, Liu said that she started watching K-dramas during the COVID-19 lockdown and while watching these, became interested in the music. The latter, in turn, led her to the K-pop group BTS and their hit song *Dynamite*. Here, then, is a case of individual chain consumption where, as a result of the isolation resulting from the pandemic, K-dramas were viewed and this experience led to the further consumption of K-pop and subsequently to the creation of a non-Korean creative production that contained Hallyu features.

However, at a level that is intermediate between the state's involvement and the happenstance of individual experiences is that of industry attempts at cultivating and even feeding into consumers' interests in things Korean. This is illustrated by the case of language learning, to which we now turn.

Sociolinguistic Consumption of the Korean Language

Recall that the notion of sociolinguistic consumption (Stroud and Wee 2007) distinguishes between the direct consumption of languages as denotational codes and

the indirect consumption of linguistic repertoires as a result of being engaged in various activities such as listening to K-pop. In Chapter 4, for example, we noted that K-pop fans do actively try to expand their lexicon of Korean terms in order to better understand the song lyrics but also in order to establish themselves as serious fans, that is, fans who have more than a superficial knowledge or passing interest in K-pop.

This expansion of the lexicon exemplifies the indirect consumption of linguistic repertoires since the various words and phrases that fans pick up are the concomitant results of their interest in K-pop music and videos. The learning of these new lexical items is made easier because of the facilitation by more experienced consumers of K-pop, who voluntarily provide translations of song lyrics as well as glossaries of key terms for the newer fans. The activities of these more experienced fans help with the anthropological stance because, for newer fans, it makes a deeper entry into the world of K-pop ("deeper" in the sense of going beyond just enjoying the music and the videos to understanding aspects of the language and culture) less onerous. The fact that there are fans who are happy to provide translations and glossaries is relevant to the affective economy because it is not just information that is circulating but also general enthusiasm for K-pop and Korean culture coming from fellow consumers and other fans. In the case of K-pop glossary providers, acting as language guides to the many newer fans for whom Korean is a completely foreign language also imbues them with a sense of pride and of being respected. This is especially true since the information is presented online and fellow K-pop consumers can convey their appreciation in the comments section. The responsibility here involves not merely glossing particular lexical items, it also involves making decisions about what items to gloss.

These more experienced consumers are essentially acting like language brokers (Morales and Hanson 2005). These glossary providers – perhaps even more so than the translators of song lyrics – play a similar role to that of language brokers. Language brokers are typically understood to be young children of immigrant families who, having learnt the language of the host country faster and better than their parents, then take on the responsibility of acting as translators to facilitate communication between their family members and various actors in the new society (e.g., shopkeepers, doctors, police officers, welfare officers). Many of them even take pride in being tasked with such work, noting that it oftentimes earns them respect and admiration from others (Crafter 2018).

This learning of various lexical items and phrases has, for some fans, opened the door to the direct consumption of the Korean language itself, that is, to an even deeper focus on and sustained interest in Korean as a denotational code. According to MacDonald (2019):

> "Many k-pop fans want to learn Korean to sing their favorite songs, which can be especially awesome for audience participation at live concerts," said Oh [Mina Oh creates Korean language, food, and travel videos on YouTube].

> The interest has prompted fans to study Hangul in both traditional and innovative ways that include YouTube, individual and college courses, immersion programs, language learning sites and/or via Hallyu fan sites.
>
> In answer to a company-conducted poll, 90% of their students cited an interest in k-pop as part of the reason they decided to study in Korea.

As examples, consider the following responses to a Reddit discussion about whether K-pop influenced one's decision to learn Korean (LostSoulsAlliance, May 1, 2018):

xxv. Yes, yes, and it was worth it during the 8 years I was into K-Pop. Stopped learning it when I lost interest in following groups, watching their shows, etc. It was still a fun hobby though.

xxvi. Since coming back to Kpop I've been more motivated to learn hangul to start off! Hoping to make sometime after school but i've been busy lately.

xxvii. I initially picked up on words and learned the alphabet by reading translated lyrics and watching Korean dramas and variety shows 2 years ago. Now I'm actually learning the language properly on my own time.

xxviii. Trying to learn for a few reasons – for the music, the dramas, the variety shows, and hopefully going down there to visit one day and being able to get around cuz I can understand the language.

xxix. Yes I did because I thought I might as well understand what I'm listening to. I didn't care at first but you get curious after a while. I'm so so. I've been slacking off lately and improving but at a slow pace.

xxx. Been studying Korean for over 5 years now thanks to Kpop. Got my level 5 on the TOPIK 2 a couple years ago and am fluent to read Korean newspapers with somewhat ease.

xxxi. i'm half korean, born in seoul but moved to the US as a baby so i never learned korean. it wasn't until last year when i watched shinee's lucifer dance practice and fell down the kpop rabbit whole did i have the desire to learn korean.

xxxii. I'm currently learning because of kpop, starting with the LingoDeer app. So far like others have said hangul alphabet has been easy, I've been looking at introductions, nationality statements, and some grammar. So far it's been worth it and I think it'll continue to be worth it since I intend on visiting Korea in the future, it's been rewarding being able to read and recognize small things like idol group names in youtube video titles or some phrases in dramas.

The K-pop industry is in fact very well aware that many who began as fans of the music are also developing an interest in the language. Thus, BTS and its

management agency Big Hit have even started providing language lessons (Delgado 2020):

> To say many ARMYs were excited by the prospect of official BTS Korean lessons would be an understatement. "WE ARE GETTING A NEW PROGRAM CALLED 'Learn Korean with BTS' WHERE THERES KOREAN EDUCATION CONTENT WITH BTS.. BTS RLLY GONNA BE OUR TEACHERS," someone commented, while others were simply ready to ditch Duolingo for Bangtan.

Hybe Corporation launched the video series "Learn Korean with BTS" also on Weverse. According to Delgado (2020):

> "*Learn Korean with BTS* is a short-form content designed to make it easy and fun for global fans who have difficulty enjoying BTS' music and contents due to the language barrier," the company wrote in its press email. "We hope that through learning Korean, global fans will be able to deeply empathize with the music of artists and enjoy a wide range of contents." …
>
> If you are wondering exactly what type of content you can expect, Big Hit disclosed the program would focus on moments from already beloved BTS series such as the weekly reality show *Run BTS!* as well as YouTube-only series like *Bangtan Bombs* and *BTS Episodes*. Snippets from these shows will be "reassembled so that one can learn Korean by listening to expressions used frequently by the members."…
>
> "We are preparing Korean language education content for our fans," Bang Si-Hyuk, Big Hit's founder, said at the conference. "There are many fans who can't enjoy Big Hit content to the fullest due to the language barrier. Foreign media point out that there is 'more demand for learning Korean thanks to K-pop,' but there are only limited ways our fans could learn Korean with ease."

BTS and Hybe Corporation[3] are by no means alone in recognising that interest in the Korean language has grown as a result of K-pop. WeeTV has launched "K-Language School" and tvN has launched "K-Pop Cultural Center", both designed to take advantage of interest in the language arising from the popularity of K-pop (Jiwon Park 2020).

The decision to try to learn the Korean language is interesting not least because language learning requires a fair amount of time and effort. This is not to assume that all who decide to learn the language are engaged in the endeavour with the same degree of commitment, of course. Nevertheless, the decision itself – regardless of the outcome – is significant because it, perhaps more so than the buying of Korean cosmetics, the eating of Korean food, or the organisation of visits to the country, points to the presence of the anthropological stance being slowly but

surely cultivated as a marker of Hallyu's success in raising interest in Korean culture. This is because, as the Reddit examples demonstrate, the motivations for learning the denotational code itself can include an intention to visit Korea or a wish to be involved in more complex and nuanced exchanges such as reading newspapers.

Norton's (1995, 2000, 2013) arguments about investment in language learning are relevant here. Investment provides an important contrast to the more individualised attention that is usually given to motivation.

