

When public diplomacy faces trade barriers and diplomatic frictions: the case of the Korean Wave

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Abstract South Korea's cultural entertainment products such as popular music, TV dramas and films have recently enjoyed growing popularity in Asia-Pacific rim countries and the rest of the world. The cultural phenomenon called the Korean Wave or "Hallyu" has elevated South Korea's national brands, increased their overseas exports, and promoted human exchanges. This study finds that the remarkable success of the Korean Wave is due to collaborative efforts by the Korean government and private cultural industries by utilizing Korea's pop entertainment products as an effective tool for global public diplomacy. This study also discusses recent setbacks in the Korean Wave due to protective trade barriers in several Asian countries, as well as strained diplomatic relations and anti-Korean Wave sentiments in Japan and China.

Keywords Korean Wave · Soft power · Public diplomacy

Introduction

The Korean Wave, or the growing popularity of South Korean entertainment culture, has been an unusual cultural phenomenon in the global media marketplace. In the past, South Korea used to be at the receiving end of the global cultural entertainment flow from the United States and other Western countries. The first sign of the Korean Wave started with overseas exports of several Korean television

mini-series dramas dubbed K-dramas to Asian countries. In 1997, Chinese national broadcaster CCTV aired a K-drama, "What Is Love All About" which became an instant hit across the country. In 2003 and 2004, Japanese public TV network NHK aired another Korean TV drama, "Winter Sonata" which garnered an enthusiastic reception from Japanese female TV viewers. A third Korean drama, "Jewel in the Palace" also enjoyed immense popularity in China, and was later aired on TV outlets in more than 90 countries. The Korean dramas' popularity gradually spread to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Indonesia. The Korean TV dramas not only heightened people's interest in the Korean pop entertainment products but also created a new trend among people in the region to follow Korean pop culture, food, fashion and consumerism (Russell 2012, September 27).

Another Korean Wave emerged with Korean pop music beginning in the 2000s. Dubbed K-pop, this musical genre showed a wide variety of audiovisual elements including synchronized dance moves and hand gestures performed by K-pop idol bands. Seabrook (2012, October 8) characterized the K-pop as a form of cultural hybridity or "East–West mash-up" due to its creative convergence of song and dance utilizing a variety of genres such as jazz, R&B, blues, hip hop, urban dance, and electronic music. In other words, the K-pop represents hybridity of Western-style music with Asian-style of lyrics and performance. K-pop idol bands such as "Girls Generation," "Exo" and "Big Bang" captivated young Asian fans during their overseas concert tours. K-pop's popularity was seen in several Asian countries when Korean idol singer Boa and idol bands H.O.T. and KARA topped music charts in Japan, China, and Hong Kong. In 2012, K-pop's popularity hit its peak when Korean rapper Psy's hit single "Gangnam Style"

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topped the charts in more than 30 countries. The music video reached the number two spot in the Billboard's weekly chart in the United States, and was the most watched video on *YouTube* with 2.9 billion views. Referring to the global popularity of the Korean entertainment culture, a Chinese newspaper even coined a new term "Hallyu."

Not only did these Korean TV dramas and pop music contribute to increasing overseas export volumes of cultural products, but the Korean Wave also helped boost the country's tourism by bringing more than 12 million foreign tourists in 2013 alone. In 2014, tourist arrivals in South Korea rose 12% compared with the number in the previous year. Tourism experts explained that the wide circulation and popularity of Korean TV dramas and Korean films in the Asian-Pacific countries worked as a catalyst for the so-called "Hallyu tourism" to South Korea (Han and Lee 2008; Kim et al. 2009). The newsmagazine *Economist* reported that South Korea charged past Japan to become "Asia's foremost trendsetter" ('Soap, sparkle' 2014, August 6). *TIME* newsmagazine called the Korean Wave the single best export item from South Korea (Mahr 2012, March 7).

Cultural soft power and public diplomacy

To understand the popularity of the Korean Wave in Asia and beyond, it is imperative to understand how the South Korean government conceived of the country's cultural entertainment products as a staple of soft power public diplomacy campaigns. Public diplomacy is the strategic effort to engage with citizens of other countries by means of culture, art, knowledge, media, language, economic and humanitarian aid, and so forth (Huh n.d.). As Nye (2004) and Snow (2014) point out, public diplomacy is beyond traditional government-oriented foreign diplomacy, and aims to promote mutual understanding and interests of concerned parties. Public diplomacy seeks to promote national interest of a country through understanding, informing and influencing foreign audiences (Leonard et al. 2002). Several scholars (Evans and Steven 2010; Nye 2004, 2009, November 10; Nye and Kim 2013; Seib 2010) acknowledge that public diplomacy is an effective tool in promoting national images and cultural proximities.

According to Nye (2004) and Snow (2014), "soft power" is the ability to achieve national goals through attraction rather than coercion. They suggest that soft power comprises not only mass media contents such as TV dramas, pop music and films but also language, educational and cultural exchanges. However, soft power tends to work indirectly by shaping the environment for official policies, and sometimes takes years to produce the desired outcomes (Nye 2004). Consequently, soft power can be vulnerable in

the face of "hard power," which refers to more formidable influence by coercion such as employing military forces, waging wars, or placing economic sanctions against another country.

