

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

South Korea is one of the nation-states that succeed in utilizing its entertainment industry as a tool for soft power diplomacy by its infamous cultural phenomenon of *Hallyu* or also known as the Korean Wave. The term *Hallyu* was coined in the 1990s after the liberalization of South Korean media. The phenomenon of *Hallyu* is used to describe the sentiment shared among Asian countries such as Japan, China, Vietnam, Thailand and others that enjoy the Korean pop culture. The Korean Wave has started in the last two decades ago, however the turning point of K-Pop itself started in the past five to 10 years. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook Database, South Korea has become the 12th largest economy in the world and it is accredited towards its ability to utilize “soft power” as a foreign policy tool (Romano, 2018).

During the post-Cold War, South Korea began to reform its democratic government which was followed by the lightening in its control over the television censorship in 1987. Prior to that, the television show and music are strictly traditional and patriotic; no pop, American-influenced music allowed until a pop-rock band called Seo Taiji and Boys emerged on television. To this day, there are three powerhouse music agency that produce K-Pop groups which consist of SM Entertainment, JYP and YG Entertainment. These powerhouse music agencies have consistently and exponentially led the birth of *Hallyu* and sustained its growth and popularity in and abroad (ibid).

The growth of *Hallyu* also helped South Korea to boost the potential of market expansion of the Korean brands. Following the footstep of Japan, South Korea has made an incredible progress in establishing a high technology, industrialized nation with the popularization of Samsung, LG, Hyundai and Kia. Thus, South Korea is ranked among the

world leaders in the production of consumer electronics, smartphones and LCD television with annual exports worth 483 billion US Dollars with 15 South Korean companies are found in the list of Fortune Global 500. However, similar to its neighbor, Japan, South Korea is lacking in raw material or energy resources and the state is ranked as world's 10 largest energy consumers that depends on its imports of fossil fuel from overseas and therefore have to rely on the diversification of other resources (Schoettli, 2019).

The South Korean entertainment industry continues to thrive, following its agenda to conquer the market in the United States after their success in maintaining their foot in the Asia continent. In the recent years, there is a significant increase on the encouragement of soft masculinity among the global society to oppose the hyper-masculinity that is projected in the status quo. One of the main actors that helped the popularization of this phenomena is male artist of Korean pop music industry. Male Korean artist is infamous for their image as *kkotminam* (flower boys), which is portrayed to softer imagery in contrast to the hegemonic imagery of masculinity that believe male have certain expected gender roles to achieve social acceptance.

South Korea's popular boy band BTS is estimated to bring the country annual economic of 4.1 trillion Korean Won (KR₩) according to Hyundai Research Institute which is 26 times larger than the average medium-sized business in Korea that earned just KR₩ 159 billion in 2016. Their popularity can be measured through their growing number of Google searches and Youtube video counts and this recognition is expected to have a positive effect on the Korean economy by the increase of foreign tourists and export consumers. The research reported that BTS is responsible for attracting 796.000 foreign tourist annually to Korea since 2013. The group is also credited to the increasing sale of US\$1.1 billion every year that includes \$233.98 million worth of clothing, \$426.64 million worth of cosmetics and \$456.49 million worth of food (Kim E. , 2018).

Through its pop culture, South Korea is setting a new standard for men's beauty and fashion as its entertainment industry receiving popularity in the West. *Hallyu* is enabling the market expansion of male beauty products throughout the world. In September 2018, Chanel, one of the world-famous beauty and fashion brands, launched "Boy de Chanel" as its first men makeup line and have set its initial sale in South Korea. The reason why South Korea is chosen to become the first location of product release is because according to Lia Neophytou from GlobalData, 75 percent of men in South Korea claims to become a primary consumer to beauty and grooming treatment (Leigh, 2018).

