

**CAN K-POP CHANGE HOW YOU PERCEIVE SOUTH  
KOREA? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE  
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN EFFECT**

by

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Abstract

In recent times, the small East Asian country of South Korea has exploded onto the global scene of being a recognizable force in an economic, political and cultural sense. The South Korean government in particular, is credited through its common financial backing of cultural programs and its push to constantly increase tourism to the country by enacting forms of soft power, which they believe to be the best choice for South Korea's further development. Korean popular music is in fact, an encompassing genre of various music styles that all have some influence from Western music. This thesis explored whether or not the country of origin phenomenon has any relevance in attempting to explain whether K-Pop has any effect on the perception of South Korea using qualitative methodology by conducting in-depth interviews. My findings from my research include that K-Pop seems to contribute to a growing interest in other cultural aspects of South Korea, K-Pop appears to have made South Korea a preferred destination for tourists and that future research could be done to measure the relationship between K-Pop music and perception of its country of origin.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to see if Korean pop music (K-Pop) can change how someone perceives South Korean products in general. The psychological phenomenon of the country of origin effect is utilized to explain how perceptions about South Korea are formed through an interest in K-Pop. The topic is important due to the lack of academic resources about K-Pop present in current popular music academic studies. This work serves as a resource to the growing interest in K-Pop in the West. The research was primarily conducted through qualitative methodology, due to the fact that qualitative research has not been conducted as of now. The concept of music as an effective tool for enhancing the global influence of a country, in this case, South Korea, is not well-researched in the literature of popular music and so, a qualitative method has been used. To determine how K-Pop emerged, a further look and understanding of the culture of South Korea is necessary.

In recent times, the small East Asian country of South Korea has exploded onto the global scene of being a recognizable force in an economic, political and cultural sense. As one of the four Asian Tigers and birthplace of impressive manufacturing conglomerates such as Samsung, LG and Hyundai, it has grown into a well-developed nation with a large economy. For a tiny country that takes up only half of the Korean peninsula, the global presence it has attained that emerged from a decade long conflict is remarkable. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a clear factor in signifying the performance of the country as one of the leading economic forces in Asia, a feat especially impressive upon learning about the development post-Korean War. Upon watching the news, especially since President Donald Trump has come into office in the United States, the political climate between North Korea and South Korea has taken center stage in most media sources. Many people who have not even heard of the country before are suddenly predisposed to learning more about the country, due to the increase in general attention. South

Korea, especially, landed on the radar of many Americans due to the possibility of nuclear war or American military intervention on the Korean peninsula. This at first glance, seems like a morbid outlook, but this interest helped shift some people's attentions towards the small East Asian nation. Even so, what perhaps is one of the most recognizable assets of South Korea comes from the way that their culture has permeated the countries surrounding it and the fact that its reach has infectiously made its way into areas across the world (Lee, 2011). It is fascinating to see how a small country in area such as South Korea has made its way into being a powerful country in its own right through unexpected ways.

Korean fashion, makeup skincare and music and other facets of the culture has been adopted and accepted in many countries throughout the world. Other countries, even those with populations and areas much larger than South Korea look up to the country as being one of the forefronts of expanding Asian culture to the West due to its influence in multiple industries.. Many other countries try to emulate what the Korean people have mastered and made mainstream specifically relating to their popular culture. A term was later coined to describe the Korean wave of influence spreading throughout other areas of the world - *Hallyu*, directly translated to "the Korean wave." The term was widely accepted and circulated after the great success of Korean drama series, supported by the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China around 1992 (Korea.net). The country has blossomed into both globalized cultural powerhouse as the decades pass and the South Korean government was instrumental in supporting the developmental changes that the budding country went through post-conflict.

The South Korean government is credited through its common financial backing of cultural programs and its push to constantly increase tourism to the country by enacting forms of

soft power, a term coined by Joseph Nye in 1990. The term refers to what he called “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion.” He says that things such as relationships with allies, cultural exchanges and more can be considered aspects of soft power (Jones, 2019). It is clear that the South Korean government decided that soft power was best choice for South Korea’s further development. Hard power, which was enforced through militaristic or economic means would be a difficult strategy for South Korea to pursue, due to the small population size and the fact that the country is still rebuilding itself after the devastation caused by the Korean War. However, the birth of South Korea as a prosperous nation took place in the last few decades of the 20th century. The country eventually grew wealthier and today, the influence of this newfound wealth can be easily seen in the grand cities and along the countryside as well: a steady network of high speed trains connect the country seamlessly from the bustling capital of Seoul to the rustic landscape of Daegu to the soothing port city of Busan, with Seoul and Busan increasingly becoming growing tourist attractions throughout the years to the benefit of the country itself. The old and the new aspects of Korean society blend seamlessly throughout the nation where it is common to see modern buildings and technology coexisting with the ancient palaces and fields that stand as relics to Korea’s thousand-of-years old traditions. Rooted in Confucian beliefs with a strong sense of resiliency, the Korean people are grown immensely proud of what their country has accomplished throughout the years.