The power of global soft power was evidenced well during the British cultural entertainment invasion into the United States and other countries during the 1960s, as well as in the global exports and distribution of the Hollywood films and American television shows during the Cold War era. In the Asia-Pacific region, Hong Kong's cinema industry during the 1980s enjoyed its immense reputation as a cultural soft power hub with highly popular action-packed movies. Just as these cultural soft power predecessors, the Korean Wave has gradually expanded its presence and popularity outside South Korea since the 2000s. As the popularity of Korean TV dramas and pop music spread throughout Asia and the rest of the world, the South Korean government saw vast opportunities to utilize these cultural entertainment products as "soft power" to elevate its national image and to help increase overseas economic exports. As early as the mid-1990s, the Korean government decided to engage with global audiences by nurturing a cultural content industry that produced TV entertainment shows, TV mini-series dramas, motion pictures, online computer games and traditional Korean cuisines. The Korean government's engagement policy with global audiences through soft power cultural products or K-culture diplomacy, focused on drawing foreign audiences to the Korean entertainment culture and the country itself, thus elevating its national image. Most of all, the Korean government deemed the Korean Wave as a viable means to help create amicable business and trade environments abroad. Nye (2009, November 10), who first coined the term "soft power," acknowledges that the success of the Korean Wave heightened South Korea's global visibility and that the cultural phenomenon is a relevant example of soft power public diplomacy efforts.

Despite the unprecedented success of the Korean Wave, the popularity of Hallyu has been challenged in the last few years. The success and influence of the Korean TV dramas have raised concerns among several Asian governments, who began viewing the growing popularity of Korean pop entertainment products as a form of cultural invasion. As a result, Chinese and Japanese television networks decided to curtail significantly the total airtime for the Korean TV programming on their domestic television outlets. Beginning in 2012, a growing anti-Korean sentiment together with anti-Korean Wave protests in Japan have resulted in dramatic cutbacks in the number of Korean cultural products being distributed into the country. Japanese network TV outlets stopped airing Korean dramas partly in fear of public sentiment. In the late-2016, South Korea's cultural products became targets for Beijing's trade retaliations



when China and South Korea were experiencing diplomatic frictions over the U.S. missile defense system deployed in Korea.

Research questions

Based on the discussions above, this study focuses on the Korean Wave as a cultural phenomenon during the last two decades, and intends to investigate and provide answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How did the Korean government and a network of independent cultural entertainment producers utilize the Korean Wave as effective instruments of public diplomacy?

RQ2: What are the impacts of strained foreign policy on the success of public diplomacy using the Korean Wave?

RQ3: What options are available for the Korean government and private entertainment industry in employing the Korean Wave as instruments for public diplomacy?

According to Yin (2003), a distinctive need for a case study arises out of the desire to understand a complex social phenomenon, because the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. This case study aims to understand a cross-cultural phenomenon, the Korean Wave, which has been discussed in numerous academic publications and reported through global news media. What has not been discussed enough is how the Korean government adopted and utilized this cultural phenomenon as its soft power public diplomacy. This study is based on a qualitative textual analysis of both scholarly discussions and news media reporting of the Korean Wave and its global impacts as well as the South Korean government's role in the global distribution of the cultural soft power.

For a textual analysis of the Korean Wave using multiple sources, the author reviewed both scholarly studies on the topic and collected news stories from prominent online newspapers, magazines and television news outlets from different countries using the keywords, "Korean Wave" and "Hallyu." The sources utilized in this study include scholarly journals, edited books, online news articles from newspapers, magazines and television news outlets. Additional research was conducted to acquire year-by-year trend data on the Korean cultural products from the Korean government agencies—the Korea Creative Content Agency and the Korea Tourism Organization. These two agencies are in charge of updating statistical data from South Korea's cultural entertainment industry and tourism.

RQ1: Proactive government and resilient non-governmental players

South Korea's efforts to invigorate cultural public diplomacy can be traced to the mid-1990s when the Korean government proposed a bold plan to subsidize media entertainment industry by designating it as one of the country's key strategic export sectors. The government then instructed the Ministry of Culture to assist the private cultural entertainment industry in producing a variety of entertainment products for possible overseas exports. After the Asian financial crises (1997–1998), South Korean government decided to nurture the country's cultural entertainment industry as part of its economic reforms and restructuring projects (Hong 2014). Specifically, the government promised to provide subsidies and low-interest loans to private cultural content industries (Leong 2014, August 2). Various forms of subsidies and investment stimulus funds were distributed to cultural product manufacturers producing pop music, TV dramas and films. Due to the generous state support and guidance, several private pop talent agencies such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment and JYP Entertainment introduced systematic training programs for K-pop entertainers and contributed to exporting K-pop products overseas. The subsidies and stimulus funds also encouraged Korean universities and colleges to create over 300 popular entertainment, broadcast drama and practical music departments to recruit young students eager to find careers in the popular entertainment industry (Onishi 2005, June 2).

