

*The HanPil (한필) Studies on Korea and the Philippines* is published electronically by the - University of the Philippines Korea Research Center. All papers included in the current volume underwent a double-blind peer review process. The *HanPil* is published annually.

Published by UP Korea Research Center  
Printed in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines  
Issue Editor        Jean Encinas-Franco, Ph.D.  
Managing Editor    Kyung Min Bae, Ph.D.  
Copy Editor        Pamela Jacar

Copyright © 2021 by the UP KRC and authors

All rights reserved, except that authorization is given herewith to academic institutions and educators to reproduce the articles herein for academic use as long as appropriate credit is given both to the authors and to this publication.

The views expressed in each paper are those of the authors of the paper. They do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the UP KRC, its Editorial Committee, or of the University of the Philippines.

**This publication was funded by the 2022 Korea Foundation Policy-oriented Research Project Grant (Reference No. APL-20210830-0283) of the University of the Philippines Korea Research Center (UP KRC).**

ISSN (Online) 2546-0234  
ISSN (Print) 2546-0226

UP Korea Research Center  
Address : University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines  
Email : [pkrc@up.edu.ph](mailto:pkrc@up.edu.ph)  
Facebook : [www.facebook.com/UPKRC](http://www.facebook.com/UPKRC)  
Website : <https://upkrkc.wordpress.com>





# HAN×PIL

STUDIES ON KOREA AND THE PHILIPPINES

VOL. 5 AUGUST 2021



**UP Korea  
Research Center**

필리핀국립대학교 한국학연구소



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>FOREWORD</b>  | i   |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>RESEARCH ARTICLES</b>   |     |
| <b>The Man in the North, the People in the South:<br/>The Two Koreas in Philippine Online News</b><br><i>Fernando Paragas, Ph.D., Bea Mae Caloyloy, &amp; Queenie Rose Chico</i> | 03  |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>From K-Pop Concerts to the Olympics: Scrutinizing the Role<br/>of Entertainment and Sports in Diplomatic Efforts</b><br><i>Erik Paolo Capistrano, Ph.D.</i>                   | 28  |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>ASEAN-ROK Cooperation on Regional Security in a Changing<br/>Strategic Environment</b><br><i>Herman Joseph S. Kraft</i>   | 58  |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>A Show of Soft Power: Korean Drama Crash Landing on You<br/>and Representations of Inter-Korean Relations</b><br><i>Michelle Camille Correa</i>                               | 74  |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>Book Talk: <i>Pachinko</i></b>  | 96  |
| <br>   |     |
| <b>NOTES OF CONTRIBUTORS</b>   | 124 |



## FOREWORD

The year 2021 was not quite what we expected. The pandemic continued to impact everyone's lives and decisions. If anything, the entire world slowly realized that it was now increasingly difficult to return to what the world was before the onset of COVID-19. The University of the Philippines' Korea Research Center continued its work despite the situation through webinars, online workshops, and conferences. The Hanpil Journal received thought-provoking papers. We worked with the authors and reviewers to provide the readers with current knowledge and research produced by students, academics, and individuals greatly interested in Korean studies in the Philippines. In this regard, we are bringing you the 2021 volume with much pride and enthusiasm for what is in store in the following pages.

*The Man in the North, the People in the South: The Two Koreas in Philippine Online News* by Fernando Paragas, Ph.D., Bea Mae Caloyloy, and Queenie Rose Chico provides a textual account of how two countries, still technically at war with each other, are represented in online news. Drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA), the paper finds that North Korea is mainly depicted through its leader, whereas South Korea is represented in collective terms or public mass. However, both are generally portrayed as countries perennially related to each other. The study has consequences beyond media text analysis and the political economy of news distribution, in which wire news reports dominate even in Philippine online news. For this reason, the authors argue, there is little context relevant to the Filipino audience beyond what the latter see in entertainment and lifestyle news about Korea.

Meanwhile, Erik Paolo Capistrano's *From K-Pop Concerts to the Olympics: Scrutinizing the Role of Entertainment and Sports in Diplomatic Efforts* examines three events detailing how South Korea employed its soft power resources to improve ties with North Korea. In 2018, the Moon Jae-In government's attempts to talk with North Korea gave fresh hope to the reunification discourse. Through the cult of celebrity lens and soft power theories, Capistrano's examination of two sports events and a concert demonstrated the possibilities and limitations of such spectacles in improving diplomatic relations. The author adheres

to previous arguments stating that while soft power resources bring vigor to diplomatic strategies, stark socio-economic differences between the two run deep and may have to be considered. In other words, soft power has to be carefully curated to be more acceptable to North Korea and complemented by long-term attempts to cooperate more substantially.

Indeed, South Korea's (Republic of Korea) heightened diplomatic efforts are also demonstrated in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations since 2010. According to Herman Joseph Kraft's paper, *ASEAN-ROK Cooperation on Regional Security in a Changing Strategic Environment*, the move was partly motivated by regional security concerns, particularly the United States and China's geo-political rivalry. He argues that under this situation, the ROK is positioning itself as "a middle power coalition revolving around cooperation between itself and ASEAN to mitigate the more egregious effects and implications of this strategic competition" (Kraft 2021, 60). However, the paper cautions that such a situation "requires both policy consistency on the part of the ROK, and strong cohesion among and the adoption of a common appreciation of the strategic situation by the ASEAN states" (Kraft 2021, 60).

