

Rise of Korean Music Culture

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Historical Foundations of Korean Music Culture

Before delving into the discussion of Korean music culture and its impact on Public relations and communications, a brief overview of Korean music will be given first. The history of Korean music culture is easily accessible and can be found in literature and archeology (Provine, 1985). The archeological discoveries that have been made include artifacts and paintings, both of which hint at the Korean music life that permeated through Korea during the early years (Provine, 1985). While analyzing Korean music history, most of the studies highlight that Korean sources have made an appearance in the Western languages (Provine, 1985). Studies also indicate that Korean popular culture has been on the rise over the years and has spread far and wide throughout the globe (Lee, n.d.).

The term “Korean wave” has been observed to be used in order to highlight the increasing fame that is associated with Korean popular culture (Lee, n.d.). This cultural wave is noted to have left a deep impact on the media across the globe, creating a ripple effect. Such an expanding culture benefitted the Korean government and was seen to be aiding the Korean media industries in exporting Korean music culture to other countries (Lee, n.d.). The global expansion created by Korean music culture has contributed to the increase in South Korea’s image and finances. It has also been used as an instrument in public diplomacy (Lee, n.d.).

A Korean wave, also termed Hallyu, surfaced in East Asia during the 1990s and was known to have been associated with the surge in the rising trends of Korean culture (Lee, n.d.). The coinage of this term can be attributed to Beijing journalists who were taken aback by the increased fame of Korean entertainment and culture in China around 1999 (Lee, n.d.). The reputation of Korean pop music and television soap operas in places like China and Taiwan ignited the spread of the Korean wave around the globe. (Lee, n.d.) Furthermore, the eruption of this wave can be outlined in the year 1997 due to the broadcast of a Korean drama, What is Love All About, on Chinese Television, which was soon followed by an MBC drama known as Jealous (Lee, n.d.). The MBC drama is considered to be the first ever drama that had been imported from South Korea in 1993. The Korean wave is known to have spread from the East Asia regions to the United States, the Middle East, and parts of Europe (Lee, n.d.). In addition to this, the Korean Wave depicts the unparalleled frame of Korean popular culture by the Korean media as well as commercial nationalism (Lee, n.d.).

Considering these factors, the Korean Wave is displayed as a local movement that signifies the success of Korean culture. The success of the Korean wave has led other countries like Japan, China, and the Middle East to be captivated by both Korean drama and music, along with Korean food and

culture (Kim, 2011). Such a fascination for the Korean culture by Asians stands to be quite beneficial for the Korean government as Korea has faced a period of critique in which it was not portrayed as a positive country by the neighboring countries (Lee, n.d.). It has been observed that numerous Asian countries have had distant relationships with neighboring countries when it comes to cultural understanding and relations (Lee, n.d.). Most Asian countries have been known to have better relationships and ties with European countries than with the neighbors they share borders with. The influence created by the Korean wave has not only pervaded popular culture but also stands to show the positive lifestyle of the Asian people (Lee, n.d.). Initially, there was little to nothing known about Korea or its culture, and the only few who did know about Korea were often negative in their opinions regarding this country (Lee, n.d.). The reason for this can be found in the stereotypes that have been associated with Korea due to the Korean War, the period of poverty that took its toll on the nation, and the political instability that was found prevalent in Korea.

Entertainment, Technology, and the Global Rebranding of South Korea

However, the negative images and misconceptions have been reduced to a minimum over the years due to the efforts of entertainers, the latest technology, and the depiction of South Korean culture through dramas and movies (Ju & Lee, 2015). It should be noted that South Korean popular music is most often talked about when the subject of the presentation of national and local identities in television dramas and music is brought up. An example of one such South Korean popular music is that of the collection of Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi's *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* (2008). While analyzing the progress of Korean culture, it should be noted that the South Korean government has played an important role in the development of its cultural industries. An example of this is the shift in the views of people towards South Korea in the past fifteen years. The misconception surrounding Korea being a land of unfathomable piracy to being a technically advanced country that enforces strict copyright laws has led intellectuals to believe that South Korea is a model that represents the future (Oh, 2016).

Aside from the spreading influence of the Korean Wave around the globe, the impact of the Korean Wave can be seen in public diplomacy in the frameworks of China and Japan (Oh, 2016). The Korean wave, or Hallyu, as previously mentioned, signifies the popularity of different Korean media sectors, such as K-pop music, television dramas, movies, and soap operas among the foreign public. It can be looked at as a part of Korea's public diplomacy for two different reasons (Oh, 2016). The first reason is that the Korean Wave adds to achieving the favor of the people overseas for Korea, and the second reason is that the Korean government takes part in promoting the Korean Wave with the help of non-state actors (Oh, 2016). It should be noted that the influence of the Korean wave was so great that anti-Hallyu movements were initiated as they considered the popularity of Korean culture, reflecting media to be a threat (Oh, 2016). Previously, Korea had never been looked at as a hegemonic nation by other countries for having power capabilities in terms of military and economy (Ma, Song, & Moore,

2012). In addition to this, Korea had not been an exporter of popular culture, such as Korean television dramas, music, and other products. With the appearance of the Korean wave, Korean popular culture has been the center of attention by both international intellectuals and the media (Ma, Song, & Moore, 2012).