As stated earlier, the government viewed the Korean Wave to be a multi-purpose tool to boost the volume of overseas exports, to engage with global audiences by encouraging them to consume Korean entertainment products, and to promote foreign audiences' cultural affinity to Korea. It was an ambitious plan to transform the country to become one of the world's leading pop entertainment exporters, similar to the Hollywood entertainment industry in the United States (Table 1).

In over a decade, the total export volume for Korean cultural products that included TV dramas, pop music, and online gaming grew from \$500 million in the early 2000s to \$6.3 billion in 2016 (Korea Creative Content Agency 2017a). The Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism set up a 700 million-dollar public fund in an effort to support the Korean cultural entertainment industry. Over the years, the fund has been allocated to build a drama town, a film studio and concert halls in the cities of Daejeon and Busan (Cho 2012, April 17; Kil 2015, June 24). The drama town in Daejeon will feature five HD drama studios, outdoor filming sites, and the film arts center when



Table 1 Exports of Korea's cultural products, 2007–2016 (US\$ Million). *Source* Korea Creative Content Agency (2017a)

| Cultural products | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Publishing | 220 | 260 | 250 | 350 | 280 | 250 | 290 | 250 | 250 | 260 |
| Cartoons | 3 | 4 | 5 | 10 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 30 | 30 | 30 |
| Music | 13 | 15 | 31 | 80 | 200 | 240 | 280 | 340 | 360 | 380 |
| Game | 790 | 1100 | 1240 | 1610 | 2380 | 2640 | 2720 | 2970 | 3210 | 3450 |
| Films | 23 | 20 | 14 | 10 | 20 | 20 | 40 | 30 | 9 | 10 |
| Animation | 70 | 81 | 90 | 100 | 120 | 110 | 110 | 120 | 130 | 140 |
| TV broadcasting | 150 | 171 | 185 | 190 | 220 | 230 | 310 | 340 | 420 | 460 |
| Advertising | 90 | 14 | 92 | 75 | 102 | 100 | 100 | 80 | 80 | 80 |
| Character | 201 | 224 | 237 | 275 | 390 | 420 | 450 | 490 | 550 | 640 |
| Intellectual property | 275 | 341 | 346 | 370 | 430 | 450 | 460 | 480 | 530 | 580 |
| Content solutions | 110 | 108 | 113 | 120 | 150 | 150 | 160 | 170 | 170 | 180 |
| Total | 1945 | 2338 | 2603 | 3190 | 4312 | 4610 | 4920 | 5270 | 6090 | 6310 |

the complex is completed in 2018. Another new film production complex is under construction near the port city of Busan. The film production center will feature two indoor studios, one outdoor site, post-production facilities, and a center for production support and funding (Kil 2015, June 24). The first phase of this construction project will be completed in 2019. The government has also supported pop music, TV drama, film, and computer game industries by providing over 900 million dollars in the form of loans and credit guarantees (Na 2013, February 6).

In short, the Korean government has adopted a variety of strategies with K-pop and K-dramas at the core of its cultural public diplomacy and national branding efforts (Faure 2016, May 10). Perhaps, the most dramatic support from the government became apparent when it helped sponsor numerous K-pop concerts, K-pop talent shows, and Korean food festivals around the world through Korean cultural centers and Korean embassies. Among the numerous Korean cultural festivals overseas are the “Fashion and Passion” festival in Brazil, the K-pop festival in Mexico, the “Korea-Iran One Heart Festival” in Iran, and “KCON Paris” in France. Domestically, state-sponsored public broadcaster, the Korean Broadcasting System, held “K-pop World Festival” annually. The festival featured onstage competitions among selected non-Korean amateur singers and performers over singing and dancing their favorite K-pop numbers in the Korean language (‘K-pop world festival,’ n.d.). Korea’s provincial governments also offered their support by hosting several Korean Wave-themed events, including the annual “Hallyu Dream Festival” during which foreign tourists were offered pre-arranged group tours to a host city to participate in a massive K-pop concert and Korean food fair in the area. (‘Hallyu Dream Festival’ 2015).

Private and non-governmental players also helped spread Korean entertainment culture overseas. Business conglomerates such as Samsung Electronics, Lotte and CJ

Entertainment & Media increased their investments in producing and distributing Korean TV dramas and films and thus transformed these private sectors into extremely competitive and vibrant industries (Park 2012, December 6). Korean TV drama exports to other Asian countries continued to see impressive successes by quadrupling the export volume within a decade, totaling 167 million dollars in 2014 (Korea Creative Content Agency 2017a). As stated earlier, the Korean Wave has also created an increased demand for Korean goods ranging from cosmetics, cuisine, and fashion. The Korean Wave has helped boost tourism revenues in South Korea, too. One episode: Beginning in 2003, eager Japanese middle-aged women tourists flooded South Korea on group tours to visit filming locations of Korean TV drama “Winter Sonata.” The City of Chuncheon in which many episodes of the mega-hit K-drama had been filmed became a tourist attraction for Japanese and Southeast Asian tourists (Salmon 2012, May 30). This type of “Hallyu tourism” trend attracted a number of foreign tourists to South Korea. Most K-drama filming locations in the country featured actual-sized cutouts of major Korean TV stars and used the locations as key attractions for Asian tourists. The booming Korean presence on television and in the movies led other Asians to buy up Korean goods and to travel to South Korea (Onishi 2005, June 2). After several Korean TV mini-series dramas were aired on numerous TV outlets in China, the number of Chinese tourists to Korea also increased dramatically. In 2014, two-thirds of all foreign tourists to Korea were Chinese (Wang 2014, April 25).