To cap the research articles for this volume, another research on soft power focuses on a Korean drama that has entertained Filipinos in early 2020, in the early days of the pandemic. Michelle Camille Correa's analysis, *A Show of Soft Power: "Crash Landing on You" and Representations of Inter-Korean Relations*, uses Stuart Hall's idea of *representation* to explore how the drama depicted South and North Korea. She finds that the popular drama portrayed the South's economic and cultural superiority amidst visuals indicating the North as backward, whose young people are avid subscribers of the South's popular culture. Correa's work emphasizes that soft power is called such because cultural products are intensely political as they are hierarchical and inclusive. Ultimately, researchers must unravel and disclose what power relations seem natural in these soft power resources.

Finally, UPKRC paid homage to Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* in a webinar in which the panelists discussed the book and the drama that starred the famous actor Lee Min Ho. The rich insights and lively discussion of the panel are documented in this volume.

**Jean Encinas-Franco, Ph.D.**

*Issue Editor*





---

# **RESEARCH ARTICLES**

---

# **The Man in the North, the People in the South: The Two Koreas in Philippine Online News**

**Fernando Paragas, PhD**

*College of Mass Communication,  
University of the Philippines Diliman*

**Bea Mae Caloyloy & Queenie Rose Chico**

*College of Mass Communication,  
University of the Philippines Diliman*

## **Abstract**

This study explores how the two Koreas are individually reported, and represented in connection to each other, in Philippine online news reports. Informed by the critical discourse analysis framework, it draws data and constructs from the yearlong news coverage about North Korea and South Korea from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020 in outlets such as ABS-CBN News, Inquirer, and Rappler. The 518 articles essay the two Korea through plot motifs and actor tropes that characterize either nation-state to the readers. Based on the text and imagery in the news, North Korea is depicted as centralized and controlled by one man yet is constantly portrayed with uncertainty. South Korea, meanwhile, is illustrated as disciplined, diverse, and providing diversions beyond politics. It was shown to be in control of its situation, even with the gamut of its characters and interests. The Philippines, meanwhile, was the fifth wheel — after China and the US — with limited interactions with the two Koreas. Finally, The paper reveals how the Koreas and their relation to the Philippines are mediated by a few organizational and individual actors.

**Key Words:** South Korea, North Korea, Critical Discourse Analysis, Online News, Actors

## Introduction

In 2018, we conducted a study on how South Korea and its citizens were featured in Philippine news (Paragas, Chico, & Caloyloy, 2017). We focused then on local news, whereas in this paper we looked at international news. We found that news stories focused on people rather than on the country, with Koreans framed in economic sense as businesspersons. Crime also emerged as an additional frame as the news featured Koreans as victims or perpetrators. Thus, in this paper, we looked less at news frames and delved more deeply into the actors and their roles in the news. We discovered in 2018 that there was constant mention of South Korea in news about North Korea, and that there was paucity in the coverage of the Philippine geopolitical realignments then. Thus, in this paper, we examined more thoroughly how the countries are reported independent from or interconnected to each other, as well as how they are interrelated to others.

This research is informed by concepts in policy research, communication studies, and journalism. From policy research, we got the binary of state and non-state actors. State actors are individuals or organizations that directly assume the roles and responsibilities of governance whereas non-state actors are people or groups that are independent of government, but which may hold influence over it. From communication studies, we draw the notion of the corporate body which can be conceptualized in two ways: the unit as its own actor with its distinct personality and behavior or the unit as exemplified by actors with their own personalities and behaviors which then characterize the unit itself. Finally, from journalism studies, we draw the understanding of the roles of media not just as reporters but also as meta-sources of news.

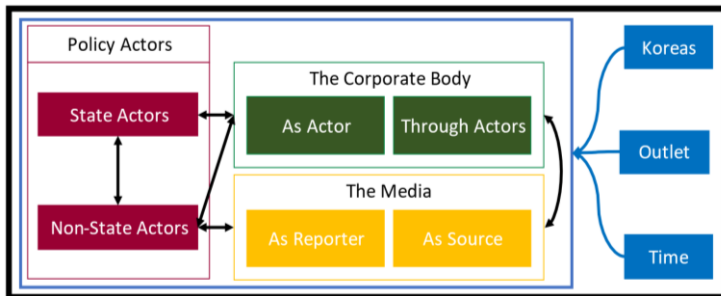


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## **The Country as Corporate Body**

The notion of the corporate body stems from the similar concept of corporate identity. Corporate identity is defined as the presentation of an entity to its stakeholders (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006). The key elements that construct corporate identity: corporate communication, corporate design, corporate culture, behavior, corporate structure, industry identity, and corporate strategy (Melewar, 2003, p. 198). The sum of these elements easily attributes body and personhood to an entity (Walenta, 2015). Thus, an entity is its own actor with a distinct personality and behavior. Burcio, Da Silva, & Alguiero, (2015) explored the multidimensional concept of country image and personality, elaborating that the country's image and personality can be viewed as a "set of descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs about a country" (p. 19) including its economic, political, and cultural characteristics.

