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K-POP, K-DRAMAS, KBBQ: AN ANALYSIS OF THE *HALLYU* WAVE

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, the world has become inundated by a cultural force, originating from South Korea, called the *Hallyu Wave*. The world has witnessed and experienced the rise of this new phenomenon through a variety of different mediums such as K-pop, K-dramas, K-movies, and more. What makes this phenomenon unique is not only the speed it employed to spread all over the world but how the actual phenomenon is also an extension of South Korea's own historical, societal, and economic development. The purpose of my paper will be to examine the *Hallyu Wave*- the phenomenon that describes this spread of Korean culture across the world. My paper will attempt to not only clear up any misconceptions surrounding the *Hallyu Wave* but will also examine the breaking point of the *Hallyu Wave*- the events that engendered this Korean phenomenon- in hopes of elucidating its complex and dark history while also providing the necessary context for its emergence. Furthermore, I will also examine the impact the *Hallyu Wave* has had on South Korea to highlight its expansive nature and importance to South Korea. In addition, I will also explain some of the leading factors that has helped sustain the *Hallyu Wave*'s popularity. Finally, I will also provide my personal thoughts on the *Hallyu Wave*, to explain its connection to my own life and in hopes of starting a much-needed conversation about the current nature and prospective future of Korean culture.

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Introduction

South Korean culture, today, has risen and taken a strong foothold amongst the sea of cultures and customs that come from countries all over the world. One prominent way in which South Korea has been able to disperse its culture is through a phenomenon called the *Hallyu Wave* (한류). *Hallyu Wave* translated into English quite literally means “Korean Wave”, a reference to the fact that the surge of Korean culture and media, like a tidal wave, has inundated the rest of the world. In fact, it is through the *Hallyu Wave* that South Korea has been able to plant itself amongst other world leaders and also become an economic and political powerhouse. In fact, it can be argued that the *Hallyu Wave* should be considered South Korea’s greatest asset and one of the best forms of consolidated soft power in the world today. But what has allowed the *Hallyu Wave* to become as big and pervasive as it is today? What events transpired that not only stimulated its immense growth and development but also helped sustain it? A quick overview shows a vast and complex web of interconnected events and philosophies that have fueled the *Hallyu Wave*. These can range from long periods of dictatorship and censorship coupled with the long-lasting consequences of Japanese imperialism to dazzling and almost hypnotic musical performances from various K-pop groups. While it is important to examine and analyze the historical and economic impact the *Hallyu Wave* has had on South Korea and the rest of the world it is equally important to examine the cultural and societal impact it has had as well. How has it affected Korean culture? How has it affected Koreans across the globe? Analyzing the *Hallyu Wave*’s societal and cultural impact will also serve to start a much-needed dialogue to bring more attention and awareness to Korean culture. This paper will provide a modest yet fundamental understanding surrounding the history and popularity of the *Hallyu Wave*, the

various impacts the *Hallyu Wave* has had on South Korea, and also provide a sententious discussion about the state of contemporary Korean culture.

Personal discourse

Before I begin, I would first like to offer my personal thoughts on this project, in terms of why I chose this project and why it is so personal and important to me. I am a second-generation Korean American. When I was growing up, even in Los Angeles, which hosts the largest Korean community in the U.S., it was always difficult to connect with my Korean heritage. On one hand, schools never made any real effort to try and get us more in touch with our Korean cultural background, and on the other hand, my parents, as well as a lot of other immigrant parents, also made sure I fit in with the “American” students. In addition, The *Hallyu Wave*, while certainly in full effect and catching on steam, was not as strong as it is today and had not really permeated into our pop culture, which meant it was not “cool” to talk about K-pop or K-dramas. All of this left very little middle ground in which I could equally learn about the two worlds I was born into. But, as I got older, specifically when I was a senior in high school, I began to notice a buck in this trend. Suddenly, K-pop groups like BTS, TWICE, or BLACKPINK were the hottest new thing in music. Korean movies like *Train to Busan* or *Parasite* were gaining international acclaim and were being offered tens of millions by competing streaming sites. But most importantly it felt that the general attitude to how we treat second-generation kids had shifted. It has felt that it has become more “acceptable” to encourage kids to embrace their different cultural backgrounds. That is why this capstone project is so personal and important to me, it allows me to contribute to this ever-growing dialogue surrounding Korean culture. It helps me bring awareness to an accessible and dependable medium, the *Hallyu Wave*, to which other Korean American kids can use to learn more about their Korean heritage.