In the early 1990s, the Korean Wave was still foreign to most global audiences who were merely familiar with American Hollywood TV dramas and films or Japanese manga or anime. During its infancy, most Korean TV dramas and films were introduced to and shared by foreign audiences through major terrestrial or satellite television stations in several Asian countries. These traditional



television platforms helped attract sizeable fans as reflected in the sensational hit of the Korean drama “Winter Sonata” and its lead male actor Bae Yong-Joon by creating the “Yonsama” syndrome in Japan in the early 2000s. During that time, successful Korean TV dramas were aired on many Asian TV outlets repeatedly, including the “Winter Sonata” on Japan’s NHK twice. The TV miniseries created a huge fandom of housewives of a certain age who were captivated by the soap opera’s romantic fantasy. Enthusiastic Japanese and other Asian fans enamored with the Korean actor Bae flooded South Korea on tours to visit the filming locations of the TV drama series, and spent tourist money in department stores and duty-free shops in Seoul (Salmon 2012, May 30).

However, competition for TV airtime among the imported TV dramas from several Asian countries, including Korea, Japan and Taiwan intensified. Soon, the Korean entertainment industry started looking for alternative media platforms to spread the Korean Wave in these countries. The online video streaming technologies were evolving rapidly at the turn of the 21st century, and the Korean Wave saw the opportunities. Video-streaming online websites such as *YouTube* and *DramaFever* were the perfect solutions for spreading Korean entertainment products by engaging with foreign audiences. *YouTube* in particular, was a favorite choice for the K-pop musicians and producers to publicize their new releases to young global fans who actively followed the Korean Wave and were eager to share their cultural tastes with their peers.

Korean TV dramas, films and music videos became available online with minimum copyright restrictions. When Psy’s “Gangnam Style” was uploaded on *YouTube* in 2012, his managing company placed no copyright restrictions, thus resulted in numerous *YouTube* copycat videos imitating Psy’s dance moves, ultimately helping boost the song’s global popularity. When the Korean TV drama “My Love from the Star” was aired in China in 2014, each episode was pirated and carried on Chinese video-streaming websites, thus making the popularity of the drama soar instantly (‘My love’ 2014, February 20).

YouTube-based free-for-all K-pop content invited criticisms from their producers for generating little commercial profits, however. Consequently, a number of Korean Wave producers have gradually expanded their distribution channels by using so called “OTT” (Over-the-top) content providers such as Hulu and Netflix. The latest move is expected to give the Korean entertainment companies and performers increased commercial profits from their copyrighted materials being streamed through subscription-based online video content providers (Song 2015, June/July). More recently, K-pop producers are proactive in expanding their arena to online, mobile and other various

media platforms by following the changing media consumption habits of the young generation.

RQ2: Trade barriers and strained diplomacy emerge as new challenges

For the last two decades, K-dramas and K-pop were extremely influential in many Asian countries. K-pop idol singers, including BoA, Girls Generation, Super Junior and KARA topped Japan’s Oricon weekly music charts. Korean pop music icons toured Asian countries with sold-out concerts. In many Asian capitals, the youngsters started following Korean-style fashion and hairdos. However, several Asian governments started raising concerns over the growing Korean Wave by regarding the cultural phenomenon as a form of cultural invasion into their national cultures. These countries began placing protective trade barriers by limiting the import of Korean cultural products or even rejecting Korean popular culture entirely (Kim and Lee 2014). In China, for example, criticisms were raised over Korean dramas’ portrayals of ancient Korea-China relations for being biased. Chinese Hallyu fans also questioned the accuracies of the Korean dramas’s depiction of historical settings. In Japan, K-drama fans were concerned that consumption of Korean cultural entertainment products would be considered unpatriotic due to Japan’s uneasy diplomatic friction with South Korea over controversial colonial history and territorial disputes (Park 2014b, February 21). Soon, the governments of China, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam started imposing foreign TV programming quotas by limiting total airtime for Korean dramas and K-pop products on their domestic TV outlets (Kim and Lee 2014). Specifically, China imposed a new rule that restricted all terrestrial and satellite television channels from airing foreign TV contents, including Korean TV dramas, during evening prime time (Kim and Lee 2014). The Chinese government also placed similar restrictive measures on the Chinese Internet websites showing Korean dramas. At the same time, Chinese TV broadcasters and drama production companies started purchasing “remake” copyrights for several popular Korean TV dramas instead of importing the original Korean dramas. This new move was to protect Chinese television and drama industries by encouraging them to produce Chinese copycat versions of the successful Korean TV dramas while utilizing Chinese actors and production crews. Gradually, the Korean entertainment products and K-drama celebrity stars were replaced by home grown Chinese versions. After expressing concerns over overgrowing Korean pop entertainment products on Thai TV outlets, the government in Bangkok also decided to reduce