## **Political and Cultural Contexts of the Two Koreas**

When tackling the political and cultural contexts of Korean societies, much emphasis is placed on the distrust of the two nations engendered by their opposing ideologies and deeply ingrained differences. The North Korean regime values extreme ideology of self-reliance (*Juche*) against foreign intervention and follows a highly centralized government system with a supreme leader at its core. Meanwhile, the South Korean regime has been increasingly focused on deepening democratization and civil society building (Park, 2019).

Although the two Koreas have starkly different political and economic systems, they share a high degree of ethnic homogeneity and cultural and historical experience (Chung & Broadbent, 2013). Oberdorfer & Carlin (2013) noted that the turbulent course of Korean history could be attributed to the influence of their neighboring superpowers. That is, Korea's vantage location has put the countries in a pivotal role where the interests and security concerns of greater powers directly converge. Hence, Korea has suffered nine hundred great and small invasions and has been under five long periods of foreign occupation – China, Mongolia, Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, both countries appeared consistently in international news headlines in the past thirty years because of their political instability.

## **Policy Actors: State and Non-State Actors**

From one nation to another, societies are crippled with problems that are a matter of public concern, such as political, economic, and environmental to mention a few. Policymaking is instrumental to the resolution of these issues. It is an intricate process where actors, both in government and outside, engage in decision-making and influence policy formulation and outcomes (Popoola, 2016). There are two kinds of policy actors: state and non-state.

State actors are duty bearers of a state whose primary obligation is the protection and promotion of human rights (Lagoutte, 2019). These are entities under the state, such as central and local government, courts, security forces, among others. State actors remain the main actors in policy making, dialogues, and cooperation at the domestic level (p. 178).

On the other hand, non-state actors are entities that are not under the state, often consisting of international, private, and transnational actors that have growing significance in foreign policies in the 21st century (Stengel & Baumann, 2017). Clapham (2017) argues that non-state actors have an impact on the enjoyment of human rights as they can be both violators and protectors of human rights.

During humanitarian crises such as disasters, non-state actors have operated in hybrid frameworks alongside the state, such cooperation has seen positive effects. In 2018, Da Costa noted one key report “The State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS)” covering the performance of humanitarian sectors, including NGOs, UN, and Red Cross (key non-state actors) from January 2015-December 2017. Through partnerships with non-state actors, guides for development plans, DRM laws, and disaster response frameworks were developed in several countries, one of which is the Disaster Law Programme (DLP) of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (Da Costa, 2018).

As non-state actors have grown in influence in humanitarian concerns and policymaking, Clapham (2017) also argues the challenges they posed: the lack of documentation of their appropriate obligations; monitoring and accountability; and our assumptions on human rights and who has human rights obligations. He especially noted the role of corporations as globalization and privatization allowed them to take on expanded activities but usually diminishing accountability on human rights abuses committed (Clapham, 2017). Moreover, international and transnational bodies such as the UN have taken on state-like tasks such as territorial administration and criminalization under international laws.

To sum, policy actors are crucial in news coverage because they

have made the media their primary arena to exercise their power to influence public perception and dictates policy outcomes and formulation (Fredheim, 2020).

### **Media and Politics**

Both state and non-state actors have long, meaningful partnerships with the media. Without media, policymakers and advocates will not be able to relay messages or raise concerns to the general public. Conversely, the media's primary source of information is government data, often in the form of health statistics, information on new public policy, security concerns, among others (Baumgartner, 2017). The interaction of media and actors is always described as a "complex mixture of mutual dependencies and advantage" (p. viii). Furthermore, the degree of policy focus varies per media outlet, and these differences are manifested across countries depending on their political and cultural systems (Aelst & Walgrave, 2017).

In analyzing *Veja* magazine's coverage of government corruption, Gomes & Alencar (2019) highlight how language practices in mainstream media help form social reality even in highly political issues--influencing perceptions on actors involved especially on politicians. The media is seen as an impartial actor and bringer of truth, but scrutiny on discourses showed that the voices of the journalists and media institutions have an impact on political identities and groups with its antagonistic representations (Gomes & Alencar, 2019). Thus, the media has been a legitimate political actor capable of building more depth and framing how we see entities.

As key state, non-state, and media actors are involved in the production of news about the two Koreas, it is important to dissect the interplay of these forces. Looking at common themes related to these key actors in local news helps surface representations of the two Koreas prevalent in local Philippine news. The duration of coverage mainly tackling pandemic response can help unveil how we see the two countries as entities and how these representations play along with the key stereotypes – a state-controlled North Korea with limited media influence and a more democratic South Korea with both state and non-state actors working together in its disaster response.