> While constructs of motivation frequently view the individual as having a unitary and coherent identity with specific character traits, *investment regards the learner as a social being with a complex identity that changes across time and space and is reproduced in social interaction*.
>
> *(Darvin and Norton 2015, 37, italics added)*

For Norton, identity is not a fixed attribute but, rather, something that changes and develops over time. It is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton 2013, 45). Norton sees investment as a function of identity, ideology, and capital (Darvin and Norton 2015). That is, a language learner's investment in a given language depends on the person's identity (which can include not only how that person sees themselves at a given point in time but, crucially, also what they see themselves becoming in an imagined future). It also depends on the prevailing ideologies, that is, normative sets of ideas which are viewed as having legitimacy (Darvin and Norton 2015, 43), especially to the extent that they influence the value of and access to kinds of capital (economic, social, cultural, following Bourdieu 1986).

Learners who are invested in learning Korean as a result of exposure to K-pop self-identify primarily as K-pop fans. The concomitant ideologies would then involve an acceptance of their relationship as fans who support their respective K-pop idols and by extension, having a positive affect towards Korean culture and society in general (which is obviously very different from someone who learns a foreign language because of job or educational requirements). The various K-pop initiatives for promoting language learning recognise and understand this, which is why the language lessons that have been created are careful to retain the indexical ties to K-pop lyrics and performers. Severing this indexicality would undermine the investment that K-pop fans have in wanting to learn the language.

In all this, it is necessary to keep in mind that identity and investment are enabled by the material processes that constitute the multiple ways in which learners are able to interact with and, hence, experience K-pop. Learners' initial exposure to K-pop and the indirect consumption of the affiliated linguistic repertoire as well as the subsequent impetus towards the direct consumption of the language as a denotational code are all significantly afforded and shaped by the consistent

use of apps, digital platforms, and streaming devices. Their understanding of what it means to be speaking or, more broadly, using Korean is inextricably linked with their ever-evolving exposure to the web series and reality shows prepared by K-pop agencies as well as (for those who want a more "traditional" mode of learning) language courses taught at schools or universities. This is a point that Darvin and Norton are at pains to emphasise when they note that

> technology has not only reshaped the way we communicate but also enabled new forms of labor and modes of productivity … As social media, SMS, email, and other Web 2.0 functionalities allow them to speak by writing, literacy has become even more essential in being able to claim the right to speak.
>
> *(2015, 41, references omitted)*

And we now see, the roles played by digital technologies and social media are no less significant when we consider how other aspects of Korean culture are consumed, such as the country's cuisine.

Korean Cuisine and Food Culture

A good example of how digital technologies and social media play an important role in fostering wider interest in Korean cuisine and food culture comes from the *mukbang* phenomenon, which is a less discussed aspect of Hallyu (Hyesu Park 2020). "*Mukbang*" is a portmanteau of the Korean words for eating ("*meokneun*") and broadcast ("*bangsong*"). It refers to an eating show – which can be prerecorded or live-streamed – where a host consumes various quantities of food while chatting with their virtual audience. As Khraibani (2018) explains:

> Mukbang … is essentially a performance … Your average Mukbang stream will have a BJ enumerating and presenting an array of consumable items very neatly before placing them on the table facing the screen. After presentation and plating, the BJ will go on to consume the food at a leisurely pace until everything has been eaten. The camera is normally positioned in a way that foregrounds the food. Along with the gestures and exaggerated chewing, the BJs are encouraged to make comments about the food and as many eating noises as possible.

Some *mukbangs* are intended to be educational, exposing audiences to regional cuisines. Regardless, in *mukbangs* generally, the *mukbanger* or BJ ("broadcast jockey"), as they are known in Korea, expresses enjoyment in the food, thus creating for the audience an atmosphere of sociality. Stancetaking is thus crucial in the role that *mukbang* plays in popularising Korean culture. *Mukbangers* do not typically consume foods that they consider to be unpalatable or disgusting. The audience may watch a *mukbang* for a variety of reasons, to vicariously enjoy the food

or to simply be part of a shared eating event. The latter is especially appealing if individual viewers are feeling isolated and it is emphasised by Schwegler-Castañer (2018), who describes three female *mukbang*ers (a South Korean, a Singaporean, and an American) and notes that *mukbang* videos mitigate the sense of loneliness and isolation that viewers may feel by connecting them to a shared virtual community. Thus, Choe (2019) suggests that one of the reasons for the popularity of *mukbangs* is its high level of interactivity, where viewers can actively participate by making suggestions to the BJ on what to eat next and even how it should be eaten. Such active participation certainly contributes to the sense of community and reduces any feeling of social isolation. For Choe (2019), the *mukbang* activity is a joint achievement where the host and viewers take turns to collaboratively participate. Viewers may even make donations to which the BJ might show gratitude in an entertaining manner, thus increasing the show's popularity. As a testament to *mukbang*'s global impact, Lawrenson (2022) points out that:

> Fully welcoming its newfound popularity on the international stage, Collins Dictionary featured "mukbang" as one of their Words of 2020 …
>
> Even rapper Megan Thee Stallion recorded her own mukbang for YouTube,[4] using the trend as promo for her new hot sauce.

Aside from the *mukbang* – which represents a specific genre, indeed, a food-based performance – Korean cuisine and food culture have become globally popular as well through the exposure of viewers to K-dramas and K-films. Indonesia and Malaysia are two examples (GlobalData 2021):

> An entire generation of Indonesians who have grown up on Korean dramas, music and films have subsequently developed an interest in the Korean culinary culture (K-food) and cosmetics (K-Beauty), among others. While Korean food initially struck a chord with Indonesian consumers on account of the novelty of its recipes, textures and plating styles, it has retained its charm over the years owing to the shared affinity for spicy and sharp flavours among Koreans and Indonesians.
>
> Hundreds of Korean eateries have popped up in Greater Jakarta over the past decade, popularising traditional K-food delicacies such as "bibimbap" (rice bowl with assorted vegetables and meat), "bulgogi" (grilled marinated beef), gochujang (red pepper paste) and "toppoki" or "tteokbokki" (spicy rice cake) …
>
> The trend is mirrored in neighbouring Malaysia, where the youth are equally enamoured by Korean drama, fashion and food. A spate of restaurants including Seoul Garden and Pullman Kuching serve localised versions of authentic Korean fare such as "kimchi" (spicy [pickled] cabbage). Recently, leading

> convenience store chain, 7-Eleven Malaysia capitalised on the popularity of the Korean boy band BTS, by unveiling an exclusive BTS HY Coffee range with two limited-edition RTD coffee variants – Cold Brew Americano and Hot Brew Vanilla Latte.

In India, the Korean *japchae* is particularly popular (Doley 2022):

> "Korean food seems to be gaining worldwide popularity as well, influenced by Korean culture such as Korean pop and Korean drama, which are immensely popular all over the world," says Chef Nam Yeon Hwang from InterContinental Seoul, who was with his colleague Chef Joon Seok Park recently in India to host a Korean food festival at Crowne Plaza, Greater Noida.
>
> And when one is talking about festivals, can japchae be left far behind? The sweet potato starch noodles, stir fried with meat and vegetables, is one of Korea's most loved dishes, especially during the festive season, and remains quite popular elsewhere too, including in India.

In the Philippines, Joven (2014) suggests, the popularity of Korean cuisine can be attributed to two major factors. One is the hit K-drama *Jewel in the Palace*, which contributed to the exoticisation of the cuisine through the portrayals of palace intrigues and culinary skills of the protagonist. The other concerns the promotional activities of the South Korean state, in the form of agencies such as the Korean Cultural Center in the Philippines and the Korea Tourism Organization.