During the old era, actors in international relation is assumed as genderless due to the idea that every individual is allowed to participate in the diplomacy and negotiation process. Compared to other disciplines, International Relations is one of the last fields that started to open up with the feminist perspectives (Wibben, 2004). However, through the emergence of the feminism and gender theory along with its development in the modern era, it becomes clear that international relation is actually "gendered". According to the feminism, women is traditionally constructed to fill in the role in private spheres, in contrast to men that belong to the public spheres. The mainstream gender role constructed in the society positioned women for reproduction activity and home-maker, whereas men is positioned for production activity and becomes the breadwinner. Traditional scholars of IR rarely use gendered term and it creates the assumption that the actors are genderless, although it is generally known as a male-dominated field.

Gender equality in today's era have showed progress and the idea of male domestication emerged, including in South Korea. Proven by its infamous TV reality show called *The Return of Superman*, which showcase the challenge that celebrity fathers faced in taking care of their children without the help of their wives and it portrays them doing house chores that is expected as women's role, such as cooking and feeding the children, bathing and changing their children's diaper along with sending and picking their children from school.

B. Research Question

Based on the explained research background, thus the author would like to explore the answer of “*Why South Korea promotes soft masculinity in its K-Pop product?*”

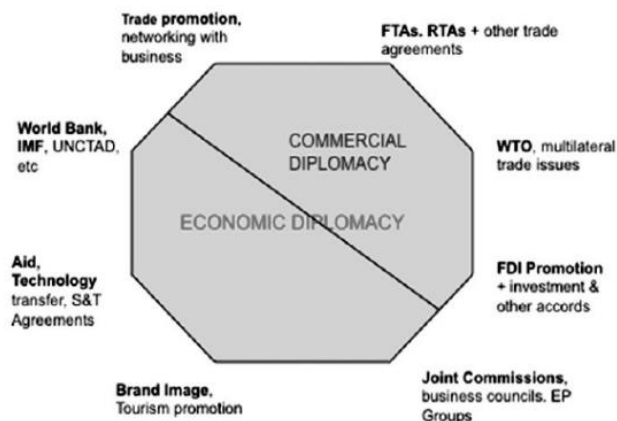
C. Theoretical Framework

In analyzing and assessing the phenomena at hand, the author would like to use appropriate concept and theory as a tool or instrument to answer the question mentioned in this undergraduate thesis, as follows:

1. Economic Diplomacy

Kishan S. Rana and Bipul Chatterjee define that the origin of economic diplomacy is the exchanges of products and services between the resident of one habitations, regions, and city-states to another. Cohen and Westbrook (2002) found that the oldest documentation of economic diplomacy in its rudiment form is the commercial exchanges in Amarna Archives that was recorded between kingdoms of Middle Egypt in 1460-1220 BC and it is continued to spread and advanced over time. Throughout the world history, trade has become the initiative for inter-state relations and agreements, even to the extent of becoming the driving force of war and conquest. In his previous research, Rana illustrated an octagonal chart that shows the characteristics and differentiation of economic diplomacy and commercial diplomacy, as the following (Rana & Chatterjee, 2011):

Figure 1.1 Economic and Commercial Diplomacy



(Source: Kishan S. Rana, 2009)

However, Rana argued that there are four stages that are essentially practiced by states in the past 40 years for the implementation of economic diplomacy and these stages are interconnected with one and another, which are:

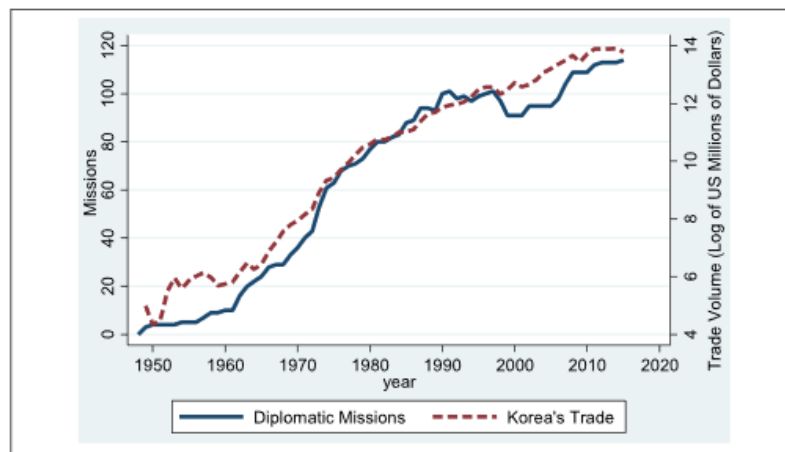
- **Promotion** of trade becomes the important key goal to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) that became a priority for governments to improve their trade earnings.
- **Networking** by mobilizing the supporters and participants of trade and investment promotion such as companies, bodies of industry, chambers of commerce, thinktanks and business schools.
- **Country Promotion** that connects all the economic activities, including inflow of foreign tourist, which is a key source of employment and foreign exchange earnings. This is closely related to a country's reputation and because of that countries invest in branding and re-branding their image.
- **Regulatory** involves the government, business bodies and public agencies into detailed management of the conditions under which trade takes place (ibid).

During the Cold War in 1950s, The Republic of Korea suffered due to the rivalry between the Northern and Southern part of the Peninsula. The state was in a poor and diplomatically isolated that led them into a dependency syndrome with the United States in terms of security, economic and diplomatic support. However, after its government democratization, the state began to rely on formal diplomatic relations by establishing embassies of South Korea in various countries and develop a new economic strategy which is called the export-led economic development strategy. The establishment of formal diplomatic relations allowed the expansion of trading relations that made the export-led economic development strategy possible. According to Pollins, the study of international

political economy recognized that nation-states use the tools of diplomacy to obtain their economic interest that includes the establishment and expansion of trading relations (Patterson & Choi, 2018).

The figure below shows that the trend of South Korean government to initiate diplomatic mission by establishing embassies have smaller gap with the trend of Korea's trade result from 1948 to 2015. As we can see from the data in Figure 1, by the end of 1980s, South Korea has maintained around 90 embassies in various nations.

Figure 1.2 South Korea's diplomatic missions and trade, 1948-2015



(Source: Patterson and Choi, 2018)

Thus, the establishment of embassies abroad plays a role to help the other stakeholders in economic diplomacy which consist of home enterprises and businessmen to enter the foreign markets at their host countries. The government bodies abroad are supposed to facilitate the expansion of export product market and this activity is not something that is peculiar as a state's foreign policy. Economic diplomacy is closely related with the nation-state brand due to the trade and investment destination profile that the country contributes to and is influenced by. Brand image of the home country becomes the core of the diplomatic activities. The most important key is to use a main idea that is powerful and simple which able to apprehend the country's unique quality.

2. Public Diplomacy

According to Joseph S. Nye, soft power is the ability to influence others in order to obtain advantages that a country wants through attraction rather than threat or sanction. He addressed that soft power lies within the country's culture, values and policies. The combination between soft power and hard power is called smart power strategy and it requires an important tool called public diplomacy. It was an essential tool in winning the cold war and it has a long history in promoting a country's soft power. Nye explained that soft power produces resources largely from the values expressed by an organization or the country itself through internal practices and policies (Nye, 2008).

Public diplomacy appears as the tool to mobilize these values towards the public of other countries by communication such as broadcasting, subsidizing cultural export, arranging exchanges and so forth. The message that the country's deliver through this public diplomacy plays an important role in building the soft power. The broadcasted value has to be attractive to bring the public's interest or otherwise the soft power will be failed to produce. Quoted from John Arquilla, "in today's global information age, victory often depends not on whose army wins, but on whose story wins." It emphasizes the importance of communicating a favorable global narrative in order to acquire soft power (ibid).