Misconceptions of the *Hallyu Wave*

To begin with, it is important to note and elucidate any misconceptions and misunderstandings surrounding the *Hallyu Wave*. Many people believe the *Hallyu Wave* simply refers to K-pop, K-dramas, and K-movies when in reality, it “refers to the current impact of products specific to South Korean popular culture (films, music, games, fashion) on this region of the world,” (Marinescu et al. 6). In other words, while the *Hallyu Wave* mainly consists of popular genres such as K-pop, K-dramas, and K-movies it also contains other lesser known mediums such as Korean food, technology, skincare products and routines, and even hangeuro (한국어), the official Korean language. This clarification is important to distinguish for a couple of reasons. One, it does not try to diminish all of Korean culture into a few sub-categories of pop culture. In addition, it also provides a more comprehensive point of view on the impact and scale of the *Hallyu Wave*.

The History of the *Hallyu Wave*

The Buildup

South Korea, compared to other global powers, is an infant. Korea spent the early half of the 20th century fighting off Japanese colonization attempts and truly came into the modern scene only after its violent split into North and South Korea in 1953, following the end of the Korean War (Sandler 14). What transpired before, during, and after these events was a series of political and cultural events, orchestrated by both foreign and domestic military dictatorships alike, that would ultimately set the stage and eventually culminate into the *Hallyu Wave*.

One of the earliest instances of censorship in Korean history occurred in 1922 when the occupying Japanese governing force mandated the “Entertainment and Venue Regulation” act in order to curb pro-Korean sentiments within the country (Im 98). More and more regulation laws

would soon be enforced by the Japanese government until Korea's liberation in 1948. However, this would not be the last of the censorship laws as the series of dictatorships that would rule South Korea for the next 31 years, continued this limiting tradition. This early period of Korean censorship is important to note. It not only set a precedent of censorship that future Korean governmental regimes would follow but it also gave the Korean populace a taste of what suppression of the arts and media was like- and began the official countdown of the *Hallyu Wave* explosion.

The Park Regime

Almost immediately after Rhee Syngman (이승만), South Korea's first president turned dictator, was disposed of, a new leader, by the name of Park Chung-Hee (박정희), an officer in the Korean military, would initiate a military coup and rule South Korea with an iron fist for the next 13 years. His time is one of controversy as although he would help South Korea take the first steps out of hermitage and into the modern world, he also employed heavy and often unfavorable and unreasonable censorships, restrictions, and tactics. This combination of modernity and censorship would prove to be the most influential factors in engendering the *Hallyu Wave*. As more and more Koreans began to be exposed to the modern world and broaden their minds, they became more frustrated with the lack of equal rights in displaying their newfound knowledge and advocated for more opportunities to do such things, inching South Korea closer and closer to the *Hallyu Wave*.

The main vessel in which Park Chung-Hee was able to enact his oppressive policies was through his highly controversial Yushin (Reformation) Constitution. This political power grab gave Park "almost monolithic control over all governmental and non-governmental institutions," (Kim & Sorensen 20). Through this, Park created and strengthened new and existing film

censorship regulations. One of the most important ones was revising and strengthening the Motion Picture Law, originally enacted in 1962. The Motion Picture Law had three basic components: 1) filmmakers needed governmental approval before starting any projects, 2) filmmakers needed to register any pertinent information regarding their film and themselves for government approval, and 3) filmmakers and production companies alike needed government endorsement before exporting or importing any film (Im 99). To enforce this, Park set up a separate office called the Public Performance Ethics Committee (PPEC) to supervise and strongarm all forms of media to follow these strict guidelines (Park 123).