The popularity of Korean cuisine shows no signs so far of slowing down even in the USA, as Beaton (2022) points out:

> Korean cuisine had its moment in 2021, and all indications suggest that popularity could last for the foreseeable future.
>
> According to new data from analytics company Spoonshot, interest in Korean cuisine spiked nearly 90% in the 12 months leading up to January 2022.
>
> "Korean flavors are especially worth keeping an eye on," Spoonshot research analyst Ranjana Sundaresan told *The Food Institute*. "Korean food is already popular, but thanks to recent pop culture influences there's going to be a lot more focus on, and demand, for authentic food and flavors from [that region]."

Like Beaton (2022), the general consensus is that Korean cuisine's popularity is the result of the popularity of K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films – "How Korean cuisine is rising to capture global food scene" as reported in *The Korean Herald* (Jo 2021).

The discussion of language learning and food culture thus far shows that chain consumption is an important factor in understanding the widening power of

Hallyu. The three Ks are undoubtedly important channels for popularising Korean culture, but they also work to create interest in other things such as language and food, which occurs when consumers of music, serials, and films start to develop, as Joven puts it, "a sustained fascination towards this foreign culture" (2014, 122). That is, the initial consumption of products via the three Ks leads to interest in things beyond these key channels. Importantly, this consumption is powered by affect. In an affective economy, it is primarily the processes of affecting and being affected that are key (Lehmann, Roth, and Schankweiler 2019). This ability to affect and be affected is significantly facilitated by the use of digital and social technologies. Baldassar and Wilding (2020) discuss the idea of "digital kinning", which highlights the role of communication technologies in maintaining support across networks in transnational and migrant communities. In the case of Hallyu, such "digital kinning" extends beyond friend and familial ties to include a sense of shared identity and common interest in consuming aspects of Korean culture. And as we now see, chain consumption and affect are no less relevant when it comes to tourism and fashion.

Touring Korea

The Hallyu effect has also benefitted tourism (Bae et al. 2017; Lee and Workman 2015; Oh 2005). Bae et al. (2017, 2) note, for example, that:

> The number of foreign tourists visiting Korea has increased nearly fourfold from 300,000 in 1998, when the Korean Wave began, to 11.8 million in 2014. Of the total number of foreign tourists, Asian accounted for 71.3% in 1998 and 83.5% in 2014, indicating that the proportion of Asia, the center of the Korean Wave, has increased.
>
> In particular, the United States, China, Japan, and Hong Kong account for more than 70% of the number of foreign tourists entering Korea. The proportion of Chinese tourists was only 4.96% of total tourists in 1998, when diplomatic relations were established with Korea, but it increased to 6.12 million in 2014, accounting for 43.14% of the total. Despite Japan's great earthquake that occurred in March 2011, Japan had a total of 3.28 million visitors, an 8.8% increase from the previous year, which accounted for 33.6% of total inbound travelers to Korea, followed by China with the largest number of tourists.

In their discussion, the authors make a distinction between "narrow" and "broad" Hallyu tourism, depending on the kinds of activities that the tourists participate in (Bae et al. 2017, 3):

> Narrow Korean wave tourism means tourism that participates in tourism activities directly related to Korean Wave, such as foreign tourists who are

> interested in Korean Wave, visiting film and drama shooting sites, participating in meetings with fans, and participating in performances related to K-Pop. In the broad sense of Korean Wave tourism, foreign tourists who visit Korea do not participate in tourism activities directly related to Korean Wave, but their direct reason for visiting Korea is their interest in Korean Wave.

In other words, those who participate in the "broad" Korean Wave tourism are also inspired to visit the country because of their exposure to and interest in Hallyu. This is even if the activities that they ultimately engage in during the visit may not involve visits to film sites or enjoying K-pop performances.

As before, we see that the three Ks are implicated here as the primary channels for developing interest in Korea. Thus, regardless of whether the activities are narrow (e.g. tied to visiting film and drama sites, or watching K-pop performances), or whether they are broader in scope, the important point here is that interest in visiting the country is sparked by the consumption of the three Ks. Bae et al.'s notion of broad Hallyu tourism clearly relies on chain consumption. The reason for these tourists wanting to visit Korea is clearly due to the effect of the Korean Wave.

Tourism that is motivated by an interest in popular culture, especially in films and television serials, is not new. As Wee and Goh (2019, 82) note:

> The internet facilitated the identification and growth of fandom based on particular cultural documents (the Harry Potter and LOTR phenomena are prominent examples), and allowed individual fans to share material, resources and ultimately also aspirations with each other. The result was the increasing popularity not only of Cosplay and fan conventions, but also fan fiction, and fan-related travel and tours. The latter phenomenon … constitutes a way in which fan identity intersects with Bildung journeys (imagined as part of the heroic journeys seen in films) and with landscapes associated with the films and the protagonists therein.

And (Wee and Goh 2019, 87):

> The most conclusive evidence of this is the rise, in recent years, of the phenomenon of film-related tourism. A number of highly popular films and TV shows have spawned a boom in tourism to countries used as film locations, and in tour companies creating tours around those shows. This is not just a secondary interest in the countries and regions because they were mentioned in – or known to be the sites of – popular shows. Rather, it is a tourism that is in many ways inseparable from fan interest in the shows, their characters and their development, the events, costumes, and other paraphernalia. There is in fact a kind of ontological blurring of boundaries, so that the real and reel sites merge in several ways, the tourist and the fan of the show are likewise

> indistinguishable, and the interest in the country or region is inseparable from the fan's interest in the scenes filmed in there.

Once again, we see the workings of the affective economy. The importance of affective regimes in sustaining this interest in film-related tourism cannot be overemphasised. Recall (Chapter 3) that an affective regime refers to how a particular site attempts to manage the kinds of affect that can be associated with it. In the case of encouraging tourism, the website of the Korea Tourism Organization, for example, helps visitors "to discover the attractive locations you enjoyed seeing in dramas, walking along the same path tread by hallyu stars" (Korea Tourism Organization, n.d.) and provides details on directions to and operating hours for various locations. More relevant to the issue of affect, the descriptions are also aimed at linking the memories of specific K-dramas with the actual location. The goal is therefore to ensure a continuity of affect where the affective regime of the visited location coheres, as far as possible, with the experience of watching specific scenes. For example, a location featured in the K-drama *What's Wrong with Secretary Kim?* is Bojeong-dong Café Street, and the website reminds the potential visitor of how that location was presented in the K-drama as well as how it might be experienced in actuality:

> Bojeong-dong Café Street is where Mi-so, who only ever focused on work, had her first blind date, as well as where Young-joon and Mi-so created new memories together as a couple in the final episode. The main street is lined with trees, perfect for taking a walk. In addition to the many sweetly decorated cafés, the area also features pubs, restaurants, and clothing shops.

As a scene where K-drama characters enjoy a date, visitors are also encouraged to enjoy a leisurely walk along the street.

Similarly, the K-drama *True Beauty* was filmed in the Bukchon Hanok Village as well as Namhae. And the website encourages tourists to "Visit these attractions to continue feeling 'True Beauty'" (Korea Tourism Organization 2022). Note the assertion that being on the swing will allow the visitor to understand "what it felt like for the main characters":

> Seolli Skywalk is a new attraction of Namhae, built at 38 meters above the ground. The view of the surrounding area is stunning, especially the sunset when the weather is nice!
>
> Another key feature of the skywalk is the swing installed at the end of the skywalk! If you're curious what it felt like for the main characters to ride on this swing, try it out for yourself! It's thrilling yet also freeing.

What is worth noting here is the emphasis on trying to assure visitors that the affective regime in the physical site is faithful to that presented in the series. Or

at least, the affective regime is sufficiently faithful that it will allow visitors to replicate to their imaginary satisfaction that they have managed to experience what the K-drama characters themselves might have felt. This commodification of specific sites that have been featured in K-dramas and K-films as something that can be consumed by visitors who wish to experience or recreate something from their favourite shows is a reminder of Thurlow and Jaworski's (2011) point that tourism plays a crucial mediating role in the ideological consumption of the world and its cultures. This commodification of experience relates to what is known as the "experience economy" where consumers look for "immersive entertainment" (Lazarus 2017). In the case of Hallyu, the immersive experiences that visitors to locales look for are supposed to evoke, as far as possible, the same emotions that they may have felt when watching films and dramas.