In general, South Korea has emerged as one of the well-known East Asian countries as time went on, not to be dwarfed by surrounding powerful countries and economies such as China and Japan that the country has as its neighbors. Korean entertainment, in particular, has proven to be a large pull for foreigners that are just beginning to learn more about South Korea, either from hearing about it in the news cycles or from other various sources. Made clear through the coining

of *Hallyu*, it is not a stretch to state that Korean dramatic television shows are well-rounded in terms of genre and captivate audiences throughout the world due to their intricate storylines, transcending language barriers. The rise of Korean popular music and its growing popularity even for those who do not speak the Korean language has become perhaps the largest selling point for South Korea to increase its soft power and I personally have also fallen for the allure.

Part of my fascination with South Korea began when I was fourteen years old. Honestly, my first encounters with music in a different language came in the form of Japanese anime soundtracks from the shows I was watching as a child. During one lazy weekend afternoon lounging around with my friend at her house, I had heard another friend play a song on her phone called “Haru Haru” by the K-pop supergroup BIGBANG, which was off the “Number 1” album originally released in 2008. I fell in love with the melody and immediately made the effort to look up the English translation of the Korean lyrics. Something about the song struck a chord within myself and what I discovered was a captivating song about the heartbreak and regret felt from a breakup with someone you had loved or continued to live. I was amazed at how I felt the all of the emotions - disappointment, confusion, and frustration among others - through the singing and rapping as the song went on, despite not having gone through the experience myself or understanding the Korean language.

From there, I dove more deeply into BIGBANGs discography and slowly branched out into listening to other breakout K-Pop artists during the time. Over time, I diversified my music taste listening to both female and male K-Pop bands and slowly, it took over my iPod and Korean Pop (hereafter referred to as K-Pop) became the bulk of the music I listened to on a daily basis, even surpassing the American music I listened to previously. I became more accustomed to hearing the language and K-Pop became such a huge part of my life, that it was a natural

progression from me listening to K-Pop music to feeling the drive to learn more about its origins and where the genre was born. Such curiosity led me to researching more about South Korea, a country I had never heard of before until then.

Listening to K-Pop was a gateway for me to wanting to learn more about South Korea itself, since it was the place where my favorite artists at the time created and released songs. I developed a fascination with the country due to my interest being piqued through K-Pop and so, I sought to learn more of the Korean language and began teaching myself Hangul, the Korean alphabet system. I used online resources as much as I could and even subconsciously, I began to model my personal clothing taste off of the trends I saw in K-Pop after seeing what the Korean female singers were wearing. I began trying different types of Korean food and I inched away from spending my afternoons watching Japanese anime to watching Korean drama series as I progressed through high school.

From there, my interest in K-Pop and South Korea took an entirely different turn. I was confident in what I was learning and I did not hide that from anyone at school. K-Pop became a part of my identity, in the sense that it became something that people automatically associated with my name. “Tara, the girl who likes K-Pop” became my identifier throughout my high school years and I embraced it. I won the category “Class Fangirl” as my senior superlative due to how widely known it was that I enjoyed the music genre. It steadily became a personal dream to see South Korea for myself and after four years of actively following Korean trends and the Korean music scene, I made a strong personal vow to myself to study abroad in the country during the time I attend college. It was one of my strongest desires and was part of the reason why I became more independent in trying to secure my own future. As soon as I was able to, I

began working really hard towards making my dream a reality and used K-Pop as my motivation to succeed at my goal.

After taking on internships, working part-time and saving any possible money that I received on my birthday and Christmas my first one and a half at Saint Peter's University, I did just that and saved as much money as possible to ensure that I would be able to study abroad, debt-free. During the spring semester of my sophomore year in college, I set off on an exchange program with Sogang University, the Jesuit university located in central Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. I spent a total of four months in the country and along with completing my coursework, I traveled throughout the country, hitting industrialized cities, rural landscapes, seaside towns and everything in between. Historical sites were dotted throughout the country and I made sure to visit them in almost every city I went to, since that became a large part of my interest in South Korea after having discovered it from listening to K-Pop. I was able to meet and talk with Korean students at Sogang University and elsewhere, which aided me in compiling observations that I was making during my time spent in the country. I was even able to attend multiple K-Pop concerts and productions as possible during my study abroad exchange program.

My trip itself serves as the basis for this paper and I started to question if other K-Pop fans went through the same facets of interests I did. Was it a steady progression of liking and enjoying K-Pop that became the basis for becoming interested in a more well-rounded understanding of South Korean culture? How did people learn about South Korea and was it only through music or was it a combination of the multiple factors playing into the government subsidized soft power movement? What about K-Pop in particular drew me and millions of other K-Pop fans from around the globe to wholeheartedly support music being produced in another language and increase the tourism of the music's country of origin? Does an interest in K-Pop

lead to Korean products and services being perceived as being that of a higher quality in comparison to products and services originating from its neighboring countries? Is there any psychological explanation as to why these things occur? To attempt to truly understand how South Korea developed into this modernized country with a stunning control of soft power that can be most certainly envied by other countries in its own right, we must first take a look at the history that precedes its success as a developed nation. This introduction serves to give some background on why this particular topic was chosen within the context of popular music and to give information on South Korea and the other cultural elements that an interest in K-Pop may have had an effect on.