In this research, we constructed a database of 518 articles from major local news sites ABS-CBN, *Inquirer* and *Rappler*. containing keyword "Korea", filtered through an advanced Google search. Guided by

Critical Discourse Analysis, we conducted quantitative textual analysis of its key elements and qualitative textual analysis to surface themes across the material.

This research aims to analyze how the two Koreas are reported in Philippine online news reports, tackling the themes on characterization, actors, and narratives present in local online news coverage.

The following sections outline the Problem and Objectives, Methodology, Findings (Micro, Meso, Macro levels), Conclusion and Implications of this study.

### **Problem and Objectives**

We explore these three concepts of policy actors, the corporeal body, and the media as they relate to: firstly, North Korea and South Korea; secondly, across three Philippine media outlets; and, thirdly, before and during the ongoing pandemic. Guided by this literature, we ask the question, “How are the two Koreas reported individually and in connection to each other in Philippine online news reports?”

In the conduct of this study, we followed Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis Framework which examines content at the micro-level of text, the meso-level of discursive practices, and the macro-level of social practice. Specifically, we looked, at the micro-level, at words and pictures in online news reports about Korea. We then surfaced two major discourses, each of which has underlying themes, about the two Koreas through an iterative quantitative and qualitative reading of the news reports. Finally, we examined how the news mediates the state in terms of personification and enactment.

Through critical discourse analysis, comparison in the narratives of the two Koreas by the media outlets could be explored. This also aids in understanding the pivotal role of media as another actor that does gatekeeping, agenda setting, and characterizing of other actors – a topic in which the fields of political science, communication research, and journalism are most interested.



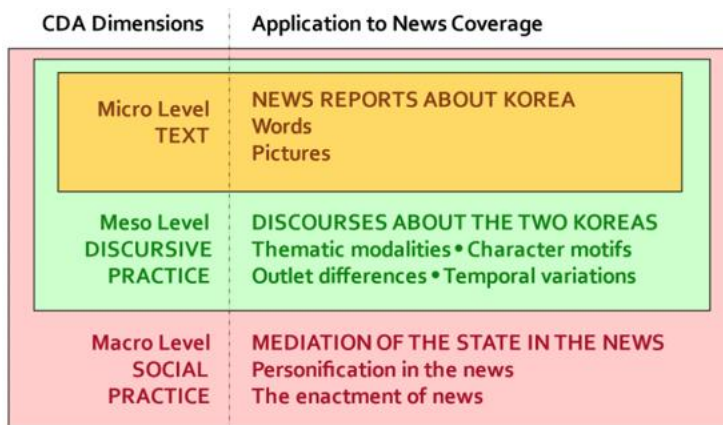


Figure 2. Analytical framework

## Methodology

In this discourse analysis, we employ both quantitative content analysis and qualitative textual analysis. Included in the study are online news reports from three media outlets. This study covers Korea content that appears in ABS-CBN, Inquirer, and Rappler. ABS-CBN is the most popular online portal of a legacy broadcaster, with its likes and followers bigger than runner-up GMA. Inquirer, meanwhile, is the most popular online portal of a legacy newspaper, with its likes and followers about twice that of runner-up Manila Bulletin. Finally, Rappler, is the top purely online news portal, the following of which is significantly bigger than BusinessWorld.

The time frame of the news coverage to be included in the database spanned for a year from 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020. Captured in this period is the onset of global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, or the lack of it, which involved several state and non-state actors.

To construct the database, we did an advanced Google search for the keyword “Korea” within the domain of the three media outlets. We then filtered the advanced search results using the news search portal and subsequently by date. The resulting database has 518 articles. Across these three portals, 161 articles or 32% come from ABS-CBN, 144 or 28% from Inquirer, and 210 or 40% from Rappler.

These articles were all coded for quantitative content analysis. We coded variables such as date, dateline, outlet, focus on the pandemic, primary and secondary countries, main speaker, primary and secondary

actors, main topic, bureaus, and authors. For the qualitative component, we did iterative coding and reading according to CDA protocols. We also surfaced exemplary articles and pictures to illustrate the themes that we see emerge from the coverage.

## **Findings**

### **Micro Level**

The micro level of text is essayed in the words and pictures about Korea in online news.

### ***The Big Picture***

The content analysis revealed majority of the news stories is about South Korea, with only 18% of reports about North Korea. News reports about South Korea and the Philippines comprised 15% of the stories, while those about the two Koreas accounted for nine percent. There were no stories about the Philippines and North Korea. Outside of the three countries, three others figured quite prominently in the news: China, USA, and Japan, each of which had specific connections to either of the Koreas.

Before the spike of 68 articles in February 2020, there was an average of 32 articles between September 2019 and January 2020. From March to August this year, there was an average of 48 news articles per month.

The pandemic was the uncontested top story as it accounted for 39% of all stories. Outside of it, foreign affairs, lifestyle and culture, and the military were the top three stories, followed by local affairs, economic affairs, and sports.