The export of Korean pop culture has contributed significantly to the growth of the national economy of South Korea. The popularity *Hallyu* in general gained from the global society is a great example of how a country proliferate its contemporary culture into "soft power" as a foreign policy. In addition to the global purchase of music, merchandise and concert tickets, *Hallyu* is also responsible in increasing tourism and other products of the country such as culinary, beauty and cosmetics, fashion industry and others. At the foundation of cultural diplomacy there is soft power. In order to create positive opinions and associations to the country, government and non-governmental actors must cooperate to mobilize their cultural resources such as cultures and values in the international sphere.

The involved stakeholders in this case is distinguished into the position of state in this affair is as the regulator of the creative economy and the agent of norm distribution is the K-pop male artist themselves that targeted the global society. The important factor that builds the positive opinions from the global society to the artist is how well the artists deliver their performance as well as their values and norms as an individual. As Joseph Nye argues that soft power can only be built if the value distributed is favorable towards the audience. According to the survey of The Soft Power 30 in 2018, South Korea is ranked 20 with the score of 62.75 (McClory, 2019). The previous statement could prove that soft masculinity promoted by South Korea received positive opinions and flourish the growth of the market even more because it represents certain part of the society that agree to the value that they commoditize.

According to The Foreign Policy Centre, in public diplomacy there is a hierarchy of impacts that can be achieved (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing, 2002):

- Increasing people's familiarity with one's country (making them think about it, updating their images, turning around unfavorable opinions)
- Increasing people's appreciation of one's country (creating positive perceptions, getting others to see issues of global importance from the same perspective)
- Engaging people with one's country (strengthening ties –from education reform to scientific co-operation; encouraging people to see us as an attractive destination for tourism, study, distance learning; getting them to buy our products; getting to understand and subscribe to our values)
- Influencing people (getting companies to invest, publics to back our positions or politicians to turn to us as a favored partner)

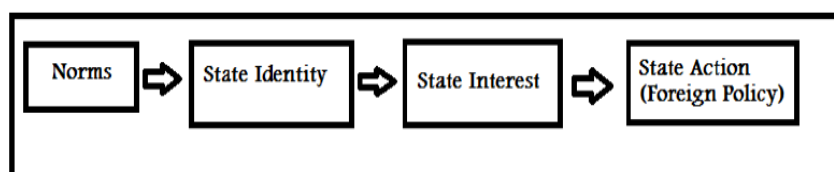
3. Constructivism

The first academician that introduced the term of constructivism in International Relations is Nicholas Greenwood Onuf through his book "World of Our Making" in 1989

where he wrote that “social facts” are made by human action which is considered as a phenomenon of human condition (Behraves, 2011). Since then, the theory continues to develop. One the most famous constructivism scholars, Alexander Wendt through his article “Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics” argued that the state action is a process of interaction and learning and institution, instead of influenced by structure (anarchy and the distribution of power) as the major stream of thoughts in international relations theorize, such as the liberals and realists. He stated that a fundamental principle of constructivist social theory is that people act toward objects, including other actors, according to the meaning that the objects have for them (Wendt, 1992).

Constructivism emphasizes on “intersubjective understanding and institutionalized norms, ideas, beliefs and values” which guide the international politics. Thus, the actors are not only state but expands into international organization, non-governmental organization, individual and others because idea and norm could be distributed from anywhere. The world is constantly changing because ideas and norms change over time, therefore the international relations is dynamic and is not permanent as contrary to what realism and liberalism believe. The adopted norm, idea, value and belief will shape the identities of the actors. The identity of the actor will influence their interest. Actor’s interest will eventually become the reasoning of a certain act or behavior that they took. However, when a social construct has been maintained, actors can also deconstruct the norm, value, idea and belief that was adopted. In this research, the author will use State Identity by Maxym Alexandrov as one of the constructivism models to explain how the norm and values could shape the behavior of the state.