## Chapter 2: History from the Korean War



This chapter relates to a brief history of South Korea and serves to illustrate how much the country has accomplished since the Korean War. Often overshadowed by its larger East Asian neighboring countries such as China and Japan, much of what was known about the small Korean peninsula to Americans became learned through the intervention in the Korean War. In the early 20th century, Korea was arguably not a very well-known or powerful country in the West or outside of Asia. In fact, for 35 years between 1910 until 1945, it was a Japanese colony until it became occupied by both the Soviet Union and the United States after Japan's decisive loss of territory following the end of World War II. The United States had proposed temporarily dividing the country along the 38th Parallel so as to maintain some sort of influence throughout the Korean peninsula. However, that divide set the grounds for an emerging civil war due to differing political ideologies and conflicts on issues that were deep-rooted in Korean society. In the wake of the Korean War in line with American values that were implemented over time, the South Korean government declared itself the Republic of Korea with Syngman Rhee as the president of a democratic and anti-communist state. To the north, Kim Il-sung created a communist state, with himself as the center adored by his people through the use of strong propaganda. The Korean War began when North Korean armies pushed past the 38th parallel and invaded South Korean territory. Backed by the Soviet Union, the North Korean armies broke through South Korean barricades and progressed into the nation and when they almost made it to the shortline of South Korea, the United States decided to intervene with military forces.

With the help of American troops, the South Korean army was able to stand their own against North Korea. With their combined military strengths, the American and South Korean armies pushed North Korean troops back to North Korea and both sides decided to sign a peace treaty. However, the two countries did not formally end the war and the conflict still very much

divides the Korean peninsula. North Korea became a closed off country while South Korea has started developing into a more industrialized state. However, South Korea did struggle with rebuilding itself after the devastation that the Korean War did to the land. In the years following the Korean war in the 1950s and 1960s, the per capita income in South Korea was less than \$100, which is about the same as it is in the poorest Southeast Asian and African countries (Brookings). In the aftermath, the land was destroyed and many families were relocated or separated. In the 1950s, families would scour the land and mountains following harvests for edible plants and herbs in South Korea, which is similar to what is being done in North Korea today. American soldiers remained on the land in the years following the war, but they were very intimidating to the Korean people, especially children. Schools were understaffed and undersupplied. In an article written by Kongdan Oh whose grandparents lived in South Korea in the years following the war, he wrote about the foreign aid that South Korea received.

During the 1950s, Korea's economy slowly began to recover, but there wasn't much to work with. Foreign aid and assistance came in from the International Development Association, the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and bilateral agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development and the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan. In the 1960s, South Korea under President Park Chung-hee launched economic and social development plans, and soon the economy began to grow, although the lives of ordinary people were hardly affected until the 1970s. By the time of Park's death in 1979, income was over \$1,500. Life was still difficult, but it was definitely getting better.

In 1961, John F. Kennedy took the presidency and helped establish the Peace Corps, which deployed missions to South Korea. At first met with hesitance by the Korean people, who some assumed were American spies, due to them giving up their wealthy lives in the United States to live and work in South Korea, a shattered country still struggling from the remnants of a civil war. However, over time, the nearly 2,000 American Peace Corps volunteers slowly gained the trust of the South Korean people. Many Peace Corps volunteers became diplomats, professors or scholars who ended up staying in Korea or learning more about the country to help its development after their return to the United States.

Much of the development took place after Park Chung-hee became president of South Korea in 1961. During this time, economic growth occurred and even continued after his passing. Perhaps the most grand example of South Korea's development during this time was their hosting of the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul. In order to prepare for the games, the streets were cleaned and flowers were planted among other things in order to look more presentable to the foreign visitors in the country to view the games. This time inspired the South Korean people, who were motivated by their hope in rebuilding their country into something great after the Korean War. This set the tone for a period of great financial prosperity for the small country and the gap between North Korea and South Korea only intensified as time went on.

However, through the end of the 1990s, things began to change. Perhaps due to the lack of resources and drive in the South Korean society during the war with North Korea, there was an excess of trying to gain more and more. The economic conditions of South Korea increased, so there was more wealth and opportunities for improvement that took place throughout the country. People began to selfishly employ means to succeed in and the traditional phenomenon of wealth discrepancy occurred along the banks of the Han River, the central river that divides

the capital city of Seoul into roughly two halves. Many of the richer Korean families moved to the southern side of the Han River, making that into an economic and financial center that still remains there today (the Garosugil and Gangnam districts, especially). The northern half of the Han River remained largely excluded from development, as many high rise condos were built on the southern banks of the Han River.

Despite this, South Korea did not have much money at all. Asia as a whole was going through a financial crisis and the South Korea government needed to find a way to raise money to develop the country. According to an NPR article, it states that, “South Korea's leaders decided to use music to improve its image and build its cultural influence. So the country's government poured millions of dollars into forming a Ministry of Culture with a specific department devoted to K-pop.” The article continues with a statement from an author of a book called *The Birth of Korean Cool* named Euny Hong. She shared that, “the Korean government treats its K-pop industry the way that the American government treats its automobile and banking industry, meaning that these are industries that have to be protected.” The Ministry of Culture set out to build the infrastructure that would support the growing interest in K-Pop such as constructing large concert halls and venues, focusing on improving current hologram technology and even making sure that the country's *noraebangs*, or singing rooms much like our understanding of karaoke, is stocked with the latest and most popular K-Pop tunes. The intent was to make South Korea in the 21st century like the United States in the 20th century, according to Euny Hong. This chapter illustrates that South Korea has rebuilt tremendously since the Korean War and it has put an emphasis on K-Pop as being a tool for enhancing its soft power. The soft power aspect of K-Pop is a main facet of the following research.