Ahmed's discussion of the "affective economy" (see Chapter 3) emphasises "emotions work as a form of capital" (2004b, 120). The Korean sites that have been featured in films and serials come to possess a form of symbolic capital based on fan recognition. This is where it becomes important to recognise the role of social media and digital technologies in fostering affective regimes and helping to encourage chain consumption. And as fans who have visited these sites go on to share their experiences (again, probably via social media), this leads to the further circulation of affect which might possibly encourage others to then embark on similar tourism ventures. Whether the actual sites themselves live up to visitor expectations is a separate matter. The purpose of websites such as those discussed above is to create an anticipation and assurance that the visits will indeed allow fans to identify with and participate in the experiences of their favourite characters. It is the creation of such anticipation and assurances, conveyed by the websites, that might motivate viewers to make the effort to physically visit those places themselves, thus broadening the reach of Hallyu's soft power from films and serials to tourism.

Fashionably Korean

Skrbic (2019) notes that "K-Pop and K-Drama ignited 'hallyu' and now it is K-Fashion's turn to lead the way", and

> By investing heavily in K-Fashion, South Korea is able to develop the national brand image it portrays to the world and promote, along with the amalgamation of drama, music and beauty, that its nation is one of culture, creativity and forward thinking.

In comparison with K-pop and K-drama, Korean fashion is therefore a more recent but nevertheless increasingly prominent part of the Hallyu soft power strategy. We have already noted that the state adopts an "arm's-length" principle towards the activities of the creative industries but will appropriate the talents and creative

outputs to further promote the country's image and boost its soft power. This is a point that Skrbic (2019) also underscores:

> The government capitalises further on these fashion events by having K-Pop singers and K-Drama actors performing and/or walking in the shows, lining the "FROW", and donning the most recent designs. The Korean Wave permeates throughout their country's creative ecosystem, ensuring that all fields continually support each other.

The interweaving of the different aspects of Hallyu is nicely illustrated by the above statement. By having K-pop and K-drama celebrities participate in the fashion shows, the state – as we have also emphasised previously – plays the important role of "ensuring that all fields continually support each other", thus providing the Hallyu strategy with a cohesiveness that might otherwise be absent.

Some of the specific events organised with the support of the state include Seoul Fashion Week and the Korean Fashion Design Contest. The former presents Korean designers to the world and the latter is a platform for promising designers to present themselves and their collections. Another event is Concept Korea, jointly organised by the South Korean and American governments, and held during New York Fashion Week. This event, too, serves to draw global attention to the talents of Korean designers. In this regard, it is worth returning once again to the state-sponsored V&A Hallyu exhibition, where, according to the lead curator, Rosalie Kim, K-drama and K-pop are spurring the development and desire for a re-imagined *hanbok*, the traditional Korean dress (Healey 2022):

> Though the fashion culture of South Korea is strongly linked with the massive rise of contemporary K-drama and K-pop from the 1990s onwards, many influential designers have chosen to go further back, tracing a lineage with ancient Korean dress.
>
> … "Through K-drama and K-pop, we've witnessed this new style of *hanbok* that is no longer seen as this nationalistic, traditional, boring costume, but something that can feel alive," says Kim …
>
> "I wanted to make a case about the hanbok and it coming back into fashion through K-drama and K-pop, because this is where a new style for it has been created," emphasises Kim. Even a cursory glance at recent pop cultural releases shows this statement is not at all exaggerated: in 2020, BlackPink's highly-anticipated comeback single *How You Like That* saw them wearing embroidered, cropped hanbok-style jackets for the music video, and BTS recently wore Tchai Kim hanboks in a promotional clip. And the popularity of historical period dramas (*sageuk*), such as 2018's *Mr Sunshine* and 2016"s *Love in the Moonlight* – both set in the 19th century – has made Korean history and its clothing styles more visible than ever.

As is clear from Kim's comments above, the issue is not merely that consumption of K-pop and K-drama has spurred interest in K-fashion. The visibility of K-pop and K-drama stars has encouraged a re-imagining of the *hanbok*, allowing it to come "back into fashion" as part of "something that can feel alive".

In yet another indication of chain consumption at work, or more accurately, an anticipation of chain consumption at work, Healey (2022) notes that one expected effect of the exhibition is an increased interest in London's Korean community:

> The V&A wanted to choose Korean designers, for instance, who felt like they had connections with the design schools of London; they have even dedicated part of the show to the Korean residents of south London's New Malden community, which will presumably witness an influx of new visitors seeking authentic barbecue or a night of karaoke this September.

And once again, this anticipated chain consumption is based on affect. This is because "the curators' aim is to recreate this fan feeling of becoming hooked on Korean culture, with all its hybrid forms meaning there are multiple entry points for everyone" (Healey 2022). The organisers are first assuming that many visitors will attend the exhibition because of an already present interest in specific aspects of Hallyu but they also hope to use the exhibition as a platform for broadening that interest. In addition, there is the assumption that interest in things Korean will spread beyond the immediate confines of the exhibition so that the Korean community in London, and Korean restaurants and bars, too, will all benefit from this sustained interest in Korea and Korean culture.

This general and broadening interest in Korea is succinctly captured in the term "K-everything" (Adams 2022), suggesting that whether genuinely Korean or not, there is considerable symbolic capital to be gained from being associated with Korea and Hallyu. A simple illustration can be taken from Singapore, where the fast-food chain Burger King advertises "Korean Dynamite Combo Meals", where a cosmetics shop has a "KStyle 2022 Collection!", and where there is a "Korean Self Photo Booth". Commercial organisations are therefore keenly aware of the wide appeal of the Korean Wave, and are more than happy to find ways of capitalising on it.

To Consume or Be Consumed: The Koreaboo

In the case of some individuals, however, the interest in things Korean can reach a point of unhealthy obsession. The term "Koreaboo" is sometimes used for such cases, to signify that an individual may be too enamoured of Korean culture, even to the point where they may wish they were Korean themselves. Here are two examples.

The first comes from Quora, an online platform for sharing information and experiences. In a contribution to the question "What was it like meeting a Koreaboo?", Mai Iznatova (2019) posted the following:

> I once had a Koreaboo friend I talked to in 6th grade and half of 7th grade …
>
> She's pretty much the stereotypical Koreaboo.
>
> 1. She brings down her own culture and wishes she was Korean … doesn't appreciate the fact that she's a Pakistani living in Scotland …
> 2. She randomly uses the 8–9 words unnecessarily everyday that all Koreaboos know. She admitted to walking past random Asian boys at her uni saying "annyeonghaseyo" to them, probably saying it wrong too.
> 3. She stands up for random Korean men even when they do something wrong …
> 4. Since she lives in a delusion that South Korea is the best and happiest country, she hates every criticism about Korea, their culture, the government, and the entertainment industry.

The second concerns a British influencer who underwent surgery to look like Jimin, one of the members of the K-pop group BTS. According to Mahirova (2021):

> The influencer previously known as Oli London changed their name to Jimin an attempt to resemble the singer. "I'm finally Korean!" they said in a video shared with TMZ. "I've transitioned. I'm so, so happy I've completed my look. I'm finally Korean, guys: I have the eyes, I've just had the brow lift as well" …
>
> Adopting a Korean accent in one video, London said: "I know it's a little confusing, nobody has ever come out as Jimin or Korean, but this is something you guys know … I've really struggled with identity issues with who I am". …
>
> … London has defended their identity, saying: "Yes I identify as Korean. Yes, I'm non-binary. Yes I look like Jimin."

