

**Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power:
The Impact of South Korea's Pop Culture on China and the World**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zhiqi Jiang', written in a cursive style.

16 day of August 2024 at Hangzhou, China

Abstract

This research paper, titled "Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power: The Impact of South Korea's Pop Culture on China and the World" is submitted by Zhiqi Jiang on August 16, 2024, as a Master's Research Report in International Relations. It examines the extent to which South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has challenged China's cultural dominance in East Asia and contributed to South Korea's rise in global soft power since the 1990s. By contrasting the cultural diplomacy strategies of China and South Korea and investigating the achievements of South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy in economics, international organizations, and foreign policies, the study argues that South Korea's strategic promotion of its pop culture, including K-pop, K-dramas, and films, has significantly enhanced its soft power. This influence manifests in South Korea's ability to shape public opinion and influence economic and foreign policies in and with China. Additionally, South Korea has leveraged global economic gains and diplomatic influence through celebrity youth diplomacy to further strengthen its international soft power. The findings highlight the critical role of pop cultural diplomacy in international relations, providing insights for nations seeking to improve their global standing.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Since the end of the 20th century, the importance of soft power has been rising significantly. While the role of soft power in East Asia has also steadily increased over the past three decades, one nation has caught the international community's attention regarding soft power in recent times. This country is South Korea. The remarkable phenomenon of South Korea investing significant effort in developing its popular culture as a major component of its national diplomatic and economic policy raises important questions: Does this strategy effectively enhance the nation's international status? How does it impact its interactions with other countries, especially China? Could the clashes arising from the deployment of soft power between countries potentially trigger a major soft power competition or even war, and if so, how might that take place?

In this paper, we aim to examine the following research question: Since the 1990s, to what extent has South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy (Hallyu) challenged China's East Asian cultural dominance and accounted for the rise of South Korean soft power in East Asia and the world?

Specifically, the research question will first seek to understand how South Korea's cultural diplomacy efforts since the 1990s have served as a counterbalance to China's cultural diplomacy and its culturally dominant position in East Asia. It will compare the two distinct cultural strategies employed by China and South Korea to assess the extent to which pop-cultural diplomacy enables a less powerful state to confront a more powerful state. Secondly, the paper explores how South Korea increased its presence and influence on the international stage through pop cultural diplomacy. It analyzes the role of cultural diplomacy in reshaping regional and global power dynamics. At the same time, this paper will discuss whether the Korean Wave influences South Korea's diplomatic leverage and political position in a significant way. Furthermore, reflecting on Geun Lee's statement that Joseph Nye's soft power concept is too US-centered and lacks value for less powerful nations, perhaps South

Korea's example could provide more practical soft power strategies for these countries to enhance their prestige..¹

In conclusion, this paper aspires to contribute valuable insights into the role of pop cultural diplomacy and soft power in the evolving field of international relations.

1.1 Background

Within the literature on soft power, the United States has traditionally dominated, given its influence, through the Hollywood film industry, pop music, and cultural and funding institutions like the American Ford Foundation. However, countries in the East Asian region, especially South Korea, have been eager to showcase their cultural diplomacy and accomplishments abroad since the early 1990s. In the 1980s, while Japan was exerting significant soft power influence with the support of the US, China continued to project soft power with its traditional culture and the success of Kung Fu movies overseas. Nonetheless, South Korea was insignificant in terms of soft power. Despite rapid economic development in the 1990s, the negative images of the Korean War and North Korea persisted as South Korea's prime impressions to the West.² Moreover, even to this date, South Korea cannot adequately compete in hard power with other advanced industrialized countries, such as the U.S. and China, despite obtaining an optimal military and being the 13th largest economy globally. As Lee illustrates, in comparison with other advanced industrialized nations, rather than using traditional diplomatic hard power strategies such as warning of war or economic sanctions, South Korea has a better bet utilizing cultural assets and cultural diplomacy to boost its international status.³ South Korea was aware of this situation in the 1990s, when the nation turned to a brand new strategy - cultural diplomacy that focused on pop culture. In this paper, this cultural diplomacy strategy will be referred to as pop cultural diplomacy. Korean pop culture is also known as Hallyu (the Korean Wave), a word that the Chinese

¹ Peter Murphy, "The Limits of Soft Power," in *Complicated Currents: Media Flows, Soft Power and East Asia*, ed. by Daniel Black, Stephen Epstein, Tokita Alison (Melbourne: Monash UP, 2010), 15.1–15.14; Geun Lee, "A Soft Power Approach to the 'Korean Wave'," *The Review of Korean Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 2009): 124.

² Hwang, "South Korean," 15.

³ Lee, "A Soft Power Approach," 124.

Media first introduced during the 1990s.⁴ Initially, the term *Hallyu* merely referred to the export of Korean TV dramas, but gradually, it expanded to encompass an extensive variety of cultural goods, such as Korean movies, K-pop music, food, gadgets, cosmetics, fashion, and etc.⁵

From the early 1980s to the late 1990s, the South Korean government underwent neoliberal reforms and eventually established a state-led cultural policy to strengthen its national economy.⁶ From 1980 to 1988, the promotion of culture was officially declared a national obligation in the South Korean constitution by the fifth South Korean president - Chun Doo-hwan.⁷ The Seoul Olympic Games in 1988 contributed to the South Korean government's increased recognition of culture's significance within a globalized context.⁸ In that particular year, the government granted permission for Hollywood's direct movie distributions to cinemas in South Korea.⁹ Although this action resulted in a surge of American products which significantly damaged and influenced the South Korean cultural industry, local traditional Korean culture began to interact and blend with American global cultural agents.¹⁰ Eventually, it created a Korean-hybrid pop culture, mostly known as Kpop today.¹¹ In the 1990s, President Kim Young-sam's administration proposed a five-year cultural development plan and initiated the Segyehwa policy, a globalization policy to address US-imposed pressures and challenges from global competition.¹² After the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the South Korean government craved new export markets and thus

⁴ Youna Kim, *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 1-2.

⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁶ Inhye Heo, "Neoliberal developmentalism in South Korea: Evidence from the green growth policymaking process," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 56, no.3 (Sept 2015): 351–364; Dal Yong Jin, *New Korean Wave: Transnational popular culture in the age of social media* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

⁷ Republic of Korea Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT), *Munhwajeongchaek baekseo* [White paper on cultural policies] (Seoul, Korea, 2001).

⁸ Tae Young Kim and Dal Yong Jin, "Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave: An Analysis of Cultural Diplomacy Embedded in Presidential Speeches," *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 5515.

⁹ Gunjoo Jang and Won K. Paik, "Korean Wave as Tool for Korea's New Cultural Diplomacy," *Advances in Applied Sociology* 2, no. 3 (Sept 2012): 200-201.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Samuel S. Kim, *Korea and Globalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

started to export culture for economic benefits and bolster cultural industry development.¹³ The policymakers emphasized utilizing culture as a resource and intended to “transform the Korean Wave into a sustainable source of income.”¹⁴ The South Korean Chaebol (business monopolies) followed the trend and poured substantial funding into their media sectors to create cultural products.¹⁵

In the new millennium, despite achieving remarkable economic success, South Korea continued to struggle to promote a new favorable national image and sought a solution.¹⁶ President Kim Dae-Jung spoke about Hallyu for the first time during the Third Conference of Tourism Promotion in 2001.¹⁷ Later, in his speech celebrating National Liberation Day, he mentioned Hallyu as a part of the cultural industry and described it as a “chimney-less key industry” rising in East Asia.¹⁸ The term “chimney-less key industry” suggests that Hallyu is a modern, dynamic, and technologically advanced industry that does not rely on conventional industrial processes associated with chimneys. Kim’s administration established the Korea Culture and Contents Agency (KOCCA) to grant cultural industries prominence in the nation’s economic planning.¹⁹ Hence, the government started supporting constant creation in music, movies, animations, games, etc., and asserted that one should consider cultural content as a method to improve South Korea’s national image.²⁰ Furthermore, in 2001, Kim’s administration increased the cultural sector’s budget by 1 percent compared to 2000 and established a fund of \$125 million to support the South Korean film industry from 1999 to

¹³ Kim and Jin, “Cultural Policy,” 5520.

¹⁴ Hae-Jang Cho, “Reading the ‘Korean Wave’ as a Sign of a Global Shift,” *Korea Journal* 45, no. 4 (2005): 160.

¹⁵ Jang and Paik, “Korean Wave,” 200.

¹⁶ Cho, “Reading,” 148.

¹⁷ Dae-Jung Kim, *Gwangwangeun segyehwa sidaeui choego saneop* [Tourism is the best industry in 21st century]. Address presented at the Third Conference for Tourism Promotion, Seoul, Korea. Retrieved from http://www.pa.go.kr/research/contents/speech/index04_result.jsp (2001). Translated by Tae Young Kim and Dal Yong Jin.

¹⁸ Dae-Jung Kim, *Gaehyeokgwa hwahapeuro miraereul yeologapsida* [Opening future with reforms and harmony]: para 57. Address presented at the Commemoration of 56th Liberation Day, Seoul, Korea. Retrieved from http://www.pa.go.kr/research/contents/speech/index04_result.jsp (2001). Translated by Tae Young Kim and Dal Yong Jin.

¹⁹ Hwang, “South Korean,” 16.

²⁰ Dae-Jung Kim, *Gogeupinryeok yangseonggi gajang joongyo* [Importance of nurturing of highly qualified professionals]: para 1. Address presented at Conference of Promoting Growth Industries, Seoul, Korea. Retrieved from http://www.pa.go.kr/research/contents/speech/index04_result.jsp (2001). Translated by Tae Young Kim and Dal Yong Jin.

2003.²¹ From 2003 to 2008, the Roh Moo-hyun administration aimed to elevate South Korea into a top-five cultural industry nation and continued to recognize culture's role as a tool for enhancing international soft power and the country's image.²² Roh even introduced the concept of "Creative Korea," inspired by Western creative programs.²³ The goal was to foster cultural exchange and enhance diversity in East Asia.²⁴ Additionally, the Roh government supported independent filmmakers who promote cultural diversity by developing the screen quota system and providing them with public film funds.²⁵

Since the mid-2000s, South Korea has fully embraced the idea of "soft power" and begun to present itself as a "developed, post-industrial middle power" playing a vital global role economically and culturally.²⁶ Furthermore, nation branding has become central to South Korea's cultural diplomacy and soft power. In 2009, the Lee Myung-bak administration created the Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB) "to enhance Korea's national status and prestige in the international community by implementing systematic and comprehensive strategies."²⁷ The PCNB introduced the new slogan: "Global Korea."²⁸ From "Creative Korea" to "Global Korea," the South Korean government's blatant ambition to project soft power worldwide was evident. Lee's government initiative involved collaboration with major corporations like Samsung, LG, and Hyundai-Kia Motors, as well as the three South Korean entertainment giants who have produced most of the successful Kpop groups to date, SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment.²⁹ In 2012, the South Korean government launched the first official government agency with the term Hallyu under

²¹ S. J. Kang, "'Screen Quota' chukso umjikime yeonghwagye gangreokbanbal." [Film business against reducing screen quota]. *Dong-A Ilbo*, Jan 22, 2002, 19.

²² Hwang, "South Korean," 16.

²³ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy," 5524.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hwang, "South Korean," 15.

²⁷ Hwang, "South Korean," 16.

²⁸ Olivia Ih-Prost and Antoine Bondaz, "South Korea trying to improve its nation brand," *Korea Analysis* (2014).

²⁹ Ibid.

the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, which was dedicated to promoting Korean pop culture.³⁰

South Korea's emphasis on cultural diplomacy reached a new high under the leadership of Park Geun-hye from 2013 to 2018. President Park prioritized "cultural enrichment" as one of her four key administrative goals and boosted cultural spending to 2% in the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism's budget.³¹ During a speech at the 2014 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Park highlighted the global spread of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) and its potential to merge cultural values with IT technology, a vital aspect of the creative economy.³² Her administration supported K-pop and major entertainment cooperation with advanced IT technology.³³ Park's state-led policies for cultural diplomacy allowed Hallyu to serve as an instrument for nation branding and a marketing strategy for a creative economy.³⁴ Park's government firmly believed that Hallyu's contribution to the national economy could function as both hard and soft power.³⁵ Additionally, Park's appearance at the 2014 Mnet Asian Music Awards, a South Korea-oriented music award festival, was the first time a state head leader appeared at an important popular cultural event.³⁶ It illustrates the critical role of popular culture in enhancing the South Korean national brand.

Undeniably, the rise of South Korean soft power through their pop culture is not a coincidence but rather the outcome of deliberate efforts planned and executed by numerous South Korean presidents as a part of their national cultural diplomacy. In addition, the government's expenditure and budget on Hallyu escalated from 1 billion KRW to a

³⁰ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy," 5526.

³¹ Dal Yong Jin, "The Power of the Nation-state Amid Neo-liberal Reform: Shifting Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave," *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 1 (March 2014): 71–92.

³² Geun-hye Park, *Reshaping the World Through Entrepreneurship, Education and Employment*. Address presented at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2014, Davos, Switzerland. Retrieved from http://www1.president.go.kr/news/speech.php?srh%5Bsrh_gb%5D=key&srh%5Bsearch_type%5D=1&srh%5Bsearch_value%5D=%BC%BC%B0%E8%B0%E6%C1%A6%C6%F7%B7%B3&srh%5Bview_mode%5D=detail&srh%5Bseq%5D=4354 (2014). Translated by Tae Young Kim and Dal Yong Jin.

³³ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy," 5527.

³⁴ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy," 5527–5528.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5528.

³⁶ Republic of Korea Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (MCST). *Hallyu baekseo* [White paper on Hallyu]. (Seoul, Korea, 2013).

substantial 319 billion KRW in approximately two decades, according to the Revenue and Expenditure and Budget Planning of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Korea.³⁷ The South Korean government promotes its cultural diplomacy strategies to shape others' preferences, portray itself as a successful model for developing nations, and enhance its reputation as a reliable business partner to collaborate with other developed nations.³⁸

In regards to China, Chinese soft power has always been a hot topic in the academic field of international relations. Chinese e-games, C-dramas, and young adult novels are gaining popularity overseas. The Chinese-developed app TikTok, regardless of certain controversies, is one of the most popular and influential apps among young people worldwide. Despite the increasing influence of popular culture, traditional Chinese culture continues to act as China's primary tool in cultural diplomacy for expanding global soft power. In this paper, we will refer to this approach as traditional cultural diplomacy. Undoubtedly, the Confucius Institute is China's most successful state-led traditional cultural diplomacy to date. The Chinese Confucius Institute project was initiated in 2004 and has become one of the most influential and enduring Chinese state-led cultural diplomacy projects. Until May 2020, there were 561 Confucius Institutes in 162 countries, and the first Confucius Institute was established in Seoul, South Korea.³⁹

Arguably, the relationship between South Korea and China has always been delicate and intricate. China and South Korea's tributary relations date back thousands of years in history. Throughout this time, the two nations conducted various cultural communications and engagements. For instance, the Chinese character system was introduced as Hanja in Korea, and it was the sole writing system in Korea until the invention and promotion of

³⁷ Ingyu Oh and Hyo-jung Lee, "K-pop in Korea: How the Pop Music Industry Is Changing a Post-Developmental Society," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 3, no. 1 (May 2014): 84.

³⁸ Hwang, "South Korean," 15.

³⁹ "History," Confucius Institute, accessed September 28, 2023. <https://ci.cn/en/gwym/lc>; "孔子学院十五年:全球'汉语热'带来机遇与挑战." 中国政府网, accessed September 28, 2023. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-12/10/content_5460063.htm.

"Fifteen years of Confucius Institute: The global 'Chinese fever' brings opportunities and challenges." Chinese Government Website, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed September 28, 2023. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-12/10/content_5460063.htm.

Hangul by Sejong the Great in the 15th century.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Confucianism, an ideology that originated in China, has been an important aspect of Korean society since ancient times. Both countries experienced the invasion by the Japanese imperial power during World War II. Although the two countries share geographic proximity and deep historical and cultural connections, the relationship between China and South Korea has been inconsistent. After WWII, the relationship between China and the Korean Peninsula entered a tense stage somewhere between tributary relations and “post-Westphalian European diplomatic relations.”⁴¹ Later on, during the Cold War and the Korean War, China’s support of communist North Korea and the US’s support of South Korea placed the two countries in opposite camps. In 1973, China-US rapprochement and China’s economic reform prompted South Korea and China to repair ties.⁴² Hence, the bilateral relationship and the trading partnership flourished, leading to the two nations eventually establishing a formal diplomatic relationship on August 24, 1992.⁴³ However, the prevailing issues of North Korea and Taiwan and the involvement of the US in East Asia have proved challenging for their political relations in the next two decades.⁴⁴

From the middle to late 20th century, China and South Korea quickly followed in Japan's footsteps and became booming regional economies. South Korea emerged as one of the “Four Asian Tigers” known for their rapid economic development. Simultaneously, its pop cultural influence grew. Korean popular culture, such as the first-generation K-pop group H.O.T. in the late 1990s and Kdramas like *Autumn in My Heart* in 2000, entered the market of other Asian countries, including China, and gained immense popularity. As mentioned before, this phenomenon was first referred to as the “Korean Wave” or “Hallyu” by the Chinese media in 1998, referring to “Chinese youth’s sudden craze for Korean cultural

⁴⁰ Florian Coulmas, *The Writing Systems of The World* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 116.

⁴¹ Takeshi Hamashita, Edited by Linda Grove and Mark Selde, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and historical perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 10 -11.

⁴² Min Ye, *China–South Korea Relations in the New Era: Challenges and Opportunities* (London: The Rowman & Little Publishing Group, 2017), 3.

⁴³ Ibid, 4-5.

⁴⁴ Ye, *China–South Korea*, 5.

products...⁴⁵ During President Roh Moo-hyun's 2003 state visit to China, he made his first statement alluding to Hallyu and highlighting how the cultural exchange between the two countries promotes mutual friendship.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, frequent political conflicts and tensions between Japan, China, and South Korea hindered the formation of friendly diplomatic ties in East Asia, despite the efforts of ASEAN +3 (China, Japan, South Korea) and other attempted East Asian cooperation.⁴⁷ Moreover, other cultural controversies emerged between China and South Korea. For instance, their claims to the history of the ancient Kingdom Koguryô and the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.⁴⁸ Clashes of soft power, along with other conflicts, resulted in the deterioration of China - South Korea diplomatic relations, leading to the two countries implementing specific policies to limit each other's cultural influence.⁴⁹

Interestingly, although less well-known and smaller in size, South Korea has a similar project to the Chinese Confucius Institute. The King Sejong Institute, a government-led organization dedicated to teaching the Korean language internationally, started in 2007.⁵⁰ In 2022, the government planned to have 244 branches in 84 countries.⁵¹ Under the leadership of President Park in 2015, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism received a more than 25% budget increase and boosted the number of Korean Cultural Centers and King Sejong Institutes abroad.⁵²

Additionally, the U.S. is impactful regarding the rise of East Asian soft power. China's development of soft power, with a focus on traditional cultural diplomacy, is encountering obstacles, primarily stemming from US concerns that China's soft power projection may challenge US soft power dominance.⁵³ In contrast, Korean pop cultural diplomacy has been

⁴⁵ Youna Kim, *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 1-2.

⁴⁶ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy," 5523.

⁴⁷ Hamashita, *China, East Asia*, 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁹ Ye, *China-South Korea*, 6.

⁵⁰ "King Sejong Institute to Add 23 Branches in 19 Countries This Year," Korea.Net : The Official Website of the Republic of Korea, accessed September 28, 2023, <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Culture/view?articleId=216439>.

⁵¹ Korea Net, "King Sejong Institute."

⁵² Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy," 5527.

⁵³ Mark Beeson and Richard Stubbs, *Routledge handbook of Asian Regionalism* (2012), 24.

making steady progress in recent years, partly due to its strong relations with the US. Moreover, South Korea's burgeoning soft power has caused certain political and cultural controversies in its relations with China. The controversies and the impact of the cultural diplomacy between the two states will be further discussed in the next chapter.

