

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background

Popular culture or pop culture, phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given culture, has been a part of the human race's life for over a century now. In the west, pop culture emerged into the global mainstream of the late 20th and early 21st century which was heavily influenced by mass media. As a fact, Popular culture has strong penetrating power and has been present in all countries of the world today. There are many kinds of pop culture that we can find daily such as entertainment products; movies, films, dramas, and music, to name a few. The specific popular culture products every people might commonly aware of are *Hollywood* from the United States, *Bollywood* from South Asia, Latin America's *Telenovelas*, and some pop culture products that had dominated Asia and the International world for quite long, *Anime*, *Manga*, and J-Pop Music, from Japan. Popular culture also can be perfect example of element or part of a nation's diplomacy tool that wants to reach its national interest.

In the late 1990s, Japan had world domination with its popular culture product such as Japanese movies, anime, manga, and J-Pop music. It has considered being the most influential Asian pop culture from the perspective of the International world; and South Korea was not excluded from this impact. To cope with the rampant wave of Japanese media in South Korea, the Ministry of Culture submitted a request for a substantial budget increase in 1998, which allowed the development of some 300 departments of the cultural industry in universities and colleges across the country. The Ministry of Culture has made this move for the sole purpose of developing its cultural products and exporting those products

across Asia and the world; taking notice of Japan's success in gaining worldwide prominence through its cultural exports.

Whereas around a similar time, South Korea was also among the countries badly impacted by the Asian financial crisis. The financial crisis revealed a lot of economic vulnerabilities and corruption problems in South Korea. Soon after, several large-scale South Korean firms collapsed, pushing interest rates up and foreign investors out of the region. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expected to provide US\$ 55 billion to South Korea as a bailout package. This point in history illustrates the fragility of the South Korean economy at the moment, irrespective of its renowned technological exports, whether cars or gadgets.

However, the government's investments towards cultural industry departments in 1998 will soon contribute to saving the country's economic downfall, with its popular culture we know today as Korean Wave or *Hallyu*. The South Korean government's investments in the cultural industry have sparked what is now known as Hallyu, also popularly known as the Korean wave, which refers to the viral increase in global popularity of Korean popular culture such as Korean soap operas (K-Dramas), Korean food, Korean language, and the current most popular one, Korean popular music or we better known as K-Pop.

More than any other international music industry, K-Pop has been deliberately intended to elevate South Korea and its culture onto the world stage (Romano, 2018) and it has become the international face of South Korea thanks to an extremely regimented, coordinated production system and the support given by the government. K-Pop music also has arguably been special element that plays a very prominent role in South Korea's bargain position. Due to today, K-Pop music has not only been a phenomenon that is popular among Asian countries but also can be accepted as a new trend of Pop Music in all parts around the globe.

The global rise of K-Pop has shown by the success of a K-Pop star who were first boomed through his single *Gangnam Style* back in 2012, Park Jae Sang or better known as PSY. Released July 15, 2012, *Gangnam Style* quickly charted at the top of South Korea's music charts, as one would anticipate from PSY a rapper boasting nationwide success over the previous decade (St.Michel, 2017). But nobody expected anyone abroad especially western audiences to notice, not even the superstar himself, who then humbly admitted that *Gangnam Style* success was “an accident”. PSY claimed *Gangnam Style* was unusual – he would describe his single that went viral as an accident – that do not happen often. After him went viral in 2012, the *Gangnam Style* music video has been seen over 3.7 billion views, as of September, 2020, on social media platform; YouTube and the K-Pop star was invited to Harvard University in Boston on May 9 2013, to discuss its success (Levine, 2013).