Table 2 Korean Wave contents export to Japan, 2007–2015 (US\$ Million). *Source* Korea Creative Content Agency (2017b)

| Cultural products | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| TV broadcasting | 53.5 | 65.6 | 65.2 | 49.7 | 102 | 112 | 138 | 79 | 71 |
| Films | 5.2 | 9.0 | 5.9 | 2.3 | 3.6 | 0.7 | 8 | 4.5 | 4.9 |
| Music | 9.4 | 11.2 | 21.6 | 67.3 | 157 | 189 | 221 | 235 | 242 |
| Game | 242 | 227 | 329 | 435 | 652 | 703 | 725 | 910 | 690 |

the total monthly running time for foreign dramas aired on Thai TV from 43 to 26 hours in 2009 (Kim and Lee 2014).

The most critical obstacles to the Korean Wave emerged in 2012 during which the governments of South Korea and Japan engaged in a series of controversial debates over uneasy historical legacies from World War II and over a territorial dispute surrounding small islets halfway between the two countries. In August, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak visited Dokdo, a site of volcanic outcroppings undergoing a century-old territorial dispute between the two countries. The islets are currently occupied and governed by Seoul but claimed by Tokyo constantly. Shortly after the Korean Presidential visit to the islets, bilateral diplomatic relations between the two countries deteriorated immediately. Another diplomatic deadlock emerged as the Korean government demanded an official acknowledgement and apology from Tokyo for having enslaved Korean women in Japanese Imperial military brothels during World War II. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's conservative right-wing government denied the allegations, refused to apologize, and continued to pursue amending Japanese Constitution to expand its military roles overseas. Japan's denial of its colonial legacies in Korea during the first half of the 20th century left lingering bitterness among Koreans. Unresolved controversies and diplomatic friction between the two countries further fueled anger and animosity between the two peoples. Outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, Korean civic groups held weekly protests along with surviving members of former "comfort women" who had been enslaved by the Japanese Imperial military. In downtown Tokyo, the history dispute sparked occasional protests against the ethnic Korean population as well as the Korean Wave. Led by right-wing activists, Japanese protesters marched through downtown, waving Japanese flags and holding signs with offensive slogans against South Korea (Park 2014b, February 21). During this period, numerous books and comic strips that focused on anti-Korean Wave topics were published and became bestsellers in bookstores in Japan. Korean businesses in Japan began experiencing sharp sales drops as the Japanese customers stopped visiting Korean restaurants, cosmetic shops and souvenir shops (Park 2014a, February 21). South Korean TV stars, once common on Japanese TV commercials have largely disappeared and Japanese network TV stations have cut back on Korean drama programming,

partly due to public protests. In 2014, major Japanese TV networks including NHK, TV Asahi and TBS announced that they would stop airing Korean TV dramas on their regular programming. The networks also announced that they would replace the Korean TV dramas with Western dramas (Park 2014a, March 13).

As evident in Table 2, the overall export volume for the Korean Wave cultural products to Japan showed steady growth between 2007 and 2013. Among others, Korean online gaming products, pop music content, and K-drama content exports have shown impressive increases. By 2015, however, three sectors such as gaming, films, and TV broadcast programming have seen dramatic decrease in the export volumes.

The hardest-hit sector was the Korean TV dramas and programming export. Specifically, the total export volume for the Korean TV broadcasting programming products to Japan remained stagnant between 2011 and 2013, and then dropped sharply mainly due to the strained diplomatic relations between the two countries. In 2015, the export volume of Korean TV programming to Japan was 71 million dollars, which was merely half of the Korean TV programming export volume of 138 million dollars two years earlier.

Despite the growing anti-Korean Wave sentiment in Japan since 2012, young Japanese fans continued to attend pop concerts by K-pop idol bands (Korea Creative Content Agency 2017b). The growth of the Korean music contents export to Japan, however, has lost its momentum and remained stagnant since 2013.

According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office in 2014, over 66% of Japanese citizens over 20-years-old said they do not feel a sense of affinity to South Korea ('Bad feelings' 2014, December 30). In the same survey, nearly 88% of the respondents also said they do not feel affinity to China, reflecting another deteriorating diplomatic situation between Japan and China. Similarly, another survey conducted by the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2014 also shows that Japanese respondents expressed the least affinity to South Korea among 5600 respondents representing 14 different countries (Cho 2014, November 9).