1.2 Literature Review

The term “soft power” was coined by Joseph S. Nye as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.”⁵⁴ According to Nye, culture, foreign policies, and political values are all critical resources that shape soft power.⁵⁵ Baldwin, the political scientist from Princeton, has praised Nye's theories on soft power for stimulating and elucidating scholars and policymakers, even those who held differing opinions from him.⁵⁶ Steven B. Rothman clarifies that hard power uses physical coercion to alter another actor's behavior, while soft power employs non-physical methods to influence an actor.⁵⁷ Moreover, Rothman adds to Nye's Soft power theory by emphasizing that credibility is also a crucial resource of soft power.⁵⁸

The debate on measuring and defining soft power persists in the academic field of international relations. Although Joseph Nye is seen as the most influential scholar regarding the notion of soft power, scholars such as Geun Lee have criticized Nye's soft power theory for its lack of a structured theoretical framework.⁵⁹ Most importantly, Lee suggests that Nye's theory on soft power is focused on the hegemonic leadership of the USA and fails to provide practical soft power strategies and insights for less powerful nations.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (Hachette UK, 2009).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Joseph S. Nye, “The Rise of China's Soft Power,” *Wall Street Journal* (2005): 38.

⁵⁷ Steven B. Rothman, “Revising the Soft Power Concept: What Are the Means and Mechanisms of Soft Power?” *Journal of Political Power* 4, no. 1 (2011): 49-64.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Geun Lee, “A Theory of Soft Power and Korea's Soft Power Strategy,” *Korean Journal of Defence Analysis* 21, no. 2 (June 2009): 205-218; Simona Vasilevskytė, “Discussing Soft Power Theory After Nye: The Case Of Geun Lee's Theoretical Approach,” *Regioninės Studijos*, no. 7 (2013): 145-157.

⁶⁰ Murphy, “The Limits,” 15.1–15.14; Geun, “Soft Power Approach”, 124.

Based on Nye's definition, culture is "a set of practices that create meaning for a society."⁶¹ Nye considers culture to be an important resource of soft power in light of its capacity to attract and impact preferences.⁶² The idea of cultural diplomacy became better known when Milton Cummings defined cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding."⁶³ Cummings also emphasizes that while public diplomacy usually involves a two-way exchange, the same is not always valid for cultural diplomacy.⁶⁴ While some confusion remains between the terms cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is widely accepted to be an aspect of public diplomacy. This has been recognized by scholars such as Simon Mark, Nicholas Cull, and Patricia Goff.⁶⁵ Edmund Gullion first coined the term public diplomacy in 1965 and states that it "deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies."⁶⁶ As Simon Mark points out, "Cultural diplomacy is seen as a subset of public diplomacy or the operation of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals."⁶⁷ More recently, Irena Kozymka highlights that cultural diplomacy is a crucial element of traditional diplomacy that has been utilized to promote a nation's culture overseas for stronger international relations, cooperation, and advanced national interests.⁶⁸

Furthermore, many scholars have discussed the shortcomings of cultural diplomacy. Mulcahy believes cultural diplomacy can play a significant role in building or repairing

⁶¹ Joseph S. Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 no.1(2008): 94–109.

⁶² Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy* 80 (1990): 153–71; Ien Ang, Yudhishtir Raj Isar, and Phillip Mar, "Cultural Diplomacy: Beyond the National Interest?" *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21 no.4(2015): 365–81.

⁶³ Milton Cummings, "Cultural Diplomacy and The United States Government: A Survey," *Center for Arts and Culture* (2009):1.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Patricia Goff, "Cultural Diplomacy," *Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 419–35.

⁶⁶ Eytan Gilboa, "Public Diplomacy," *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (New York: Wiley, 2015); "Public Diplomacy' Before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase." USC Center on Public Diplomacy, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/public-diplomacy-gullion-evolution-phrase>.

⁶⁷ Simon Mark, "A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy," *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy* (Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2009), 9–15.

⁶⁸ Irena Kozymka, *The Diplomacy of Culture: The Role of UNESCO in Sustaining Cultural Diversity*. (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

relationships between states when applied skillfully and consistently.⁶⁹ However, he also emphasizes that measuring the temporary effectiveness of cultural diplomacy strategies is challenging due to their typically long-term focus.⁷⁰ In addition, Goff asserts that cultural diplomacy serves as an accessible form of public diplomacy and engages the population usually out of traditional diplomacy's reach.⁷¹ Nonetheless, he states that cultural diplomacy's capacity to influence policy outcomes is limited.⁷² More importantly, Feigenbaum explains that the one-way approach of cultural diplomacy - states actively promoting their culture to others - could be deemed as propaganda instead of a sincere effort to encourage mutual understanding; hence, the legitimacy of cultural diplomacy is considered fragile.⁷³

Concerning popular culture, Nye recognizes how it reflects the general public's desires and believes that researchers can effectively assess how successful pop cultural diplomacy strategies are due to popular culture's dependence on media attention for legitimacy.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, he is also aware that governments and official institutions have historically overlooked the potential of popular culture in foreign affairs and preferred high culture (e.g. fine arts) and traditional culture for representation and recognition in the international community.⁷⁵ Additionally, Schneider indicates that popular culture was an "untapped resource" waiting to be exploited for the use of soft power in many countries.⁷⁶ As a consequence, most states are reluctant to employ and further improve pop cultural diplomacy or other ongoing strategies of cultural diplomacy.⁷⁷ This has resulted in an insufficient amount of academic studies on how nations can enhance their soft power by strategically utilizing popular culture.

⁶⁹ Kevin V. Mulcahy, "Cultural Diplomacy and the Exchange Programs: 1938-1978 Cultural Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War World," *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society* 29 no.1 (1999): 7-29.

⁷⁰ Mulcahy, "Cultural Diplomacy," 7-29.

⁷¹ Goff, "Cultural Diplomacy," 419-35.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Harvey B. Feigenbaum, "Globalization and Cultural Diplomacy," *Art, Culture and the National Agenda Project* (Center for Arts and Culture, 2002): 29.

⁷⁴ Nye, "Public Diplomacy," 94-109.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Cynthia P. Schneider, "The Unrealized Potential of Cultural Diplomacy: Best Practices and What Could Be, If Only Repositioning Culture in US International Relations," *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society* 39 no.4 (2009): 260-79.

⁷⁷ Cummings, "Cultural Diplomacy," 1.

Nevertheless, South Korea is a particular case due to its unprecedented scale of utilization of popular culture as a major cultural diplomacy strategy to enhance soft power. Tae Young Kim and Dal Yong Jin have pointed out that there has been increasing use of the term "Hallyu" in South Korean presidential speeches, which manifests how the importance of pop cultural diplomacy grew over time in each administration.⁷⁸ This phenomenon has garnered scholarly attention and started new debates on whether the use of pop cultural diplomacy as a form of soft power is effective. Peter Murphy claims that the "Korean Wave (Korean popular culture) is never going to make a decisive difference in relations between Japan and Korea, and [that is] why reliance on soft power in international relations is an illusion."⁷⁹ However, Geun Lee disagrees and suggests that "even if Korea cannot depend solely upon soft power for its diplomacy, the Korean wave can contribute to its soft power by providing opportunities for the manipulation of Korea's images, extending a network effect of Korean popular culture, and also producing internationally influential heroes and celebrities."⁸⁰ Similarly, Elfving-Hwang holds a more optimistic view of soft power and argues that instead of regarding popular-culture-supported soft power as a substitute for hard power, it should be seen as "a form of long-term engagement; while it would, of course, be naïve to suggest that events like Project K (South Korean popular culture project) can be used to solve thorny national disputes, they can certainly make a difference in the longer term because of their appeal to one demographic that has traditionally been important for cultural (and exchange) diplomacy: the university students."⁸¹ This idea is based on the fact that University students and youth represent the future, and influencing them is tantamount to shaping the future global perspectives of the South Korean image. Interestingly, since South Korea's most successful cultural diplomacy continues to be Hallyu, some scholars compare the Chinese Confucius Institute with Korean pop culture expansion instead of the King Sejong Institute. Through Falk Hartig's observation of China's soft power and the

⁷⁸ Kim and Jin, "Cultural Policy," 5515.

⁷⁹ Murphy, "The Limits," 15.1–15.14.

⁸⁰ Lee, "A Soft Power Approach," 123.

⁸¹ Elfving-Hwang, Joanna. "South Korean Cultural Diplomacy and Brokering 'K-Culture' outside Asia." *Korean Histories* 4, no. 1 (2013): 25.

Confucius Institutes in Germany, he concludes that the “joint-venture structure” of the institutes, in which “foreign scholars work within the structure in collaboration with the Chinese government lend significance and legitimacy to the ‘cultural message’ put forward through the institutes.”⁸² Hwang adds that this collaborative approach is similar to the organization of Korean cultural events, which is a mix of traditional and pop cultures overseas; “[Korean cultural event Project K] potentially at least allows for a very potent form of cultural diplomacy that will attract larger crowds and recognition of Korean cultural products overseas.”⁸³

⁸² Hwang, “South Korean,” 25.

⁸³ Ibid.

Chapter 2 - South Korea and China's Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

While both the political and academic fields initially overlooked the potential impact of pop cultural diplomacy, South Korean presidents have striven to cultivate a robust pop cultural industry since the 1980s to contribute to the nation's economy and cultural diplomacy. Meanwhile, China was reestablishing ties with South Korea and developing its soft power through traditional means. The growing Korean pop culture started to permeate China, generating interesting phenomena and sparking specific cultural conflicts for decades.

Among the three major East Asian countries—China, Japan, and South Korea—Japan has achieved significant economic and soft power success far earlier than China and South Korea due to the support of the United States and its diligence. Therefore, the soft power of South Korea and China is a more appropriate and intriguing comparison, especially since the two countries were once the two main East Asian powers “catching up” to Japan but have since strengthened their soft power with incredible speed. Due to geopolitical and historical reasons, China dominated the East Asian region in ancient times, while Japan's development was a late 19th-century phenomenon. On the contrary, South Korea remained less influential throughout most of history and only gained limited attention with its economic development after the American occupation and reconstruction in the 1960s. Nye has described South Korea as an internationally insignificant country with a GDP similar to Ghana in the past.⁸⁴ Although South Korea has eventually become a well-developed country, it is still overshadowed by China and Japan's influence in the international community. However, South Korea has generated impressive results in combating this dilemma by embracing a digital and modern cultural diplomacy approach since the 1990s.

While South Korea's primary cultural diplomacy strategy relies on its pop culture - the Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu, China's soft power expansion has relied on its traditional culture, especially the government-sponsored Confucius Institute project.

⁸⁴ Joseph S. Nye, “South Korea's Growing Soft Power,” *The Korea Times*, November 13, 2009.

Although it might be a stretch to say that South Korea and China are now in an explicit soft power competition, South Korea's soft power enhancement arguably affects its diplomatic relationships with China and overshadows China's soft power expansion.

This chapter will discuss six key aspects:

- the differences and similarities between China's and South Korea's cultural diplomacy
- a comparison between the impact of the two nation's cultural diplomacy on their soft power growth
- the reasons behind South Korea's cultural diplomacy challenging China
- the impact of South Korean pop culture trade on economic foreign policies with China
- South Korean pop culture's influence on China's public opinion and foreign policies
- South Korean pop culture's situation in China as a reflection of the diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

Overall, this chapter argues that since the 1990s, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has been implicitly challenging China's East Asian cultural dominance and improving its soft power in the region through significant cultural expansion. South Korea regards China as an unequal cultural trade partner and engages in cultural competition with China over similar cultural elements, influencing China's public opinion and foreign policies towards South Korea. China's reaction indicates that they also perceive South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy as a confrontation and threat, resulting in increased anti-South Korean sentiments, exaggerated rumors, and policies to reduce or ban South Korean pop culture appearances in China.

2.1 Differences and Similarities Between the Two Countries' Cultural Diplomacy

China's cultural diplomacy, with a focus on traditional culture, is widespread and appealing. However, its expansion encounters major resistance from the West due to the prevailing China threat theory, its communist authoritarian system, a high number of regional disputes, and international concerns regarding political propaganda. On the contrary, South

Korea's cultural diplomacy, centered on pop culture, progresses smoothly and has significant potential. South Korea's adoption of the Western liberal democracy system, lower incidence of territorial disputes, and a perception of pop culture as being less political contributes to its non-threatening image. Nonetheless, in both cases, the governments actively participate and play crucial roles while targeting younger international audiences.

Unlike South Korea, which emphasizes popular culture - pop music, film, and TV shows - in its diplomatic strategy and intends to promote its traditional culture through popular culture, China has been advocating Chinese modern-day values predominantly through traditional culture and language education within its cultural diplomacy. Chinese popular culture exports are not substantial in comparison to South Korea, but they do exist. Its global popular cultural influence encompasses a variety of world-renowned writers, including Yu Hua, Gao Xingjian, and Mo Yan, with the latter two being Nobel Prize laureates in Literature. Noteworthy Chinese movie directors such as Zhang Yimou and Li An contributed to this impact, with Li An achieving an Oscar for the movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," which was once the most profitable non-English film worldwide. It is well-known that globally acclaimed Kung Fu movie stars of Chinese origin like Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Jet Li are beloved around the world and have motivated generations of people to learn Kung Fu. Furthermore, the famous Chinese basketball player Yao Ming, who is a former player of the United States National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets, adds to the multifaceted aspects of China's pop cultural influence. In addition, China's light novels, TV dramas, and young celebrities have begun to accumulate a substantial fan base overseas. However, due to specific values within the Chinese government and its predilection for political restrictions, popular culture is not the priority for China's cultural diplomacy or soft power expansion. China has an attractive traditional culture that is rooted in Confucianism, and the government prefers to promote China through this concept while maintaining soft power under its control.

Since the end of the Cold War, the USA's vehement promotion of the China Threat Theory has prompted China to increase its soft power and actively tell the Chinese story

through its own voice in order to denounce the China Threat.⁸⁵ In 2007, China's then-president Hu Jintao officially announced at the 17th Chinese Communist Party Congress that it was necessary for China to develop its soft power by advocating Chinese culture.⁸⁶ Since then, the Chinese government has actively and steadfastly bolstered its soft power. This phenomenon has been continuing under Xi Jinping's leadership today. President Xi stated that the nation will "promote China's cultural soft power by disseminating modern Chinese values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the world."⁸⁷ Specifically, China has founded Confucius Institutes globally to advocate its language and traditional culture. The China Central Television (CCTV) is utilizing multiple languages for international broadcasting on television and radio in order to reach a larger overseas audience.⁸⁸ Moreover, China has been gifting pandas, the nation's symbol, as a creative way to foster diplomatic ties with other nations.⁸⁹ With these efforts, the number of foreign visitors and foreign student enrollment has significantly increased. In 2005, 110,000 foreign students enrolled to study in China, and by 2018, this number increased to an all-time high of 492,185 students.⁹⁰ Although the numbers have decreased after the pandemic, China is still ranked as one of the top 10 countries for foreign student enrollment by UNESCO in 2022.⁹¹

⁸⁵ 孟献丽, "中国威胁论" 批判,《意识形态与社会思潮评析》, (2021): 118.

Xianli Meng, "Critique of the 'China Threat Theory,'" *Analysis of Ideology and Social Trends* (2021): 118. Translated by Zhiqi Jiang.

⁸⁶ Joseph S. Nye, (2023). "The Rise of China's Soft Power," in *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition* (Singapore: Springer, 2023): 30;

Yerin Kim, Byungjun Kim, Min Hyung Park, Woomin Nam, and Jang Hyun Kim, "A Soft Power Challenge, or an Opportunity? A Big Data Analysis on Chinese Soft Power during COVID-19 Pandemic," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 19, no.3 (July 2023): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orad011>.

⁸⁷ Yerin Kim, Byungjun Kim, Park, Nam, and Jang Hyun Kim, "A Soft Power Challenge" 3.

⁸⁸ Martin Davidson, "China's Soft Power: a Comparative Failure or Secret Success," in *The Soft Power* 30 (Washington, DC: Portland, 2017), 70–72.

⁸⁹ Falk Hartig, "Panda Diplomacy: the Cutest Part of China's Public Diplomacy," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 8, no.1(2013): 49–78.

⁹⁰ Joseph S. Nye, (2023). "The Rise of China's Soft Power," 30;

忠建丰, "2018年来华留学统计," 中华人民共和国教育部政府门户网站, accessed November 2, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20190415023723/http://www.moe.edu.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201904/t20190412_377692.html.

Jianfeng Zhong, "Statistics of International Students Studying in China Since 2018," *Government Portal Website of the People's Republic of China Ministry of Education*, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed November 2, 2023,

https://web.archive.org/web/20190415023723/http://www.moe.edu.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201904/t20190412_377692.html.

⁹¹ Uis, "Other Policy Relevant Indicators : Inbound Internationally Mobile Students by Continent of Origin," accessed November 3, 2023, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3804>.

Among all the Chinese soft power expansion efforts, the most important one is the government-led cultural diplomacy project - the Confucius Institutes. Interestingly, the first Confucius Institute was founded in 2004 in South Korea's capital city Seoul.⁹² As of today, China has spent billions of dollars on establishing 500 plus Confucius Institutes and more than 1000 Confucius Classrooms in over 140 countries.⁹³ The Confucius Institute project is especially successful in Africa. The first Confucius Institute in Africa started operating at the end of 2005, and now the number of Confucius Institutes in Africa has increased to 61, running in 46 African nations.⁹⁴ In addition to enhancing interest and admiration towards the Chinese culture and language, the Confucius Institutes project stands to assist the Belt and Road Initiative in achieving its goal of "people-to-people-bonds."⁹⁵ Culturally, it intends to change China's image of being a mere economic powerhouse and a global threat indicated by the West.⁹⁶

However, the Confucius Institute project has been facing various challenges. As Nye emphasizes, China's territorial disputes with its neighboring countries, mainly surrounding the South China Sea, are impeding its cultural diplomacy efforts and soft power expansion in general.⁹⁷ For instance, the recurring clashes between Philippine fishing boats and Chinese naval vessels near the Philippine coastline could diminish the appeal of the Confucius Institute in Manila.⁹⁸ Similar rules apply to the territorial disputes between China and Japan over the islands known as the Diaoyu Islands to the Chinese and the Senkaku Islands to the Japanese, as well as China's territorial conflict with Vietnam over the Paracel Islands.

In addition to the regional disputes, the most pressing challenges the Confucius Institute faces are rigorous government control and the allegation of serving as a platform for

⁹² 孔子学院全球门户网站, accessed November 14, 2023, <https://ci.cn/gywm/lc>.

The Official Global Website of Confucius Institute, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed November 14, 2023, <https://ci.cn/gywm/lc>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "Confucius Institutes Increase as Another Opens in Djibouti," *University World News*, accessed November 14, 2023, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2023040505021956>.

⁹⁵ Nilgün Eliküçük Yildirim, and Mesut Aslan, "China's Charm Defensive: Image Protection by Acquiring Mass Entertainment," *Pacific Focus* 35, no. 1 (April 2020): 148.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Joseph S. Nye, (2023). "The Rise of China's Soft Power," 38.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

political propaganda. Nye specifies that the rigorous and persistent Chinese government control over Chinese civil society is not conducive to the nation's soft power growth. Nye explains, "A great deal of a country's soft power is produced, not by its government, but by its civil society. And that makes the country more attractive and resilient. If the Party insists on clamping down on everything in civil society, that makes it less flexible, less attractive."⁹⁹ In fact, excessive government control could easily lead to the act of promoting culture being regarded as propaganda. For example, the Chinese government and its agency under the Chinese Ministry of Education, Hanban, strictly controlled the Confucius Institute. Hanban managed the 500 Confucius Institutes and 1,000 Confucius classrooms all over the world and was constantly being accused of restricting and disrupting academic freedom in foreign universities.¹⁰⁰ Thus, many governments and scholars regard China's soft power as a typical state model export and condemn the Confucius Institutes as "an importer of Chinese state censorship."¹⁰¹ Scholars such as Bodomo Adams criticize the Confucius Institutes for being "a one-way cultural exchange of China in the African continent."¹⁰² This has resulted in the disbandment of many Confucius Institutes globally, especially in the United States.¹⁰³ A report written by the United States National Association of Scholars in 2017 strongly advised all universities in the United States to close down their Confucius Institutes, asserting that "a foreign government should not interfere with a university and free-ride off its credibility and reputation."¹⁰⁴

China recognizes the challenges the Confucius Institute encounters while increasing soft powers and has been taking measurements. Due to the allegations against Hanban and the prevalence of the China Threat theory, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced the name change of Hanban to the Center for Language Education and Cooperation in July

⁹⁹ Joseph S. Nye, (2023). "The Rise of China's Soft Power," 190.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid; Yildirim and Aslan, "China's Charm Defensive," 149 - 150.