The coverage of the pandemic provided for rather consistent characterizations of either Korea. North Korea's medical system was described as "ill-equipped" (Lavalley, 2020a) and weak (Agence France-Presse, 2020a), and the country itself as impoverished (Associated Press, 2020a; Associated Press, 2020b). North Korea's figures about its COVID-19 cases were not accepted as factual, with reports using phrases such as "insists it is free" (Lavalley, 2020b) and "claims to be coronavirus-free" (The Korea Herald/Asia News Network, 2020a); On the other hand, South Korea's count of its COVID-19 cases were reported in a straightforward

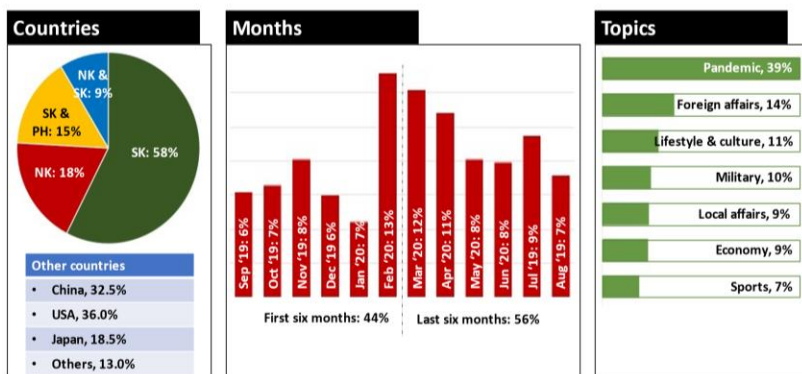


Figure 3. Coverage across countries, months, and topics

manner, highlighting instead how the situation is “very grave,” as described by its President Moon Jae-in (Lavalley, 2020c), and that the country has the most infections (Rappler.com, 2020a), the worst affected (Agence France-Presse, 2020b), and the largest outside China (Agence France-Presse, 2020c). As the pandemic progressed, the story was of increasing difficulty in North Korea and a redemption arch for South Korea.

### ***Titular Actors***

Who gets to enact the stories? The choice of actors changes the focus and flavor of the story as it indicates who is the pivotal character or who holds the expert opinion in the topic. Collectively, it impresses upon the audience the important people in specific discourses.

Let us look at the following titles on COVID-19 as examples of how people or groups are privileged by being the titular actor in stories. The titles also indicate whether the action is collective or singular in nature. The first title focuses on the head of state, the second on the state itself, while the third situates the pandemic among the public as cases. The fourth and fifth ones consider institutions. The fifth and sixth ones, meanwhile, show either the organization or its officer as actors.

Based on their titles, for over a third of the stories, it is the state itself that serves as the actor, followed by members of the public and heads of state. The coronavirus and military equipment as “objects” rank fourth.

How about in terms of the content itself? Absent the country as an actor, who gets to speak on its behalf? We coded at most two such speakers for each article, for a total of 878 characters. Interestingly, government officials and their agencies comprised a third of each of the

report actors. Heads of state, members of the public, and the media completed the top five. Note, however, that country-specific findings were quite different. Government officials, agencies, and the public were the top three for South Korea whereas the head of state and state media were tops for North Korea. Following are exemplar stories for the titular actors for each of these categories:

| Actor                   | Article   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Head of state        | South Korea 'very grave,' says Moon as coronavirus cases approach 1,000 (Lavallee, 2020c)                       |
| 2. State                | South Korea reports 29 new COVID-19 cases ( (The Korea Herald/Asia News Network, 2020b)                         |
| 3. Public               | South Korea coronavirus cases approach 5,000 (Lavallee, 2020d)  |
| 4. Government agency    | South Korea central bank cuts growth outlook on virus fears (Agence France-Presse, 2020d)                       |
| 5. Organization         | WHO says window of opportunity to stem virus 'narrowing' as cases soar (Agence France-Presse & Lavallee, 2020)  |
| 6. Organization officer | Some 'starving' in North Korea as virus measures deepen food crisis – U.N. expert (Agence France-Presse, 2020e) |

*Table 1.* Exemplar titular actors

In terms of their origin, a big majority of the actors came from South Korea. Only 13% came from North Korea, and 11% from the Philippines.

### ***Images in the Coverage***

Most (91%) of the stories were accompanied by a picture. Of these 470 pictures, 19% featured members of the public and 18% showed various settings—and these were pictures mostly from South Korea. Heads of states appeared in 15% of the pictures—and this category was dominated by North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un. Pictures of various personalities and celebrities from South Korea comprised 13% and 11% of the study population, respectively. Military images, usually about South Korea and North Korea or South Korea and the Philippines accounted for 6%.