Before *Gangnam Style*, K-Pop groups Girl's Generation and Wonder Girls attempted U.S. crossovers, with English songs and Nickelodeon specials. However, by accident, PSY achieved success beyond any of them. Bernie Cho, the head of Korean digital music export agency DFSB Kollektive said; “*he proved that a contagious worldwide hit wasn't contingent on singing a song entirely in English*” (St.Michel, 2017). Yet for the entirety of its achievements, *Gangnam Style* lacks one crucial milestone: It never really bested Billboard's Hot 100 chart. *Gangnam Style* was K-Pop's enormous crossover event in America and around the globe, truly, yet it never got the one trophy that would have impressed on the minds of many. And that's due to Billboard didn't count YouTube plays as chart placements in 2012.

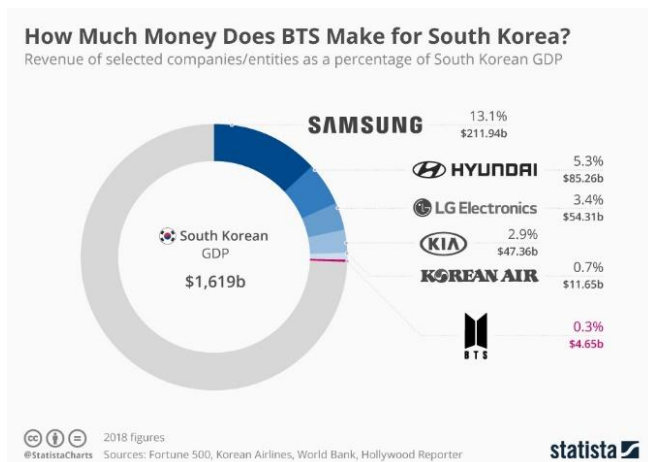
Similar to the PSY's "unintended" phenomenal hit, recently, another K-Pop act boy group *Bangtan Seonyeondan* or better known as BTS pulling off successful treks around America—and become an undeniable global phenomenon in today era remarked with two songs reaching the Billboard Hot 100, which one of the song so-called *Mic Drop* was composed and created in collaboration with American musician Steve Aoki, making it as first South Korean K-Pop act whose Korean based song with a prominent success without them having to give up the Korean lyrics and change it into a dominant-language such as to full-English to draw American and or more wide range of audience's attention. Regarding that, Steve Aoki also addressed that he felt amazed that the song that was 90% Korean based, which a non-dominant language could globally renowned. BTS really does not need to speak the dominant language to get into people's minds and hearts, because the world just went along with them today. He then added that he hopes with BTS is breaking such odds, it could open it up to all other artists who might not have had a chance just because they do not speak English or sing in English. (Kelley, 2019).

Also, BTS' major appearance at the American Music Awards, and at the same time, won the award of *Top Social Artist* at the Billboard Music Awards (BBMAs) in 2017 beating out Justin Bieber's position as a solo artist who has been the winner of *Top Social Artist* category at the Billboard Music Awards (BBMAs) for six times in a row since 2011 - 2016, then their following "comeback" to BBMAs in the following two years along with the awards they achieved at the same category as the previous one, plus *Duo/Group* category in 2019, was alleged as one of the crucial turning points of this Korean Superstar success. It was a sign of recognition that a team consists of seven from South Korea can compete in the upper echelons of world music, without being hindered by physical or language limitations. It was also a recognition not only of the group's prowess in attracting new fans

and new listeners, especially those who were before not a fan of K-Pop (Tamar, 2019).

Additionally, many of analysts have been observing that BTS's effect is not just confined to music, yet it is likewise exceptionally influencing its home country's economy and culture. Various of Institutes have provided data and results that show that the "BTS Effect" is contributing to South Korea's culture, economy, and industry in the accompanying specific focuses:

- 1) **Economic effect;** In December 2018, the Hyundai Research Institute (HRI) reported that BTS generates an estimated amount that will easily surpass the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics which reached ₩41.6 trillion (Asiae News, 2018). According to Statista's analysis of the 2018 company revenues report, BTS' contribution to South Korea's GDP is almost comparable with the Korean Air company.