¹⁰² Bodomo Adams, "Africa-China Relations: Symmetry, Soft Power and South Africa," China Review 9, no. 2 (2009): 174.

¹⁰³ Ibid; Yildirim and Aslan, "China's Charm Defensive," 149 - 150.

¹⁰⁴ Rachelle Peterson, "Outsourced To China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education," *A Report by The National Association of Scholars* (April 2017): 148.

2020.¹⁰⁵ While it is still under the Chinese Ministry of Education and remains responsible for global Chinese language promotion and linguistic and cultural exchange facilitation, the newly named Hanban is no longer in charge of the branding and operational management of the Confucius Institute.¹⁰⁶ Instead, the management of the Confucius Institute has been transferred to the Chinese International Education Foundation, a non-governmental and not-for-profit organization founded by various Chinese universities and private enterprises.¹⁰⁷ Evidently, this is a move to address apprehensions regarding the major influence of the Chinese government on Confucius Institutes, aiming to resolve the issue of governments around the world regulating and shutting down Confucius institutes and classrooms. It will be interesting to observe the effectiveness of this tactic and witness the future fate of the Confucius Institute.

Intriguingly, while South Korea has been emphasizing pop culture for its cultural diplomacy, it also founded a language learning institute in 2007 called the King Sejong Institute, not long after China. It is named after Sejong the Great, the inventor and promoter of the Korean alphabet. The South Korean government established the King Sejong Institute to promote Korean language learning globally. In 2023, there are 248 King Sejong Institutes

¹⁰⁵ “教育部关于孔子学院总部更名为教育部中外语言交流合作中心的通知(教人函[2020]1号),” 教育部, 上海, accessed November 15, 2023,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200704120015/https://i.guancha.cn/bbs/2020/07/04/20200704134219788.jpg?imageView2%2F2%2Fw%2F500%2Fformat%2Fjpg>

"Notice from the Ministry of Education on Renaming Confucius Institute Headquarters as the Ministry of Education's Center for International Language Exchange and Cooperation (Letter from the Ministry [2020] No. 1)," Ministry of Education, Shanghai, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed November 15, 2023,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200704120015/https://i.guancha.cn/bbs/2020/07/04/20200704134219788.jpg?imageView2%2F2%2Fw%2F500%2Fformat%2Fjpg>;

若瑜, “重磅|教育部中外语言合作交流中心首亮相,” 搜狐网新闻, accessed November 15, 2023,

https://m.sohu.com/a/404094130_99992021.

Yu Ruo, "Major News | Debut of the Ministry of Education's Center for International Language Cooperation and Exchange," Sohu News, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed November 15, 2023,

https://m.sohu.com/a/404094130_99992021.

¹⁰⁶ “孔子学院,” 中外语言交流合作中心设立公告, 教育部中外语言交流合作中心, 北京, accessed November 15, 2023.

https://www.sohu.com/a/405892555_100150488

"Confucius Institute," *Establishment Announcement of the Center for International Language Exchange and Cooperation*, Ministry of Education Center for International Language Exchange and Cooperation, Beijing, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed November 15, 2023.

https://www.sohu.com/a/405892555_100150488

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

in over 80 countries.¹⁰⁸ Due to the rising global popularity of Korean pop culture over the past two decades, there has been a rapid increase in demand and interest in learning the Korean language.¹⁰⁹ This surge in popularity has also led to an influx of foreign students, visitors, and immigrants to South Korea.¹¹⁰ According to UNESCO data, South Korea had 15,497 international students in 2005, and in 2021, this number grew more than seven times to 118,528.¹¹¹ Likely, the size of the King Sejong Institutes and foreign students studying in South Korea will continue to increase alongside South Korea's soft power expansion, potentially achieving success in the strategy of using pop culture to spark young people's interest in learning the Korean language and traditional culture. Nevertheless, at the moment, the King Sejong Institute is not as well-known and attracts less academic attention compared to the Confucius Institute. After all, South Korea's cultural diplomacy focuses mainly on its popular culture for now.

Moreover, neither the establishment of the King Sejong Institute nor the spread of Korean pop culture has been hindered on purpose by the West, like the Confucius Institute. In contrast, South Korea's relatively low territorial dispute cases with neighboring countries, long-term insignificant world status, and close ties with the West have led its traditional and popular culture to become an unthreatening and even welcoming presence. More importantly, South Korea's liberal democracy system, a major difference from China's communist authoritarian system, also gives the impression that their foreign projects are less susceptible to government manipulations and propaganda. Therefore, South Korea's rise in soft power is not regarded as problematic as China's rise and may even be embraced to some extent, particularly with its added potential to counterbalance China. Additionally, although the South Korean government plays a pivotal role in the promotion of Korean pop culture and has previously implemented heavy regulations towards it, it is evident through

¹⁰⁸ 세종학당재단누리집 King Sejong Institute Foundation, accessed November 15, 2023, <https://www.ksif.or.kr/ste/ksf/hkd/lochkd.do?menuNo=31101100>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Uis, "Other Policy Relevant Indicators : Inbound Internationally Mobile Students by Continent of Origin," accessed November 15, 2023, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3804>.

observation that most people still recognize pop culture as an organic product that originates from civil society, especially when the mainstream voices even emphasize that “soft power mostly springs from the society of a country.”¹¹² This perception lessens K-pop’s implied political connotations among the general public. In other words, pop culture’s sudden rise in popularity is still believed to be a result of fortunate timing, the influence of social media, and its appeal to the younger generation instead of political agenda. As a result, Korean pop culture hardly bears political attention or faces allegations of cultural invasions, like the Confucius Institute, and is generally well-received by many countries and their citizens.

While China and South Korea chose to focus on different areas in cultural diplomacy, the states have been playing an essential role in both China’s and South Korea’s soft power development, regardless of traditional or pop cultural diplomacy. Both Chinese traditional cultural diplomacy and Korean pop cultural diplomacy target a crucial audience—the future generation of the world. They aim to change the perception of other countries, especially of the youth, young adults, and university students, towards China and South Korea. Nevertheless, as Yildirim and Aslan have demonstrated, China’s cultural diplomacy is a double-edged sword.¹¹³ China aims to promote its values in international society mainly through traditional culture while also counteracting Western popular culture’s influence domestically.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, China has recognized the limits of its traditional cultural diplomacy in elevating its international image and, therefore, has adjusted its main goals to safeguarding its image, particularly in Western countries.¹¹⁵ Additionally, China continues to present itself as a peaceful rising superpower by adopting distinctive soft power strategies that not only impact other countries’ perceptions towards China but also prevent others from distracting Chinese citizens’ perceptions of their own country.¹¹⁶ Moreover, Yildirim and Aslan believe that achieving the goal of national brand building and reputation protection “is not possible merely by churning out movies, books, and other cultural goods or following

¹¹² Yildirim and Aslan, “China’s Charm Defensive,” 150.

¹¹³ Ibid, 150.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Yildirim and Aslan, “China’s Charm Defensive,” 150.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

aggressive public diplomacy.”¹¹⁷ However, the rising Korean popular culture trend could be proving this statement wrong. South Korea implements its cultural diplomacy through capitalist outreach and exports of consumer products like cars, household appliances, and K-pop merchandise. It focuses on a more lighthearted, apolitical, and fun pop cultural approach. This phenomenon stands in strong contrast to China's traditional cultural approach, which is often associated with more serious concepts such as political and cultural values. Hence, South Korea's political agenda is more implied, subtly fostering the younger generation's preference for South Korea in hopes that the good image will one day turn into an influential and supportive force on the stage of international relations.

2.2 Comparison Between the Two Countries' Cultural Diplomacy Impact on Their Soft Power Rise

The trend of China's and South Korea's soft power rise and cultural diplomacy influence can be examined and analyzed through the IfG-Monocle Soft Power and the Soft Power 30 Indices and reports created by Jonathan McClory for the years 2010-2012 and 2015-2019.

The IfG-Monocle Soft Power Index is “the world's first composite index for soft power” measurement produced by the Institute for Government in collaboration with Monocle Magazine.¹¹⁸ It is composed of five indicators contributing to a state's soft power: “government, culture, diplomacy, education, and business/innovation.”¹¹⁹ Each sub-index is calculated by normalizing the raw data for each indicator using the min-max method, transforming raw data into a value within the range of 0 to 1.¹²⁰ To calculate the final index score, indicators in each sub-index are weighted equally and then combined with the normalized panel scores.¹²¹ In the final score, the panel scores are given a weight of 30%, while the quantitative sub-indices are 70%.¹²² The cultural sub-index under the IfG-Monocle

¹¹⁷ Yildirim and Aslan, “China's Charm Defensive,” 150.

¹¹⁸ Jonathan McClory, “The New Persuaders III: A 2012 Global Ranking of Soft Power,” (2012): 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Soft Power Index comprises indicators such as the international impact of a nation's music industry, the annual number of foreign tourist arrivals, and even the global achievements in sports.¹²³

Based on the IfG-Monocle Soft Power Index, Jonathan McClory partnered with the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) and expanded on Joseph Nye's three primary sources of soft power to develop the Soft Power 30 index.¹²⁴ Nye considers it as "the clearest picture of global soft power to date."¹²⁵ It assesses the combination of international polling (subjective data) and objective data in order to produce what it has self-claimed as "the world's most comprehensive comparative assessment of global soft power."¹²⁶ The report conducts polling surveys globally in seven categories, including culture, cuisine, and foreign policy, with a new total sample size of 12,500 and 500 respondents per country.¹²⁷ Additionally, there are six sub-indices of objective data based on various reliable third-party resources and academic literature on soft power: Culture, Education, Engagement, Digital, Enterprise, and Government.¹²⁸ The overall index has shifted from a 70% weighting on objective data and 30% on subjective data to a new allocation of 65% for objective data and 35% for subjective data, prioritizing the former due to its greater relevance to policy adjustments affecting the enhancement or diminishment of soft power.¹²⁹ The culture sub-index of the Soft Power 30 incorporates measures for cultural diplomacy tactics, including the music industry exports and market size, the total number of international tourists visiting, Power Language Index (PLI), number of UNESCO World Heritage sites, and the amount of films featured in prominent film festivals.¹³⁰

¹²³ McClory, "The New Persuaders III," 7.

¹²⁴ Jonathan McClory, "The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019," (2019): 11.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 10.

¹²⁶ McClory, "The Soft Power 30," 23.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 29.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 27.

¹²⁹ McClory, "The Soft Power 30," 33-34.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 27.

Table 1 China and South Korea Soft Power and Culture Comparison (2010-2012, 2015-2019)¹³¹

		China				South Korea			
	Year	soft power ranking	soft power score	culture sub-index ranking	culture sub-index score	soft power ranking	soft power score	culture sub-index ranking	culture sub-index score
IfG-Monocle Soft Power Index	2010	17	0.8	NA	NA	19	0.7	NA	NA
	2011	20	3.7	7	NA	14	4.5	NA	NA
	2012	22	4.2	6	NA	11	5.3	10	NA
The Soft Power 30	2015	30	40.9	9	49.0	20	54.3	13	41.4
	2016	28	45.0	9	48.9	22	51.4	16	39.4
	2017	25	50.5	8	56.1	21	58.4	13	44.0
	2018	27	51.9	9	50.7	20	67.5	11	50.4
	2019	27	51.2	8	48.5	19	63.0	12	44.7

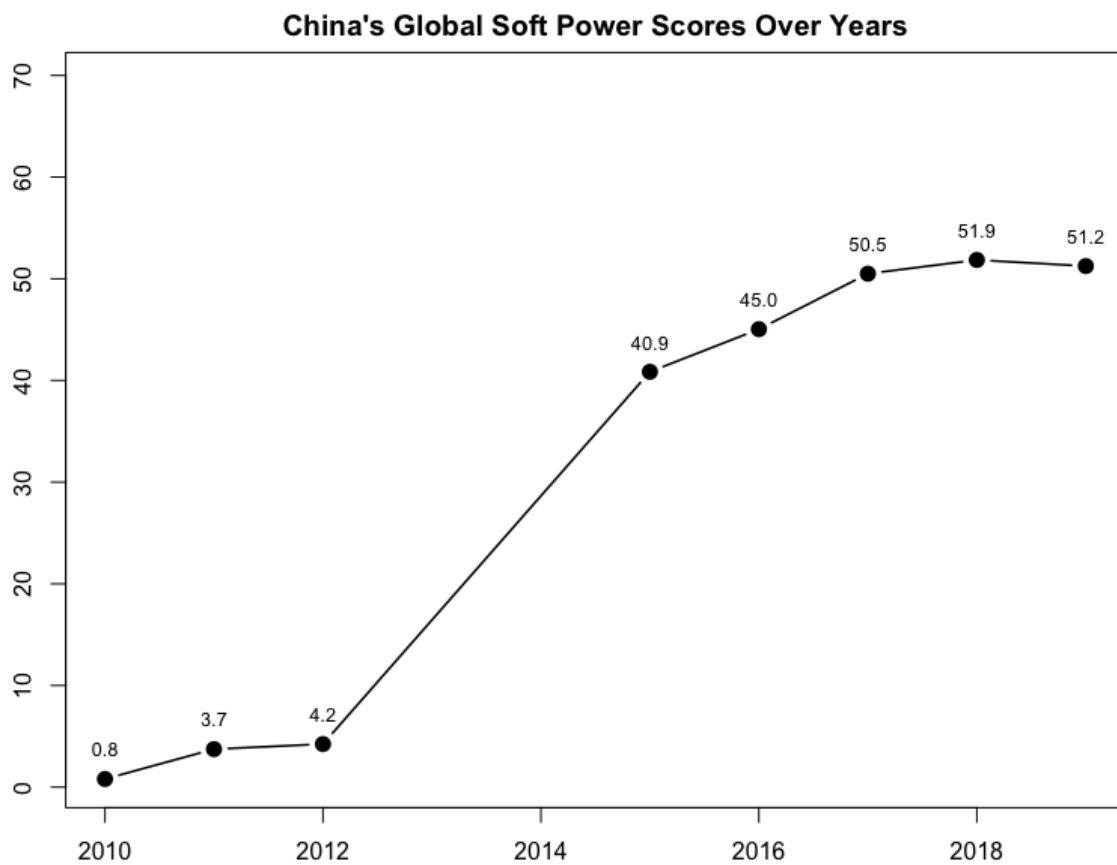


Figure 1

¹³¹ Jonathan McClory, "Soft Power 30," *Soft Power*, accessed November 12, 2023, https://softpower30.com/?country_years=2018%2C2019&sort_by=culture.