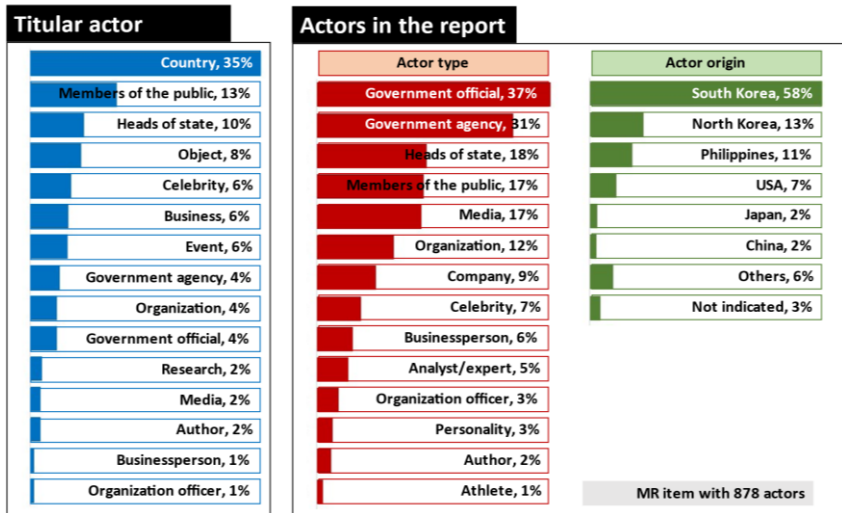


Figure 4. Actors in the coverage

## Meso level

From the base analysis of the text, let me now proceed to discursive practices. We found two major discourses in terms of plot motifs and actor tropes.

### *Plot Motifs*

What were the key discourses in North Korea in the year under study? There was much speculation about Kim Jong-Un’s health--whether he was sick or has died—to which the US and South Korea reacted. North Korea’s relations with the US, especially as regards President Donald Trump and his relationship with Kim Jong-Un was also a staple topic. North Korea’s missile testing also figured in the news. As we said earlier, North Korea’s pandemic response, from the ferocity of it to insinuations about the lack of it, also made it to the news. The news cited the Korea Central News Agency, making media in this regard both source and reporter. The stories about North Korea thus painted a picture of centralized control yet persistent uncertainty.

For South Korea, the pandemic was the prominent story: Firstly, from the initial gravity that was described as the worst outside China to the successes of its test, trace, and treat approach. Secondly, from its waves of pandemic to the pockets of transmission. And thirdly, the return of

sports. Outside the pandemic, other discourses pertained to the apparently love-hate relationship between South Korea and Japan, the performance of South Korean economy in general and its big corporations specifically. Celebrities were framed in terms of the positive and negative consequences of fame: from the successes of the BTS and Parasite to the numerous personalities who died by suicide. Many of the stories that emanated from South Korea featured Korean government agencies and their officials. Collectively, the themes about South Korea demonstrated diversity in its characters, stories, and frames as well as diversions from the pandemic trajectory and in popular entertainment.

For the Philippines, pop culture stories, especially with the popularity of BTS, Crash Landing on You, and the arrival of the Running Man, dominated the Korean discourse, and shadowed the rather limited coverage of the President’s visit to Korea. Stories about Filipina women, particularly one who was recognized for being the epitome of filial duty, also got covered across platforms—as did the story about a former SK embassy official in the Philippines. The paucity in stories involving the Philippines in Korean affairs, where countries such as the US, China, and Japan take precedence, made it appear as a fifth wheel in geopolitical alignments in the region. Instead, Philippine news as it pertained to Korea were rather in soft in nature—stories about sports and entertainment outnumbering those about politics and the economy.

| North Korea   | South Korea   | Philippines  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kim Jong-Un’s health</li> <li>• NK-US relations</li> <li>• Missile testing</li> <li>• COVID -19 incidence and response: strong arm and credulity</li> <li>• Kim and the Korea Central News Agency</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID-19               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gravity and success</li> <li>• Waves and pockets</li> <li>• Sports and sports fans</li> </ul> </li> <li>• SK-Japan relations</li> <li>• Economic performance</li> <li>• Celebrity and other personalities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successes: BTS &amp; Parasite</li> <li>• Suicides</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Korea government agencies and their officials</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pop culture: CLOY</li> <li>• Duterte visit</li> <li>• Filipinas in Korea</li> <li>• Former SK embassy official</li> </ul> |
| <b>Centrality &amp; uncertainty</b>   | <b>Diversity &amp; diversions</b>   | <b>The soft fifth wheel</b>  |

Figure 5. Country-specific themes

Across the two Koreas, the intersections were mainly about the confluence and conflation of politics, military, and foreign affairs. When North Korea fired its missiles, the South reacted. When a group from

South Korea distributed unification fliers, the North responded and the South disavowed. Even the NK-SK themed CLOY, with its military subplot received attention from the North which said, “Recently, South Korean authorities and film producers are releasing anti-republic films and TV dramas” that are “deceptive, fabricated, absurd and impure” (ABS-CBN News, 2020).

News about the pandemic reinforced these themes. For instance, reports hinted at the North’s supposed inability to provide adequate response to the pandemic and its consequences (Associated Press, 2020c). Figures released by South Korea about the rising number of cases there were taken at face value—and always juxtaposed against images of disciplined mask-wearing public and frontliners in action (Agence France-Presse, 2020c).



