

## Korea in the Virtual World: Unveiling the Cultural Heritage of Korea

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### Abstract

The Korean culture in the present period of globalization is becoming popular in many parts of the world and therefore it is helping Korea to retain its global influence. The main purpose of the essay is to understand the significance of Korean culture in the contemporary world which will be explored by thorough examination and analysis of different materials. This essay will explore the Korean culture by discussing the popularity of Korean wave. Then it will discuss and explore the Korean cities by unveiling their unique cultural heritages. Finally, it will discuss the significance of Korea's soft power by utilizing and promotion of its cultural aspects.

**Keywords:** Korea culture, Korean wave, Korean Cities & Cultural Heritage, Soft power.

### Introduction

Korea is a country renowned for its culture and traditions. It is one of the most uniform nations of the world having its own unique culture, language, food and customs. The success of Korean popular culture which includes K-pop, Korean movies, Korean food, beauty and fashion explains the global acceptance and popularity of Korean traditions. According to Storey (1993) popular culture represents a form of culture that emerges from the people, their everyday interaction, everyday activities, styles of dress, food habits and in general the numerous aspects of social life. Even though contemporary Korea is well-known across the world like K-pop and K-dramas, its historical roots are still present that has shaped Korea's rich cultural legacy. In addition to preserving national identity, celebrating Korea's cultural legacy is crucial for promoting its acceptance across nations. Korea is now regarded as one of the powerful and vibrant country in terms of culture. Despite challenges, Koreans have excelled in safeguarding their traditions thereby transferring it from generations to generations.

### Popularity of Korean Wave

Out of the many industries around the globe, the Korean entertainment industry holds a prominent position and influence all around the globe. According to Kim (2021) "Korean wave" also popularly known as "Hallyu" rose significantly since the late 1990s thus producing and exporting popular cultures like K-pop, Korean dramas, foods, online games,

smartphones, etc. beyond borders. This proves that Korean wave have gained worldwide acceptance and popularity as people across the globe are able to connect with Korea's culture. It can be seen with the growing dissemination of South Korean culture and commodity worldwide. The products include K-Pop, popular bands like BTS and Blackpink, globally acclaimed and popularized brands like Samsung, Korean movies, Korean dramas, foods, Korean Gaming, etc. The first evidence of the world witnessing K-pop was the release of the song Gangnam style on YouTube. Ever since then we are witnessing second wave of K-pop in the form of bands like BTS and Blackpink. This has helped Korea to fight the long-standing stereotypes by establishing itself as a progressive nation. Similarly, this Korean wave can be seen in the context of Korean dramas. Korean television shows and dramas like "Descendants of the Sun" and "Crash Landing on You" has gained immense popularity post covid pandemic with OTT platforms like Netflix distributing the content worldwide. The popularity of K-dramas lies in its themes highlighting Korean values of family and love thus offers the viewers to hold grasp of Korean culture and social nuances. The reason behind success of Korean wave is due to the fact that people across the globe are able to develop a sense of mutual understanding with Korean culture. Many Korean movies are able to attract the audiences emotionally due the presence of emotions and innocent love, depicting the beautiful and serene environment, locations, etc. which represents the underlying values of Asian community. This highlights that the role of Korean popular culture is not only to entertain the mass audiences but also to serve as advocate of culture depicting Korea's language, ways of living, customs, and other aspects. The Korean wave or the Hallyu acted as a fortune for Korea. It has expanded the businesses, culture and the image of the country globally. This has resulted in economic growth and progress of the nation. This has culminated in enabling South Korea to develop stronger diplomatic relations with other countries. On the whole, it can therefore be said that the increasing demand of Korean popular culture or Korean wave has initiated a deep interest in Korea's cultural journey and traditions.

### **Korean Cities and Cultural Heritage**

The Korean cities also provide evidences and instances to the people across the globe about Korea's culture and traditions. Sangcheol et al. (2016) gives vivid description about Korea, the important cultural cities, its geography and cultural significance. This proves the unique cultural significance of the South Korean cities. For example, Seoul, the capital and the largest city of Korea provides the tourists both the modern and traditional aspect of South Korea. There is presence of skyscrapers highlighting Korea's progress as well as historic places and sites like Gyeongbokgung and Chandeokgung depicting Seoul's rich and vibrant past. Similarly, Seoul Street food tradition is now globally known and accepted. For example, the famous spicy rice cakes, traditionally known as Tteokbokki has now become popular globally with many YouTube channels providing description on the preparation process. Mung Bean Pancakes, traditionally known as Bindaetteok, is another important delicacy of South Korea which has become popular globally. Seoul represents the country's cultural