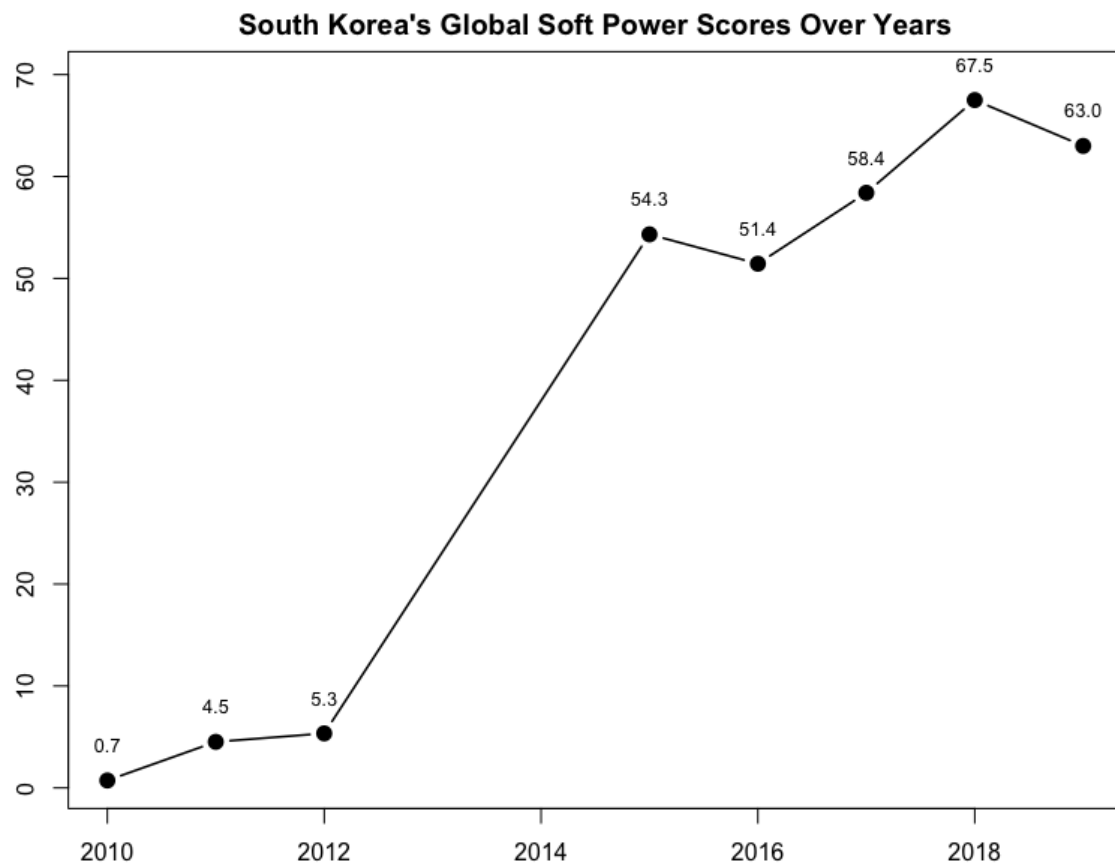


Figure 2

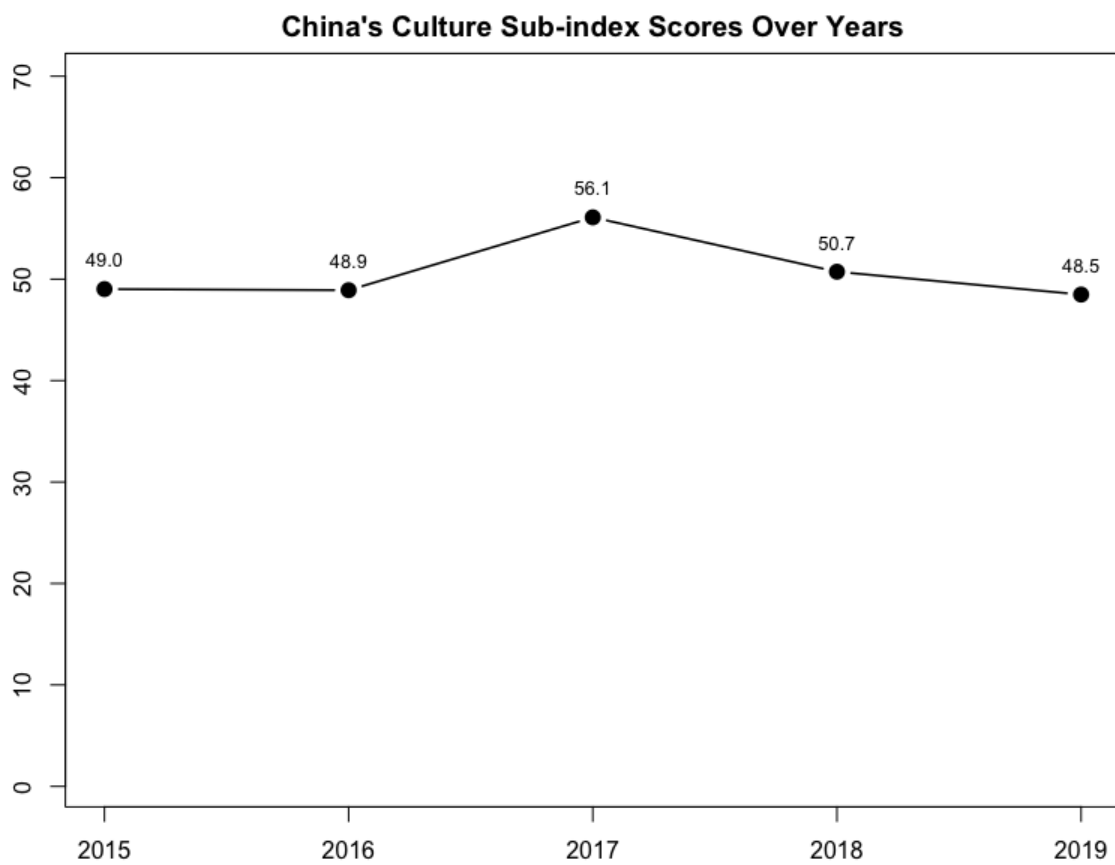


Figure 3

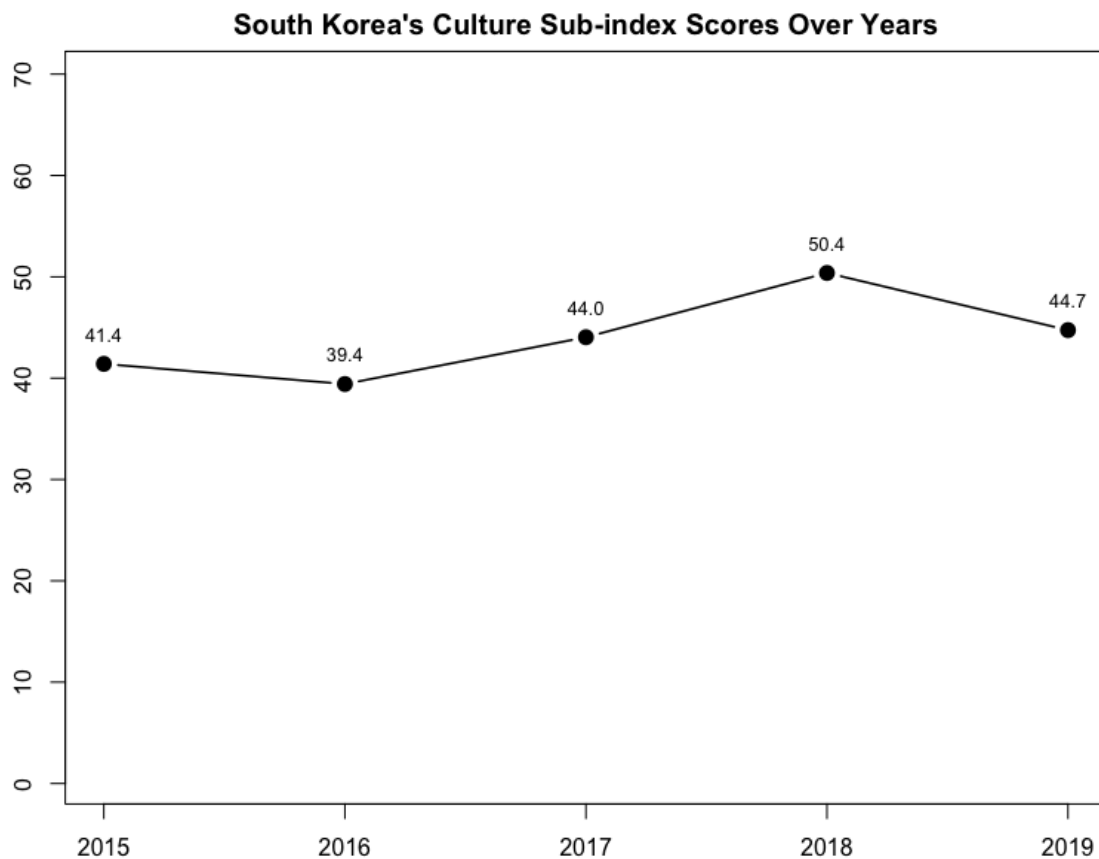


Figure 4

As a result, findings from both the IfG-Monocle Soft Power Index and the Soft Power 30 Index, alongside their respective reports, suggest an increase in the influence of Chinese and South Korean soft power and fluctuations in their cultural diplomacy over the years. Since the culture sub-index includes many elements that are part of cultural diplomacy, it can naturally be seen as a representation of cultural diplomacy. China's soft power scores quintupled from 0.8 to 4.2 during the years 2010 to 2012, according to the IFG-Monocle Soft Power Index (refer to Table 1 & Figure 1). From 2015 to 2019, the improved Soft Power 30 Index demonstrates a general increase in China's soft power score, from 40.9 to 51.2, with a slight decline in 2019 compared to 2018 (refer to Table 1 & Figure 1). Meanwhile, the scores of China's culture sub-index fluctuated; it rose from 49 in 2015 to a peak of 56.1 in 2017 and then declined to 50.7 and 48.5 in 2018 and 2019, respectively (refer to Table 1 & Figure 3). Furthermore, South Korea's soft power scores increased almost sevenfold from 0.7 to 5.3 between 2010 and 2012 (refer to Table 1 & Figure 2). According to the Soft Power 30 Index,

despite a drop in South Korea's scores from 54.3 in 2015 to 51.4 in 2016, it subsequently improved to 63 in 2019 (refer to Table 1 & Figure 2). At the same time, South Korea's cultural sub-index scores fluctuated but generally rose from 41.4 to 44.7 during the years 2015 to 2019 (refer to Table 1 & Figure 4).

To analyze how much cultural diplomacy has been influencing soft power, one inspects the correlation coefficient. A correlation coefficient is a statistical metric that varies between -1 to 1; It conveys the direction and strength of the linear relationship between two variables. When a correlation coefficient equates to 0, it suggests that there is no correlation between the two variables. When a correlation coefficient is between 0 and 1, it indicates a positive correlation, which further demonstrates a positive linear relationship between the two variables. Therefore, as one variable rises, so does the other. On the contrary, a correlation coefficient between -1 and 0 reveals a negative correlation coefficient, which represents a negative linear relationship. Hence, as one variable decreases, the other variable increases. Moreover, while a correlation coefficient close to 1 specifies a strong correlation, a correlation coefficient close to 0 indicates a weak correlation. The calculation of the correlation coefficient for the soft power score and the culture sub-index score only included the scores from the Soft Power 30 Index due to the missing culture sub-index scores from the IFG-Monocle Soft Power Index (refer to Table 1). Consequently, the correlation coefficient between the culture sub-index score and the soft power score for China is 0.39, implying a moderately positive linear relationship. In other words, it illustrates that China's traditional-element-focused cultural diplomacy plays a positive role in raising China's soft power, but the impact is not very significant. As for South Korea, the correlation coefficient between the culture sub-index score and the soft power score is 0.97, representing a very strong and positive linear relationship. This correlation coefficient reveals that the growth of South Korea's popular-element-focused cultural diplomacy has strongly supported the enhancement of South Korea's soft power.

Overall, the Chinese and South Korean soft power and culture sub-index scores increase on varying levels. The correlation coefficient for China and South Korea reveals a

tendency for soft power to increase as the impact of cultural efforts grows, demonstrating the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in contributing to soft power rise. However, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy strategies appear to exhibit a stronger relationship with their soft power growth compared to China's traditional cultural diplomacy. Additionally, one should be aware that there is a limited sample size, and the observation is restricted to the years 2015-2019.

2.3 Reasons South Korea Would Challenge China Through Pop Cultural Diplomacy

There are many reasons to explain South Korea's eagerness to challenge China's cultural dominance in East Asia through pop cultural diplomacy. As the economic differences between China and South Korea diminish, South Korea seeks to maintain its current advantageous position as one of the most developed Asian countries. Since there is cultural proximity between the two countries, South Korea's use of cultural diplomacy, intending to promote traditional culture through pop culture, is likely to spark conflicts with China. South Korea is currently proceeding with its cultural diplomacy while aware of this situation.

In modern days, the dynamic between South Korea and China has been complex and filled with conflicts. It is undeniable that China historically held a position of cultural dominance in the East Asian region. While the pervasive impact of Western culture and the rise of Japanese and South Korean culture have diminished China's cultural presence, its extensive and profound ancient history and rapid modern development maintain its dominant cultural position in East Asia. On the other hand, South Korea, as a previous tributary state of China, witnessed China's defeat by colonial powers and experienced Japanese colonization from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century, which led to disappointment in its fellow East Asian countries.¹³² Thus, South Korea began to seek redemption and solutions from the West.¹³³ By adopting Western methods, South Korea developed rapidly and surpassed China's development shortly, resulting in a visible gap between the two

¹³² J, Seo and Y Cho, "The Emergence and Evolution of International Relations Studies in Postcolonial South Korea," *Review of International Studies* 47, no. 5 (2021): 621.

¹³³ Ibid.

countries for more than twenty years. The long-term economic gap of uneven development between South Korea and China contributed to their complicated bilateral relations and a delicate power transition between “a middle power and a great power.”¹³⁴ While South Korea had taken national pride in its fast development, China's economy was also entering a period of significant growth and was catching up to South Korea with remarkable speed. Similarly, this rapid development led to a surge of Chinese national pride and the growth of popular nationalism, which played a role in shaping the nationalist inclination in China's foreign policy.¹³⁵

As the gap between China and South Korea decreases, South Korea begins to feel uneasy like many other countries in the world. Research indicates that countries' perception of reality for each other, accurate or distorted, has the ability to profoundly impact international relations, resulting in either more cooperative or more conflicting outcomes in bilateral relations.¹³⁶ In the case of the China-South Korea bilateral relationship, frequent misconceptions arise and contribute to the prevalence of problematic images and mutual misinformation between the two nations, producing more conflicting outcomes.¹³⁷ These conflicts reveal some truth and also pose multiple questions regarding the China-South Korean relationship. At the moment, China lacks the absolute power to dictate the relationship between the two countries and, to some extent, still needs to maintain a decent relationship with South Korea for its economic development needs.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, South Korea is not satisfied with its role as a subordinate partner or to be overshadowed by China after years of hard work; it strives to become a more equal or perhaps superior role.¹³⁹ According to traditional realists, rational states are always seeking to optimize their national

¹³⁴ Min Ye, *China–South Korea Relations in the New Era: Challenges and Opportunities*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 29-30.

¹³⁵ Thomas J. Christensen, “The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March/April 2011): 59.

¹³⁶ Noel Kaplowitz, “National Self-Images, Perception of Enemies, and Conflict Strategies: Psychopolitical Dimensions of International Relations,” *Political Psychology* 11, no. 1 (March 1990): 54-55.

¹³⁷ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 29.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

interests.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it is reasonable for South Korea to challenge China in many ways, including culturally. South Korea's ambitions are evident in various recent events, including efforts to join NATO, strengthen partnerships with the U.S. and Japan to isolate China, and promote Korean pop culture vehemently overseas.

Whether intentionally challenging China or not, South Korea aspires to enhance both hard and soft power further to improve its international status in East Asia and the world. Due to their cultural similarities and mode of interaction, South Korea's utilization of cultural diplomacy is bound to stir certain conflicts with China, as this paper will elaborate in the subsequent sections.

2.4 Korean Pop Culture Trade and Economic Foreign Policies with China

Korean pop culture has contributed to the economic relationship between China and South Korea in various ways. Since the two countries established diplomatic relationships in the 1980s, trade, and economic foreign policy have been pivotal topics for the two nations' diplomatic relationship. In 2013, mainland China stood as South Korea's most significant trade surplus provider, surpassing the combined surpluses from the second and third largest sources, which were Hong Kong and the United States.¹⁴¹ Simultaneously, South Korea was the second-largest contributor to China's trade deficits.¹⁴² In 2015, China rose to become South Korea's third-largest investor and ranked as South Korea's second-largest foreign investment recipient, surpassed only by the United States.¹⁴³ In the same year, the China-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (CKFTA) advanced their level of economic cooperation and presented a higher level of economic integration.¹⁴⁴ Due to the variation in scale, while South Korea presents appealing economic incentives to China, China, as an enormous market, holds a huge economic significance to South Korea. Needless to say, South Korea

¹⁴⁰Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 32.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 72.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Qizi Sun, "China's Investment in South Korea Doubled," *Economic Observer Newspaper*, accessed November 15, 2023, <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2015/0123/271630.shtml>.

¹⁴⁴ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 7-8.

has grown to depend on China economically.¹⁴⁵ To profit from China's lucrative market, South Korea has been adopting various strategies, including advocating Korean pop culture to China, and has managed to benefit economically from China through the export of K-pop, Kdrama, Korean food, etc.

Korean cultural products, particularly Korean dramas and TV shows, officially began entering the Chinese market and other overseas markets in the 1990s.¹⁴⁶ After the 1997 financial crisis, South Korea and China both encountered grave economic difficulties and looked for breakthroughs and reforms. To survive, South Korean media companies heavily competed with each other in order to provide affordable but high-quality popular content.¹⁴⁷ As a result, the import of Korean dramas to China as a part of Hallyu began, and this move was considered a crucial economic relief for both countries.¹⁴⁸ Korean drama became instantly popular in China for a few reasons. First of all, the Chinese understood South Korea's experience with social and economic transformation since they were in the same process.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, it was easy for Chinese viewers to feel empathetic towards the characters and the life events they go through in the dramas. Secondly, there is a sense of cultural familiarity between the two countries as they are connected through the East Asian Confucius cultural circle.¹⁵⁰ Hence, the family life and social values depicted in the dramas were highly relatable.¹⁵¹ Due to these sentimental correlations and blunt economic needs, Korean dramas prospered in China for a long time.

Around the early 2000s, there was a significant increase in drama imports to China, but voices of dissatisfaction regarding the cultural product trade imbalance between the two nations rose in China.¹⁵² As one Chinese scholar pointed out: "We believe that for China to

¹⁴⁵ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 7-8.

¹⁴⁶ Soo Hyun Jang, "The Korean Wave and Its Implications for the Korea-China Relationship," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 19, no.2 (December 2012): 103.

¹⁴⁷ Jang, "The Korean Wave," 103.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Jang, "The Korean Wave," 102.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Haiming Zhang, "Acceptance and Collision: Cultural Difference in Perspective behind Korean Drama Fever (Suyonggwa Chungdol: Hanguk Deurama Yeolpung Imyeonui Munhwajeok Sicha)," *Junggukhak Nonchong* 19 (2006): 148.

¹⁵² Haibo Lu, "Hallyu in China: Present and Future (Junggugeseoui 'Hallyu': Hyeonhwanggwae Mirae)," *Yeongsang Yesul Yeongu* 10 (2007): 54.

become an equal partner of complete cultural exchange, we need to slow down the import of Korean drama series through an indirect method (slackening the pace of official screening of Korean dramas). This is merely a trade-balancing strategy. I believe that if Korean friends want to resolve the problem [of the dwindling drama exports to China], they should come up with a solution to tackle the trade imbalance problem that both sides can agree on so that hallyu can thrive in China. I am saying this because the Chinese audience likes and loves hallyu.”¹⁵³ The Chinese media echoed this thought from time to time, criticizing the South Korean government for trade protectionism and arguing that the Korean cultural industry was only interested in the Chinese market for short-term gains.¹⁵⁴

Many Chinese intellectuals saw Hallyu as “a state-level project to expand economic gains and deepen cultural influence” early on.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, they were not impressed with the trade imbalance and deficit in cultural commodities between the two nations.¹⁵⁶ For example, although South Korea imported certain Chinese dramas, they were never aired on the major Korean TV channels but on small channels like Junghwa TV, resulting in low ratings.¹⁵⁷ In addition, while the volume of Chinese drama exports to South Korea only yielded 1.48 million US dollars, exports of Korean dramas to the Chinese market in 2005 amounted to 9.31 million dollars,¹⁵⁸ In 2010, South Korea's imports of Chinese drama declined to 0.39 million dollars, however, the nation experienced a surge in drama exports to China, reaching 15.57 million dollars.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, a debate arose on whether Korean dramas were accurate or biased in their depiction of ancient Korea-China relations and stirred controversy in China.¹⁶⁰ Alongside the governments in Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam, China adopted

¹⁵³ Lu, “Hallyu in China,” 54.

¹⁵⁴ Jang, “The Korean Wave,” 108.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Hyeon Gwon and Yeongsu Gim, “Strategies and Policies for the Expansion of Hallyu: With a Focus on Broadcasting (Hallyu Hwaksaneul Wihan Jeollyakgwa Jeongchaek: Bangsongyeongsangmureul Jungsimeuro),” Seoul: Korea Creative Contents Agency (2006): 144-145.

¹⁵⁸ Jang, “The Korean Wave,” 108.

¹⁵⁹ Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) Chinese Office, “The Current State and Future Trends of Korean TV Dramas in China (Jungguk Nae Hanguk Deurama Hyeonhwang Mit Baljeonchuse),” *Trends in Chinese Contents Industry (Jungguk Kontencheu Saneop Donghyang)* (2012): 2012-14.

¹⁶⁰ Hun Shik Kim, “When public diplomacy faces trade barriers and diplomatic frictions: the case of the Korean Wave,” *Place Brand Public Dipl*14 (2018): 238.

policies to impose quotas on foreign TV programs¹⁶¹ The Chinese government agency placed restrictions on the total airtime allocated to Korean popular culture content, including K-dramas, on all local television channels, especially during television prime time in the evening.¹⁶² It also regulated Korean popular culture content on the Chinese Internet and websites.¹⁶³ Simultaneously, to avoid importing too many Korean TV shows, Chinese production companies and broadcasters began to purchase copyrights in order to legally remake successful Korean dramas and reality shows in China.¹⁶⁴ This initiative intended to support the production of locally adapted versions of popular Korean TV content using Chinese production teams and actors.¹⁶⁵ The ultimate goal was to gradually diminish the impact of Korean pop cultural products and celebrities and eventually protect and boost the Chinese entertainment industry.¹⁶⁶

In conclusion, the exchange of cultural products played a crucial role in China and South Korea's multifaceted economic relationship. While Korean dramas initially flourished in the Chinese market and contributed positively to the economic relationship, voices of dissatisfaction regarding imbalanced cultural trade and criticisms towards Hallyu being a calculated effort merely for economic gains surfaced in China. The persisting trade imbalances eventually prompted the Chinese government to regulate and restrict Korean cultural imports and generated the solution of local Chinese remakes of Korean TV content. Therefore, due to South Korea's failure to view cultural exchange as a mutual effort and China's belated realization of cultural protection, the prospering cultural trade relationship suffered from the eventual backlash.

¹⁶¹ Kim, "When public diplomacy," 238.

¹⁶² J.Y. Kim and J.O. Lee, "Korean pop culture: A decade of ups and downs," *International Journal of Multimedia and Ubiquitous Engineering*9, no. 3 (2014): 129–134.

¹⁶³ J.Y. Kim and J.O. Lee, "Korean pop culture: A decade of ups and downs," *International Journal of Multimedia and Ubiquitous Engineering*9, no. 3 (2014): 129–134.