### Chapter 3: What is K-Pop?

This chapter aims to explain what is K-Pop and its unique characteristics that may contribute to why it is so liked both within and outside South Korea. K-Pop may very well be the strongest aspect of the Korean wave and the biggest component of the soft power influence that South Korea has. The term “K-Pop” may refer to Korean pop music to most people unfamiliar with the genre at first since the same thought process can be applied to all forms of pop, including American pop music, but a more fitting description would be “Korean popular music.” Not all of the music in K-Pop fits under the pop genre. K-Pop is in fact, an encompassing genre of various music styles that all have some influence from Western music. Artists in South Korea created their own subgenres like “K-Hip Hop” and “K-Indie” to accommodate their musical styling and to distinguish it from being classified under the pop genre. This genre of music branched out into its own subcultures itself, with each representing its own culture that permeate throughout Korean society.

Music has always been a central part in every culture including Korean culture, but the modern understanding of what K-Pop is today can be traced back to the early 1990s. Groups like Seo Taiji and the Boys pioneered the genre by incorporating different music styles and other foreign influences into the songs they released. Seo Taiji’s and the Boys song “I Know” was

released and its jack-swing inspired melody, catchy chorus and meaningful lyrics was a clear turning point in the K-Pop genre. Moving away from the previously popular folk music and highly traditional music, the group amassed a large following and dedicated fandoms were created in response to supporting the group. Inspired by the work of Seo Taiji and the Boys, record labels referred to as entertainment companies were established and they would introduce an influx of soloists, duos, boy groups and girl groups that would become incredibly successful in the coming years. H.O.T, Fin.K.L, and g.o.d introduced the concept of idol groups to South Korea (psu.edu).. Following the 1997 Asian financial crisis, these groups branched out to other markets such as China and Japan. This signaled the beginning of K-Pop not only being a South Korean staple, but also an internationally focused one. Some groups have even adapted to creating entire versions of songs in Chinese and Japanese to further appease their growing international levels of popularity.

K-Pop has become something of a phenomenon of its own, with multiple facets to the organization of it. On the surface, catchy tunes and strong choreography make K-Pop an impressive audio-visual experience by international standards, but there is an entire system to the supposed madness. Dozens of solo acts, groups and bands release debut singles and proportionately so, older groups tend to lose group members as time goes on or they end up disbanding entirely. It is an industry that is undoubtedly cyclical, with raw talent and company influence being the only way that some these groups survive. Simply though, due to the sheer saturation of music acts at any given moment in the industry, it becomes clear that only the strongest survive. However, the story behind why K-Pop is so alluring to its audience is not a mystery. The entertainment companies behind the K-Pop acts know exactly what they are doing and they know how to market their groups extremely well.

Many K-Pop celebrities, or idols, got their start through auditioning for entertainment companies, which are most similar to a record label here in the United States. The most notable with the largest market space are commonly referred to as “The Big Three,” comprised of SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment. Upon signing a contract with the company, the artist is then referred to as a trainee and is subject to classes meant to improve their talents. Some of the classes conducted include vocal training, dance training, and Korean language courses if the trainee is not already fluent in Korean, since there has been a growing amount of non-Korean trainees joining entertainment companies. These classes are also done at training agencies. Being multilingual is a plus in many cases, due to the globalization of the K-Pop genre. Being able to speak multiple languages is especially important when it comes to events abroad and most K-Pop groups are armed with at least one English speaker for translation purposes. They may also get training on how to properly act on variety shows, since those are also viewed as an important aspect to the marketing efforts of the act. Trainees often train for hours and sleep for a short period of time in order to learn and memorize the choreography to their songs. The trainees have a responsibility to make sure that their bodies are fit and their appearances are in perfect shape. In some cases, the entertainment company may encourage plastic surgery to increase the trainee’s shot at being placed into a group. The entertainment companies pay for room and board and in return, the trainees are pitted against each other, with the most talented ones having the best shot to be debuted.

Due to this mechanical system prevalent from the largest entertainment companies even to the smaller ones, the talent of the people that make up K-Pop groups is incredible. They are able to sing and dance for hours on end, with most choreographies being exceptionally difficult to master. Korean concerts are even quite long in comparison to Western ones – they can

sometimes last in excess of 3 hours long and the celebrities' voices and dancing are consistently stable even after hours of intense singing and dancing. It is almost superhuman at how they manage to pull this off, but it becomes feasible to understand when in reality, many celebrities were training in entertainment companies since their early teenage years. The dedication to the cause is palpable - some students drop out of school or opt to be homeschooled throughout the process.

Personal schedules as a trainee and even as a celebrity are highly regulated and in most cases, the only vacation celebrities get is during national holidays when they are allowed to go home. During comeback periods where they release new albums and songs, they are whisked away to various events in one day. These schedules may comprise of fanmeets, interviews or appearances on television shows. The comeback period is always the most hectic time of their career and if they are not promoting their songs during the comeback period, then they are set to train and practice their skills even more. Training even continues as the promotion of the album goes on, which may extend for weeks or months at a time.