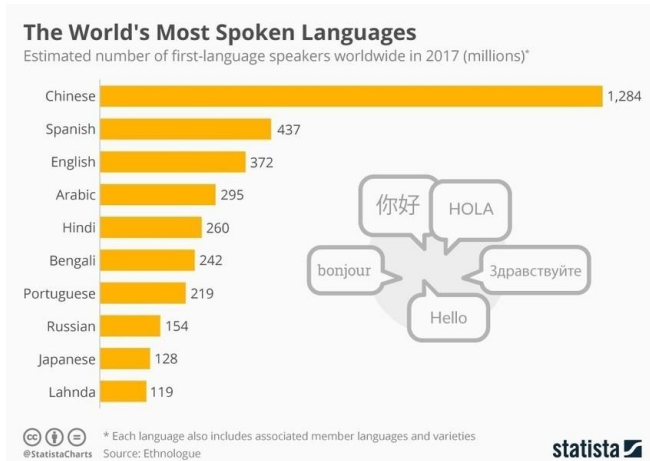


**Figure 1.1 Contributions to South Korea GDP by some of Large Companies and the K-Pop act BTS. (Statista, 2019)**

The Institute also claimed that BTS will generate an economic value of ₩41.8 trillion over the 2014 - 2023 period if the band continues to maintain its popularity (Yonhap , 2018). This is an impressive contribution since no K-Pop act was reported to bring such a huge economic effect in South Korea before. Korean soloist PSY (gained his global fame for his global viral song *Gangnam Style* brought economic value worth of ₩1 trillion while Korean actor Bae Yong Joon brought an economic value of around ₩3 trillion via his lead role in the famous K-Drama (Korean drama) *Winter Sonata* (the K-Drama was a mega huge hit in Asia). The fact BTS managed to surpass them is mind-blowing (SBS , 2018).

- 2) **Significant South Korea's tourism;** It was reported that in 2017, out of the 10.41 million people visitors from foreign countries that has visited South Korea, 7.6% amongst the visitors was impacted by BTS (The Investor, 2018). HRI likewise expressed that one in every thirteen foreign tourists visited South Korea in 2017 were believed to have chosen South Korea as their destination last year because of BTS (The Korea Herald, 2018). It is quite an uncommon case for any country's tourism sector to have a boost within the industry that is contributed by a specific group of people rather than sights or events.
- 3) **Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) significant growth;** According to the 2018 Global *Hallyu* Current Status, published by the Korea Foundation for Foreign Affairs and Trade (KF Chairman Lee Si Hyung) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as of December, it was reported that BTS lead a 22% increase of *Hallyu* fans worldwide in 2018 (Naver, 2019).
- 4) **The Promoter of Korean Language & Culture;** The World Economic Forum (a worldwide discussion for powerful business pioneers, International political pioneers, top financial specialists, and so forth) made a special report where they talked about BTS and globalization. BTS's global success is going against the

“cultural odds” because (1) American culture is the main global culture around the world (making English the global language) and (2) Korean is not even in the top 10 of the world’s most spoken languages, making their success even more astonishing.



**Figure 1.2 The World’s most spoken Languages (Statista, 2018)**

BTS are showcasing their Korean culture and language worldwide through their music and ideas fighting against all odds (Vanham, 2018), making the civic group Nation’s People Preserving the Korean Language chose BTS as the ‘Top Promoter of the Korean Language’ of 2018 for promoting and increasing the interest of the Korean language around the world (Yonhap, 2018).

With the multiple effects BTS has been created majorly in the past three years in which contributing for South Korea’s soft power diplomacy and its bargain position in the International community, BTS then recognized by their home country on October 2018, and received the fifth-grade *Hwagwan* Order of Cultural Merit at the ‘2018 Korean Popular Culture & Arts Awards’, officially signed them as the youngest recipient in history to receive the award

(Kelley Caitlin, 2018). Into the bargain, the famous weekly news magazine based in New York; TIME Magazine even called them the *Next Generation Leaders* and one of the ‘Most Influential People of 2019’, does them made unprecedented history as Korean people and as artists (TIME, 2018).