¹⁶⁴ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers," 238.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

2.5 Korean Pop Culture and The Impact of Public Opinion on Foreign Policies

Beyond the official government's economic relationship, Korean pop culture also impacts the day-to-day Chinese citizens' perception of South Korea due to the prevalence of the internet. Also, public opinion has affected the diplomatic relations between countries. Among the citizens, the netizens - active internet users, are the ones with growing power to affect diplomatic decisions. A common suspicion is whether a non-democratic country actually listens to public opinion. According to research, public opinion does play a role in shaping foreign policy, even in authoritarian states like China.¹⁶⁷ A study by Goldsmith and Horiuchi covering 58 democratic and non-democratic nations discovered no substantial differences in the impact of public opinion on foreign policy between democracies and non-democracies.¹⁶⁸ In general, while democratic state elections allow citizens to convey their support and provide leaders with compelling motivation to acknowledge public opinion, the public of non-democratic states exert influence on their leaders through protests, established official channels, and conventional or digital media.¹⁶⁹

According to Ye, there are multiple contact channels between South Korea and China, such as the official diplomatic channel and the day-to-day people channel.¹⁷⁰ Putnam's renowned two-level game model of international negotiations also concludes that international negotiations consist of two distinct games: "a level-I game between government representatives over tentative international agreements and a level-II game inside each country participated by various domestic groups regarding the ratification of the agreements. The two games are connected by the concept of 'win-set,' namely, all possible level-I agreements that are acceptable to a country's domestic constituents."¹⁷¹ Putnam emphasizes that, although level-I game players can manipulate international negotiations, a country's domestic politics still plays a major role in the process, proving how important the

¹⁶⁷ X. Li and D. Chen, "Public Opinion, International Reputation, and Audience Cost in an Authoritarian Regime," *Working Paper* (2018).

¹⁶⁸ B.E. Goldsmith and Y. Horiuchi, "Search of Soft Power: Does Foreign Public Opinion Matter for US Foreign Policy?" *World Politics* 64, no. 3 (2012): 555–585.

¹⁶⁹ Li and Chen, "Public Opinion."

¹⁷⁰ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 84.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 32.

level-II domestic groups can be for enhancing national interest during a diplomatic situation.¹⁷²

As the economy developed in South Korea and China, citizens and the general public became more outspoken and involved with diplomatic affairs. Interactions between the two nations are no longer confined to official channels, and “Government-to-foreign-public and people-to-people interactions have turned into critical dimensions of current China-South Korea relations.”¹⁷³ The people-to-people channel, which is crucial for the level-II game and composed of multiple social actors, is capable of challenging and affecting the governments’ public positions and foreign affairs decisions to different extents.¹⁷⁴ This unofficial contact has progressively shaped public opinion and allowed the foreign policy-making process to be more transparent.¹⁷⁵ The people-to-people channel not only exists in the physical world but also in the digital world as an increasing number of Chinese and South Koreans have started residing in each other’s countries.¹⁷⁶ The rapid growth of the internet has produced a highly vocal group of social actors in China and South Korea’s foreign policy process, often referred to as “netizens.”¹⁷⁷ Netizens’ concrete influence on foreign policies remains questionable. However, they have acquired the online space as a crucial platform to share insights, debate on policies, coordinate real-world activities, and exert influence over the foreign policy-making process.¹⁷⁸ For instance, many noteworthy controversies and soft clashes between China and South Korea were either initiated or extensively publicized through online platforms.¹⁷⁹

A significant amount of young people who have access to the internet constitute the group of netizens. These netizens not only watch Korean dramas and reality shows online but also listen to K-pop music and are members of K-pop fandoms. On one of China’s most

¹⁷² Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 32.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 8.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 84.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Yoonkyung Lee, “Digital Opportunities and Democratic Participation in Tech-Savvy Korea,” *Korean Observer* 44, no. 4 (2013): 545-568.

¹⁷⁷ Lee, “Digital Opportunities,” 545-568.

¹⁷⁸ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 8.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

prominent music streaming platforms, QQ music, often more than half of the top ten most-played Music Videos are from Kpop music groups.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, South Korean celebrity news and performances constantly appear on the frequently-searched list of the two other most extensive social media and video platforms in China, Weibo and Bilibili. The daily involvement with Korean popular culture has affected many young Chinese people's opinions and preferences towards South Korea; a period of time after the import of Korean pop cultural goods, young Chinese people held positive attitudes toward South Korea and adored Korean celebrities and fashion, leading to the invention of words like Hallyu and Ha Han Zu, a word describing young people who are Korean pop culture enthusiasts.¹⁸¹ However, while the internet attracted young people to Korean pop culture, it also raised concerns in Chinese society. For instance, many people criticized Korean drama plots for being repetitive and stereotypical, which provides no positive value for Chinese audiences. Additionally, Chinese entertainment news revealed certain Korean celebrities' questionable manners towards China and claimed they were merely interested in Chinese money with no genuine intention for cultural communications.¹⁸² Consequently, many people's opinions became complex and even negative towards South Korea.

Moreover, soft clashes frequently appear in China-South Korean relations. The word "soft clashes" was used by Chung to describe "traditionally less noticeable, mostly 'low-politics' issues cause[ing] a significant level of public attention and civic engagements in both countries," in this specific case, the soft clashes between China and South Korea manifests the "generally positive but consistently declining" tendency of the relationship between the two states in the 21st century.¹⁸³ In the early to mid-2000s, most of the soft clashes emerged due to controversies surrounding UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage lists instead of pop culture, such as the the Duanwujie/Danojie dispute and the

¹⁸⁰ "MV巅峰榜 - QQ音乐-千万正版音乐海量无损曲库新歌热歌天天畅听的高品质音乐平台!" QQ音乐. Accessed November 20, 2023, https://y.qq.com/n/ryqq/mv_topli.

¹⁸¹ Jang, "The Korean Wave," 107.

¹⁸² Jang, "The Korean Wave," 107.

¹⁸³ Ye, *China-South Korea Relations*, 71 - 72; Jae Ho Chung, "China's "Soft" Clash with South Korea: The History War and Beyond," *Asian Survey* 49, no.3 (2009): 468-483.

Koguryo controversy.¹⁸⁴ Since then, occasional rumors have circulated, suggesting that South Korea has been leaning towards registering another prominent Chinese tradition as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.¹⁸⁵ From Chinese characters to Chinese medicine, almost all major Chinese cultural traditions were utilized for the rumors at one point, with the most notorious one being South Korea claiming that Confucius is Korean.¹⁸⁶ Despite many of the rumors being misunderstandings or false statements due to close historical and cultural relations and similar customs, these soft clashes over cultural heritage predominantly impacted the Chinese public view of South Korea negatively and generated anti-Korean sentiments.¹⁸⁷

The escalated anti-Korean sentiments led to a phenomenon described by Gries as Chinese people believing in the illusion that the nation of South Korea claims to own everything worldwide.¹⁸⁸ In 2007, an online survey with more than 12,000 Chinese respondents showed approximately 40 percent of netizens selecting South Korea as their most disliked nation, which is ten percent more than Japan, the second disliked nation.¹⁸⁹ Shockingly, a 2010 survey exhibited 41 percent of Chinese students residing in South Korea with anti-Korean sentiments.¹⁹⁰ Regarding the people-to-people interactions in the level-II game, the Chinese citizens' anti-Korean sentiments played a significant role in the decline of China-South Korean bilateral relations in the latter half of the 2000s.¹⁹¹

Recently, new cultural soft clashes have taken place in the thriving Korean pop culture. Despite the continued popularity of Korean pop culture in China, the global rise in its popularity has been exacerbating misunderstandings related to historical and cultural disputes, unfortunately fueling anti-sentiments among people in both countries. As Korean

¹⁸⁴ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 83.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ P. Gries, "Disillusionment and Dismay: How Chinese Netizens Think and Feel About the Two Koreas," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 12, no. 1(2012): 31-56, doi:10.1017/S159824080000761X.

¹⁸⁹ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 83.

¹⁹⁰ Seong-Hun Yun and Kelly Vibber, "The Strategic Values and Communicative Actions of Chinese Students for Sociological Korean Public Diplomacy," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 6, no. 1 (2012): 77-92, DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2011.634864.

¹⁹¹ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 83.

pop culture is succeeding overseas, South Korea has added more elements of its traditional culture in pop cultural products in order to promote Korean traditional culture simultaneously. However, Chinese netizens suspect that South Korea is passing off traditional Chinese elements as their own. For example, in March 2023, Jisoo, a member of the internationally renowned K-pop girl group BLACKPINK, released her first solo teaser concept. This sparked a heated debate on the Chinese internet about whether she was appropriating Chinese culture; the Chinese-traditional-like elements featured in the teaser, including the folding screen, plum blossom pattern, Zanzi (traditional hairpin), and ink-wash painting, were reported by South Korean media as symbols of traditional Korean culture.¹⁹² Another controversy arose when Wonyoung, the most popular member of the renowned K-pop girl group IVE, wore a traditional-Chinese-phoenix-like Zanzi at the 2022 Paris Fashion Week, asserting it was a representation of Korean traditional culture.¹⁹³ These K-pop controversies, among others, intensified the Chinese online accusation that “South Korea tends to claim everything in the universe.” Meanwhile, as a result of these incidents and heightened political attention, anti-China sentiments in South Korea have been on the rise. For instance, many South Koreans and even government officials expressed strong reactions and protested vehemently when a girl from the Korean-Chinese ethnic minority group¹⁹⁴ appeared wearing a Hanbok, a kind of Korean traditional clothing, as one of the representations of China’s 56 ethnic groups at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics opening ceremony.¹⁹⁵ Many soft clashes similar to the ones mentioned above have been taking place

¹⁹² One of the examples: “BLACKPINK金智秀的solo预告惹争议, 被指偷文化, 韩媒说是韩国风,” 网易首页, accessed November 22, 2023, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/I0ETFU>.

“BLACKPINK Jisoo's solo teaser sparks controversy, accused of cultural appropriation, Korean media says it's Korean style,” Wangyi Homepage, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed November 22, 2023, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/I0ETFU>.

¹⁹³ “韩星张元英巴黎展头戴我国传统凤簪, 却说很有韩国风情惹争议_簪子_凤凰_文化,” 搜狐网, accessed November 23, 2023, <https://www.sohu.com/a/59339340>.

“Korean Star Wonyoung Wears Traditional Chinese Phoenix Hairpin at Paris Fashion Show, But Controversially claimed it to be Korean Style - Hairpin - Phoenix - Culture,” Sohu, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed November 23, 2023, <https://www.sohu.com/a/59339340>.

¹⁹⁴ Korean Chinese, also known as 朝鲜族 in Chinese, are ethnic Koreans with Chinese nationality who have resided in China for centuries and are an officially recognized ethnic minority group by the Chinese government.

¹⁹⁵ G. Shin, H. Gordon, and H. J. Kim, Gi-Wook Shin, Haley Gordon, and Hannah June Kim, “South Koreans Are Rethinking What China Means to Their Nation,” FSI, accessed November 23, 2023, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/south-koreans-are-rethinking-what-china-means-their-nation>.

in both countries for the past few years. They are caused by a profound change, which is that the general public in both countries can form their own opinions on foreign affairs and directly engage with each other now.¹⁹⁶ According to Jang, “[these] incident[s] [are] classic example[s] of cultural nationalism creeping into the realm of popular culture.”¹⁹⁷

Both the impact of soft clashes on public opinion and the influence of public opinion on foreign affairs have been increasing. These soft clashes caused by traditional or pop cultural controversies have the potential to create more disruptions in the bilateral relations between China and South Korea than before.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, societal actors in both countries have showcased their significant influence on diplomatic decisions during soft clashes, such as in the Koguryo conflict, South Korean societal actors succeeded in pressuring the government to change its position.¹⁹⁹ Ye believes that, in the foreseeable future, the governments and publics of China and South Korea will need to learn to coexist with these soft clashes, particularly since the public is increasingly involved, there are no immediate solutions to these issues, and minor conflicts cause more damage for the bilateral relationship now than before.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, China's anti-South Korean sentiment partially results from detecting the challenge posed by South Korea. While South Korea is feeling the pressure of China's development, China is perceiving the impact of Korean pop culture's wide expansion

2.6 Korean Pop Culture as Reflection of the Diplomatic Relationship

For the diplomatic relationship between China and South Korea, Korean pop culture is not only the effector but also the reflector; policies on K-pop reflect the change in the diplomatic relationship between China and South Korea. One major example is the diplomatic disruption caused by Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in 2016. THAAD is a United States missile defense system that the South Korean government

¹⁹⁶ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 83-84.

¹⁹⁷ Jang, “The Korean Wave,” 108.

¹⁹⁸ Chung, “China's “Soft” Clash with South Korea,” 468-483.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ye, *China–South Korea Relations*, 71-72.

agreed to host on its territory in 2016.²⁰¹ It is designed to provide protection against potential North Korean attacks with an extended-range radar detection function.²⁰² Nevertheless, THAAD's radar detection ability poses a threat to China since it can allow the U.S. military to detect missile activity in most areas of China.²⁰³ Unsurprisingly, the Chinese government promptly accused THAAD of being a disguised U.S. strategy for infringing on China's sovereignty and criticized South Korea's deployment of the system.²⁰⁴

The aftermath of this diplomatic episode was reflected by one of the biggest bans on Korean pop culture activities in China, in both official and private situations. As mentioned in the paper, in the 21st century, Korean pop culture has achieved its most substantial success in total export volume in China, leading to China surpassing Japan and becoming the biggest market for the Korean entertainment industry.²⁰⁵ Therefore, to serve as a warning, a protest, and a sign of indignation, China retaliated by boycotting Korean cultural products vehemently. The Chinese government acted quickly after the South Korean government announced the deployment of THAAD; it denied visas for South Korean celebrities, canceled a variety of Korean pop cultural events in Shanghai and Beijing, such as Kpop concerts and fan meetings, and removed mainstream Korean dramas and TV shows from the Chinese websites.²⁰⁶ Additionally, Chinese officials from Qingdao abruptly canceled their participation in a cultural festival in Daegu, South Korea, Qingdao's sister city, and explicitly asked Daegu officials not to make an appearance at a Qingdao beer festival as prescheduled.²⁰⁷ Although no official documents were publicized, and the Chinese foreign minister's spokesman has even denied that there was ever a ban on Korean popular culture (Xian Han Ling 限韩令) in China,²⁰⁸ South Korean entertainment industry observers suspected that last-minute

²⁰¹ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers," 240.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ A. Diaz and S. Zhang, "Angered by U.S. anti-missile system, China takes economic revenge," CBS News, accessed November 23, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com>.

²⁰⁷ G. Gibson, "Is China already taking its revenge for THAAD?" The Diplomat, accessed November 23, 2023, <http://thediplomat.com>.

²⁰⁸ 黎洁婵, "外交部: 中方从来没有实施过所谓的'限韩令,'" 南方网, accessed November 24, 2023, https://news.southcn.com/node_179d29.

cancellations and adjustments were caused by unspoken yet official pressures from the central government in Beijing.²⁰⁹ In addition, many Chinese news media outlets spoke out, publishing articles and commentaries in support of the government's ban on South Korean celebrities and pop cultural products.²¹⁰ For instance, The Chinese state media actively criticized the South Korean government's decision to deploy THAAD.²¹¹ And China's state-funded Global Times attributed the success of the South Korean entertainment industry in China to friendly relations between the two countries in an editorial, warning that Hallyu in China would be heading for decline if Seoul persisted with the missile defense.²¹²

The impact of China's retaliation policies not only hit the South Korean entertainment industry hard but also hampered the South Korean tourism industry, resulting in substantial economic loss. Reports in March 2017 indicated that the Chinese government had prohibited Chinese tour groups from visiting South Korea.²¹³ Consequently, compared to the previous year, there was a decrease of 27% in Chinese tourists visiting South Korea in March, which severely setback the South Korean tourist industry.²¹⁴ The Chinese tourist boycott especially affected South Korea's hotels and duty-free shops, leading to the Korean Development Bank estimating potential losses of up to \$11 billion, predicting an 80% sales decline for South Korea's tourism industry and duty-free sector with China's continuing boycott.²¹⁵ South Korean conglomerate Lotte, which runs retail stores in China in a manner similar to Walmart's style in the United States, suffered the most significant economic loss. Lotte provided the land in South Korea for Thaad; hence, Chinese authorities shut down 75 Lotte

Jiechan Li, "Ministry of Foreign Affairs: China has never implemented the so-called 'Korean Ban,'" Southcn, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, accessed November 24, 2023, https://news.southcn.com/node_179d29.

²⁰⁹ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers," 240.

²¹⁰ A. Qin and S. Choe, "South Korean missile defense deal appears to sour China's taste for K-pop," New York Times, accessed November 23, 2023, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

²¹¹ "Seoul to blame if Korean Wave falters," Global Times, accessed November 23, 2023, <http://www.globaltimes.cn>.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ J. Gibson, "China's tourist boycott backfires on South Korea's Jeju Island," The Diplomat, accessed November 25, 2023, <http://thediplomat.com>; R. Premack, "A row with China over U.S. missiles is devastating South Korea's tourism industry," Time, accessed November 25, 2023, <http://time.com>.

²¹⁴ "Monthly statistics of tourism," Korea Tourism Organization, accessed November 25, 2023, <https://kto.visitkorea.or.kr>.

²¹⁵ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers," 240.

stores due to “inspection failures.”²¹⁶ As a result, South Korean government sources reported that this action caused a loss of \$180 million in China for Lotte.²¹⁷

The deployment of THAAD by South Korea and China's ban on Korean pop culture reveal that Korean pop culture does not just influence diplomatic relationships over concerns of unfair cultural and economic trade and soft clashes, but what occurs to it also reflects changes in foreign policies and the diplomatic relations between China and South Korea.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, since the 1990s, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has provided Korea with a new path to indirectly counterbalance China's dominant cultural position and increase its soft power influence in the East Asian area while avoiding major hard power clashes. South Korea swiftly spread its cultural influence across Asia and permeated China through cultural trade. While mutually beneficial at first, China soon learned the trade was imbalanced, which stirred controversies and eventually resulted in discontent with South Korea over various cultural elements and representations. Anti-Korean sentiments and rumors arose, propelling China to respond to this perceived challenge through policy restrictions or prohibitions of Korean popular culture's influence within China.

While the traditional cultural diplomacy of China encounters Western resistance due to the idea of the “Chinese threat,” its authoritarian system, and regional disputes, South Korea's cultural diplomacy, with its focus on popular culture, faced fewer challenges, benefiting from its relationship with the West, democratic system, fewer territorial disputes, and a non-political image. Nonetheless, In both cultural diplomacy strategies, the government is actively involved, with China's focus being control and Korea's focus being promotion. Moreover, both strategies target a younger international audience. As one can observe from the results of the IFG-Monocle soft power index and the Soft Power 30, cultural diplomacy on the part of both China and South Korea has been improving the two nation's soft power. However, solely based on the observations of scores from 2015-2019, it

²¹⁶ IKim, “When public diplomacy faces trade barriers,” 240.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

is evident that South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has a stronger impact on the growth of its soft power. Furthermore, historical reasons and China's fast-growing economy threaten South Korea's current leading status in East Asia and are important factors that propel South Korea to challenge China in order to retain its advantageous position. In addition, the cultural product exchange, which initially contributed to the thriving economic relationship between South Korea and China, proved to be an unequal trade partnership, leading to the relationship turning adverse and China's regulation of Korean cultural imports. Cultural proximity between the two nations suggests that misunderstandings and soft clashes with China could emerge while South Korea's cultural diplomacy is promoting traditional culture through pop culture around the world. This resulted in rising anti-sentiments in both nations. The increasing impact of soft clashes on public opinion and their influence on foreign affairs suggests a delicate and complex relationship between China and South Korea. Additionally, K-pop serves as both an influencer and a reflector of the diplomatic changes between the two nations, with the THAAD missile system incident serving as a major example.

Overall, whether it started intentionally or unintentionally, South Korea has been challenging China's cultural dominance in the East Asian region through its cultural diplomacy. While the pop cultural diplomacy of South Korea affects the diplomatic dynamics in East Asia, it is also vigorously working its charm in the rest of the world. In the following chapter, this paper will explore how South Korea utilized pop cultural diplomacy to elevate its status, impact, and soft power on the global stage.

Chapter 3 - South Korea's Pop Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power in the World

South Korea's cultural diplomacy has led to a significant rise in soft power while refining its position in the world and influencing other state and non-state actors. This chapter explores the transformative impact of South Korea's cultural diplomacy and the surge in its soft power on the international stage. It will specifically discuss pop cultural diplomacy's impact on economics, its role in international governmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and diplomacy with other countries, such as North Korea, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Saudi Arabia.