Figure 6. Cross-country themes

### Actor Tropes

For reports about North Korea, it was the head of state and media which were the main actors. For South Korea and the Philippines, it is the government agencies and their officials as well as the members of the public who spoke for them in the news.

| <b>Report Actor</b>   | <b>NK (n=106)</b> | <b>SK (n=505)</b> | <b>PH (n=93)</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Head of state         | 33.0              | 5.7               | 6.5              |
| Government official   | 20.8              | 24.0              | 29.0             |
| Government agency     |                   | 23.8              | 28.0             |
| Members of the public | 4.7               | 13.1              | 16.1             |
| Media                 | 40.6              | 4.8               |                  |
| Celebrity             |                   | 7.1               | 1.1              |
| Organization          |                   | 6.5               | 5.4              |
| Business              |                   | 5.9               | 7.5              |
| Businessperson        |                   | 2.8               | 2.2              |
| Personality           | 0.9               | 2.4               |                  |
| Analyst, scientist    |                   | 1.8               | 2.2              |
| Organization officer  |                   | 1.4               | 1.1              |
| Athlete               |                   | 0.8               | 1.1              |

*Table 2.* Report actors across countries

In terms of pictures, the head of state appeared in majority of the images about North Korea. For the South, it was the public, different locations in the country, and its frontliners in action that were depicted most frequently. For the intersections between the North and the South, heads of state and the military were shown, whereas for the Philippines and South Korea, what were shown were personalities and celebrities as well as the military—specifically the Philippine Navy’s frigates.

| <b>Picture Actor</b> | <b>NK (n=82)</b> | <b>SK (n=281)</b> | <b>NK &amp; SK (n=39)</b> |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Heads of state       | 51.2             | 5.0               | 28.2                      |
| Others               | 0.0              | 1.4               | 7.7                       |
| Personalities        | 7.3              | 9.3               | 10.3                      |
| Celebrities          | 0.0              | 10.7              | 10.3                      |
| Frontliners          | 7.3              | 16.7              | 2.6                       |
| Government           | 1.2              | 2.1               | 2.6                       |
| Infographics         | 11.0             | 5.0               | 2.6                       |
| Military             | 4.9              | 2.1               | 17.9                      |
| General public       | 6.1              | 27.0              | 7.7                       |
| Setting              | 11.0             | 20.6              | 10.3                      |

*Table 3.* Picture actors across countries



For North Korea, the image was almost always its Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-Un as he sat next to the flag, stood with world leaders such as US President Trump, or positioned for a hero-angle perspective. State Media released the images, and the wire agencies used them as a motif. One article, “No mask amid COVID-19 threat, no mistake for North Korea’s Kim,” specifically discussed how the depiction of the North Korean leader. It stated, “The North carefully controls and calibrates imagery of Kim, and analysts said his uncovered features send an intended message” (Agence France-Presse, 2020).



Figure 7. Pictures of North Korea’s Kim Jong-Un

Meanwhile, for South Korea, citizens were always in positive action: from members of the public who were almost always wearing masks properly to the frontliners who were engaged in preventing the spread of COVID-19. As the pandemic was getting resolved, life in the public sphere became the focus of images. The ABS-CBN News in the accompanying figure, titled “S.Koreans return to work, crowd parks, malls as social distancing rules ease,” illustrates the use of the public in the imagery of the news. The article also includes a quotation from the member of the public: "I'm a member of a community football club and we went out to play on Saturday for the first time in 2 months," said Kim Tae-hyung, a 31-year-old power plant engineer living in Seoul. "We were wearing a mask while we played, still worried about the coronavirus, but the weather was nice, and I felt so refreshed" (Shin & Heekyong, 2020).

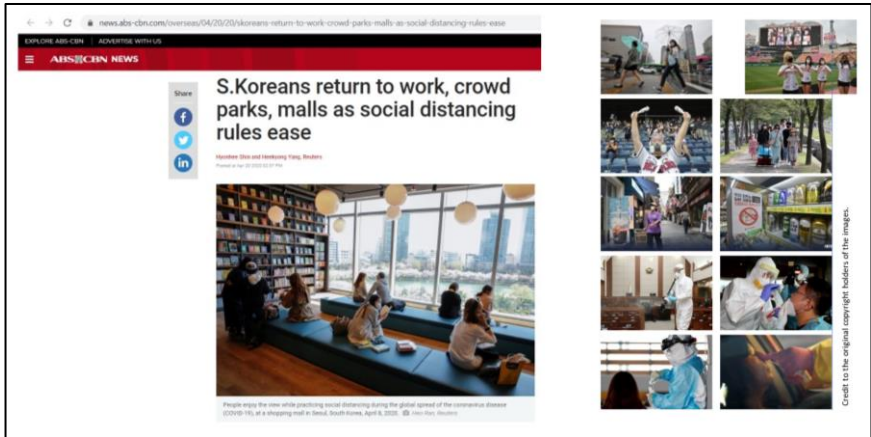


Figure 8. Pictures of South Korea’s public

### ***Macro Level***

What may be behind the micro level words and images as well as the macro-level plot themes and actor motifs? To answer this, we look at the media as another actor that does the personification of the other actors in the news—and in so doing, arguably performs the enactment of news.