Whether or not the individuals described in the two examples above count as cases of Koreaboo is perhaps debatable. What is clear, however, is that, at least from the perspective of those who are reporting on them, their interest in Korean culture is unhealthy. Thus, Iznatova highlights how the Pakistani "Koreaboo friend" refuses to countenance any kind of criticism about Korea, and is even prepared to disavow her own culture and identity. And Mahirova quotes extensively from London to show how they identify as Korean and require surgery in order to reflect that particular identity claim. In London's case, what is interesting, and perhaps disturbing, is not simply the desire to look Korean but the intention to look like a specific Korean individual, in this case, the popstar Jimin of BTS.

What these examples indicate is that the Koreaboo phenomenon is ultimately about identity. We know that one important way in which identity claims are manifested and perhaps legitimised is via consumption. The decisions we make

regarding what we eat, wear, drive, the places we vacation in, etc., help us to present ourselves to the world around us. But this link between consumption and identity can become extreme, especially if we feel that there is only one specific way in which our identity can be made manifest, and sacrifices in other aspects of ourselves are worth making. In such cases, the drive to consume can itself become all-consuming.

It is nevertheless important to keep in mind, as Yoon (2019, 184) reminds us, that the link between Hallyu and the Koreaboo is not a strong causal one:

> The link between hallyu fandom and identification with Korea is far from obvious. Even though some fans, known as "Koreaboos," are singled out for their fetish of liking, buying, and promoting all things Korean, most hallyu fans distinguish themselves from Koreaboos, whom they perceive as overenthusiastic, extreme and obsessive.

What this means is that the kind of extremism and obsessiveness associated with the Koreaboo should not be confused with the anthropological stance. The anthropological stance involves cultivating an interest among those not familiar with Korean culture in that culture. In other words, it is by definition predicated on taking an interest in a culture that is not one's own. It is therefore at odds with any claim that one is in fact Korean. The kind of ownership or in-group membership claim associated with the Koreaboo phenomenon is not in any way consistent with the anthropological stance.

The Other Side of Soft Power: Pride in Being Korean

This global interest in things Korean – even where they may result in the kind of obsessiveness associated with the Koreaboo phenomenon – cannot but have an impact on Koreans themselves, particularly in creating a stronger sense of national pride. For example, in a brief autobiographical description of his life as a Korean growing up in Singapore, Chan (2022) makes the following statements:

> I remember when it became cool to be Korean in Singapore. It was the early 2010s and I had just begun secondary school.
>
> Many a Singaporean housewife had started to swoon over Bae Yong Joon in "Winter Sonata" and be dazzled by Lee Young-ae in "Jewel in the Palace". *Hallyu* or the "Korean Wave", would begin its slow engulfment of their children …
>
> Part of me wanted to capitalise on this coolness, this intense allure generated by Korea's cultural exports.

Similarly, Shim (2011) recounts how, when living in Britain, his sense of national pride was boosted when he became aware of just how popular K-pop was:

> The current hallyu (Korean wave) fever sweeping parts of the globe including Europe will help boost the national image in the international community. Korea will become more familiar for the people in Europe where K-pop stars are wowing fans.
>
> This reminds me of the early days of my family's time in Cambridge, the United Kingdom, from February 2006 for a one-year stay as a fellow of the East Asia Institute (EAI) of Darwin College. In the first encounter with the owner couple of the house we rented, I was perplexed when middle-age [sic] British curiously asked several questions about my family and my nation, Korea. The first question was "Do you have your own language?" The second one was "Do you have your own money?" Caught off guard, I remained speechless for a while. Soon I realized they were considering Korea as just a tiny land adjacent to bigger nations, China and Japan, possibly using their language and currency …
>
> Such experiences hurt my national pride to some extent.

What the comments from Chan and Shim so clearly demonstrate is how the success of the Korean Wave has had very personal impacts on them as people of Korean descent. The positive reception enjoyed by K-dramas such as *Winter Sonata* and *Jewel in the Palace* made Chan feel that it was indeed "cool to be Korean". Likewise, the realisation that K-pop stars were admired did much to restore Shim's national pride. The experiences of Chan and Shim point to the need to discuss the "inward" implications of a successful soft power strategy, that is, the implications for Koreans themselves. This discussion is especially useful since soft power is otherwise usually analysed in terms of its "outward" or international effects. It is to these inward implications that we now turn. To do this, we begin with the notion of national pride.

National pride is, of course, not an uncommon phenomenon, and for South Koreans to take pride in their country's achievements is natural. However, there are reasons to think that, even putting the Hallyu strategy and success aside, South Korea is already especially concerned about how she is perceived internationally. Consequently, her achievements on the global stage do seem to create a particularly strong sense of national identity and pride. Gi-Wook Shin (2006) attributes this to the country's history of dealing with colonialism, war, and authoritarianism:

> Ethnic national identity has been a crucial source of pride and inspiration for people during the turbulent years of Korea's transition to modernity that involved colonialism, territorial division, war, and authoritarian politics. It has also enhanced collective consciousness and internal solidarity against external threats and has served Korea's modernization project as an effective resource.

There is, in fact, a Korean term *gukppong*, which is made up of the words *guk* (the Korean word for "country") and *pon* (derived from a Japanese colloquialism for the drug methamphetamine). *Gukppong* therefore suggests that a person is high on or intoxicated with nationalism. This is not to suggest that Hallyu necessarily breeds or is motivated by *gukppong*. But if there is already a pre-existing tendency to look for reasons to intensify collective pride and solidarity, then one unsurprising consequence of the success of Hallyu is an enhancement of what it means to be Korean.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, such a development can be understood if we combine Du Bois's (2007) stance triangle with the socio-psychological phenomenon known as basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) (Boen et al. 2002; Dijkstra et al. 2010). The objects of evaluation in a stance triangle can be inanimate (perhaps a piece of music) or sentient (perhaps a singer). In the case of Hallyu, both are present, of course, since alongside music videos and films are also the performers and actors. Performers and actors may be variously grateful or dismissive of the kinds of reception that they garner from audiences. But their compatriots, who are not directly themselves the objects of stancetaking in a stance triangle, will see the overwhelmingly positive affect towards Korean products and celebrities as something that also reflects well on them as Koreans in general.

This is where BIRGing becomes relevant (Wee 2014, 33). BIRGing is a socio-psychological phenomenon of impression management where individuals associate themselves with highly regarded others (e.g., a championship football team, a celebrity, a son/daughter who does well in school) in order to boost their self-esteem or social acceptance. A supporter of a successful football team who uses the pronoun "we" to include himself/herself as part of the team's success (e.g., "We won the championship!") is engaging in BIRGing. A fan of a pop star or celebrity who proudly displays his/her fan-ship by wearing T-shirts with images of the star or celebrity is also indulging in BIRGing. Individuals like Chan and Shim are obviously not themselves Hallyu celebrities. But it is clear that they are engaging in BIRGing, by affiliating themselves (in this case, through the Korean identity) with successful others with the result that their self-esteem becomes boosted (Dijkstra et al. 2010). This BIRGing can be seen in Kang (2007, 274), where, in a discussion of Hallyu, the statement is made that "never in the history of Korea has our culture been so widely accepted in foreign countries". Thus, the inward result of this soft power strategy is that "For many Korean citizens, Hallyu has become a symbol of national pride" (Jungsoo Kim 2016, 101).

Conclusion

Once we move beyond the three Ks to look at the consumption of Korean culture more generally, we start to appreciate that while it is important not to overstate the state's contribution to the success of Hallyu, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the state does contribute by ensuring a more multidimensional promotion of

Korea. Other, less salubrious aspects of this broader consumption also emerge such as the Koreaboo phenomenon. And finally, while much attention has been given to the effects of soft power as a strategy internationally, our discussion also reminds us not to overlook the inward implications, implications that, as this chapter has shown, can be explained by combining the sociolinguistic notion of a stance triangle with the socio-psychological notion of basking in reflected glory.