In the domain of economics, South Korea possesses an ambition to create a profit-generating Hollywood-like national cultural institution. While moving in this direction, pop cultural diplomacy has become a significant influence that boosts South Korea's economic expansion through the global export of Korean cultural products. Beyond economics, the South Korean government's adoption of celebrity youth diplomacy through the means of pop culture has substantially enhanced its engagement with IGOs and NGOs. More importantly, this strategy has cultivated symbiotic relationships between K-pop idols and global organizations like the United Nations, resulting in the promotion of South Korea's representation and influence within the international community. In addition, the chapter analyzes the impact of South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy on foreign policies. By proactively advocating Korean pop cultural activities abroad and encouraging K-pop idols' participation in domestic and international political events, South Korea has effectively utilized pop culture as a powerful diplomatic tool. However, while these pop cultural diplomatic strategies have predominantly generated positive outcomes, certain countries have raised concerns about them, especially regarding their effect on the young generation and future foreign policy decisions.

Overall, this chapter argues that since the 1990s, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has had a major impact on its rise of soft power and international status in the

world. It has contributed to South Korea's rapid economic development and expanding cultural influence through massive exports, increasing its level of participation in international and nongovernmental organizations. Cultural diplomacy has also been a crucial instrument in foreign policies for South Korea and other nations. This chapter sheds light on the intricate relationship between South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy, soft power projection, and its evolving international role.

Moreover, this chapter will discuss the concept of "celebrity diplomacy" coined by Andrew F. Cooper.²¹⁸ It is a concept that emphasizes the impact of celebrities' involvement in international governmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations and their interactions with high-level state actors on various policies.²¹⁹ According to Cooper, celebrity diplomacy establishes a new diplomatic "space" that encourages innovative forms of engagement, addressing the question of disconnection in traditional International Relations.²²⁰ In many ways, celebrity diplomacy is an essential part of pop cultural diplomacy. However, the study of celebrity diplomacy has concentrated chiefly on Western celebrities' actions and perceptions.²²¹ For instance, the most well-known celebrity diplomats include Angelina Jolie, who is a UNHCR Special Envoy, and George Clooney and Leonardo DiCaprio, who are UN Messengers of Peace. Aside from Western celebrities, many scholars studying celebrity diplomacy focus on UN celebrity ambassadors from China, as China's international status is peculiar, and there are approximately 30 Chinese celebrities now acting as UN goodwill ambassadors.²²² Nevertheless, not many studies have been conducted on the Korean Wave and celebrity diplomacy.

²¹⁸ Mark Wheeler, "Celebrity Diplomacy: United Nations' Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace," *Celebrity Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011): 6-18.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Wheeler, "Celebrity," 6-18.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² "A Closer Look at South Korea's-UN Celebrity Youth Diplomacy," *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/closer-look-south-korean-un-celebrity-youth-diplomacy>.

3.1 South Korea's Pop Culture Global Achievements To Date

Despite some controversies, it is difficult to overlook the fact that the burgeoning South Korean cultural export industry is exerting a global influence through its three-pronged approach of Korean wave – K-pop music idol groups, Korean films, and Korean dramas. There are a sufficient amount of reports and statistics in the global music, film, and online streaming industries that demonstrate the extent of South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy expansion.

In regard to Kpop music, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) published a report in 2019 stating that K-pop was one of the most-liked music genres worldwide.²²³ IFPI is a non-profit organization founded in 1933 to represent the global recording industry's interests. The IFPI music listening report is derived from online survey data collected from 34,000 individuals aged 16-64 in around 21 diverse nations.²²⁴ Specifically, the 2019 report emphasized the outcomes from 18 nations, incorporating countries such as Argentina, Australia, France, Japan, Mexico, Poland, and South Africa.²²⁵ It officially labeled K-pop as an independent music category and ranked Kpop as number seven on the favorite music genres list.²²⁶ Considering the scale of the countries and participants surveyed, the report indicated a significant global recognition of K-pop and a major breakthrough in the history of K-pop music.

After four years, in the 2023 IFPI Global Music Report, K-pop music groups have become frequent guests on the global ranking charts. For instance, among the Top 10 Global Recording Artists Chart in 2022, there were three Kpop music groups, with SEVENTEEN ranking number six, Stray Kids ranking number seven, and BTS ranking number two.²²⁷ BTS's rank is merely below Taylor Swift and above Drake.²²⁸ Among the

²²³ "A Closer Look," *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*.

²²⁴ Tamar Herman, "K-Pop Ranked as One of the Most Popular Genres in the World, According to IFPI 2019 Music Listening Report," *Billboard*, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/k-pop-most-popular-genres-world-ifpi-music-listening-report-8531464/>.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, "Global Music Report 2023," 6-7.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

Global Top 10 Albums for 2022, four of the albums belong to Kpop artists: *Proof* by BTS, ranking number four, *Maxident* by Stray Kids, ranking number six, *Face the Sun* by SEVENTEEN ranking number seven, and *Born Pink* by BLACKPINK ranking as number eight.²²⁹ This is an impressive outcome, considering that all other albums and musicians on the chart were prominent Western musicians.

Furthermore, it is known that BTS is the music group with the highest number of Billboard awards; the group has won an impressive amount of twelve Billboard Music Awards in total.²³⁰ In addition, the group has received five Grammy nominations for the past three years.²³¹ BTS is currently the most famous Kpop music group in the world, breaking the Guinness world record of the most viewed YouTube music video in 24 hours on May 22nd, 2021, with their music video titled "BTS (방탄소년단) 'Butter' Official MV" reaching 108.2 million views in one day, and remains the record holder till this day.²³² BTS was also the previous holder of this Guinness World record with their music video "Dynamite" in 2020, "Boy with Luv" in 2019 and "Idol" in 2018.²³³ For the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, BTS member Jung-kook performed at the opening ceremony and made history as the first-ever Asian musician to sing the FIFA World Cup's official anthem.²³⁴ It is worth mentioning that another globally-renowned Kpop group - BLACKPINK, made history with their album, "The Album," in 2020 by claiming the top spot on the Billboard Artists 100 chart as the first female

²²⁹ International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, "Global Music Report 2023," 8-9.

²³⁰ Joe Goggins, "BTS Set New Record at 2022 Billboard Music Awards," Rolling Stone UK, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.rollingstone.co.uk/music/news/bts-set-new-record-2022-billboard-music-awards-16876/>.

²³¹ "BTS: Artist." Artist | GRAMMY.Com, accessed February 2, 2024, <https://www.grammy.com/artists/bts/28774>

²³² "Most Viewed YouTube Music Video in 24 Hours," *Guinness World Records*, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/415878-most-viewed-youtube-music-video-in-24-hours>.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ "BTS: Jungkook: Jungkook Performs at FIFA World Cup 2023, BTS Members RM, V, J-Hope & Suga Cheer for Singer," *The Economic Times*, accessed February 5, 2024. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/jungkook-performs-at-fifa-world-cup-2022-bts-members-rm-v-j-hope-suga-cheer-for-singer/articleshow/95654314.cms>.

group.²³⁵ As a country overall, South Korea ranks as the seventh biggest Music Market in 2022.²³⁶

While the K-pop music industry is thriving, South Korean films are also on the rise, with a growing presence at the Big Three film festivals - Cannes, Venice, and Berlin. Before the 2000s, South Korea had only won four awards at these film festivals collectively, with the first one received in 1961.²³⁷ In comparison, prior to the year 2000, films from mainland China had won twenty-three awards collectively at the Big Three film festivals²³⁸ and Japanese films had won five awards solely at the Cannes Film Festival.²³⁹ However, after the 2000s and till this date, South Korea has won twenty-one awards collectively at the Big Three: nine awards at the Berlin International Film Festival²⁴⁰, nine awards at the Cannes Film Festival²⁴¹ and three awards at the Venice Film Festival.²⁴² The best achievement for the South Korean film industry so far is *Parasite* being the first East Asian and non-English language film to win Best Picture at the 92nd Oscar Academy Awards.²⁴³ *Parasite* was also the first Korean film to receive six nominations at the Oscars winning four of them, which are Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, Best Director, and Best International Feature Film.²⁴⁴

²³⁵ Xander Zellner. "BLACKPINK Become First Girl Group & Third K-Pop Act to Hit No. 1 on Artist 100 Chart," *Billboard*, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/pro/blackpink-first-girl-group-third-k-pop-act-number-1-on-artist-100-chart/>.

²³⁶ IFPI, "Report," 10.

²³⁷ "Prizes & Honours 2017," *Berlin International Film Festival*, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/2019>.

²³⁸ "三大影展華語電影或華人獲獎及評審履歷," *Wikimedia Foundation*, February 5, 2024, <https://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-cn/%E4%B8%89%E5%A4%A7%E5%>.

"Chinese-language Films or Chinese Award Winners and Judges' Resumes at the Big Three Film Festivals," *Wikimedia Foundation*, February 5, 2024, translated by Zhiqi Jiang, <https://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-cn/%E4%B8%89%E5%A4%A7%E5%>.

²³⁹ Rory O'Donnell, "Japan at Cannes," *ELFS Japan*, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://elfsjapan.com/blog/japan-at-cannes/>.

²⁴⁰ "Prizes & Honours," *Berlin International Film Festival*, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/2019>.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² "History of Biennale Cinema," *La Biennale di Venezia*, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/history-venice-film-festival>.

²⁴³ Patrick Brzeski, "Oscars: 'Parasite' Makes History as First Foreign-Language Film to Win Best Picture," *The Hollywood Reporter*, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/oscar-bong-joon-hos-parasite-wins-south-korea-first-oscar-1277161/>.

²⁴⁴ Brzeski, "Oscars."

Moreover, the South Korean actress Yuh-Jung Youn won Best Supporting Actress at the Oscars Academy Award in 2020 with the film *Minari*.²⁴⁵

Additionally, many South Korean TV show producers have broadened their distribution channels through collaborations with some of the world's biggest subscription video streaming service platforms, including Netflix and Hulu.²⁴⁶ The most significant global success South Korean Television has achieved to this date is Netflix's series *Squid Game*. It was the first-ever Korean TV show to appear on Netflix's global top ten most-watched TV show charts, ranking number one in 94 nations.²⁴⁷ This led it to become Netflix's most-viewed series at its launch.²⁴⁸ Following Netflix's revision of its viewership metrics in November 2021, *Squid Game* remains in its position as the most-viewed TV show on the platform due to its striking 1.65 billion hours of view time accumulated during the initial 28 days.²⁴⁹ As of today, *Squid Game* is still the number one show on the Netflix Global Top 10 List of the Most-Watched TV and Films.²⁵⁰ The influence of the show extended beyond viewership and achieved global phenomenon status in various aspects: the main cast of *Squid Game* was invited to one of the top talk shows - Jimmy Fallon Show in the United States, and the lead actors' social media followers surged while a simple Korean Algona cookie game became a

²⁴⁵ Neda Ulaby, "Youn Yuh-Jung Is First Korean To Win Oscar For Best Supporting Actress," NPR, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-oscars-2021/2021/04/25/989638064/youn-yuh-jung-is-first-korean-to-win-oscar-for-best-supporting-actress>.

²⁴⁶ Hun Shik Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers and diplomatic frictions: the case of the Korean Wave," *Place Brand Public Dipl* 14 (2018): 238.

²⁴⁷ "142m Households Watched *Squid Game*, Netflix Says as It Adds 4.4m Subscribers," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/oct/19/netflix-quarterly-results-subscribers-squid-game>; Catie Keck, "Netflix Calls *Squid Game* Its 'biggest Ever Series at Launch' - The Verge: Ghostarchive," accessed November 5, 2023, <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/HyFc2>.

²⁴⁸ "142m Households Watched *Squid Game*, Netflix Says as It Adds 4.4m Subscribers," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/oct/19/netflix-quarterly-results-subscribers-squid-game>; Catie Keck, "Netflix Calls *Squid Game* Its 'biggest Ever Series at Launch' - The Verge: Ghostarchive," accessed November 5, 2023, <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/HyFc2>.

²⁴⁹ Todd Spangler, "'Squid Game' Is Decisively Netflix No. 1 Show of All Time With 1.65 Billion Hours Streamed in First Four Weeks, Company Says," *Variety*, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://variety.com/2021/digital/news/squid-game-all-time-most-popular-show-netflix-1235113196/>.

²⁵⁰ "Global Top 10," Netflix Top 10 - Global, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.netflix.com/tudum/top10/tv?week=2023-11-26>.

global sensation. Since then, Netflix has increased the number of Korean dramas on its platform.²⁵¹

Overall, the impact of the pop cultural diplomacy associated with the Korean wave - K-pop music idol groups, Korean films, and Korean dramas, has achieved unprecedented heights and shows no signs of diminishing at the moment.

3.2 Pop Cultural Diplomacy's Impact on Economics

South Korean pop cultural diplomacy boosted its national economy by exporting Korean cultural products, which led to an expansion of Korean cultural outreach and the elevation of South Korea's global economic status. Specifically, the South Korean government adopted official policies to support entertainment companies that cultivated successful K-pop groups overseas, such as BTS and BLACKPINK and promoted "Hallyu tourism" and K-pop music videos on international platforms.

Since the mid-1990s, the South Korean government has been intentionally cultivating Korean pop culture as the nation's most crucial cultural diplomacy strategy. One of the top goals of its pop cultural diplomacy is to boost South Korea's economy by transforming the South Korean entertainment industry into one of the nation's biggest export markets.²⁵² This will enable the entertainment industry to connect with an extensive international audience, foster their cultural affinity towards Korea, and promote the consumption of Korean entertainment products.²⁵³ Ultimately, South Korea aspires to emulate the success of the United States' Hollywood industry, aiming to be recognized as one of the foremost global exporters in the popular entertainment sector.²⁵⁴

To accomplish this ambitious goal, the South Korean government directed the Ministry of Culture to adopt a series of measures and to offer countless state assistance to the

²⁵¹ Michelle Toh, "Netflix plans its biggest-ever slate of Korean content," CNN, accessed November 5 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/16/business/netflix-korean-content-expansion-2023-intl-hnk/index.htm>

²⁵² Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers," 236.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

private sector, such as supporting cultural content manufacturers in creating new products, performing economic reforms in the entertainment industry after the Asian financial crisis,²⁵⁵ and providing private entertainment companies with generous subsidies, stimulus funds, and low-interest loans to encourage productivity in movies, TV shows, and pop music.²⁵⁶ These measures allowed private Kpop entertainment companies, such as the industry Big Three - SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, to flourish and implement the famous and controversial training system in the 1990s, which contributed to the success of K-pop products' export overseas.²⁵⁷

Over the past 20 years, private Kpop entertainment companies led by the Big Three have turned Kpop idols and music into a multi-billion-dollar business while providing substantial economic benefits to South Korea.²⁵⁸ These companies are known as star-making factories that built mature industrial models for rigorous trainee selection processes and the intensive entertainment training system. They produced iconic groups such as H.O.T., TVXQ, Super Junior, Girls' Generation, and BIGBANG during the first decade of the Korean Wave. By benefiting from the substantial investments made by the three major entertainment companies in the early stages, BTS, a group originally from a small entertainment company, became the first Korean idol group to penetrate the European and American markets successfully. Together with BLACKPINK, a group produced by YG, they are considered the two real game-changers who propelled the Korean Wave onto the global stage, which is an achievement many Korean entertainment companies have been striving to achieve since the 1990s.

Building upon the foundation laid by their predecessors, the two young groups successfully solidified their positions in the global music industry by dominating the North

²⁵⁵ E. Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture*, (New York: Picador, 2014).

²⁵⁶ M. Leong, "How Korea became the world's coolest brand," Financial Post, accessed November 5, 2023, <http://business.financialpost.com>.

²⁵⁷ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers", 237.

²⁵⁸ Glenn Peoples, "K-Pop Companies Had Average Revenue Growth of 71% in Q2," *Billboard*, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/pro/k-pop-companies-revenue-growth-71-percent-average-q2-2023/>.

American Billboard charts, collaborating with Western artists on hit singles, and creating group dances that go viral on TikTok. More importantly, BTS and BLACKPINK acting as prime representations of South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy, boosted the profitability of the K-pop market and contributed to South Korea's financial prosperity. The accomplishments of K-pop music enabled South Korea to become one of the most rapidly expanding international music markets, ascending to the 6th biggest market in 2020 from the 28th in 2004.²⁵⁹ Specifically, for the years 2020 and 2021 in the United States, BTS secured the status of the best-selling digital music artist, demonstrating that it is the most financially successful K-pop group to date in the global markets.²⁶⁰ In 2019, BTS independently contributed more than 4.6 billion USD to the national economy of South Korea, which is the equivalent of 0.3 percent of the nation's GDP.²⁶¹ This phenomenon led industry observers to compare BTS to certain Korean corporate giants such as Samsung and Hyundai.²⁶² Undoubtedly, this comparison reveals BTS's astonishing economic contribution to their nation and the massive economic potential of other K-pop idol groups.

Between the years 2017 and 2021, the export revenue of the Kpop music industry increased five times, resulting in a total export value of 230 billion KRW in 2021.²⁶³ Within South Korea's cultural industry exports, the Korean Wave, particularly in the form of K-pop music groups, became the most lucrative asset that is also the most widely accessible and exposed market on the international stage.²⁶⁴ Aside from BTS as a group alone, the entire

²⁵⁹ International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, "Global Music Report 2021".

²⁶⁰ Keith Caulfield, "Dua Lipa's 'Levitating' Is Most-Streamed Song of 2021 In U.S., Morgan Wallen's 'Dangerous: The Double Album' Is MRC Data's Top Album," *Billboard*, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/music/chart-beat/dua-lipa-morgan-wallen-us-2021-mrc-data-1235016079/>.

²⁶¹ Seth Abramovitch, "BTS Is Back: Music's Billion-Dollar Boy Band Takes the Next Step," *The Hollywood Reporter*, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-features/bts-is-back-musics-billion-dollar-boy-band-takes-next-step-1244580/>;

Katharina Buchholz and Felix Richter, "Infographic: How Much Money Does BTS Make for South Korea?" *Statista Daily Data*, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/chart/19854/companies-bts-share-of-south-korea-gdp/>.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ Korea Customs Service. Korea Customs Service Trade Statistics; Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy: Sejong, Korea, 2022. <https://www.customs.go.kr/english/main.do>.

²⁶⁴ Krista Mahr, "South Korea's Greatest Export: How K-Pop's Rocking the World," *Time*, accessed November 6, 2023, <https://world.time.com/2012/03/07/south-koreas-greatest-export-how-k-pops-rocking-the-world/>.

K-pop music industry's significant international success and substantial contribution to South Korea's economy began to receive noteworthy recognition, for example, being labeled as "the next Samsung" and "South Korea's greatest export."²⁶⁵

In addition to the K-pop music industry, other South Korean cultural products also experienced a significant surge in exports. While South Korean TV shows maintained impressive exporting results to different countries in Asia - quadrupling the export volume in 10 years, South Korean TV shows have been generating revenues on overseas streaming platforms.²⁶⁶ In fact, the substantial profit has prompted Netflix to willingly invest 2.5 billion in Korean dramas over the past four years.²⁶⁷ The striking popularity of Kpop and Kdramas have generated growing demand for a variety of related Korean products, including Korean fashion, cosmetics, and food.²⁶⁸ Particularly, the popularity of the Korean wave has encouraged Korean Tourism Organizations to create a trend named "Hallyu tourism."²⁶⁹ It is based on the hype of the Korean Wave and its appeal to overseas tourists.²⁷⁰ To encourage foreign tourists to travel to South Korea and purchase South Korean products, a large number of life-sized cutout boards of Kpop celebrities are featured in tax-free and cosmetic shops, while cutouts of famous Korean drama actors are placed in different locations which are original filming sites of the dramas in the country.²⁷¹ The "Hallyu tourism" trend has significantly increased tourism revenues in South Korea.²⁷²

Moreover, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy swiftly grasped the opportunity presented by the advancing online video-streaming trend at the beginning of the 21st century; it began to spread Korean pop cultural content products on video-streaming websites like YouTube and DramaFever, aiming to engage with a broader range of foreign

²⁶⁵ Mahr, "South Korea's Greatest Export."