There are certain archetypes in each K-Pop group that makes the group dynamic very easily understood to foreign audiences. Each position has certain responsibilities and even personality traits attributed to them sometimes, painting K-Pop as a predictable genre, almost akin to a machine. Criticisms of K-Pop are common in that some may assume they are all too manufactured. To some degree, they are correct since K-Pop lends its success to being extremely structured. There is always a leader of the group, designated as so. The leader may be the oldest member of the group, the member who has trained the longest in the company, or even the most responsible member that is able to care for the other members. The leader leads the group's introductory greeting at public appearances and answers many of the interview questions,

serving as the main representative of the group. There are positions related to talent, such as the positions of “main vocal,” “main rapper” and “main dancer,” with the strongest members in each field taking those titles. The main vocal, for example, is responsible for the strongest vocals and higher notes commonly heard in K-Pop songs. The other members in the group then take the sub positions “lead vocal,” “lead rapper,” etc. However, all of these titles are not set in stone as more rappers are beginning to take singing roles in songs. G-Dragon of the YG Entertainment boy group BIGBANG was officially designated as a rapper within the group, but he sings extensively within his own songs, especially in his solo content.

Some of these concepts may not be difficult to understand for outsiders new to the genre, but two positions exclusive to the K-Pop idol industry that may be odd to Westerners are the positions of the “Visual” and “Maknae” of the group. The company determines the visual of the group in response to fan reactions and that title is given to the most conventionally attractive member of the group by classically Korean beauty standards. The visual is designated to be the face of the group and is often deliberately placed in the center during choreographies or given the responsibility to start off the song to convince viewers to watch the rest of the groups’ performance. The visual is expected to especially take care of their appearance compared to the others, as it is essentially their job title to be the handsomest or prettiest member of the group.

The “Maknae” simply is a Korean term referring to the youngest member of the group. As a maknae, they are prone to being teased by both fans and their other group members because of their youth. Oftentimes, they are babied by those around them and are generally regarded to be the cutest member of the group in an endearing light. As so, they are often coerced into doing “aegyo,” a Korean term for acting cute using sounds, gestures and facial expressions. “Aegyo” can seem almost baby-ish in nature and is a controversial interest that some people enjoy and

some do not. With high-pitched voices and childish hand motions, the maknae often captures the hearts of fans with their charismatic energy. The maknaes and visuals of the groups continue to be common fan-favorites throughout the industry. One of the most successful visuals in a girl group is AOA's Seolhyun who is the face of dozens of advertisements in South Korea and one of the most successful maknaes in K-Pop is Oh Sehun of the boy group EXO, who leads a fantastic career not only as a rapper, but as a model for different fashion brands in South Korea. It is not uncommon for K-Pop celebrities to branch into acting for movies and tv shows as well, showing how well-roundedly talented so many of them are. Only the best of the trainees get placed into groups to debut.

SM Entertainment is credited with creating the idol lifestyle present today and many of the acts it debuted were successful in the K-Pop world. The female soloist BoA is credited with first starting her successful career in Japan, being the first Korean artist to break into mainstream Japanese music scene. She hit the number one position seven times in the Oricon Weekly album chart. The boy group TVXQ set a record for being number one nine times on the Oricon Weekly album chart. In Japan in the early 2000s, Japanese media compared this Korean cultural invasion of Japan to the Beatles' success in the United States during the 1960s (Jung).

The Korean wave has been facilitated by the increased use of social media to interact with fans. K-Pop acts have online fancafes moderated by the entertainment companies where important notices regarding the group's activities are disseminated, and many acts have used it to send messages directly to their fans. It is a very interpersonal relationship, with many idols choosing to interact with their fans as if they were their own personal friends. Messages like "Don't catch a cold, please stay warm" during the winter season or "Study hard for your exams and do well" during the school year are common messages that K-pop idols post to encourage

their fans and maintain a good relationship. However, some groups also use websites like Twitter and Instagram. Depending on their company, idols run personal or group Twitter and Instagram accounts. Often posting the Korean word for selfies – “selcas” or general remarks about their day, K-pop idols bridge the gap between fan and celebrity effortlessly, also contributing to their global success (Oh and Rhee). Part of the reason why K-Pop has reached so far on a global scale is because the distance between the fan and the celebrity feels shorter due to the close interactions on social media accounts. The members of the K-Pop boy group, BTS, posts daily on their shared Twitter account, posting selcas, music recommendations, pictures of their pets and more. It helps build a human connection, which makes the fans feel important, recognized and appreciated.

K-Pop as a genre is becoming increasingly multicultural. It is not rare to see groups produce entire songs in other languages, especially in Japanese and Chinese. EXO, an originally twelve-membered boy group created by SM Entertainment in 2012 had the unique concept of having subgroups Exo-K and Exo-M. Exo-K, consisting of 6 Korean members, mainly recorded songs in Korean while Exo-M, made up of 2 Korean and 4 Chinese members, mainly recorded songs in Mandarin Chinese. This concept proved to be somewhat successful in the sense of that when the group wasn't promoting their albums together, they often split up and Exo-K and Exo-M doing separate promotions in South Korea and China, respectively. Another boy group was debuted in 2016 under the company called NCT, where the strategy was to create different unit groups within a larger one. Some included are NCT Dream, NCT U and NCT 127. This was a very successful venture for SM Entertainment, due to the fact that each unit appealed to different segments of the population. SM Entertainment previously recruited Chinese and Taiwanese trainees as well, such as the case of Zhoumi in Super Junior. NCT recently formed an entire

Chinese unit called WayV. Due to the embracing of K-Pop idols from other Asian countries, other companies began recruiting international trainees as well, holding auditions throughout Asia and even the United States.