Notes

1 See *The Birth of Korean Cool* by journalist Euny Hong.
2 V&A South Kensington also has a Korea collection that spans the fourth century to the present day.
3 Hybe Corporation was originally established as Big Hit Entertainment in 2005. As of 2021, it became known as Hybe Corporation with Big Hit Music being one of its divisions.
4 See Megan Thee Stallion, "Megan Thee Stallion – Hottie Sauce Mukbang," 16 October 2021, https://youtu.be/qHCmwfYifv8.

8

TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SOFT POWER

Introduction

As we close our investigation into the sociolinguistics of Hallyu as a form of soft power, it is useful to summarise some of the main points that have arisen from our discussion in the chapters thus far. This summary can then form the basis of a broader consideration of the nature of soft power.

We hope it is clear by now that an understanding of Hallyu's soft power success benefits significantly from the use of sociolinguistic concepts such as indexicality, affect, style, and stance. Indexicality explains how it is that the attributes that happen to be associated with one entity can be extended to another entity. And where it is the case that one entity already enjoys a positive affect, then the result of indexicality is that yet other entities may come to also be seen in a similarly beneficial light. These various entities and their indexical associations can then be used as stylistic resources to help create a desired identity. At the same time, because the desirability of an identity is not dependent on the intention of the styling agent alone but depends crucially on the perceptions and receptions of others, stance – in particular, the concept of a stance triangle – cannot be neglected. It is through the combination of these concepts – indexicality, affect, style, and stance – that we are able to appreciate how the three Ks are able to cultivate an anthropological stance so that interest in Korea extends beyond K-pop, K-dramas, and K-films to include the language, the cuisine, specific locales in the country, and the fashion, among others.

The value of these sociolinguistic concepts of course extends beyond a focus on Hallyu. They are of general significance whenever the phenomenon being put under the microscope involves likeability, attractiveness, and communication – features that, as we pointed out at the beginning of this book, are assumed to be

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present in any form of soft power. This leads us nicely to the focus of this concluding chapter: how the Hallyu soft power might differ from other attempts at exercising soft power. Here, we highlight what we consider to be the most distinctive aspect of Hallyu's soft power success, namely, the "arm's-length" principle where the state maintains respect for the autonomy of the creative industries.

As we have emphasised at various points in this book, it is because the state adopts an "arm's-length" principle towards the various cultural products and activities that it is then able to work on appropriating the success and positive reception enjoyed by these to further bolster the country's global image and to convert that positive affect into economic capital by, among others, generating tourism revenue and sales. If the state had not respected the "arm's-length" principle, this would have severely compromised the authenticity and value of the cultural products and activities, making them far less attractive globally. We don't think it is possible to overstate the importance of the "arm's-length" principle if the goal is to have a soft power strategy, and in the remainder of this chapter, we explain why.

Soft Power and the Limitations of the State

In studies of soft power, much of the focus has been on the state (see Chapter 2). And this, too, tends to be the case when the discussion is about South Korea and the Korean Wave. Thus, Nye and Kim (2019, 51) suggest that the Hallyu strategy has certain limitations because of the state's involvement:

> With the active involvement of the government, the Korean Wave has been largely constructed within nationalistic discourses and policies, and imagined with cultural nationalism – a form of hegemony masked in soft power … This Korean version of nationalistic and expansionistic cultural policy has a tendency to develop into another form of hegemonic cultural imperialism in the region. The Korean Wave popular culture, as resources for soft power by the postcolonial periphery, can ironically generate a new version of cultural imperialism that is deeply embedded in cultural nationalism and its ideological position going against cultural diversity and soft power of attraction.

In other words, Nye and Kim are concerned that there may well be a backlash against the Korean Wave because it is too widely seen as "a form of hegemony" where the South Korean government is trying to push for a form of cultural imperialism. While we do not think their concerns are completely unfounded, we do think their views require nuancing.

The first thing we want to highlight is that their reference to the "active involvement of the government" does not sufficiently take into consideration the "arm's-length" principle that, as we have noted, is a key lynchpin in the success of Hallyu. The state supports the promotion of various aspects of Korean culture, as we have seen, but its relationship to Hallyu's actual creative products is

that of appropriation after the fact. So, while this can, as Nye and Kim warn us, lead to concerns about nationalistic hegemony, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the actual activities and products associated with K-pop, K-dramas, K-films, K-cuisine, and K-fashion, among many others, are beyond the control of the state itself. In fact, there is evidence that consumers of Hallyu may be protective enough of the Korean Wave to be vigilant about state involvement. For example, Hyonhee Shin (2022) reports that fans of the K-pop group BTS warned then President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol against trying to exploit the group when it appeared that Yoon's team might try to get BTS to perform at his inauguration ceremony:

> As of Thursday, there were more than 1,800 posts on the transition committee's website, all decrying the possibility of mixing pop with politics.
>
> "Please do not politically exploit BTS. They do not exist to raise your approval ratings. They are global artists who promote Korean culture," said one post.
>
> A separate online petition with the presidential Blue House had garnered some 6,000 signatures since its launch on Wednesday. Many fans also took to the Weverse fandom platform posting comments under the hashtag "#NoBTSforInauguration."

What this example demonstrates is that fans and consumers are able to identify moments when the state may try to use Hallyu for its own specific ends, and they will not hesitate to act so as to prevent this from happening. This does not mean that Hallyu can never be part of any kind of nationalistic endeavour. After all, Hallyu performers are clearly also expected to discharge their artistic citizenship responsibilities – something that fans understand. Thus, when BTS held a 2022 concert to introduce "Busan and Korean culture to a worldwide audience in an effort to boost interests in Busan's bid for the World Expo 2030" (Hicap 2022), the concert went off without protests and was in fact a huge success.

The difference between these two instances is that, in the first, fans were concerned that a specific government administration was trying to exploit the popularity of BTS for its own political gain whereas, in the second, fans understood that, as Korean artists, BTS would well be expected to prioritise their own country or city – especially if the context was one where the competition was one between countries or cities, as was the case when Busan was bidding to host the World Expo 2030. The "arm's-length" principle thus means that state involvement is very much limited to the kinds of supporting and promotional roles we have described. Any attempt by the state to co-opt, direct, or control the cultural products of Hallyu would likely, as we have seen, lead to angry responses towards the state (or more accurately, towards a political party that was perceived to be abusing its state-sanctioned power to co-opt non-political entities) rather than towards the various Hallyu performers themselves. And this is a point that can be more

easily appreciated or understood once the study of soft power is prepared to detach itself from a state-centric perspective.

Soft Power and Its Relationship to Hard Power

We saw in Chapter 2 that there are debates over whether soft power actually exists as a form of power on its own, or whether it is actually an extension of hard power. If the latter is the case, then it makes sense to see soft power as hard power in disguise. Hard power is typically considered in terms of military or economic might. The former can be used to threaten invasions or destruction (as is the case with North Korea's testing of ballistic missiles); the latter can be used to impose sanctions (as is the case with attempts by various European countries to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine).

Keeping this in mind, if we agree that the Hallyu strategy clearly exemplifies soft power success, then if it is indeed the case that soft power is an extension of hard power, we have to then ask what kind of military or economic might would South Korea be exerting in order to ensure this success. Consider the issue of military might. It is not clear that the success of Hallyu can be said to rely in any way at all on the country's military power. There is no evidence that South Korea's military forces are actively involved in pushing for the global spread of K-pop, K-dramas, or K-films,[1] either by threatening countries with military retaliation should they fail to allow for these cultural products to be streamed or accessed in some way, or by promising them military support in return for a willingness to promote Korean products. It seems absurd that such a claim should even be countenanced given the evidence that is (un)available. Instead, South Korea's military forces are primarily focused on protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, particularly against encroachments from North Korea, and are engaged in supporting various humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts across the globe.