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid; Sohee Kim, "Netflix Outlines \$2.5 Billion Korean Bet as K-Drama Mania Grows," Bloomberg, accessed November 6, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-06-22/netflix-outlines-2-5-billion-korean-bet-as-k-drama-mania-grows?embedded-checkout=true>.

²⁶⁸ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers", 237.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

audiences.²⁷³ YouTube serves as the leading online platform for K-pop producers and celebrities to promote their new releases in front of a global fanbase.²⁷⁴ The K-pop group fanbases are actively engaged in the Korean Wave and assist the promotion further by enthusiastically sharing their preferences with peers.²⁷⁵ K-pop music videos, Korean dramas, and films became accessible online with minimal copyright restrictions purposefully to facilitate the proliferation of Korean pop culture. For instance, the first global sensational K-pop music video, "Gangnam Style" by Psy, had no copyright restrictions when it was uploaded onto YouTube by Psy's management company YG, which enabled the creation of countless parody videos of the original music video on YouTube.²⁷⁶ The parody videos eventually enabled "Gangnam Style" to be the biggest hit song globally in 2012, further promoting K-pop and related Korean pop cultural products.²⁷⁷ The phenomenon of "Gangnam Style" led to a surge in search volume and subscribers for K-pop music videos and related content on YouTube. Today, K-pop groups and companies are able to generate substantial profits from their YouTube channels. For example, in 2021, Forbes Korea published a list of the most profitable Korean YouTube channels, with BTS's BangtanTV and BLACKPINK's channel being the two highest-earning Kpop idol group YouTube channels, acquiring \$16.5 million and \$11.6 million respectively.²⁷⁸

In terms of the film industry, *Parasite* remains the prime example of South Korea's film achieving remarkable global commercial success. The Hollywood Report stated approximately four months after its release in the United States in 2020, "Parasite's U.S. gross rested at \$33.2 million, one of the best showings of all time for a foreign-language film. Globally, it has earned \$163 million, making strong showings in many markets that are

²⁷³ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers", 238.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ "K-Pop Idols with the Highest-Earning YouTube Channels, Ranked," *South China Morning Post*, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/celebrity/article/3156225/k-pop-idols-highest-earning-youtube-channels-ranked-bts>.

typically not nearly so receptive to subtitled Asian cinema.”²⁷⁹ It is reasonable to anticipate that the success of *Parasite* will pave the way for more Korean films to be noticed on the global stage, potentially leading to increased commercial success for the South Korean film industry in general.

While South Korean cultural products had a total export volume of 500 million USD at the beginning of the 2000s, it swiftly increased to 6.3 billion USD in 2006.²⁸⁰ In 2016, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs released the Public Diplomatic Act, which is the nation’s first regulation on public and cultural diplomacy.²⁸¹ After the implementation of the act, there was a substantial increase in the export of creative goods, content, and services.²⁸² Based on the sales data supplied by the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism in 2022, along with Content Industry Statistics from 2020, the Korean cultural content industry witnessed dramatic growth in size, sales, and trends, escalating from 6 billion USD in 2016 to 10.8 billion USD in 2020, and 11.9 billion USD in 2022.²⁸³

In summary, through exporting and promoting cultural products abroad, South Korea’s pop cultural diplomacy has generated unprecedented revenue for the nation. It continues to do so, elevating the nation’s economic standing globally. As economic development plays a vital role in improving a country’s global status, pop cultural diplomacy is contributing to Korea’s enhancement of its global status. Moreover, South Korea has extended its cultural influence worldwide by exporting its popular culture, further strengthening its national soft power.

²⁷⁹ Patrick Brzeski, “Oscars: ‘Parasite’ Makes History as First Foreign-Language Film to Win Best Picture,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, accessed November 6, 2023, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/oscars-bong-joon-hos-parasite-wins-south-korea-first-oscar-1277161/>.

²⁸⁰ Kim, “When public diplomacy faces trade barriers”, 237.

²⁸¹ Enna Park, “Korea’s Public Diplomacy,” in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, (London: Routledge, 2020).

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Iga Permatasari, “Hallyu And Multitrack Diplomacy Of South Korea By SM Entertainment,” *Kybernology: Journal of Government Studies* 2, no. 2 (2022): 114.

Kim, “When public diplomacy faces trade barriers”, 237.

3.3 Pop Cultural Diplomacy's (Celebrity Youth Diplomacy's) Impact on South Korea's Role in IGOs and NGOs

South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy, specifically celebrity youth diplomacy, has facilitated collaborations between IGOs and NGOs and South Korea's K-pop music idol groups, which reflects pop cultural diplomacy's efficacy in enhancing the nation's soft power and global status. Through celebrity youth diplomacy, South Korea has expanded its engagement with various IGOs and NGOs while increasing the representation and voices of South Korea in these organizations. The rise in popularity of K-pop, particularly groups like BTS and BLACKPINK, has led to collaborations with the United Nations and other international bodies to advocate for global issues such as mental health, vaccination, and climate change awareness. These collaborations have resulted in mutually beneficial partnerships positively impacting South Korea's role in IGOs and NGOs.

In September 2018, BTS made history as the first K-pop music group to deliver a speech at the United Nations. The purpose of their involvement at the UN was to advocate for UNICEF's Generation Unlimited campaign, which aimed to create solutions for all young people in the world to receive appropriate education, training, or employment by 2030.²⁸⁴ BTS also established the LOVE MYSELF Campaign in 2017, using their own song name as a partnership with UNICEF and raised \$3.6 million.²⁸⁵ The group donated an additional \$1 million on their own, along with a share of the group's album and merchandise proceeds to the United Nations for child violence combat.²⁸⁶ As celebrity diplomats, BTS delivered impressive results for the UNICEF ENDviolence campaign through the LOVE MYSELF Campaign by harnessing their extensive social media following.²⁸⁷ The LOVE MYSELF

²⁸⁴ Pamela Falk, "K-Pop Boy Band 'BTS' to Give Some Buzz to Staid United Nations," *CBS News*, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/k-pop-boy-band-bts-beyond-the-scene-bangtan-boys-united-nations-general-assembly-generation-debate/>.

²⁸⁵ Falk, "K-Pop;" "UNICEF and BTS Celebrate Success of 'groundbreaking' LOVE MYSELF Campaign," UNICEF, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-and-bts-celebrate-success-groundbreaking-love-myself-campaign>.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Jin Ha Lee and Anh Thu Nguyen, "How Music Fans Shape Commercial Music Services: A Case Study of BTS and Army," (University of Washington, 2022): 4.

campaign was deemed mutually beneficial as it enabled BTS to associate a UN initiative with their brand name, while the UN benefited from BTS's fame and popularity to promote the campaign. This was a crucial step for BTS and their agency, Big Hit Entertainment, to enhance BTS's global diplomatic presence.

The campaign effectively demonstrated BTS's international influence to the United Nations and paved the way for future collaborations. In 2020, BTS partnered virtually through a live stream with the United Nations to raise awareness for COVID-19 vaccinations at the 75th United Nations General Assembly.²⁸⁸ More than one million BTS fans appeared to support the live stream on the United Nations' YouTube channel.²⁸⁹ In 2021, former South Korean President Moon Jae-in issued BTS members diplomatic passports and officially appointed the boy group as the "Special Presidential Envoy for Future Generations and Culture" of South Korea, which is a role equivalent to diplomats.²⁹⁰ Members of BTS were invited to speak at the 76th UNGA Sustainable Development Goals campaign, advocating and expressing support for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.²⁹¹ President Moon Jae-in clarified that it was the United Nations who extended an invitation to BTS, representing the global youth community, and asked if BTS could attend the SDG meeting with him.²⁹² In an interview with the Korea Herald Report, President Moon indicated "that [UN's invitation] itself shows the enhanced global stature of South Korea."²⁹³ The group also performed at the UN General Assembly Hall with their hit single, "Permission to Dance."²⁹⁴ This marked another milestone for K-pop as BTS was the first K-pop music group to ever

²⁸⁸ "BTS (방탄소년단) Speech at the 75th UN General Assembly." YouTube, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aPe9Uy10n4>.

²⁸⁹ Emma Spectar, "BTS Just Promoted Vaccines at the U.N. to a (Virtual) Audience of One Million," *Vogue*, accessed February 6, 2024, <https://www.vogue.com/article/bts-just-promoted-vaccines-at-the-united-nations-general-assembly>.

²⁹⁰ Sammy Westfall, "K-pop icons BTS appointed South Korean presidential special envoys ahead of U.N. General Assembly," accessed November 8, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/09/14/bts-un-assembly/>.

²⁹¹ "From BTS, K-Pop Heroes, to Net Zero: 5 Things to Look out for at UNGA76 | UN News," United Nations, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/>.

²⁹² Ji-won Choi, "President Moon Meets BTS, Officially Appoints Them as Special Diplomatic Envoy," *The Korea Herald*, accessed November 8, 2024, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210914000864>.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ "From BTS," United Nations.

perform at the United Nations New York Headquarters.²⁹⁵ As President Moon has mentioned, the UN invitation to speak and perform at the headquarters is a recognition of South Korea's rise in soft power and its improved international status.

Furthermore, an increasing amount of K-pop groups followed BTS's footsteps and played diplomatic roles for South Korea. In 2021, the United Nations invited BLACKPINK to become the UN's Sustainable Development Goals Advocates.²⁹⁶ UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres personally announced this role, and the group was the first K-pop and even Asian music group to serve this role.²⁹⁷ It is worth mentioning that the group was appointed as advocates alongside other prominent figures dedicated to global improvement, such as Microsoft President Brad Smith, Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, and STEM activist Chica Rosadita, demonstrating their influence among youth globally.²⁹⁸ In 2020, the former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson invited BLACKPINK to serve as Goodwill Ambassadors for the COP26 Summit held in Glasgow, Scotland.²⁹⁹ Later on, another popular K-pop girl group, Aespa, delivered a speech using their popular song name in the title named "Next Generation to the Next Level," at the 2022 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development held at the United Nations headquarters in New York.³⁰⁰ This speech aimed at encouraging young people to show interest and support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.³⁰¹ The above are all major examples of how South Korea utilized the power of celebrity diplomacy to improve its soft power and influence globally while assisting the UN in motivating the younger generation's engagement in sustainable development.

²⁹⁵ "From BTS," United Nations.

²⁹⁶ "BLACKPINK," *SDG Advocates*, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.unsdgadvocates.org/blackpink>.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ "CALLING ALL BLINKS: REFLECT ON #COP26 주한 영국대사와 함께한 블랙핑크의 #기후행동 돌아보기," YouTube. accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rceGqSF4-w>.

³⁰⁰ Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), "K-Pop's Aespa Urges Future Generations to Support UN SDGs : Korea.Net : The Official Website of the Republic of Korea," *Korea.Net*, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Society/view?articleId=217548>.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

In addition to K-pop music groups, K-pop industry giants like YG and SM Entertainment actively promote cultural diplomacy through partnerships with non-governmental organizations. In 2022, YG Entertainment signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), a non-profit and non-governmental organization leading sustainable forest management to combat deforestation globally.³⁰² This strategic cooperation seeks to enhance the mission and promote the positive environmental impact of FSC by utilizing YG Entertainment's grand reputation in the Korean pop music industry.³⁰³ Moreover, as the oldest and one of the largest K-pop companies, SM Entertainment is an important part of the South Korean government's multitrack diplomacy.³⁰⁴ In 2015, SM Entertainment started a partnership with UNICEF, focusing the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on "global citizens."³⁰⁵ Although there was a suspension, the partnership was renewed in 2022.³⁰⁶ In 2016, SM Entertainment launched another initiative with UNICEF called "Smile for U" to support children's music education.³⁰⁷ The initiative contributed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by advocating lifelong learning and high-quality and inclusive education for everyone.³⁰⁸ K-pop artists from SM Entertainment were broadly involved in the UNICEF partnerships, such as a member of Super Junior, Siwon, who worked as an ambassador for the UNICEF East Asia & Pacific Region in 2019.³⁰⁹

The efforts of the K-pop industry have contributed to South Korea's elevated position in international organizations. South Korea was elected as a non-permanent

³⁰² "K-Pop Giant YG Entertainment Joins FSC's Fight against Deforestation," *Fsc.Org*, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://fsc.org/en/newscentre/standards/k-pop-giant-yg-entertainment-joins-fscs-fight-against-deforestation>.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Permatasari, "Hallyu," 112.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ "SM Entertainment sign agreement to support music education for marginalized and underprivileged children in Asia," UNICEF Korea, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/unicef-korea-sm-entertainment-sign-agreement-support-music-education-marginalized>

³⁰⁷ Permatasari, "Hallyu," 112.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ "Siwon Choi appointed UNICEF Regional Ambassador for East Asia and Pacific," UNICEF, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/siwon-choi-appointed-unicef-regional-ambassador>.

member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2024-2025 term to maintain international peace and security in June 2023.³¹⁰ After 11 years, South Korea received the role of non-permanent member for a third time, with the previous terms being 2013-14 and 1996-97.³¹¹ To secure a position as a UNSC non-permanent member, candidates must receive a two-thirds majority through the secret ballot voting even if they are running without an opponent.³¹² This time, out of the 193 UN member states, 192 of them took part in the voting, and South Korea won 180 votes with no contestant from the Asia-Pacific Group.³¹³ After the win, the current South Korean president, Yoon Suk Yeol, issued a statement to congratulate the results of the election and called it a "diplomatic victory" since a significant amount of UN members voted in favor of South Korea to become a non-permanent member.³¹⁴

Several factors contributed to South Korea's victory, including its status as the sole candidate in the Asia-Pacific category for the election and its potential to address the North Korean issue effectively. However, the influence of South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy in the UN can not be overlooked. K-pop celebrities have been diligently cultivating a positive diplomatic image of South Korea and enhancing its soft power capabilities through diverse strategies in the international community.

According to Mark Wheeler, the main goal of UN ambassadors' mandates is to raise general public awareness rather than targeting a specific demographic.³¹⁵ However, the USC public diplomacy department discovered that South Korea's celebrity diplomacy has been

³¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, "ROK Elected as Non-Permanent Member of UN Security Council for 2024-25 Term View: Ministry News: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea," accessed November 9, 2023, https://down.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=320861&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi_itm_seq=0&itm_seq_1=0&itm_seq_2=0&company_cd=&company_nm=

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² "UN Security Council to Welcome Five New Non-Permanent Members | UN News," United Nations, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1137382>.

³¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, "ROK Elected as Non-Permanent Member of UN Security Council for 2024-25 Term View."

³¹⁴ "Korea Elected to UNSC, Pledges to Cooperate with China, Russia," Korea Joong Ang Daily, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2023/06/07/national/diplomacy/korea-unsc-voted/20230607092220464.html>.

³¹⁵ Wheeler, "Celebrity," 6-18.

mainly targeting the youth, which reflects the rising trend of youth diplomacy and South Korea's use of celebrity youth diplomacy.³¹⁶ Youth diplomacy highlights the involvement and empowerment of young individuals in the policy domain, and their impact can be profound.³¹⁷ Through the delivery of compelling messages, UN diplomats who are influential among youth can guide the younger generation in supporting UN goals and foster their expectations of immediate actions from their local governments.³¹⁸ However, this also implies that, by actively using celebrity youth diplomacy, South Korea has the potential to affect youth's involvement in other nations' diplomatic decisions.

3.4 Pop Cultural Diplomacy's Impact on Foreign Policies

The South Korean government has not only strongly supported Korean pop cultural activities in various countries but has also allowed K-pop idols to actively participate in domestic and international political events, a phenomenon referred to as idol-state interactions. These strategies of pop cultural diplomacy have been impacting foreign policies in South Korea and other countries in various ways, including serving as gestures of friendliness and diplomatic commitment, as well as warnings and tools of influence. The most prominent examples of such interactions are South Korea's engagements with North Korea, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Saudi Arabia. While the impact on foreign policies demonstrates greater soft power and global status, many countries have also raised concerns regarding the potential impact of these interactions on youth.

One of South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy strategies and official foreign policies is to invest significantly in government-sponsored K-pop activities worldwide. As Kim indicates, the extent of the South Korean government's support of Kpop and Korean cultural activities overseas is almost dramatic.³¹⁹ Through Korean embassies and cultural centers all around the world, the Korean government sponsors countless meet-ups, pop concerts, and festivals

³¹⁶ "A Closer Look," *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*.

³¹⁷ Ibid; "The Rise of the Youth Diplomat," *Chevening*, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.chevening.org/news/the-rise-of-the-youth-diplomat/>.

³¹⁸ A Closer Look at South Korea's-UN Celebrity Youth Diplomacy," *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*.

³¹⁹ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers," 237.

in Korean culture, food, and film.³²⁰ For instance, the official website for the South Korean government, Korea.net, is available in ten different languages as of 2023 and lists numerous official overseas events under 22 distinct countries and regions, ranging from locations in Europe, North America, and Asia to Latin American, the middle east and Africa.³²¹ Based on the official South Korean Website, there have been over 1300 Korean cultural events in 2023 alone held in these 22 countries and regions.³²² Most of the events took place in North America and are predominantly associated with Kpop, K-drama, and Korean films.³²³ Interestingly, almost one hundred Korean cultural events and festivals occurred in Nigeria, and almost sixty took place in South Africa through local Korean Cultural Centers.³²⁴ It illustrates how South Korea is eagerly expanding the implications of its pop cultural diplomacy geographically by reaching more areas. In fact, this is a cycle that epitomizes the efforts and outcomes of cultural diplomacy: as cultural outreach expands, cultural influence rises, leading to increased soft power, thus facilitating further expansion of cultural outreach.

Moreover, the former president of South Korea, Moon Jae-in, has stated that during his conversations with other world leaders, the topic of K-pop celebrities frequently emerges; he remarked: "Some[world leaders] had even asked if we could invite BTS to hold a K-pop night when they make state visits. As such, you[BTS] have been of great help diplomatically."³²⁵ In fact, the incorporation of K-pop idols in state-sponsored events exemplifies another strategy of the South Korean government's pop culture diplomacy, which is defined by Erwin as idol-state interactions.³²⁶ State-idol interaction is when K-Pop idols attend formal events involving both foreign government representatives and South Korean government officials.³²⁷

³²⁰ Kim, "When public diplomacy faces trade barriers," 237.

³²¹ Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), "Overseas : Korea.Net : The Official Website of the Republic of Korea." *Korea.Net*, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.korea.net/Events/Overseas>.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Choi, "President Moon."

³²⁶ Elizabeth Erwin, "Implications of Pop-Cultural Diplomacy: An Analysis of Idol-State Interactions," Honors College Theses (2021): 2.

³²⁷ Erwin, "Implications," 2.

In fact, there are two primary forms of idol-state interactions: the first involves K-pop stars appearing at domestic diplomatic events, while the second occurs when K-pop stars participate in formal occasions by accompanying South Korean political leaders' visits to other states or international meetings. When other political leaders visit Korea, K-pop performances have become a staple form of national greeting and entertainment, such as the example of BTS above. There are also ample examples of K-pop idols visiting other countries with political leaders or as a representation of their own country. For instance, K-pop idols have appeared multiple times at diplomatic occasions and cultural communication events with their neighboring country, North Korea.

In the case of North Korea, the South Korean government has consistently adopted pop cultural diplomacy as a means to express its diplomatic commitment to the challenging relationship between the two Koreas. In the spring of 2018, global news outlets reported the famous K-pop girl group Red Velvet visited North Korea and performed in Pyongyang for the North Korean people and their leader, Kim Jong-un.³²⁸ This performance occurred at a critical time - just less than one month before the historical moment of Kim Jong-un and the then-South Korean president Moon Jae-in's meeting for the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit at the North-South Korean border, which signified the first time a leader of North Korea ever stood on South Korean ground.³²⁹ Surprisingly, Kim Jong-un made a visit to the performance with no prior announcement, which was also the first time in history for a North Korean leader to appear at a South Korean music performance.³³⁰ In fact, before Red Velvet, only four other South Korean K-pop idol groups visited and performed in North Korea, including the girl group Fin.K.L and the boy group Sechs Kies in 1999, and the boy group Shinhwa and girl group Baby Vox in 2003.³³¹ These K-pop idol visits are not only displays of South Korea's modernism but also a message of peace and a commitment to diplomacy.