Notable examples of this are present in almost every top entertainment company today. Lisa from YG Entertainment's group Blackpink is undoubtedly one of the most popular members of the group internationally, due to her skill in rapping and doll-like appearance that proves to be marketable as she is the face of cosmetic brands in South Korea. Group members Bambam from GOT7 and Nichkhun from 2PM, are also Thai and are members of the most successful boy groups currently active under JYP Entertainment. TWICE, perhaps the most popular girl group from JYP Entertainment has three members hailing from Japan named Momo, Mina and Sana, along with one member from Taiwan named Tzuyu.

Increasingly so, recruitment has also been done extensively through countries in the West. Amber from SM Entertainment's girl group f(x) is Taiwanese-American while Henry from Super Junior is Taiwanese-Canadian. Ailee, a successful female soloist is Korean-American. Even children who are half-Korean have been popular in the K-pop industry. Jeon Somi, a contestant on the popular Korean show "Produce 101" that is similar to the American program of "Making the Band" is half Korean and half Dutch-Canadian. Vernon, a member of Pledis Entertainment's group Seventeen hails from New York and is half-Korean and half-American. Nowadays, Samuel who gained popularity after being on "Produce 101 Season 2," is making waves in the industry by being the first half-Korean, half-Mexican K-Pop idol. Companies have even been experimenting with allowing non-Asians into the K-Pop industry. Alex was an African-American girl who became a member of the K-Pop group BP Rania under DR Music, but she eventually ended up departing the group after 2 years (Choralee).

The blending of multiple ethnicities coming together under the K-pop genre has opened the doors for K-Pop not only being limited to Korean lyrics. Nowadays, many groups release songs with English titles, such as in the case with “As If It’s Your Last” by Blackpink and “Never Ever” by GOT7. These English titles have helped create a better Western following and make songs more easily searched by foreign audiences. Often, English phrases are thrown into K-Pop songs to break up Korean lyrics. Sometimes, groups release songs with English titles written with the Korean alphabet, such as in the case of K-Pop girl group Red Velvet’s song “Russian Roulette.” Perhaps the most evident blending of Korean and English titles comes in the form of Seventeen’s song “아주 Nice” with the Korean word meaning “very.” The song reads, “Very Nice” in English, but it is clear to see that English has a very distinct role in modern K-Pop music.

K-Pop groups also place a strong emphasis on producing their own music. Due to their trainee days, many idols have had training in music production. Seventeen has become one of the most popular K-Pop boy groups today and a part of that was due to them being marketed early on as a completely self-produced group. This distinction was not done by choice, but rather out of necessity. Pledis Entertainment was struggling due to the commercial failures of its previously debuted groups and did not have extra money to hire outside choreographers and producers, so the group members of Seventeen did it themselves. Group member Woozi wrote and produced songs, while group member Hoshi created formations for the thirteen members of the group.

Many K-Pop idols take part in producing and composing songs, with the majority of them being able to play a musical instrument of some sort. Often times, they are able to play multiple instruments. Woozi alone can play the piano, clarinet, guitar, drums and other band instruments.

More and more, as the genre expands and grows more traction in the West, K-Pop groups are embarking on world tours. Asia tours were quite common and continue to be, with many groups making stops in Asian countries like Japan, Singapore and the Philippines multiple times throughout the year. However, as time goes on, more companies are allowing their groups to perform concerts in other countries, especially throughout North America, South America and Europe. Groups like BIGBANG, Seventeen, and GOT7 have had sold-out tour dates in American cities such as Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles. Tour dates in countries like Chile and Brazil are becoming more commonplace as time goes on, due to an increasing demand for K-Pop concerts in those areas. For groups who perhaps are not as popular to hold their own solo concerts abroad, opting for organized K-Pop music conventions have been extremely successful. K-Con is an annual Korean wave music festival that began in Los Angeles in 2012, but has since set up conventions in New York, Japan, Abu Dhabi, Paris, Mexico, and Australia (Wikipedia). There, multiple groups perform 2-3 of their most popular songs at a night concert and are therefore able to gain more international exposure. It continues to be successful, with the most recent KCON NY having changed the concert and convention venues from Newark, New Jersey to Manhattan, New York.

Some statistics that show just how K-Pop has spread across the world includes that in 2014, *Hallyu* (the Korean wave) contributed to an estimated \$11.6 billion dollar boost on the South Korean economy (Roll, 2018). Incredibly, representatives from Bloomberg have been writing articles more on K-Pop, due to its growing financial contributions to the South Korean

economy. In fact, they reported that global revenue from K-Pop reached a record \$4.7 billion in 2016 (Kim, 2017). In a Statista online poll conducted in 2017, it was shown that 40% of respondents from 16 foreign countries reported that K-Pop was very popular in their home countries. As one of the most popular K-Pop music videos that became a global trend in its own right, Forbes reported that Gangnam Style by PSY was the first video to be viewed over 1 billion times on YouTube, an honor that had it surpass music videos from globally recognized artists such as Justin Bieber (McIntyre, 2018).