So perhaps it might be more plausible to argue that Hallyu's success qua soft power is really dependent on South Korea's economic might. There are at least three problems with this argument, however. One, as we have already seen, the creative industries that are key to Hallyu are treated differently by the state than, say, the automotive or information technology industries. The state regulates the former far less and mainly focuses on appropriating or promoting the successful outcomes of these creative endeavours. Two, to the extent that the economy is involved, the strategy is more one where, as the South Korean music executive and record producer Lee Soo-man suggests (see Chapter 7), the idea of "Korean cool" is first developed and exported so that industrial giants like Samsung and LG, Hyundai and Kia, can also benefit. In other words, the economic success follows from the cultural success of Hallyu rather than the other way around. Finally, a significant theme that recurs in quite a number of K-dramas and K-films is the abuse of authority and excess levels of privilege enjoyed by *chaebols*, the large

industrial conglomerates that are usually run by single families or even just one individual. To the extent that the Korean economy is the hard power that underpins the spread of Hallyu, it seems counter-intuitive that highly negative portrayals of the country's economic giants would be not just tolerated but globally promoted.

The Hallyu case therefore demonstrates that soft power success can come about without any clear reliance on hard power. It is necessary then to consider that soft power has to be recognised as something that is independent of hard power. In this regard, it is worth considering the following statement by a scholar of leadership and strategy (quoted in Handley 2020; see also Fisk 2020, 1):

> Peter Fisk, professor of leadership and strategy at Madrid's IE Business School, said that soft power is likely to continue to have an impact on nations, describing it as "meta power." "Meta power is not about having the largest army, it is about having the best story," he stated in the report.

Fisk's statement is particularly interesting because it suggests that where the ontology of soft power is concerned, "it goes beyond our traditional sources of power, and boundaries of control" (Fisk 2020, 1). Rather, soft power is a form of "meta power", by which he appears to mean that soft power is an achievement of narrative, of having "the best story". If this is true, then questions about any proportional relationship between hard and soft power are no longer a concern since the latter is no longer seen as an extension of the former. According to Fisk, "power lies in the new stories of society – the sports teams we love, the influencers we follow, the movies we watch, the people who reflect our aspirations" (2020, 5). Just as interesting (though this is not a point developed by Fisk) is the implication that even hard power might need to be treated as a form of meta power, as a form of narrative achievement. After all, a state that possesses nuclear weapons is not particularly threatening if the general international consensus is that it is highly unlikely or extremely reluctant to use those weapons. The political posture of having the will to use such weapons, too, arises from the construction of a particular narrative, that is, from meta power. Finally, if soft power is about having "the best story", then soft power obviously cannot be something that only states possess. It is something that we need to be willing to accord to organisations, corporations, communities, and even individuals. And as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, an organisation's styling involves trying to construct a narrative about what kind of entity it is. In the case of the Banyan Tree, for example, beyond its primary activity of providing luxurious stays for its guests, the luxury resort chain wants to also be seen as being concerned with the wellbeing of the local community and environment. All this contributes to the organisation's soft power in the sense that it (hopefully) makes the Banyan Tree more attractive to potential guests, for whom values such as community-mindedness and care for the environment might be important.

Obviously, "the best story", as Fisk puts it, should not be taken to necessarily mean a clearly constructed narrative with a proper beginning, middle, and

well-defined end, as might be the case when a corporation presents its corporate history to the public. Such a carefully curated narrative may be useful as part of public relations – and their contribution to soft power should not be dismissed – but in the case of Hallyu, where multiple creative industries work autonomously with the state providing support from a distance, the presentation of an officially worked out story would likely have the counter-productive effect of undermining Hallyu's appeal. Rather, the Hallyu "story" involves a loose affiliation of creative industries (music, television, film, fashion, food, tourism, and even language learning) and support from the state. Creatives from these various industries, aided by the extensive use of digital and social media, work to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, and to gradually gain global appreciation for the quality of their cultural outputs. It is this lack of a central directing agent that is a critical part of the Hallyu narrative. And as we have shown in this book, to better understand the nature of soft power stories, sociolinguistic concepts of indexicality, style, affect, and stancetaking are extremely useful.

Soft Power Problem #1: When States Cannot Keep Their Distance

One important lesson from the Hallyu case is that the relationship between the state and these other institutions in fostering soft power cannot be too close, especially when creativity is involved. It is important that the artistic autonomy of the creative industries be respected. The question for us to consider is whether this is something that is specific to Hallyu or whether it is generalisable to other cases of soft power. We suggest the latter, albeit with suitable qualifications.

The South Korean state's "arm's-length" principle is really a specific manifestation of a more general willingness to be liberal and less authoritarian, where a government avoids imposing its own interests on its own citizens, and, this is important as well, where it refrains from threatening those whose views and ideas might differ from its own. In other words, the "arm's-length" principle is really an instantiation of a more general respect from the state for autonomy. Consider, in this regard, the states in China and North Korea, which are two regimes that are generally perceived to be highly intolerant of different viewpoints. Neither of these regimes has any compunction about harshly punishing those whom it sees as diverging from its particular goals and values. And in the case of North Korea particularly, the regime is only too quick and eager to perceive slights and insults, and to then react belligerently. In this regard, it becomes easier to understand why neither North Korea nor China are likely to be particularly successful in their soft power strategies. In fact, between the two, North Korea is less successful than China, and this supports our argument here because the Chinese government is, relatively speaking, somewhat less authoritarian than the North Korean.

For example, Bartlett (2021) suggests that in an attempt to "soften its negative image abroad", North Korea's main strategy is to embark on "a global disinformation campaign, as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un recently instructed the country's

propagandists to improve overseas messaging efforts, signalling a vested national interest in strengthening the country's soft power". Bartlett's point is that North Korea's only recourse for any kind of soft power success is some form of state-level prevarication. In contrast to North Korea, in the case of China, the Chinese government has supported the many Confucius Institutes located in various parts of the world in an attempt to promote the Chinese language, culture, and history. That being said, these institutes have been at times criticised for being too tightly controlled by the authorities to the point where academic freedom is being suppressed (US Government Accountability Office 2019). What this shows is that soft power attempts become weakened when the state is seen to be interfering with the various institutions that might otherwise be useful in promoting a greater liking for and appreciation of the country's culture. This is not to say that North Korea and China are completely lacking in soft power. Chinese history, cuisine, and locales may exert an attractive global influence on individuals, organisations, and countries. The same may be said of North Korea. But the soft power in these cases accrues to North Korea and China *in spite of* rather than because of the activities and reputation of their respective states. It is not a contradiction to talk about countries possessing soft power in spite of their states – this follows from our argument that the study of soft power must be prepared to move away from a state-centric perspective.

There is perhaps no better evidence that authoritarianism can diminish a state's soft power than the case of the USA under Donald Trump's presidency. Trump's presidency (2016–20) was an unconventional and controversial one, to say the least. He largely eschewed diplomacy in favour of aggression, and he alienated historical allies (Canada, the European Union) while treating traditional enemies (North Korea, Russia) more kindly. It is no surprise to find that Nye himself has concluded that "the presidency of Trump has led to a reduction in American soft power" (Wei 2020). The specifics of this diminution are suggested in a soft power survey (Handley 2020):[2]

> The Global Soft Power Index, by consultancy Brand Finance, surveyed more than 50,000 consumers in 87 countries to rank countries in terms of their familiarity, reputation and influence, among other measures.
>
> The U.S. came in top, with Germany, the U.K., Japan and China following. France, Canada, Switzerland, Sweden and Russia make up the rest of the top 10 …
>
> But while the U.S. was ranked highly by respondents in terms of its influence in entertainment, media, sport and science, its reputation, governance and political stability are seen less positively by people around the world.
>
> "The mixed international reception of controversies surrounding President Trump's administration is likely to be the reason behind relatively low ratings for reputation," the report authors noted.