Figure I.3 Model of Constructivism

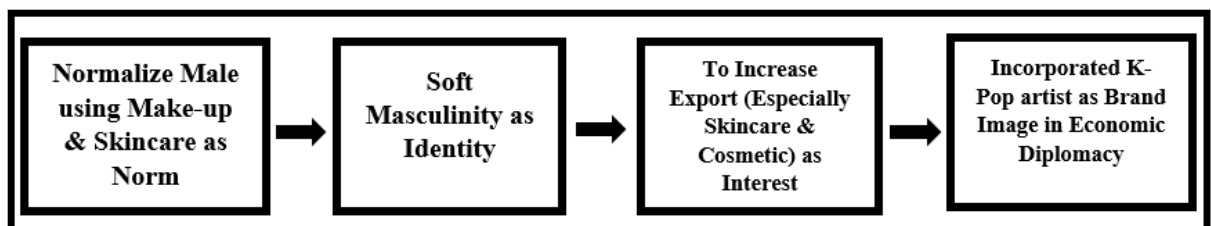


(Source: Maxym Alexandrov, 2003)

The K-Pop male figures have constructed a new imagery of masculinity through their marketing strategy. When people feel represented by the artist, there will be a connection and it will become the stimulus towards the fans to care about the artist. Most of the South Korean entertainment industry has utilized the globalization and the internet to connect with fans globally. The K-Pop artists are given the social medias as platform to share their videos and pictures as well as messages regularly towards their audience to project an image whom the fans can relate to like a close friends or relatives.

This strategy works as communication and networking of a “virtual community” that involves the fans to deepen their emotional identification with the artists which will generate positive opinions. This leads into the manifestation of feelings that will create dedication from the fans towards the idols. The transfer of culture and values from idols to fans is clearly visible in the fandom culture. There is an underlying message that each artist sends toward their audience which includes the shaping of perspective and lifestyle due to the constant communication between them. The implementation of the theory of constructivism in this study case is as below:

Figure 1.4 Implementation of Constructivism Model to South Korea's Soft Masculinity



1. **Norm:** The society of South Korea has normalized the idea of male using make-up which is seen as abnormal in the hegemonic masculinity perspective that will lead into the questioning of one’s masculinity and even his sexuality. Make-up is considered as women’s thing and due to its relevancy to femininity, men who wear make-up is assumed to be less manly or even gay. However, in South Korea, it is not an oddity to encounter

men who wear make-up on the street. South Korea is considered as a trendsetter in men's beauty culture. Due to the culture of lookism in South Korea, people are looking up to the celebrities for their appearance. K-Pop stars and their progressive way in defining masculinity opens up the acceptance towards what it means to be a beautiful man and how the society should react to it. During the 1980s, this was not the norm. Male aesthetic in South Korea is defined with suits, luxury watches and a traditional male look. They were portrayed as tough guys in gangster and detective films and dramas. However, there is a shift in norm when K-Pop started to gain popularity in the society (Asher, 2018).

2. **Identity:** The norm of normalizing male's consumption to skincare and cosmetic then allows the transition of identity from hegemonic masculinity to soft masculinity that allows the freedom of men's expression through their appearance. The imagery of pretty boy and gentle male in the media, especially through K-Pop and K-Drama has influence the way general public views masculinity. Before the K-Pop male artist who breakthrough the industry with their unique appearance that involves make-up and fashionable clothes, the masculinity of South Korean male is still rigid and rely on the idea that being masculine have to be owning "muscle", as they are required to go through mandatory military service. Soft masculinity is emancipating men from the idea of becoming less manly or categorized as homosexual when they pay more attention towards their appearance.

Figure 1.5 Members of EXO, a famous K-Pop group, getting their makeup done



(Source: SM Entertainment Co.)