In regard to the third component of the Motion Picture Law, Park's regime took it one step further and decided to tie foreign movie exports to domestic productions, setting the "number of imported movies at one-third the number of domestic films produced annually," (Park 123). In other words, they effectively managed to control the quality and quantity of Korean produced films while also severely limiting the number of foreign, mainly Western, films as well. This ban would later also be extended to include severe restrictions on all forms of Japanese media (manga, anime, movies, music, etc.), leading to an entertainment famine for the Korean populace that would last nearly 20 years. It was this paradoxical business of globalization and censorship that made Park's rein the main catalyst for the explosion of the *Hallyu Wave*. This notion can be aptly explained by Karl Marx's idea of 'commodity fetishism', in which fetishism "attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities," (Marx 48). This means that people confuse the exchange-value of a commodity with its use-value, thereby tying a commodity's value to its social value rather than its intrinsic use, placing more value on a commodity's social status than its inherent use. Through his attempt at globalization,

Park also allowed his denizens to tap into the global market and broaden their horizons. But, by restricting these same people, through censorship, access to a commodity, he inadvertently increased its exchange value- how much society values a commodity- making the people yearn for it even more. In other words, by giving South Koreans, for the first time, almost unprecedented access to the modern world and restricting their right to apply, practice, and enjoy these newfound ideologies, skills, and entertainment mediums, Park left many South Koreans being culturally and creatively oppressed and frustrated.

The Final Push

Park Chung Hee's reign eventually came to an end with his assassination in 1979. Along with it came a series of socio-political events that would not only drastically change South Korea but also serve as the final push for the explosion of the *Hallyu Wave*.

In the following year, in 1980, the political void Park left behind was quickly filled by another military dictator by the name of Chun Doo-Hwan (전두환). However, although he had obtained absolute political power, that power had significantly weakened, evidenced by the fact that his reign lasted only 8 years. One reason was because Chun inherited a messy political situation with many old time political rivals, such as Kim Young Sam (김영삼) and Kim Dae Jung (김대중), taking advantage of Park's death and began pushing for democratic reforms.

These sentiments were held and echoed by the general population who "had become more active in the open political arena due to the collapse of the Bak Jeong-hee Regime," (Jean 162). The Korean people, already having been oppressed by two consecutive dictatorships and recently been exposed to the modern world through South Korea's globalization attempts, took advantage of the chaos and initiated a number of protests calling for democratization.

The most infamous and influential of these protests was the 1980 May 18th Gwangju Uprising (오일팔), otherwise known as the Gwangju Massacre. This protest, lasting from May 18th to May 27th, was initially triggered by Chun's ever growing martial power and military crackdowns. But, according to Ahn Jean, it quickly came to represent "the people's political demands ... for the transition to a liberal-democratic system, away from a fascist ruling structure," (164 Jean). It became the biggest protest for democracy, in South Korea, since the 1960 Korean Student April Uprisings (사일구), and the bloodiest as over 160 protestors were killed while thousands more were left injured. All said, the Gwangju Massacre became one of the darkest chapters in Korean history, highlighted by the slaughter of innocent civilians conducted by its own punitive government. However, the Gwangju Massacre is also remembered as the turning point in the fight for Korean democracy as it "played a pivotal role in checking military intervention in politics... as well as in establishing the principle of civilian supremacy" (Kim 225).

The Gwangju Massacre became a rallying cry for the Korean populace in the 80's. Soon more and more protests and demonstrations began to dominate South Korea throughout the decade and Chun's regime, caught in the crossfire, began to lose power and thus, was faced with a difficult choice. He could either mobilize his troops and forcibly quell the demonstrations, thereby risking civil war, or peacefully give up power and begin the transition to democracy (Han 54). He chose the latter and on June 29th, 1987, his regime announced a "democratization plan that embodied a wholesale acceptance of the opposition's demands," (Han 54). South Korea's first fair presidential election was held on December 16th, 1987, and along with it came the end of a long series of dictatorships and the chance to build something new. The

implementation of democratic institutions became the tipping point that opened the floodgates for the *Hallyu Wave*, which took off immediately in the coming years.