³²⁸ Erwin, "Implications," 17.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Yoon-seung Kang, "N. Korean Leader Kim Jong-Un, Wife Attend Performance by S. Korean Art Troupe," Yonhap News Agency.

³³¹ Seo-nah Shim, "Red Velvet to Sing 'Red Flavor,' 'Bad Boy' in Pyongyang," Yonhap News Agency.

In addition, the South Korean military at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) plays K-pop music as a form of propaganda and warning when tension escalates between the two nations.³³² For instance, soon after the nuclear test conducted by North Korea in January 2016, South Korea blasted K-pop music with loudspeakers towards North Korea, playing songs like Bigbang's "Bang Bang Bang" and Psy's "Gangnam Style" as a show of protest.³³³ This was the first time South Korea's loudspeakers were turned back on at the DMZ since it was silenced in 2015 based on a mutual agreement.³³⁴ However, in April 2018, South Korea decided to turn off the loudspeakers again for the Inter-Korean Summit.³³⁵ As South Korea's Defense Ministry reported in a statement: " [this action is intended to] ease military tensions and create a peaceful mood for the meeting ... We hope that our move today will result in South and North Korea ending mutual slandering and propaganda against each other and creating a peaceful new beginning."³³⁶ Overall, It is intriguing to observe how the on and off of playing K-pop music at the border of North and South Korea reflects the fluctuating state of peace and tension between the two countries.

Returning to the topic of state-idol interactions as a component of South Korean cultural diplomacy, many such interactions took part between South Korea and the United States. For instance, Choi Min-ho, a member of the K-pop boy group SHINee, was present at former First Lady Melania Trump's visit to Seoul in 2017 to launch an initiative organized by the U.S. Embassy called the "Girls Play 2!"³³⁷ It was a campaign aimed at encouraging girls' involvement in sports as a promotion for the 2018 Winter Olympic Games.³³⁸ Many

³³² Sang-Hun Choe, "To Jar North, South Korea Used a Pop-Music Barrage," *The New York Times*.

³³³ Richard Allen Greene, "South Korea Blasts North with K-Pop, Propaganda after Nuclear Test," *CNN*, Cable News Network, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/08/asia/north-korea-propaganda-music/index.html>.

³³⁴ Erwin, "Implications," 23.

³³⁵ Tamar Herman, "South Korea Shuts Off Loudspeakers Playing K-Pop at the DMZ Ahead of Summit," *Billboard*, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/south-korea-turns-off-propoganda-speakers-k-pop-8369828/>.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ "Choi Min-Ho of K-Pop Group SHINee Steals Spotlight in Viral Video of First Lady Melania Trump & South Korean Teens," *Billboard*, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/choi-min-ho-shinee-viral-video-melania-trump-8029949/>.

³³⁸ "Choi Min-Ho of K-Pop Group SHINee Steals Spotlight in Viral Video of First Lady Melania Trump & South Korean Teens," *Billboard*, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/choi-min-ho-shinee-viral-video-melania-trump-8029949/>.

news reports focused on how the girls at the event were more captivated by Choi Min-ho than Melania.³³⁹ In June 2022, President Biden met with BTS at the White House to address the importance of Asian communities in the United States and condemn anti-Asian racism as such incidents were surging at the time.³⁴⁰ This act was not only Biden's intention to use the celebrity impact of BTS and Kpop to ease domestic racism conflicts but as many analysts interpreted, it was also his friendly gesture to Asian communities outside of the United States, particularly Southeast Asian communities, in order to build a stronger connection.³⁴¹ According to surveys, BTS has an enormous fan base in countries such as the Philippines, India, and Indonesia.³⁴² Therefore, the meeting with BTS not only demonstrated President Biden's eagerness to maintain friendly ties with South Korea, gain the support of the US Asian communities and the favor of younger generations worldwide but also complemented important initiatives that took place in Southeast Asia in the same year, such as the US-ASEAN Special Summit and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).³⁴³

Moreover, in November 2023, BLACKPINK accompanied the president and first lady of South Korea on their official state visit to the United Kingdom. During the visit, all four members of BLACKPINK, Rosé, Jennie, Jisoo, and Lisa, received Honorary Members of the Order of the British Empire (MBEs) from King Charles III at Buckingham Palace.³⁴⁴ This was the first time any K-pop artist had received MBEs. It was to acknowledge the girl group's role as advocates for COP26 during the 2021 Summit in Glasgow.³⁴⁵ This event made headlines and stands as a significant moment in the history of Korean pop cultural diplomacy. But most importantly, by fostering a connection with the trendy, youth-favored K-pop, the British Royal

³³⁹ Erwin, "Implications," 1.

³⁴⁰ Martin Kwan, "Celebrity Diplomacy: What Prompted Biden to Invite the K-Pop Group BTS?" *Modern Diplomacy*, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/06/08/celebrity-diplomacy-what-prompted-biden-to-invite-the-k-pop-group-bts/>.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ "Blackpink Receive Honors from Britain's King Charles," *CNN*, Cable News Network, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/11/22/entertainment/blackpink-honorary-mbes-king-charles-gbr-intl-scli/index.html>.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

Family and the United Kingdom in general not only sustain diplomatic relations with South Korea but also cultivate an international image of being progressive, approachable, global, and youthful in the eyes of younger audiences.

Furthermore, Kpop's state-idol interaction has extended to the Middle East, starting with Saudi Arabia. Red Velvet performed in Dubai with the boy group EXO at a concert held by S.M. Entertainment not long after their 2018 Pyongyang concert.³⁴⁶ It was the first time ever a Kpop concert was held in the Middle East.³⁴⁷ This concert opened a gateway for official soft power and pop culture collaborations between the two nations. In 2022, the Ministry of Culture in Saudi Arabia cooperated with SM Entertainment by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to assist the development of Saudi Arabia's own soft power in the realm of pop cultural diplomacy.³⁴⁸ The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlines the collaboration's key objectives, including local talent discovery and development, hosting auditions, creating training procedures, generating local pop cultural content, setting up Saudi-pop production studios, and organizing sizable SM concerts in Saudi Arabia.³⁴⁹ According to SM Entertainment's former chief producer, Lee Soo-man, the collaboration aims to utilize the culture technology created for Kpop to produce S-pop and improve Saudi Arabia's culture industry.³⁵⁰ At the same time, South Korea deems this project as a significant opportunity for the Korean culture industry to access the market in the Middle East.³⁵¹ Lee stated, "We hope to progress both the cultural industries of Korea and Saudi by producing S-pop that people all around the world can enjoy. We will continue to expand strategic networking like this to achieve global growth of Korean and Saudi Arabian culture."³⁵² Overall, South Korea's official cultural collaboration with Saudi Arabia serves as a prime

³⁴⁶ Korea Times, "K-Pop Concert in Dubai Hosted by SM to Star EXO and Red Velvet," South China Morning Post.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Permatasari, "Hallyu," 108; "SM Entertainment Signs MOU with Saudi Arabian Ministry of Culture," Korea Joong Ang Daily, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2022/12/13/entertainment/kpop/Korea-Kpop-SPOP/20221213145649740.html>

³⁴⁹ "SM Entertainment," Korea Joong Ang Daily.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

example of how South Korea's success in cultural diplomacy, leading to the enhancement of its soft power, has inspired another country with relatively weaker soft power to develop its pop culture influence by seeking assistance from K-pop. In fact, it is possible that more countries, similar to Saudi Arabia, will start to develop pop cultural diplomacy due to South Korea's success story, potentially cultivating further diplomatic relations with South Korea in the future.

Although South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy, including idol-state interactions and the previously mentioned celebrity youth diplomacy, are mainly conducive to South Korea's national image and foreign affairs in many aspects, implications of pop cultural diplomacy continue to raise concerns among governments as they worry about its potential impact on youth in their countries: will it encourage youth to favor policies and ideas of foreign nations?³⁵³ After all, K-pop groups like BTS have attained political status as South Korean diplomats, meaning that they play a role in representing South Korea's political stance and conveying its messages while transcending cultural boundaries.³⁵⁴ The transnational impact of South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has been extensive and unprecedented since youth are adept at utilizing effective communication platforms such as social media in today's world.³⁵⁵ This means the influence of political messages can swiftly increase and has the potential to affect domestic and local policy discussions and advancements instantly.³⁵⁶ Therefore, some governments are apprehensive about South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy, concerned that youth might become overly obsessed with South Korean culture and pose challenges to local values.³⁵⁷ For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter,

³⁵³ "A Closer Look," *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*.

³⁵⁴ "BTS: From K-Pop Idols to Diplomats: The Right Formula for Effective Public Diplomacy?" *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/bts-k-pop-idols-diplomats-right-formula-effective-public-diplomacy>; Duncan Bartlett, "BTS as Ambassadors: Is South Korea's Entertainment Royalty Being Set Up as Moon's Puppets?" *JAPAN Forward*, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://japan-forward.com/bts-as-ambassadors-is-south-koreas-entertainment-royalty-being-set-up-as-moons-puppets/>.

³⁵⁵ "A Closer Look," *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

China has restricted the influence of the “Korean wave” by unofficially issuing a ban on the activities of South Korean celebrities in China.

In conclusion, this chapter argues that South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has had a major impact on enhancing South Korea's global position and soft power since the 1990s. Economically, pop cultural diplomacy works as a catalyst for South Korea's economic expansion by facilitating the global export of Korean cultural products. In regard to its role in the international community, South Korea's employment of celebrity youth diplomacy has elevated its representation within international and non-governmental bodies. For foreign policies, despite certain concerns, pop cultural diplomacy has played a major role in sustaining foreign relationships and sending diplomatic messages.

Chapter 4 - Conclusion

In this research paper, we explored the research question: "Since the 1990s, to what extent has South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy challenged China's East Asian cultural dominance and accounted for its rise of soft power in East Asia and the world?" The analysis concludes that since the 1990s, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has been implicitly contesting China's cultural dominance in East Asia and raising its soft power through substantial cultural exports across the region, unfair trade, cultural soft clashes, and impacting South Korea-related public opinion and foreign policies in China. Moreover, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has played a pivotal role in its soft power expansion in the world through the extensive export of global cultural products enhancing South Korea's economic standing, implementing celebrity youth diplomacy in international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and shaping both South Korea's and other countries' foreign policies.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the importance of soft power has steadily increased since Joseph Nye's initial introduction of the concept, which has led to the emergence of countless related concepts, including cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy has gained academic attention as a relatively new area of study, but for pop cultural diplomacy, the attention is limited. While various nations have implemented their own interpretations of cultural diplomacy, South Korea has notably emphasized the role of popular culture. South Korea's rapid rise in soft power and the unprecedented approach of popular culture in diplomacy illustrate pop cultural diplomacy's promising potential in international relations and its crucial contribution to soft power.

In this paper, Chapter Two examines South Korea's utilization of cultural diplomacy in redefining regional power dynamics and its implications for the country's diplomatic relationship with China. The soft power South Korea has exerted today is the result cultivated by multiple Korean presidents through a continuously developed national pop cultural diplomacy. During this process, South Korea's soft power spread to China when the

relationship between the two countries was revived. Simultaneously, China was fostering its soft power with a focus on traditional cultural diplomacy.

By comparing the differences and similarities between the cultural diplomacy between China and South Korea, one can conclude that Korean pop cultural diplomacy faces less resistance than China's cultural diplomacy in the international community. China's traditional culture outreach and soft power expansion are impeded by the China threat theory narrated in the West, the unpopular communist authoritarian system, and the numerous regional disputes with its neighbors. Many countries are particularly concerned that China is using traditional cultural platforms, such as the Confucius Institute, as a disguise to propagate political agendas. In contrast, South Korea's approach to pop cultural outreach is generally met with greater acceptance due to its perceived apolitical nature. South Korea's adoption of a Western-influenced liberal democracy, its limited involvement in territorial disputes, and the general understanding that popular culture primarily originates from society instead of politics contribute to this perception. Nonetheless, both the governments of China and South Korea are heavily engaged in promoting cultural diplomacy. While their focuses may differ, both countries share a common ambition to reshape the perceptions held by younger generations worldwide toward their countries.

In addition, the cultural diplomacy of China and South Korea has both affected their soft power growth positively, as demonstrated by the correlation coefficient calculated with the scores provided by the Soft Power Indices. The correlation coefficient also reveals that South Korea's cultural diplomacy has a stronger positive impact on its soft power. By examining South Korea's reason for employing cultural diplomacy to challenge China's dominant cultural position, one discovers that it is likely a strategy for South Korea to preserve its current advantageous global economic status, thus avoiding being overshadowed once again in East Asia. Initially, exporting Korean dramas to China was regarded as mutually beneficial for both countries in terms of economic development. However, the unequal cultural trade eventually led to dissatisfaction in China, generating questions about South Korea's intentions in cultural trade. Hence, the Chinese government

took measures to regulate and restrict imports of Korean culture. As a result, the once burgeoning cultural trade relationship between the two nations became stagnant.

Korean popular culture also affects public opinion in China, especially among young Chinese people, which further impacts Chinese foreign policy towards Korea. At first, K-drama and K-pop improved South Korea's image in the eyes of the Chinese audience and cultivated a positive sentiment toward the nation. However, China's suspicion of the motives of South Korea's cultural expansion, negative media reports of Korean popular culture, and tensions over cultural heritage have contributed to a more unfavorable view and even led to an anti-Korean sentiment. In the past, Korea looked to China for cultural inspiration, but the roles have reversed, and young Chinese people have begun to look for inspiration in Korean popular culture. This change in dynamic further fueled China's anti-Korean sentiment since it perceives Korean pop culture's growing influence as exerting pressure and encroaching upon China's cultural sphere, which is posing a challenge to China's traditionally cultural-dominant position. Soft clashes over historical and cultural disputes exacerbated public opinion towards each other, resulting in stronger anti-sentiments from both nations. The growing anti-sentiments significantly contributed to the deterioration of the diplomatic relationship between China and South Korea. Moreover, the treatment of Korean pop culture not only influences but also reflects the change in the diplomatic relationship between the two nations. This was evident during the deployment of the THAAD missile system, where one of the largest bans on Korean pop culture activities occurred in China.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the pop cultural diplomacy of South Korea not only assisted South Korea's soft power growth in East Asia but also predominantly contributed to its worldwide enhancement of soft power and global status. South Korea's pop culture, specifically in the three areas of K-pop music groups, Korean films, and K-dramas, has achieved significant results around the world through the government's emphasis on pop cultural diplomacy. The accomplishments within the South Korean entertainment industry have made a significant contribution to the country's economic development,

particularly with the emergence of the K-pop music industry as one of the most lucrative export markets.

Furthermore, Korean popular culture has provided South Korea with more diplomatic leverage through celebrity youth diplomacy, directly influencing South Korea's role in IGOs and NGOs. Celebrity youth diplomacy has allowed South Korea to engage further with IGOs and NGOs. It has provided more opportunities for the nation's voice to be heard on a global stage through official representations, such as K-pop groups BTS and BLACKPINK. These efforts have facilitated positive images of South Korea in the international community. Simultaneously, the involvement of K-pop idol groups and K-pop agencies in international organizations helps IGOs and NGOs to connect better with the global youth population and express their messages more efficiently. Through celebrity youth diplomacy, South Korea has the potential to influence diplomatic decisions in other nations by impacting the opinion of its young people.

Additionally, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy is playing a role in foreign policies worldwide. Many countries, including South Korea, utilize K-pop to mend relationships, assert positions, establish new connections, cultivate positive images, and advance their own diplomatic agendas and soft power. This paper examined these tactics mainly through idol-state interactions in four countries: North Korea, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Saudi Arabia. In the context of North Korea, the South Korean government showcases its modernity and promotes a message of peace through visits by K-pop idols. However, the South Korean military also utilizes K-pop music as a form of propaganda and protest in the Demilitarized Zone during times of tension. Conversely, turning off the music signifies important political events or periods of peace between the two countries. As for the United States, the US government utilizes South Korea's popular culture as a strategic instrument to improve the image of the United States within Asian communities both domestically and internationally, particularly in Southeast Asian countries, aiming to build stronger political relations with the region. Aligning with the youth-centric and globally acclaimed K-pop culture enables the United Kingdom and the British Royal Family

to earn a reputation for progressiveness and inclusiveness while maintaining amicable diplomatic ties with South Korea. In regards to Saudi Arabia, South Korea's pop cultural diplomacy has facilitated formal soft power initiatives and cultural exchanges between the two countries. This development provides South Korea with a significant opportunity to extend its soft power influence into the Middle Eastern region and a chance for Saudi Arabia to advance its soft power further. Despite many positive developments in international relations, South Korea's pop culture has also raised concerns among governments, leading to a cautious approach towards the treatment of South Korea's popular culture.

Overall, the research paper has manifested the significant impact cultural diplomacy centered around pop culture could have on soft power and global status, which suggests that pop culture is valuable as a subject of international relations and a political instrument. As exemplified by South Korea, the emphasis on pop cultural diplomacy to expand soft power influence may emerge as a future trend. It is clear that soft power plays a long game in nurturing future generations. Moreover, in light of Geun Lee's critique of Joseph Nye's soft power concept as being overly focused on the United States and lacking relevance for less powerful nations, the case of South Korea could offer more pragmatic soft power strategies for such countries to improve their soft power game, as demonstrated by its interactions with Saudi Arabia.

However, pop cultural diplomacy has its limitations; even South Korea may overestimate the extent to which pop cultural diplomacy can help achieve its national goals. For instance, at the end of 2023, South Korea's bid for their city, Busan, to host the World Expo 2030 failed dramatically. South Koreans were frustrated for witnessing a humiliating lost of Busan against Saudia Arabia's Riyadh; out of the 180 votes, Riyadh received 119 votes while Busan received merely 29 votes.³⁵⁸ This frustration arose from the South Korean administration, led by President Yoon, misleading the public into believing they had a

³⁵⁸ Eunwoo Lee, "South Korea's Failed World Expo Bid Sparks President Yoon's First Apology," *The Diplomat*, accessed February 6, 2024. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/12/south-koreas-failed-world-expo-bid-sparks-president-yoons-first-apology/>.

promising chance of winning the bid, which resulted in President Yoon's first official apology during his term.³⁵⁹ Throughout the bidding process, K-pop idols and musicians played a key role in advocating for the Busan World Expo. They were Busan Expo's ambassadors and featured prominently in the promotional materials.³⁶⁰ The failure of the Busan Expo bid evokes reflection on the limitations of pop cultural diplomacy and questions whether it represents a sustainable long-term strategy or merely produces temporary effects.

Furthermore, the research has certain weaknesses and areas for improvement. For example, the dataset derived from the Soft Power Indices used for analyzing pop cultural diplomacy and the rise of soft power was relatively small, only containing five years of data from two countries. This weakens the reliability of the conclusions. However, this limitation is expected to be addressed in the future as the Soft Power Index expands over the years. In addition, certain sections of the essay halted at particular levels of analysis and could benefit from further exploration. For instance, a more in-depth investigation into whether South Korea is intentionally challenging China with cultural diplomacy and soft power, additional examples demonstrating how popular culture reflects fluctuations in diplomatic relations, and further discussions on the specific measurements other countries have taken due to concerns of K-pop's influence can enhance the depth of the research.

Finally, this paper leaves room for future discussions and provides direction for new research topics. These include examining the possibility of the current soft clashes between China and Korea escalating into an intense soft power competition or even a soft power war, analyzing the long-term implications of pop cultural diplomacy, and investigating whether it will become a mainstream diplomatic strategy in international relations, leading to emulation by many countries.

³⁵⁹ Lee, "South Korea's Failed World Expo Bid."

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

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