Reflecting the worsening diplomatic relations, the Korean news media started reporting that the popularity of the Korean Wave was declining rapidly in Japan although TV



Table 3 Monthly statistics on Chinese visitors to South Korea in March 2011–2017. *Source* Korea Tourism Organization (2017)

| Month/year | Visitors from China | Change in % | Foreign visitors in total |
|------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| March 2011 | 77,217 | | 342,690 |
| March 2012 | 84,041 | + 8.8 | 392,801 |
| March 2013 | 110,675 | + 31.7 | 406,272 |
| March 2014 | 149,484 | + 35.1 | 446,272 |
| March 2015 | 182,625 | + 22.2 | 492,069 |
| March 2016 | 206,418 | + 13 | 522,360 |
| March 2017 | 151,148 | – 26.8 | 495,052 |

dramas and K-pop contents were still popular in other Asian countries (Goo 2013, September 30; Kim 2013a, b, July 3). The diplomatic setback since 2012 has clearly affected the Korean Wave negatively and has posed challenges to the Korean pop entertainment industry as well as to the Korean government's efforts to use the Korean Wave as soft power public diplomacy.

In 2016, another diplomatic dispute erupted when the South Korean government announced that the country agreed to deploy a United States missile defense system or THAAD on its soil. With its long-range radar detection capability, the American missile defense system is designed to guard against possible attacks from North Korea, but it also can detect any missile-related activity in much of China. As a long-time nemesis to the U.S. military influence in the Asia-Pacific rim region, the Chinese government immediately denounced the news and alleged that the missile defense system was in fact targeted at encroaching into Beijing's sovereignty. As stated earlier, the Korean Wave has garnered its biggest success in China in terms of the total export volume in recent years. In fact, China is the largest market ahead of Japan for the Korean entertainment industry.

In the weeks following the Korean government's announcement of the U.S. missile defense system, the Chinese government cancelled several Korean cultural entertainment events, including fan meetings and promotional concerts featuring K-pop entertainers and TV stars in Beijing and Shanghai. K-pop stars had to cancel concert events in China after being denied visas. Popular South Korean TV dramas were removed from the Chinese websites (Diaz and Zhang 2017, April 7). Officials from the Chinese city of Qingdao cancelled their appearance at a cultural festival in their sister city of Daegu, Korea at the last minute, and explicitly requested Korean officials from Daegu not to attend a beer festival in Qingdao (Gibson 2016, August 3). Entertainment industry observers in Korea speculated that these cancellations were due to invisible but official pressures from the Beijing government. The Chinese news media also played their role, as some media outlets published commentaries and news articles to support Beijing government's ban on South Korean entertainers (Qin

and Choe 2016, August 7). The Chinese state media also made a concerted effort to criticize the Korean government's decision on the missile defense. State-funded *Global Times* stated in its editorial that friendly ties between China and South Korea were the reason that the Korean entertainment industry had succeeded in China. The editorial warned that the Korean Wave in China would inevitably wane if Seoul continued with the THAAD deployment ('Seoul to blame' 2016, August 4).

China's political retaliations against South Korea affected more than the Korean media entertainment industry. In March 2017, Chinese government authorities were reported to have banned tour groups from visiting South Korea (Gibson 2017, March 23; Premack 2017, April 10). As expected, South Korea's tourism industry has been hit hard as the number of Chinese visitors to Korea plunged by 27% in March compared to the same month the previous year (Korea Tourism Organization 2017) (Table 3).

Many tourist hotels and duty-free shops in Korea have seen a direct impact on their businesses from China's tourist boycott. The Korea Development Bank estimated that Korea's tourism and duty-free sectors could see up to an 80% decrease in sales, a loss up to \$11 billion if China maintained its crackdown (Gibson 2017, March 23). The biggest economic damage was inflicted on South Korean conglomerate Lotte, which operates U.S. Walmart-style retail stores across China. In 2016, Lotte supplied the land for the U.S. missile defense system in Korea. Since the deployment of the U.S. missile defense system, Chinese regulators have temporarily closed 75 Lotte stores in China, citing inspection failures (Diaz and Zhang 2017, April 7). According to the Korean government sources, Lotte has lost \$180 million in China due to the closures of its retail stores.

RQ3: Available options for the Korean cultural industry and the government to sustain the popularity of the Korean Wave

Most research pointed out that the Korean Wave is a vibrant cultural force and predicted the cultural phenomenon will continue to dominate the Asia-Pacific



countries and the rest of the world (see Shim 2011; Kim Hogarth 2013; Nye 2009, November 10). However, Korean media sources (see Goo 2013, September 30; Kim 2013a, July 3) are reporting that the popularity of Hallyu has been waning or stagnant at best since 2012. Several Asian governments regard the success of the Korean Wave as a form of cultural imperialism threatening their domestic cultures and entertainment industries. Legal and trade barriers against the Korean cultural products in these countries have a negative impact in commercial sales of the Korean Wave products and tourism revenues in South Korea.