The pre-history of the *Hallyu Wave* is important to note because it provides important context for the events that not only spawned the *Hallyu Wave* but the circumstances that led to its rising and continuing popularity. To ignore it would not only be disingenuous to all those who suffered and fought hard to ensure its survival and prosperity but also would deny the actual movement its historical and cultural identity, a huge aspect of its popularity. Delineated later on in this paper, a huge reason as to why the *Hallyu Wave* is so big and pervasive as it is today is because many South Koreans, particularly the government, hold the *Hallyu Wave* in high regard and treat it as one of its most valuable assets. This type of support does not occur without first acknowledging the historical plight their ancestors had to go through and that is why we cannot analyze the *Hallyu Wave* in a vacuum and must acknowledge its historical pretext as well.

The Hallyu Wave

The Explosion

Just as it is important to talk about the historical context of the *Hallyu Wave* it is also important to talk about the actual phenomenon itself.

In the years following South Korea's implementation of democratic institutions, it immediately experienced a cultural revolution the likes of which the country, and perhaps the world, had never seen before. Decades of censorship and oppression had finally boiled over, leading to a cultural explosion that rocked South Korea and the rest of the world. With this explosion came several new genres such as K-pop and Korean movies which not only became a staple amongst the Korean population but also slowly began to become a part of the global zeitgeist.

Indeed, some of the earliest “surfers” of the *Hallyu Wave* came in the form of movies. One of the earliest and well-known examples of this would be the 1999 action movie *Shiri* (쉬리). At the time, it smashed a number of Korean film records, including being the most expensive Korean film ever made (8.5 million USD) and becoming the most watched movie in South Korea, beating the record set by *Titanic* a couple of years earlier. It also became a commercial success outside of South Korea as well and gained popularity all throughout Asia. The success of *Shiri* can be thought of as a steppingstone for the *Hallyu Wave* as not only did it give South Koreans the confidence to pursue and experiment with other forms of art it also signaled to the rest of the world that a new era of Korean media and arts was underway.

The success of *Shiri* quickly gave way to a number of other Korean films. The early 2000’s saw the debut of several successful Korean films, which include but are not limited to: *Joint Security Area* (공동경비구역 JSA), *Friend* (친구), *My Sassy Girl* (엽기적인 그녀), *Memories of Murder* (살인의 추억), *Oldboy* (올드보이), and *Taegukgi* (태극기 휘날리며). All of these films would go on to gross millions at the box office and would also earn various film awards, both domestically and internationally, helping spread the *Hallyu Wave* and exposing audiences to more of South Korea. *Oldboy* and *Memories of Murder*, in particular, would go on to play a huge role in the *Hallyu Wave* as they were really the first to gain such an enormous international cult following and are widely considered some of the best South Korean films of all time. In addition, both films would go on to start and define the trend of Korean noir and thriller films which has become a staple in Korean cinema.

Other early “surfers” of the *Hallyu Wave* came in the form of K-pop and K-dramas. The emergence of K-pop can be traced back to the debut of the 1996 boy band H.O.T (에이치오티). This group became a sensation overnight with their debut album, *We Hate all Kinds Of Violence*,

selling over 1.5 million copies and all subsequent albums selling just as much (Fuhr 75). However, what really set them apart from other singers and idols was not their profound success in South Korea but their profound success overseas, specifically in China. They were the first K-pop group to hold a concert in China, drawing around 13,000 fans (Chung & Lee). It was their overseas success in China that paved the way for future K-pop groups, by not only providing the blueprint for how to succeed but also putting a foot in the door for K-pop to thrive in international markets. The success of H.O.T quickly gave rise to a whole slew of early K-pop “surfers” such as g.o.d (지오디), BoA (권보아), Rain (비), TVXQ (동방신기), Girl’s Generation (소녀시대), Big Bang (빅뱅), and many more.

In terms of K-dramas, one of the earliest and most popular “surfers” would be *Winter Sonata* (겨울연가) which first aired in 2002. The drama drew on average over 20% of prime-time viewers and would go on to sell over 300,000 DVD copies (Lee). It is usually thought of as the main medium to which the *Hallyu Wave* was able to spread to Japan. Indeed, it became so popular that the then Japanese Prime Minister famously remarked that the leading actor, Bae Yong-Joon, was more popular than him (Lee). Another early “surfer” would be the hit drama, *Dae Jang Geum* (대장금), which attracted 57% of South Korean viewers when it aired in 2003 and earned 40 million dollars worldwide (Hua). It even fueled the Korean tourism industry as fans, both domestic and foreign, clamored to see the rural and rustic backdrops that the show became famous for.