K-Pop at first glance may not seem to be a tangible product, but it is. It can be regarded as an export of South Korea that is representative of at least some of its societal values. South Korea is marketing that export to be consumed by the rest of the world and it does so by making it attractive to the consumer. Things like brand awareness, brand positioning, brand image and more come to play in regards of a potential customer's reaction to the product. South Korea has invested time, money and energy in hopes that K-Pop would generate much needed profits after the Korean war. Since the country itself is directly related to K-Pop, what I wanted to test in this thesis was to see if an interest in K-Pop had any influence on how an individual felt about South Korea. Both intrinsic and extrinsic clues influence how consumers perceive a product. Whether or not they actually have any grounds in predicting the quality of a product varies.

K-Pop can indeed contribute to soft power because it is clear that it has had a positive effect on the South Korean economy. Nye related to soft power as being a way that countries can spread their influence in a way that is not through economic means or military coercion. A psychological explanation for how this technique may have worked so well may be explained by the country-of-origin effect. In terms of Korean products and services, K-Pop in relation to the country-of-origin effect may influence the overall perception of South Korea. The principal take

away from this chapter is that K-Pop has unique characteristics that may lead it to becoming a factor in the global perception of South Korea through the use of soft power.

This study is mainly exploratory in nature it requires the use of the country of origin effect. This chapter will discuss the early use of the country of origin effect. Country of origin labeling actually began in 1887, when the British government required British products to be printed with the country's name in order to curb international competition (Rayasam). In terms of the basis of international marketing, it is a highly researched topic. The country of origin effect can also be referred to as a nationality bias and it refers to the perceptions of quality. On the website Global Economists, it says an interesting fact about how Asian products are perceived in relation to American or European products. It reads:

One of the biggest challenges many Asian companies face as they globalise is the perception that Asian brands are inferior. Research in international marketing has proven that country associations do lead to customer bias and this bias depends on how a customer views the image of a country. French wine, German cars, Japanese robots, Colombian coffee, Italian fashion, Singaporean efficiency, Belgian chocolate.

Somewhere in our minds, these products and services are associated with particular countries owing to their legacy or culture or lifestyle, which automatically leads us to perceive them as 'premium'.

The country of origin effect describes that in particular, "made-in" labels are still of significance, especially when they refer to risky products or ones with the potential of health hazards. Despite that, "made-in" labels do not necessarily have a concrete effect on consumers and before things like offshoring manufacturing became commonplace, it was synonymous with the country of origin. Originally as a topic just referring to where a product was made, it has expanded to refer to customers' perceptions and attitudes towards purchasing a product or

service. They may be positive or negative and are influenced by multiple factors. Some people may purchase products from their own country out of their own pride, while others may purposefully buy more products from a country because they perceive the country's goods to be of higher quality. Multiple studies have emphasized positive effects that country of origin has in relation to products, such as familiarity with the product or the perceived quality of it (Thakor & Lavack, 2003). This may even include the transfer of certain country perceptions and values as a halo effect (Piron, 2000). Surprisingly so, country of-origin emotional connotations can also be formed through direct experiences, like through traveling and interacting with foreigners, or indirect experiences, through means like art, education, mass-media, word-of-mouth or stereotypes (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). "Country of origin has been proven to be an important factor in influencing consumers' brand evaluation, perceptions and purchasing behavior and it can offer brands a significant competitive advantage" (Procedia). The principal takeaway from this chapter is that the country of origin effect does seem to play a role in affecting the perception of a country and K-Pop's success may have to do with that effect.

## Chapter 5: Research, Interviews, Results and Conclusion

In this chapter, it discloses the research method used to collect information to determine whether K-Pop and the country of origin effect play a role in influencing the perception of South

Korea. To conduct the research, interview questions were drafted and presented to my thesis advisor for revisions. Qualitative research was chosen due to the lack of quantitative research on the topic. The study was determined to be of a qualitative instead of quantitative research due to the lack of information within the current literature of pop music. In-depth interviews were decided upon due to the intent of finding out why people thought they way that they did when it came to perceiving South Korea through consumption of its products. The goal was to see how the interviewee was first exposed to K-Pop and how their interest in the genre influenced their perception of South Korea. The questions were also meant to see if the country of origin effect had any effect on the participants. The full list of questions is stated below:

1. Tell me the story of how you first got into K-Pop.
2. Around when did you begin to like K-Pop?
3. Why do you think that you began to like K-Pop?
4. Describe what you like most about K-Pop.
5. What do you think is special or unique about K-Pop in relation to other genres of music?
6. Have you ever made any effort to learn the Korean language?
7. Do you think that you prefer Korean products over Chinese products?
8. Tell me what happened at the first K-Pop concert you went to. What happened at it and why did you go? How was your experience?
9. In what way has your life has changed since you got into K-Pop?
10. How did your friends and family react towards your love for K-Pop?
11. What did you know or think about South Korea before your interest in K-Pop?  
Describe how K-Pop has affected your attitude towards South Korea.