To sustain the popularity of the Korean Wave, both Korean government and private cultural entertainment industry practitioners should seek to find new approaches to soft power public diplomacy from its traditional one-way distribution of the Korean cultural products to a more influential and sustainable two-way communication method. For example, Korean drama producers and filmmakers must find ways to navigate protective trade barriers set by foreign governments by co-financing or co-producing Korean TV dramas, films, and K-pop music products with each host nation's local actors, performers and production crews. Specifically, Korean media giant CJ Entertainment & Media has produced dozens of TV dramas in China and Vietnam after the company signed co-financing and co-production agreements with its foreign counterparts (Song 2015, June/July). These co-produced TV dramas typically cast both Korean and the partnering country's local actors and production crews. In addition, each drama episode features both Korea and the respective partnering country as filming locations. Following a similar formula of international cooperation, other Korean entertainment companies such as Chorok Bam Media, Showbox, and NEW Entertainment also partnered with Chinese financiers or entertainment companies in an effort to co-produce and co-distribute TV dramas, films and K-pop products in China (Joo 2015, December 9). According to Chinese and Vietnamese trade and legal provisions, TV dramas, films and pop music contents produced from the bilateral collaborations are considered domestic cultural products in these countries. Consequently, the Korean entertainment producers hope to bypass legal and trade restrictions on imported foreign cultural products in these countries. While the number of Korean actors who starred in TV dramas and films made in other countries is increasing, the number of Korean drama and film directors who have joined Chinese and Vietnamese media production companies to produce a variety of miniseries TV dramas is increasing as well (Korea Creative Content Agency 2017b). The nationalities of K-pop idol band members are also getting more diversified. In 2016, an idol band "Space Girls," which consists of 12 Korean and

Chinese teenaged girls, debuted in Korea and China. The "Sino-Korean K-pop" idol band was created after two entertainment management companies in Korea and China agreed to launch a series of joint K-pop projects (Kim 2015, December 21).

During the late-1990s and early 2000s, Korean films such as "My Sassy Girlfriend," "Joint Security Area," and "OldBoy" have garnered successful box office profits in South Korea and several Asian countries. Over the last decade, however, Korean films have seen little success in overseas film markets. Many point to overreliance on stale and repeated themes, including violent gangster fights and horror, as the reasons for lukewarm reactions from the foreign audiences. In this respect, the Korean filmmakers must strive to create more creative plots and experimental genres of films to appeal to global audiences. Although the Korean films still enjoy a large cult following in other countries, the success of the K-film industry is considered relatively insignificant in terms of total export volume compared to that of Korean TV dramas and K-pop music. As shown in the continued successes of the Korean TV dramas, Korean filmmakers should strive to co-finance and co-produce their future films with other Asian business partners to stay competitive in the international film markets.

During the last decade, K-pop's success has been impressive as seen by Psy's global smash hit "Gangnam Style" in 2012. The export volume of K-pop to Asian countries shows a steady growth over the years. However, the K-pop entertainment industry is considered a niche market success story because it depends largely on enthusiastic and cohesive young fans sharing similar cultural tastes. Although the popularity of Korean pop idol bands is often characterized as a remarkable global cultural phenomenon, the influence of the K-pop is merely visible within the Korean and Asian immigrant communities in North America and Europe ('Inconvenient truth' 2013, August 1). For example, few Americans know about or have listened to K-pop except for Psy's "Gangnam Style." Another criticism of K-pop centers on a factory-style of training thousands of teenage idols and their cookie-cutter performances with little variations (Choe 2013, August 9; Seabrook 2012, October 8).

To sustain and spread K-pop to these regions of the world with a relatively low level of cultural proximity, both Korean government and private cultural entertainment industry must work together to promote mutual cultural exchange programs using Korean pop music. For example, Korea's national TV broadcaster KBS has been sponsoring K-pop concerts and other cultural events overseas by featuring both Korean and host nation's pop musicians. A Korean cable TV channel Mnet has hosted annual "Mnet Asian Music Awards" or "MAMA" to bring global K-pop



fans together and enable them to communicate beyond the TV screen, through online, mobile and various other platforms ('Asian Music Awards' 2015). Held in different Asian cities, including Macau, Singapore, and Hong Kong since 2010, the global K-pop award ceremony has been broadcast simultaneously to Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania. In 2014, the MAMA featured more than 50 Korean businesses as official program sponsors, advertising a wide range of consumer products from women's cosmetics and designer clothing to Korean foods to global audiences (Song 2015, June/July).

Conclusion

The success of the Korean Wave or Hallyu is summed up as a rare cultural phenomenon. Originating in China and Japan, and spreading gradually across Southeast Asia and other continents, the Korean Wave is largely attributed to a successful formula of collaborated efforts between the Korean government and the private Korean cultural entertainment industry. Some scholars (see Hong 2014; Nye 2009, November 10; Nye and Kim 2013) suggest that the Korean government's proactive role in investing to invigorate the Korean cultural entertainment industry since the late-1990s as a key ingredient for the remarkable success. Some scholars (Hong 2014; Kim 2017) even argued that the Korean Wave is a "government-supported industry" which will eventually help promote South Korea's international standing and national image. On top of the state-driven initiatives, independent private cultural entertainment producers joined forces and created unusually successful Korean cultural products that appealed to global audiences. The initial objective for this collaborative effort was humble. The target audiences with whom the Korean government and the Korean entertainment producers wanted to engage were not those who live in the industrialized West. Many countries in which the Korean Wave has flourished include non-Western, developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. In this respect, the Korean Wave is sometimes referred to as an Asian reaction to Western or Hollywood's soft power hegemony (Kim Hogarth 2013).