In recent years, the *Hallyu Wave* has experienced a rapid acceleration in its growth with more and more countries recognizing Korean art and media. In terms of Korean cinema, movies such as *Parasite* (기생충), *Train to Busan* (부산행), *The Handmaiden* (아가씨), and *Burning* (버닝) are some of the first Korean films to have won and been nominated for some of the most

prestigious film awards in the entire world, such as an Oscar, a Golden Globe, a Palme d'Or, a BAFTA, and more. In particular, *Parasite* became the first non-English language film to win an Academy award, for Best Picture, alongside with its golden globe and BAFTA. On the other side, K-pop has also become a huge phenomenon all across the world. Idol groups such as BTS, BLACKPINK, EXO, TWICE, and more have shattered long standing music records and accumulated an intense and dedicated fanbase. BTS, in particular, has an outstanding career, being one of the most recognizable boy bands in the entire world. They set numerous Billboard records, are one of the most streamed musical artists in the world and have one of the largest social media followings amongst all musicians (BowenBank). Finally, the ubiquitousness of K-dramas has also expanded and is now on the screens of millions of people worldwide. Some critically acclaimed K-dramas now include *Squid Game* (오징어 게임), *Goblin* (쓸쓸하고 찬란하), *Good Doctor* (굿 닥터), *Vincenzo* (빈센조), *Descendants of the Sun* (태양의 후예), *Sweet Home* (스위트홈), and more. In fact, *Squid Game* became so popular that it has become Netflix's most watched show of all time, accomplishing this feat within the first four weeks of its debut (Spangler). In addition, *Squid Game* was also nominated for over 60 awards, including for a BAFTA and a Screen Actors Guilds Awards (SAGA), and won over 25 of their nominations, making it one of the most highly awarded k-dramas to date (IMDB).

The *Hallyu Wave* movement has seen tremendous growth since its inception in the early 90's. What was once contained in South Korea, the *Hallyu Wave* is now seen in many different genres and areas of the world. From little kids being in awe of K-pop music videos to Korean beauty products lining up the shelves of every cosmetic store, the *Hallyu Wave* has been instrumental in the rapid growth and acceleration of South Korea and its culture.

Impact on South Korea

Now, moving past the historical analysis and explanation of the *Hallyu Wave*, analyzing what kind of impact it has had on South Korea gives us a more in-depth view and shows just how integral the *Hallyu Wave* is to South Korea. In fact, since its inception, various groups, such as politicians, celebrities, academics, and more, both Korean and foreign, have commented on the immense impact the *Hallyu Wave* has had on South Korea. Indeed, Moon Jae-In (문재인), the 12th president of South Korea, even commented, in a press conference, on how the *Hallyu Wave* has helped South Korea “achieve innovative growth through the power of content and culture” (Moon Jae-In). In particular, two particular key regions of growth stand out: South Korea’s economy and South Korea’s soft power.

South Korea’s economy

One of the main and important ways the *Hallyu Wave* has affected South Korea is by accelerating and changing its economy. A passing examination of South Korea’s economy from the late 1990’s and beyond, around the time the *Hallyu Wave* began to truly take off, shows a substantial and exponential increase in its GDP. However, a closer and more comprehensive analysis reveals that the *Hallyu Wave* has had a deeper impact than what the numbers show and might have even helped save South Korea from bankruptcy and complete economic ruin.

In the summer of 1997, a financial crisis, first originating in Thailand, gripped much of East Asia and many countries in the region plunged into financial trouble, with South Korea being no exception. Specifically, in South Korea the unemployment rate skyrocketed, reaching 8.1% in March 1998, with almost 2 million South Koreans being unemployed (Choi & Chung 5). This financial crisis, commonly referred to by Koreans as the 1997 IMF crisis, left a bad taste in many South Koreans' mouths and had their government scrambling for solutions. While the