3. **Interest:** Previously, beauty market is exclusive for women to fulfil their needs to look beautiful and rarely create male's product. This progressive way of viewing what it means to be masculine, allowing market diversification and create market opportunity for male's beauty product in the country to fulfil the market demand.
4. **State Action:** Seeing the opportunity, the skincare and cosmetic companies hire K-Pop male artists to become their brand ambassador that fit into their brand personality and therefore the K-Pop male artist becomes the frontliner of the soft masculinity imagery. The male artists are portraying gentle and kind behavior along with good appearance that symbolize their image as *kkotminam*. The government also started to invite K-Pop artists to its diplomatic meetings. Such action is deemed necessary due to the influence of K-Pop popularity abroad and the artists are utilized as supporting role in the diplomacy to introduce South Korean culture.

Figure I.6 K-Pop Artist in Diplomatic Meetings. Left: EXO-CBX at Korea-China Economic and Trade Partnership Opening Ceremony in Beijing, 2017. Right: EXO at Dinner Banquet in the Blue House with Donald Trump, 2019.



(Source: YONHAP NEWS)

4. Soft Masculinity

In response to a talk show by Steve Harvey in 2017, Eddie Huang wrote an article in New York Times about his life experience being an Asian-American man. He wrote “every Asian-American man knows what the dominant culture has to say about us. We count good, we bow well, we are technologically proficient, we’re naturally subordinate, our male anatomy is the size of a thumb drive and we could never in a thousand millenniums be a threat to steal your girl.” In his article, he conveyed his feeling as an Asian minority in

America that was portrayed in a stereotype that emasculate the male in his race as Asian (Huang, 2017).

In the status quo, the being masculine means that you should not pay attention to your appearance because caring about fashion or makeup is woman-like and this is restricting freedom of expression towards male. The restrictive practice of masculinity which is often called toxic masculinity can inflict psychological damage towards a certain individual and even create a gender problem. Men in history have been portrayed as this one-dimensional figure that is aggressive, domineering, unemotional due to the gender roles that have been taught in the society. However, there are different dimensions toward the imagery of masculinity. There are males that acquire feminine qualities but still claimed their gender as males. For long, the society has labeled male with femininity as “gay”, “trans” or “queer” and stigmatize them as lesser than a man.

The concept of masculinity is closely related with the word muscle, which means physical power or to accomplish by strength according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary. The etymology for masculine derived from the Latin word of *masculus* or *masculus* that means having the appropriate qualities of the male sex, mentally and physically and also related to the words manly, virile and powerful. The association of masculinity with power allows the marginalization and subordination of female. The Latin word *femininus* in its literal meaning is “to suck” and the characteristic of female is represented as the sex that bears children, as opposed to male that is positioned as a husband and a father that become the protector and provider in a family. Hegemonic masculinity is designed to justify the dominance of men over women that validate the patriarchal system in the society.

Soft masculinity is the concept of male ways of treating other people in a more subtle and gentler way (Louie, 2017). It also implies to the concept of masculinity that focuses less on physical power and strength which is attributed to male traits. This construction of

masculinity portrays lack of aggressiveness and dominance of men over women significantly. Yoo Sang-Cheol along with his co-authors in their book, *The Secret of Hallyu*, argue that the key for South Korea’s regional success is the “uniqueness” of their popular culture. This argument is based on the commercial success of South Korean drama, *Winter Sonata*, that highly influenced the Country’s industries of entertainment and tourism that contributed to US\$2.7 billion in total from Japan-South Korea economic activity (Yoo, 2005). In the modern era, soft masculinity is marketable due to the increased buying power of women. It is seen as desirable among women because this concept of masculinity give women the sense of power as it does not see femininity as a sign of weakness and vulnerability. As the following is a table that shows the comparison of hegemonic masculinity and soft masculinity in characteristic wise.