aspects globally. It is a center of various museums, arts, parks, and as mentioned places of ancient significance. For examples, Chongmyo and Changdok are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The discussion on week 05 provides evidences about the housing culture and social structure in South Korea thus depicting why such housing styles are preferred. For example, many cities like Jeonju, Kyeongju and Andong represents the traditional Hanok villages. This housing style is preferred as they are eco-friendly and promotes good health and well being among the people thus highlighting global masses about unique culture of South Korea. The city Busan became well known to the global world after the success of the Korean Movie “The Train to Busan (2016)”. Busan is an important port city global tourist spot known for its tremendous beaches. Important places in the city includes Haeundae Beach and Gwangalli Beach giving tourist the similar experiences to that of Miami Beach thus unifying the locals and well the tourist during the festivals like Busan Lotus Lantern Festivals, Haeundae Sand Festival and the Busan Firework Festivals. The largest seafood market is located in Busan “Jagalchi Fish Market” thus representing Busan and its maritime tradition across the world market. Mokpo city, by drawing visual evidences form YouTube vlogs, highlights the local culture. It is well known for its mesmerizing visuals, maritime landscapes and coastal areas. The video also gives insights to the traditional music and K-pop being merged together and performed during the festivals. The glimpses of regional markets and traditional cuisines also highlight its vibrant culture to the world. On the whole, it can therefore be said that the Korean cities provides unique example and evidences of Korean culture which are transfused and disseminated globally in the form of food habits, festivals, dressing styles, thus portraying Korea’s dynamic culture.

### **Korean Culture as a Soft Power**

South Korea by promoting its culture and tradition through various forms is increasing its soft power by capturing the heart and minds of the people globally. According to Joseph Nye (2005) the term soft power refers to a nations or country’s ability to change the perspective of the people and influence them without using any form of forces but by attracting their emotions. This proves that soft power plays a significant role in the progress of a nation like South Korea. It is by the use of cultural aspects a country can enhance its economic power which ultimately leads to global influence and acceptance. Soft power goal is to change the heart and mind of the people worldwide through the use of cultural commodity. This can be seen in the context of South Korea where export of South Korean culture and commodity worldwide has resulted in growing acceptance of their culture. This has resulted growth and progress of the nation. For example, evidences on South Korea’s fashion highlights that this fashion senses have become popular with the coming of Bands thereby influencing the worldwide fashion industry. This provides evidences of South Korean own unique dressing culture. It represents one’s own aesthetic freedom. The fashion industry of Korea reinforces the idea of not conforming to the existing dressing style. Hanbok traditional dress is now globally promoted and sold through e-commerce platforms and shopping malls. Many K-pop ideals and performers were the reformed hanbok. Globalization has also played a significant

role in popularizing the hanbok as all tourists and visitors visiting Korea needs to wear the dress. This proves that utilizing culture and its aspects enable Korea to retain its prominence globally by exercising soft power strategy. It enables countries to build relationships based on mutual understanding, shared ideas and global interaction. The discussion in week 6 provides insights about the Korean food habits and pattern. There are various food categories which include daily foods, ritual foods, seasonal foods and regional foods in Korea. Thus, the promotion of Korean foods in different countries has made them popular among widespread masses resulting in glocalization of traditional culture. As a results Korean food has now been globalized and globally available for example Kimchi noodles, Guksu and Ramyeon noodles. This makes it evident that presence of cultural industries and cultural content and its dissemination has allowed South Korea to have a global influence. Overall, it can therefore be said that the widespread popularity of South Korean soft power like the K-pop, Korean fashion foods, brands, etc. has resulted in progress of the country by cultural admiration and acceptance around the globe without the use of forces but by emotionally attracting the heart and minds of the people globally.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the widespread and ever-increasing popularity of Korean wave highlights the innovative strength of cultural exports. As evident, Korea became independent just a hundred years ago, but with its innovative cultures, cultural promotions, and numerous cultural industries; it is able to bring global acceptance and transfusion of Korean culture. Though the popularity of K-pop, K-dramas, innovative lifestyle, social structures, beauty and unique fashion, South Korea was able to gain worldwide prominence. Korean wave is not only about entertainment but it also represents values, traditions and aesthetics to which the global audiences were able to resonate. Similarly Korean cities present unique characteristics to its audience's thereby contributing to the country's culture. It has enabled cross-cultural evidences, adaptation and appreciation of different cultures thus fostering communal harmony. Korea by promoting its cultural products is able to increase its soft power by appealing the hearts and minds of the people without the use of force. Thus, all these aspects have made Korea and its culture find admiration and acceptance globally.

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