Korean entertainment companies, such as the music industry, have greatly influenced Korea's relationship with other countries. The Korean government has immensely benefitted from the export of Korean popular media to overseas countries (Ma, Song, & Moore, 2012). Not only has the media been an active participant in showcasing Korean cultural aspects and values, but it has also embraced foreign traits and led to the hybridization of Korean popular culture (Ma, Song, & Moore, 2012). In addition to this, studies show that in the past, the Korean government worked with the media industries as its own economy and culture were at stake (Kwon, 2017). This is an example of how the media has been beneficial for the Korean government in stabilizing not only the economy but also foreign relations. To maintain public relations with other countries, Korean cultural products, especially the music culture, have been seen to be actively working on making the necessary changes (Kwon, 2017). Therefore, extensive research was carried out in order to assess the foreign audience and their tastes. According to the demands of the foreign public, the Korean entertainment company brought in a foreign element that would appeal to the audience and increase popularity, thereby acting as a force that would enhance the relations (Kwon, 2017).

Cultural Exchange, Media Cooperation, and the Expansion of Korean Influence

Aside from this, the Korean government developed different cultural exchange programs that would assist in creating cooperation between the Korean media and that of other countries, such as the Asia Song Festival, which allowed Asian singers to gather from different parts of the world and sing on stage with the other singers (Kwon, 2017). Programs like these bring in more foreign audiences, which results in enhancing the foreign relations between Korea and other Asian and the different European countries. The popularity of Korean culture through the use of music, such as the current Korean bands like BT and S, which are popular all over the world, helps in creating new relationships with the foreign public and also stabilizes the country's economic and social-political structures (Kwon, 2017).

In the case of K-pop, it has been observed that the Korean media industries have added diversity to their idol groups with the inclusion of Chinese members. The addition of Chinese members in Korean companies has led to diversity in their cultural context (Kwon, 2017). In addition to this, the production of K-pop stars who have Chinese citizenship has contributed to creating familiarity with the Chinese public (Kwon, 2017). Aside from the addition of Chinese members, Korean singers have entered the Japanese market and have produced new songs that are meant solely for the Japanese market. Korean actors and singers have been actively performing at the forefront to gain the Korean government's popularity. An example of a Korean singer is Boa, who is well-known in Japan. Boa

performed at the APEC to bring Korea and Japan closer and to reduce the tensions between the two countries (Kwon, 2017). It has been observed that K-pop artists have been working in collaboration with other artists, such as American and European composers, to bring about a change in their music industry (Kwon, 2017). Adding a foreign element to one's culture makes space for diversity and also enhances foreign relations as the foreign public is attracted to this kind of diversity (Kwon, 2017). The Korean wave has received diverse responses from different parts of the world, and most of them have been positive, implying that Korea has been progressing in the right way by becoming intimate with other countries (Kwon, 2017). The Korean government has been doing different projects that allow it to invite foreigners as well as hold concerts in other countries, which results in the enhancement of public relations as well as a positive impact on the economic and political structures (Howard, 2015).

From the above discussion, the influence of Korean music culture can be seen in public relations. What started as the Korean Wave was seen to have spread from Korea to different parts of the world, influencing the public all around the globe. It should be noted that in the past, Korea was known as a country that did not have any power capabilities such as military or economy, and it did not have any exports either. Therefore, other nations had negative views about Korea, and advancing a friendly hand was out of the question. However, after the rise of the Korean wave, the condition of Korea has changed considerably. Its economy and socio-political structures have been stabilized. In addition to this, the foreign public has taken an interest in Korean culture, and this has led to the enhancement of foreign relations. The Korean media industry has embraced foreign traits in order to meet the requirements of the foreign public, which has proven to be beneficial as the foreign audience has been attracted to Korean culture. Aside from this, allowing Chinese members to join the K-pop groups has allowed Korea to develop deeper bonds with China. Korean media products have been influential as they have gained attention from different parts of the world. The focus on Korean singers in recent years has also been beneficial in advancing public relations. The use of different Korean music programs, such as shows that involved singers from different Asian countries, has also allowed Korea to gain fame across the globe, making it a worthy ally and helping it create new relationships. Korean public relations have been seen to have increased considerably over the years, and with further developments in the programs that involve foreign audiences, Korea can gain more attention.

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