South Korean government took multiple routes to solving this problem, such as taking out international loans or regulating banks, a unique strategy they implemented was actually increasing their investment and interest in their entertainment and media industries, such as the music and film industries, which eventually brought “significant changes in the media market,” (Fuhr 137), or in other words; help bring about the *Hallyu Wave*. For example, the South Korean government “subsidized 473 million Won to independent producers and cable channels,” (Fuhr 138), to help produce and circulate Korean productions all throughout East Asia. In addition, the South Korean government brought regulative changes to their music industry which “brought a significant increase in the number of music companies on the market,” (Fuhr 140). The effects of these investments and changes were felt rather quickly and proved beneficial as by 2003, “exports of South Korean programs totaled 71.4 million U.S. dollars,” (Hua). In addition, by 2001 the South Korean music industry had totaled over 203 million U.S. dollars and would become the 4th largest music market by 2006 (Fuhr 141). In 2004, *Hallyu Wave* related exports brought in a little over 150 million U.S. dollars, by 2018 the *Hallyu Wave* was bringing in over 13 billion U.S. dollars for South Korea, with movies and t.v. contributing 8 billion U.S. dollars (Oxford Economics) and K-pop adding in 5 billion U.S. dollars (Vox). All in all, South Korea’s bet on its own cultural media and the emergence of the *Hallyu Wave* paid off and as early as 2000 the South Korean economy not only began to slowly stabilize but was also able to use its prior investments to establish a firm foothold in the entertainment and media industries and become a global cultural powerhouse.

Soft Power

Another important area of focus that has been impacted by South Korea’s growing *Hallyu Wave* phenomenon is its concentration of soft power. Soft power, as described by Dr.

Vuving in his paper *How Soft Power Works*, is the “ability to affect the behavior of others by influencing their preferences” (6), or in other words, to co-opt rather than coerce. The reason why soft power is important is because it offers a medium through which an agent, in this case a country, can impose their will and agenda through minimal resources and conflict. In addition, Dr. Sook Jung Lee argues that the value of soft power has ballooned even more, thanks to the digital nature of our world today. She argues that this digital revolution has leveled the playing field by “reducing costs... barriers of entry to markets, thus reducing the power of large states,” (Lee 139). These facets are particularly important for South Korea because although South Korea has the 10th largest economy in the world (Investopedia) and ranks 7th in military strength (Business Insider), as of 2021, pundits still agree that its “diplomacy is weak compared to its economic standing,” and still often seen as a “middle power,” (Lee 140). Therefore, one way for South Korea to “legitimize” their global strength and standing is to focus on increasing their own soft power, which they have done through the *Hallyu Wave*. In 2021 alone, the South Korean government spent around 8.4 trillion won, over 6.9 billion USD, in *Hallyu* related fields such as “culture, sports, and tourism,” (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2021). By doing this, South Korea can now more easily impose and influence its own foreign policy plans and global perception, which in turn can also affect its own economy through trade and industry growth. In fact, this strategy, for all intents and purposes, seems to be working for South Korea. According to the Soft Power 30, a global index that analyzes and ranks the world’s strongest sources of soft power, South Korea ranked 19th out of 30 countries in 2019, being labeled as one of the most notable upward movers. In short, the *Hallyu Wave* has provided South Korea a valuable way to shore up and expand its own legitimacy and strength through unconventional means.

Reasons for popularity

This paper has widely established that the *Hallyu Wave* is indeed a true global phenomenon that has pushed its way into the global zeitgeist, but what about it makes it so popular and beloved? While this section of the paper will certainly not claim to have the most definitive answers it will present and explain some of the commonly accepted answers for some of the highly popular aspects of the *Hallyu Wave*.

In terms of K-Pop there are multiple reasons as to why it has grown so popular today. It makes great use of pop music tropes and the internet to cultivate an intense group of loyal followers. For example, many people might believe that there is a secretive and intensive formula to making a K-pop song but in reality, it follows a very basic formula: a catchy beat and an easy-to-follow chorus. In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Dr. Dal Young Jin explains how K-pop songs “emphasize catchiness through devices like repetition.” Hit songs like, *Sorry Sorry*, *Fantastic Baby*, *Growl*, *DDU-DU DDU-DU*, and many more follow this exact recipe by emphasizing its repetitive hook. This repetition makes it easier for listeners, both foreign and domestic, to sing and dance along to, making it all the more likely that they will become fans of the group. In addition, K-pop also employs simple but infectious choreography, called “point dances” to compliment the actual song (The Washington Post). Dance moves like Psy’s *Gangnam Style* horse-like dance or BLACKPINK’s finger shooting *DDU-DU DDU-DU* dance not only makes it easier for fans to follow but it immerses them so seamlessly it makes them feel a part of the group itself. Finally, another technique the K-pop industry uses is maximizing its social media presence. In 2020 alone, there were over 6.7 billion K-pop related tweets, setting a new world record (Kim). Many K-pop groups have social media accounts that have well over tens of millions of followers. *BTS* is the 33rd largest twitter account, with over 45 million