After two decades of success, however, the Korean Wave is at a crossroads; can the Wave continue to expand its influences and impact on global cultural scenes and media marketplace? Overproduction or overuse of stale themes and formats, together with inconsistent production quality controls may precipitate the decline of the Korean Wave. Trade barriers and diplomatic frictions between South Korea and its Asian neighbors may continue to pose serious challenges to the sustainability of the Korean Wave. In particular, uneasy Korea-Japan bilateral diplomatic ties have threatened the popularity of the Korean

Wave in Japan. According to several Korean media reports, Japanese citizens who once were enamored with Korean pop entertainment products are losing their interest in the Korean Wave (Kim 2013a, July 3). This is indeed a stark signal to the Korean government and the entertainment industry as to the viability of their public diplomacy efforts using cultural soft power. In short, the Korean Wave cannot be sustained without concerted foreign diplomacy efforts by the Korean government. During the 2012 diplomatic conflicts over the territorial dispute between South Korea and Japan, Korean Wave stars, particularly K-drama actors, became victims of anti-Korean attacks. As anti-South Korean sentiment grew in Japan, once highly popular Korean TV dramas and idol singers were abruptly banished from Japanese TV channels.

A similar diplomatic dispute between China and South Korea presented a quagmire in 2016, when the Korean government approved the deployment of a U.S. missile defense system on its soil. K-pop stars and actors became the scapegoats as Sino-Korean relations cooled down. A Chinese news outlet officially reported that China's state media regulatory agency has started curtailing South Korean artists' entertainment business activities, including fan meetings and concert tours in China (Kim and Yu 2016, August 2). China's blockade of the Korean cultural entertainment products was expanded further when Beijing placed economic sanctions, a hard power measure, by banning Chinese tour groups from visiting South Korea and closed down nearly 80 Lotte mart stores in China. The use of hard power as political punishment has been effective at least as a short-term measure in spreading a "chilling effect" to the entire Korean cultural entertainment industry doing business in China.

To compensate for this vulnerability, the Korean cultural entertainment industry should make concerted efforts to reinvigorate its TV dramas, films and pop music contents so the Hallyu soft power can continue to attract more audiences in China. At the same time, both the Korean government and the Korean cultural entertainment industry must devise new public diplomacy strategies to alleviate the so-called "cultural hostility" toward the Korean Wave and to promote a variety of human and cultural exchange opportunities between Korea and other countries. Exporting and distributing Korean TV dramas, films and pop music products to persuade and change people's attitudes toward Korea and its culture are short-term public diplomacy efforts. The latest efforts by the Korean entertainment industry to co-host K-pop concerts and festivals in several Asian and Western capitals, and to co-produce TV dramas, films and K-pop music with other Asian partners represent longer-term public diplomacy strategies using cultural and human exchanges.



Against the backdrop of fluctuating Korea-Japan diplomatic relations due to an unresolved territorial dispute and unpleasant memories of the past between the two countries, Korea's public diplomacy efforts should be intensified to break up the ongoing diplomatic cul-de-sac. There was one positive development: In December 2015, South Korean and Japanese governments reached a bilateral agreement in which Japan made an apology and promised an \$8.3 million payment to the surviving former sex slaves (Choe, December 28). Although the agreement was based more on political negotiations rather than legal settlements, this landmark diplomatic deal is expected to pave the way for improving bilateral ties between the two countries and may help reinvigorate the Korean Wave in Japan.

The cases described in this study reflect episodic but undeniable evidence that strained foreign relations between national governments can overshadow the success of soft power public diplomacy by non-governmental level players. The failures of state-level political and diplomatic dialogues in Northeast Asia have presented difficult challenges for the Korean entertainment industry despite its impressive successes over the last two decades. As evidenced by the effective state-private partnership in promoting the popularity of the Korean Wave overseas, the time has come for both the Korean government and the country's cultural entertainment industry to devise a more effective public diplomacy strategy that is less susceptible to state-level interventions from foreign governments.

For all the economic sanctions from China, the Korean Wave is expected to sustain its popularity and vigor due to a growing and passionate fan base in Southeast Asian countries. The Korean soft power will continue to expand its influence in other Asian countries slowly but steadily.

Last but not the least, the Korean government must realize that remarkable accomplishments through cultural soft power can easily be tarnished by failing foreign diplomacy and political disputes using hard power such as economic sanctions and trade barriers. Perhaps, the first step to remedy and reinvigorate South Korea's cultural soft power public diplomacy approach is to recalibrate the governmental foreign diplomacy agendas toward its neighboring China and Japan. In May 2017, South Koreans elected a new president, Moon Jae-in, who advocated more vigorous engagement with China and North Korea. President Moon also promised he would ease geopolitical tensions by negotiating with the U.S. and China over the controversial deployment of the U.S. missile defense system in South Korea ('South Korea's Moon' 2017, May 9). Before long, there may be a window of opportunity for China and South Korea to rebuild mutual trust through international dialogues and negotiations. The Korean Wave is indeed a relevant example, having shown its effectiveness in promoting mutual understanding between peoples

using cultural soft power. That is why the Korean Wave is becoming even more important in the 21st century in which many countries are still divided and separated by cultural, economic and geopolitical disputes.

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