12. Do you think you want to visit South Korea in the future because of K-Pop or are there any other reasons?
13. Have you ever tried Korean food? What kinds of Korean food do you like?
14. Compared to Chinese food, which one do you prefer?
15. Compared to Japanese food, which one do you prefer?
16. Which Korean products do you typically find yourself buying and why? Is there any reason that you do?
17. What about Korean electronics?
18. What other Korean things do you have at home?
19. What is your perception regarding Chinese products and Korean products?
20. If you could go on an all-expense paid trip to one of the following countries, which would you visit? South Korea, Philippines, Japan or Indonesia? Why?
21. What is your gender and age range?

The key questions were how K-Pop affected their perception of South Korea, their differences in opinion between Chinese and Korean products, and which country they would choose to go to for an all-expense paid trip. Such questions led to direct introspection revolving around the topic of the thesis and knowing the reasoning behind them contributed to an in-depth understanding of the issues.

For the interviews themselves, a mix of genders and ages of K-Pop fans was chosen. The interviews were to be 10-15 minutes long and to be audio recorded on my cell phone. K-Pop fans known personally were reached out to and the interviews went well. However, a larger audience was needed and the location of my university played to an advantage. Online research was conducted and it was shown that that a K-Pop training facility has an office in the Koreatown

block of New York City. Called Born Star Training Center, it serves a purpose to help train people for the auditions to become K-Pop stars in South Korea. A representative was reached out to and interviews were scheduled with the students.

The advantage of interviewing people in Koreatown allowed access to a diverse set of people interested in K-Pop. New York City is a city that many people reside in and so, there were many students to choose from to conduct the interviews with. The advantage of interviewing on the Saint Peter's University campus was the shortened travel time and how easier it became to schedule interviews. Participants were reached out to through emails and text messages, depending on how well I knew the participant. The interviews were conducted and recorded with my cell phone using the Voice Memos application, with each of the interviews lasting between ten to fifteen minutes. A total of ten interviews were conducted. After the interviews were conducted, the recordings were played back several times to collect the necessary information in order to draw the conclusions needed. The key takeaways from the exercise were to gain insight into how K-Pop can play a role in drastically affecting the perception of South Korea.

The results of the interviews themselves were fascinating. Naturally, the stories of how each participant first heard of and got into liking K-Pop varied. Some had heard it from their friends and family, while one woman in particular first started liking K-Pop after seeing it being featured in a BuzzFeed YouTube video. It just shows how diverse K-Pop has gotten in terms of international exposure and it can be determined that social media and websites like YouTube play a role in spreading K-Pop outside of the Korean market. Ages of when people first got into K-Pop varied naturally, but what people liked most about K-Pop was similar. The unique audio-visual experiences, the sheer caliber of the dances and synchronization and discussion about

topics that transcended beyond just Korean societal values made the entire experience of listening to K-Pop captivating. Many of the interviewees made efforts to learn the Korean language, with the exception of Korean-American participants who had learned it from their parents. A wonderful experience one interviewee had was not feeling connected to her Korean culture and feeling uncomfortable about it growing up, but found solace in K-Pop as restoring part of her heritage. K-Pop affected peoples' lives positively. Stories were about finding a community of friends and building a support group of like-minded fans and discovering a passion that they were not familiar with. One participant left college to pursue her dream of training and becoming a K-Pop celebrity in the specific entertainment company that produced her favorite groups. What was striking about the participants was the diversity in ethnicity, which shows how globalized K-Pop has become.

Generally, friends accepted the participants' interest in K-Pop, while parents' tended to not understand it fully, but still respected their children's interest in it. K-Pop has positively affected their perception of South Korea and has led them to purchasing more Korean products, particularly in the realm of Korean skincare, makeup and fashion. Fascinatingly so, most of the participants had Android phones, which shows that they are more akin to choosing Korean technology through the use of Samsung products. Regarding Chinese products, the participants tended to choose Korean products over those because they perceived Korean products being of higher-quality. Surprisingly enough, while many participants chose to eat Korean food over Chinese food, they were inclined to choose Korean food, but became hesitant when they thought about sushi. The responses to which country they would choose to go to an all-expense paid trip varied. Most of the participants said they would like to visit South Korea if they have not been there already.

Through this research study and thesis, I was able to find out more about why K-Pop has been supported by the South Korean government so long. The key findings from the research were that K-Pop seems to play some role in the perception of South Korea for some fans of the genre. An interest in K-Pop may have lead to Korean products. being regarded as higher quality in comparison to other Asian products. Along with a growing interest in Korean culture, skincare and makeup, K-Pop seems to contribute to tourism in South Korea. As K-Pop begins to grow more popular internationally, future research can be done to measure the connection between K-Pop music and perception of its country of origin since it is a topic that is still not being heavily researched.

The findings were not very surprising, as I had also shared similar sentiments with many of the participants. What I had learned about South Korea from the study was that the country was very successful at employing a use of soft power through the pop music produced in the country. This research contributes to the country-of-origin effect research due to it being applied to a genre of music that is rapidly growing in popularity throughout the world. This research has built upon the current research surrounding the country of origin effect. The main takeaway from this use of the country-of-origin effect does seem to play a part in improving the perception of South Korea. For people who want to study country-of-origin effect in the future, the possibilities are endless since it can be applied to any product from any country, whether tangible or intangible. From this study, it is also clear that soft power plays a strong role in influencing the perception of South Korea, just as the South Korean government intended it to be. As for now, the academic material on K-Pop is still growing and I look forward to it becoming a strong aspect of the current literature relating to pop music from around the world.

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