followers. In addition, as of August 2021, in the top ten most viewed YouTube videos in 24 hours, 8 of them belonged to K-Pop with many more not far down the list (Statista). Yeongjin Kim, head of Global K-pop partnerships at Twitter, explains how social media allows K-pop groups to closely interact with its fans, which in turn creates a sense of loyalty and camaraderie, which further generates engagement and revenue (The Washington Post).

On the other hand, K-movies have employed a wholly different technique that accounts for its popularity: history. In terms of k-movies, one specific genre stands out as the most abject form of storytelling: noir. The reason for South Korea's obsession, and mastery, of noir lies in its turbulent past of Japanese colonialism, dealing with an international civil war, and cycling through decades of dictatorships. Stephen Teo, in the book, *International Noir*, explains how South Korean filmmakers are so conscious of "their historical moment," (150) that it becomes inevitable that noir becomes their preferred method of storytelling. To that he explains how noir films allow South Korean filmmakers to show "an object of baroque cruelty... of South Korean society and its social problems," (Teo 150-151). In other words, noir films afford South Korean filmmakers the medium to properly critique and convey the brutality, violence, and hopelessness that they feel is accustomed to much of South Korea's history and society. It is precisely this unfiltered depiction of violence and brutality that draws people into South Korean films. Indeed, it should then be no surprise that some of South Korea's most recognizable movies, such as *Parasite*, *Oldboy*, and *Memories of Murder* are noir films that critique South Korea through raw bloodshed and violence. Teo further explains how unlike other film industries, "violence is that fixed point of attraction around which Korean cinema has crystallized its power," (150) and that this stark contrast caught people by surprise but intrigued and wanting to indulge more in the "orgasmic and prolonged" (150) nature of violence in South Korean noir films.

Finally, when it comes to the secret of K-dramas' international success, it is a hodgepodge of varying strategies and techniques. In their paper, *Korean Dramas and Films: Key Factors for their International Competitiveness*, Parc and Moon outline some of the most important variables and strategies that contribute to the popularity of K-dramas. They note that K-dramas are "diverse in stories and themes" (Parc & Moon 143), which allow them to appeal to a wide range of audiences. For example, serious dramas that tackle subjects such as class issues and poverty, like *Squid Game*, are marketed towards adults while lighthearted and fun dramas, such as *Business Proposal*, are geared towards young adults and teenagers. In addition, according to an interview with Dr. Dafna Zur, k-dramas "strike a balance of predictability and originality" (De Witte), in their characters, plots, and even backdrops. She explains how this balance hooks in new viewers with the lure of something exciting or new while also retaining old viewers by providing a blanket of security and familiarity.

In short, the *Hallyu Wave* has seen tremendous growth and success not only because of its ability to innovate and adapt, both to their own environment and the world around it, but because it embraces the fact that it is as much a cultural movement as it is a global phenomenon.

Conclusion

On the surface, the *Hallyu Wave* seems like a superfluous name for South Korea's entertainment industry. But, as demonstrated by this paper, the *Hallyu Wave* is a great deal of many things. It is a fascinating case study of how history, cultural technologies, and innovation can come together to create a powerful cultural driving force. In addition, it is a testament to the will and perseverance of the South Korean population, overcoming decades of dictatorships and using these experiences to fuel and inspire the *Hallyu Wave*. It is also a cultural spotlight and anchor for South Koreans and Korean expats alike, doubling as a source of pride and acting as a

subsidiary. At the end of the day, while the *Hallyu Wave* is a great deal of many things, the most important one is the fact that it is here to stay.

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