## **B. Research Question**

Based on the background above, this research is aimed to find out:

*“How does BTS contribute to South Korea’s economy and culture?”.*

## **C. Theoretical Framework**

### **Cultural Diplomacy**

To explain the existing problem, the author is using the concept of Cultural Diplomacy. The term Cultural diplomacy derived from two words; culture and diplomacy. ‘Culture’ is involving the result and effort of human cultivation towards the environment (SJ, 1984). While ‘diplomacy’ is an attempt conducted by a nation-state to fight for its national interests in the international community (Holsti, 1978). According to Joseph Nye, Culture is a set of values and practices that create meaning for society (Nye, 2004). It involves both high cultures such as literature, art, and education, which appeals to elites and popular culture that appeals more to the masses that arises from a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. Cultural diplomacy is a type of soft power which is meaning the ability to attract and co-opt through attraction rather than coercion. It indicates that the value of culture lies on its ability to become a preference and appeal for people in foreign countries.



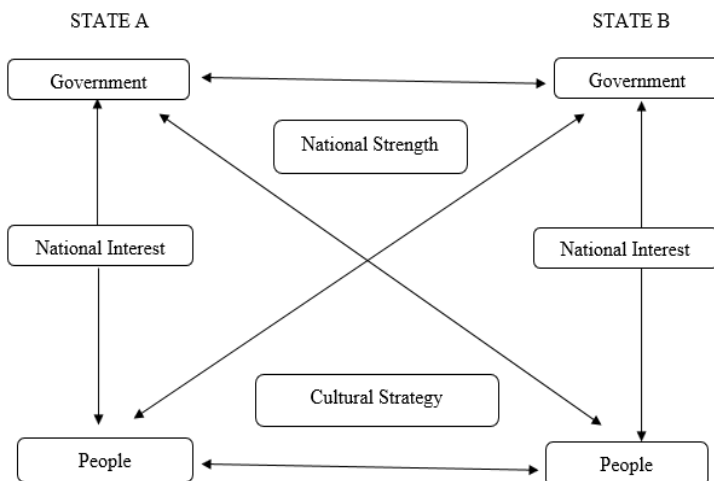
Joseph Nye regards to culture, political values, and foreign policy as the foundation of soft power, as well as a means of expressing soft power' attraction and penetration. Culture, as a kind of superstructure, has strong influence on a nation. Political values express the political ideals of a country and gain international recognition and legality. Meanwhile, foreign policy involves international ideals supported by a country and concrete actions, so that it becomes an import component of soft power. Political values are the core element, culture is the support, and foreign policy is the method. These elements are closely related and interacted. (Li Lin, 2017).

Cultural diplomacy is also an element of Public Diplomacy. Public diplomacy is a diplomacy that is enhanced by a wider society and culture, but at the same time, it helps to amplify and publicize that society and culture to the world in large (Lord, 2006). Cultural diplomacy has been referred to as “linchpin of public diplomacy” (Lord, 2006) because cultural activities could present the best of a nation. In this way, cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy are closely related. Cultural diplomacy is an attempt to regulate the international environment by make use of the cultural sources and achievements then advertise them to be known worldwide (Cull, 2008), and is also meant to be a two-way exchange medium. The two-way exchange is aimed to create a mutual understanding and thus a party could influence the targeted nation. Since a culture is a sphere of international relations in its own right as much as a tool of foreign policy, In the early 21st century, this notion of cultural diplomacy has been considered as one of the most predominant public diplomacies. This suggests that culture is beyond than just arts, but in its wide definition, it is a medium to promoting human development, encouraging intercommunity dialogue and understanding, building peace, and broadening education” (Kozymka, 2014)

In the world of cultural diplomacy, the implementer of cultural diplomacy is not restricted only to the government level. Aside from government, Non-governmental institutions, and individuals are also enabled to do so. Therefore, the pattern of cultural diplomacy between nations can occur between governments, a government directly target another country's people and vice-versa, or even between group of individuals or private sectors who are directly targeting the people of one nation. The main objective of conducting cultural diplomacy is to fulfill the general needs, influence public opinion, creating better understanding and to support a state's national interest by using its cultural resources and strategy. (Kartikasari, 2007). Also, it is important to note that, the private sector has a very predominant role to play rather than the government, because the government does not create culture, therefore, it can only attempt to make a culture known and define the impact this organic growth will have on national policies.