The survey goes on to note:

> The U.S. came 13th for reputation, 13th for ethical standards, 19th for political standards and 44th for relations with other countries. People also ranked it low for climate action (28th) and trustworthiness (23rd), according to the study, published Tuesday.
>
> "This is perhaps understandable given America's decisions to unilaterally pull out of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iranian nuclear policy, undermining the nation's reliability as a partner on the world stage," the report stated …
> Like the U.S., China and Russia rank higher for influence than for reputation. China is ranked as the world's second-most influential country but comes in at 24th for reputation. Russia ranks 7th for influence and 26th for reputation.
>
> *(Handley 2020)*

There seems to be little doubt that Trump's presidency has diminished America's soft power. Trump is (in)famous for his use of Twitter, which served as his favourite channel (until he was banned) for making policy announcements, delivering opinions on global developments, and keeping in touch with his supporters. This preference for social media continued even after he was banned from Twitter causing him to launch his own platform called "Truth Social" in February 2022. And he has also been scathing about "fake news" – which refers primarily in his case to the mainstream news media (such as *The New York Times*, CNN, and BBC) – for, in his view, deliberately misrepresenting him to the American public. In turn, critics of Trump have accused social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook of being too slow to label Trump's messages as unsupported by facts or as outright lies. Trump's political persona is that of someone who is brash, unapologetic, and unpredictable. This has played well to his domestic base of supporters but internationally, it turned the USA into a state that many other countries find aggressive and difficult to rely on or to work with.

From the perspective of the affective economy (Ahmed 2004a, b), Trump's tweets are well known as a primary channel by which his views circulate, thus serving to increase the affective value of his political style. As pointed out by Andrews (2020), Trump used his Twitter account "to announce policy, move markets, attack the press, dispute reports, insult enemies and energize his base – all unvarnished by a journalist's interpretation". The tweets served to consolidate Trump's political style as one that is uncompromising and with little time for tact or diplomacy. According to Matthews (2020), one of Trump's tweets about sending the National Guard to deal with riots in Minneapolis was even labelled "violated Twitter rules about glorifying violence". Unsurprisingly, Trump continued to be unapologetic and his reaction became one of further aggression, this time directed at the media companies and threatening to shut them down (Cellan-Jones

2020). Most dramatically, of course, has been Twitter's decision to permanently ban Trump (though Elon Musk has since reinstated Trump's Twitter account) following the 6 January 2021 attack on the US seat of government, Capitol Hill, an attack attributed mainly to supporters of Trump who are White supremacists and who have bought into many of the conspiracy theories that Trump has been accused of peddling, including the Q-Anon Storm conspiracy that Republican vindication will come about following a military take back of the country. The move by Twitter is in addition to Facebook's decision to ban Trump until at the least the end of his term in office. The moves followed the violent attack on Capitol Hill, following Trump's continued claims of election fraud and his encouragements to his followers to reclaim the country. Twitter made the decision that Trump should not be able to evade its ban by tweeting from a different account; his tweets would be deleted if he tried to tweet from a government account (Allyn and Keith 2021). Insofar as the American president can be said to embody the country's policies and mode of governance, Trump's bellicose behaviour, propagated by his use of social media, has led to a perception in the international arena that the USA is no longer as cooperative or even as compassionate as it used to be. By giving attention to style, affect, and stancetaking, it is possible to demonstrate qualitatively just how Trump's communicative activities have diminished American soft power. His successor, Joe Biden, took pains to declare "the message I want the world to hear today: America is back. America is back. Diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy" (Biden 2021).

Soft Power Problem #2: When Foreign Participation Is Neglected

The case of Japan is particularly interesting and deserving of its own discussion because there are many similarities between Japan and South Korea as regards their soft power strategies. And yet, it seems that in recent years, at least, Japan's soft power strategy has not succeeded as well as South Korea's.

Known as "Cool Japan", this is the country's brand strategy aimed at garnering global interest in Japanese culture, and it involves the dissemination and promotion of games, anime, manga, fashion, and technological products, among others (Cabinet Office 2015). Like the Korean Wave, there is collaboration between the public and private sectors. Notably, state involvement and support come from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which established a Creative Industries Promotion Office in 2010. And in 2013, the Japanese government committed ¥50 billion to be spent over 20 years. There is therefore a clear long-term commitment from the government.

Japanese soft power has clearly had its successes. Universities overseas saw an increase in the number of students applying for Japanese studies. Its cuisine became sought-after globally. Japanese craftsmanship and aesthetics were highly respected. Japanese pop music and films grew in popularity. As McGray (2023) puts it:

> Sometimes, like an Issey Miyake gown, the Japan that travels is authentic. Sometimes, like cream cheese-and-salmon sushi, it is not. But cultural accuracy is not the point. What matters is the whiff of Japanese cool.

Problems and criticisms soon appeared, however. Kelts (2010, italics added) provides a devastating and incisive analysis when he identifies "an unsettling gap between the American fans of cool Japan and the Japanese who actually make what's cool":

> I've taken to calling this Japan's pop culture branding gap. While cool Japan has amassed a vast audience overseas in the past decade, very few of its fans know anything about the brands behind it … Quite a few industry producers and publishers still maintain Japanese-only Web presences, but that hardly matters. In either language, most of the industry's online offerings are amateurish, hard to navigate, and worst of all, dull – just the opposite of their vaunted products.
>
> *This antiquated, inward-looking and provincial approach to brand marketing* may have sufficed when Japan's domestic market was still breeding successive generations of native otaku. But today, with a shrinking youth demographic, imperilled economy and new competition from their Asian neighbors, Japan's producers of pop culture can no longer afford to ignore the overseas market.

In other words, there was no serious attempt to engage the consumers and fans of "Cool Japan", leaving the overseas market "ignored". This is where a clear contrast with Hallyu can be seen. As we pointed out (Chapter 4), the success of Hallyu as a global phenomenon is also attributable to the use of social media and digital technologies, not only for the transmission of cultural products but, importantly, also as avenues by which fans can easily access and interact with the performers and producers. Active fan participation is not a marginal dimension of Hallyu. It plays a critical role in the affective economy, fostering a sense of community among fans in their various attempts at trying to understand and support their favourite pop groups or stars.

Conclusion

The "arm's-length" principle that is so important to Hallyu's success represents a specific manifestation of a state's willingness to be less authoritarian. And the stance triangle provides a useful way of illustrating this point. If the state were to dictate, say, the contents of the creative industries or the media, to the point where such outputs are no longer independently formed but mere reflections of how the state wants to be seen, then there is effectively no triangle anymore. There is only the state publicly using the media or the creative industries to admire itself.

The triangle becomes reinstated when would-be consumers now view the state-media-creative industries as a single complex entity and have to make evaluative decisions about their own stances vis-à-vis this new behemoth. In other words, a state that co-opts other institutions to the point where the latter are perceived as nothing more than agents of the state returns us to the lesson of the first point: that soft power success rests on states working with other actors rather than subsuming them.

The other issue that arises when states do maintain their distance and refrain from exerting any tendency towards authoritarianism is this: how can some sense of strategic cohesiveness be maintained if government, media, and industry all act autonomously? Again, the Hallyu phenomenon provides us with some answers. The South Korean state provides the supporting infrastructure and promotional activities. It does two important things. One, it appropriates the successful outputs to further enhance the country's image. Two, it ensures a more multidimensional approach by promoting many different aspects of the country's culture and achievements than would have otherwise occurred if left up to individual industries.

Soft power then needs to be appreciated as something that is not necessarily reliant on or related to hard power. In fact, both soft and hard power need to be understood in relation to having "the best story" which is best at achieving the desired affect. And to analyse just how such a story might emerge or be constructed, the tools of sociolinguistics have proven to be valuable in providing us with new insights into both the workings of the Korean Wave as well as the nature of soft power more generally.

Notes

1 One uniquely Korean intersection of soft power and hard military power is when male stars of K-pop or K-drama fulfil their duty as Korean citizens, fans and the media are present to send them off as they enter the military camp. In December 2022, when Jin of BTS entered training camp, their management agency asked fans not to gather as "he will not be doing any greetings, and he'll enter the facility without leaving his vehicle". ARMY all over the world wished Jin the best for his time in military service whatever their own political stance may be.

2 For a discussion of South Korea's soft power index, see Chapter 4.

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