Table I.1 Table of Comparison between Hegemonic Masculinity and Soft Masculinity

Indicator	Hegemonic Masculinity	Soft Masculinity
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscular, buffed body • Tanned skin • Defined facial feature • Thick facial and body hair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean, sculpted body • Fair skin • Soft facial feature • Lack of facial and body hair
Mentality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of emotion • Dominant • Aggressive • Focus on physical strength 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More emotional • Less dominant • Gentle • Focus on intelligence and mental strength

Male Korean pop figures surfaced in the scene of entertainment industry and trademarked to dress well, have a delicate features and beautiful skin, wearing makeup and even to the extent of undergoing beauty surgery (Lovley, 2018). More to that, soft masculinity portrays male to be emotional, nurturing, and non-aggressive. According to Sun Jung, the norm of soft masculinity emerged after the appearance of Bae Yong Joon, an actor

from a drama called *Winter Sonata* (2002), which was a ground-breaking drama that became popular in other neighboring East Asia countries along with Southeast Asia countries that also happened to be the start of Korean wave phenomena. The author explained that soft masculinity in the South Korean culture is heavily influenced by the trans-cultural amalgamation of the traditional concept of masculinity in South Korea called *seonbi* that is heavily influenced by the *wen* masculinity of Chinese Confucianism, *bishonen* of Japan and metrosexual masculinity by the global society (Jung, 2011).

Figure I.7 Portrayal of Soft Masculinity by K-Pop Idol



(Source: BBC, 2018)

The exposure that these Korean male artists received within the global media recently is undoubted and there is an interesting visual that attached to them that distinguish them to artists from the other part of the world. They seem to be projecting a new image towards the traditional idea of masculinity and become the frontliner of the trend in shifting the perspective that you can wear make-up and flashy clothes and still be a man. Through the platform that they utilize, these male artists show that they can be vulnerable and show

emotions like crying and hugging their male friends without being afraid. For long the global society has conformed to the toxic masculinity by repressing gender roles that men should not have feminine qualities which is dangerous towards men and can affect women and larger society. South Korea entertainment industry has shown that they are trying to challenge the toxic masculinity by countering it with *soft masculinity* which allows men to express themselves freely.

D. Hypothesis

In addressing the research question, based on the research background and theoretical framework stated above, South Korea promotes soft masculinity in its K-Pop product because the country is utilizing the uniqueness of soft masculinity as its brand image to enhance its economic diplomacy, especially for skincare and beauty product export, through their platform of public diplomacy.

E. Research Methodology

The research methodology that the author applies to explain why South Korea is promoting soft masculinity through its public diplomacy are as follow (Babbie, 2011):

1. Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis that will be examined is South Korean government as the subject that will be analyzed (dependent variable) and the unit of explanation in this thesis will be the driving factors of why South Korea promotes soft masculinity (independent variable).

2. Data Collection Method

The collection of the data is analyzed through descriptive qualitative methodology obtained from secondary source. The data collection from the secondary source consisted of the literature review from previous relevant research on the topic of masculinity in South Korea and its economic and public diplomacy that were written in various book, journal

repository and news sources. The author gathered the existing data and comparing data from different sources to create a comprehensive and systematic analysis.

F. Purpose of the Research

The objective of the author in this research is to explain the reason behind why South Korea promotes soft masculinity through their means of public diplomacy as opposed to hyper-masculinity that the society has adopted. Furthermore, through this research the author would like to show the readers a new perspective in seeing the transfer of value from public figure towards their audience and how that might influence the society. The author sees that this research is significant to understand the importance of awareness towards gender issue and how people-to-people diplomacy could greatly contribute towards nation-state and the global community in achieving global development.

G. Writing System

In order to create a comprehensive and systematic analysis for this scientific writing, the author would lay out a framework of the research in clear outline. The following are the description of the outline:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter consists of the background and the significance of research, research question, theoretical framework, hypothesis, research methodology.

Chapter II: Masculinity in South Korea: Then and Now

This chapter gives the insight on the history of the emergence of soft masculinity in South Korea and how the society adopts the norm and value.

Chapter III: The Impact of Soft Masculinity to South Korea Exports

This chapter gives the insight on how South Korea utilize soft masculinity as a brand image to promote its local brand to the global market and also analyzes how it affect the trend in South Korea's export activity.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the undergraduate thesis to give an end and conclusion to the scientific writing.