**Table 1.1****Scheme: Actor and Target of Cultural Diplomacy**

(Kartikasari, 2007)

**Information:**

To fight for its national interests, every nation always optimizes its national resources (national strength). In the form of utilization of culture, all national forces are engineered in a Cultural Strategy.

Based on the explanation above, it can be summed up that it is indeed plausible for any party to taking part or for being influential enough for such cultural diplomacy agenda. In this paper, the author will specifically analyze how the phenomenal K-

Pop group *Bangtan Seonyeondan* or better known as BTS as a non-state actor had an impactful influence on the culture and economy of its home country, South Korea, through this concept. As the band has reported giving contributions that every cultural diplomacy actor would wish to obtain as signs of them have succeeded in reaching national interests.

## **D. Hypothesis**

Using the concept of cultural diplomacy as the theoretical framework which the author has explained above, it can be hypothesized that BTS contribute to South Korea's economy and culture through;

1. The popularity of BTS, which can bring influence, and therefore enhance the spreading of *Hallyu*;
2. "BTS Effects" which contributes to the economic growth for their homeland, South Korea; and
3. The cultural elements that BTS showcases which attract more people to have an interest in Korean language and culture.

## **E. Research Method**

### **1. Level of Analysis**

Based on the research question proposed by the author, the unit of analysis in this thesis is on the individuals or small group level, or group to the state level, because the phenomenon explained in this research is vertical relations (from the very bottom stage to the upper stage); how a group of individuals within a country can contribute and give impact to its state's image and the state's economic profits (national interests).

### **2. Purpose of Research**

Since the research question is asking about what are the means and efforts of K-Pop acts BTS has been doing to contribute to South Korea's economy and culture, therefore the purpose of this

research is to describe how they conduct attempts that are questioned.

### **3. Data-collection Method**

The type of data that the author uses are data collection and information gathering; by a throughout and extensive reviewing of relevant sources (both printed and online) such as a book, journal, article, official website, online news, library research, reports and other wide variety of topics regarding the subject of this study.

### **4. Data Analysis Method**

In a method of analyzing the data, this thesis is carried out with a qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis is a method for examining social research data without having to convert them into a numerical format. The assessment of observation in this thesis is done by doing a content analysis, in which the evidence is provided from the result of analysis of mainly official speeches and relevant documents available.

### **5. Range of Research**

In order to avoid the wide scope of research that might lead the research from being too broad and becoming out of context, the research focus that the writer will explain in this mini-thesis is limited only to the topic in concerning the dynamics of Korean wave particularly since the biggest game-changing the K-Pop boy group BTS resulted in 2017 – 2020 in *Hallyu* world and how they start to positively influence their homeland South Korea in quite many sectors; such as economy, tourism, culture, and diplomacy. A more detailed discussion is in the outline below.

## F. Writing System

The following passage is the description of the Writing System:

- CHAPTER I** discuss the background of the problem, highlight the research question, the theoretical framework, the hypothesis, the research method, and the chapterization;
- CHAPTER I** describe the historical background of Korean Wave and K-Pop including the dynamics and the evolution, and how it is implemented by the government of South Korea as a mean in cultural diplomacy;
- CHAPTER III** describe *Bangtan Seonyondan* (BTS) as the subject in this study; including the emergence of the group in K-Pop industry, its philanthropy, the journeys and experiences as musician and beyond, and the achievements;
- CHAPTER IV** discuss and deliver more data on the actual attempts or efforts of used by BTS as means to contribute to South Korea's economy and culture and finally analyze them;
- CHAPTER V** a closing part of the paper which will wrap-up the whole discussions with the conclusions.