Going back to my literature-based study framework, let me now return to the study framework. Based on the meso-level arguments, we find that the reports proffer a narrative of the national character that is at once reflexively related to the character of its nationals who serve as its actors. The packaging of the state as a corporate body on its own and through its actors is thus made neat for the audience. What then happens with the balance between state and non-state actors, which points to the level of centralization of government affairs, or at least as reported in the news?

We find that stories collectively use the state as the titular actor, effectively embodying the nation-state in the government. Moreover, among all characters in the stories themselves, there were as many state actors (Lagoutte, 2019) as non-state actors. When it came to the pictures, however, it is the public that is depicted. Let me note, however, that this is the full discourse about SK, NK, and the Philippines—but that important nuances within country-specific or cross-specific themes exist in the coverage as we have explained earlier. In this collective Korea discourse, much of the news reporting done is through behavior of South Korean actors. Moreover, we also find that non-human corporate entities act in the titles, but human actors give life to the stories and images.

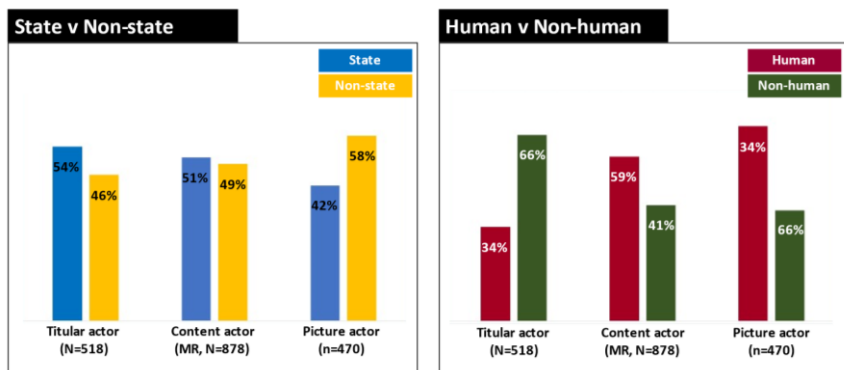


Figure 9. Actor typologies in the news

### The Media-Actor

These arguments lead me to an important argument about the enactment of news where the media are not just reporters or sources but as gatekeepers and agenda-setters themselves by virtue of their profile as media actors (Gomes & Alencar, 2019).

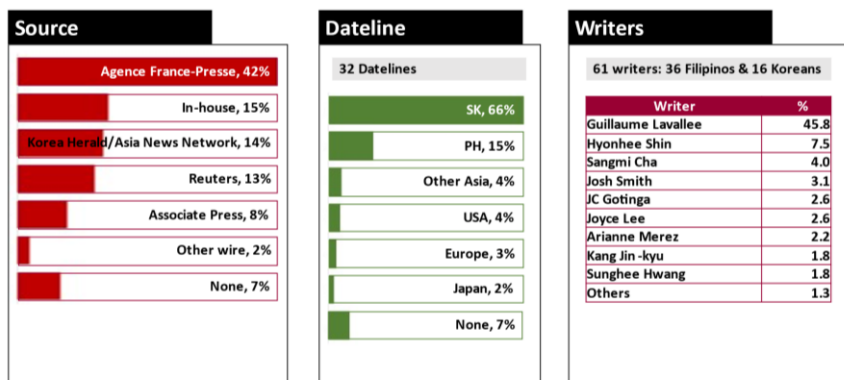


Figure 10. Media-actor data

The dominance of wire agencies in international news flows is readily apparent in this study. Collectively, they reported 78% of all stories, with AFP accounting for 42%. Only 15% of stories were produced in-house by ABS-CBN, Inquirer, or Rappler. Over two-thirds of the news stories came from South Korea, and it perhaps bears investigating to what

extent does the location of bureau relate to the topics, frames, and actors integrated in the story. Finally, while we recorded 61 writers, of whom 36 were Filipinos, the majority of the stories were written by only two people, AFP correspondent Guillame Lavalle and to a much smaller degree Reuters journalist Hyonhee Shin.

Moreover, there is quite a clear matching between local outlets and international agencies. ABS-CBN uses AFP and Reuters, Rappler uses AFP, and Inquirer uses Associated Press and Korea Health/Asia News Network. Across outlets, stories mostly emanated from South Korea, with Inquirer depending most heavily on its connections there. Essentially, therefore, we have what appears to be a small community of media actors who essay the story of the two Koreas for our local consumption.

|                                | <b>NK<br/>(n=82)</b> | <b>SK<br/>(n=281)</b> | <b>NK &amp; SK<br/>(n=39)</b> |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>BUREAU</b>                  |                      |                       |                               |
| In-house                       | 19.5                 | 15.7                  | 7.6                           |
| Agence France-Presse           | 35.4                 | 67.1                  | 11.8                          |
| Reuters                        | 39.6                 |                       |                               |
| Other wire agencies            | 5.5                  |                       | 1.4                           |
| Associated Press               |                      |                       | 29.2                          |
| Korea Herald/Asia News Network |                      |                       | 50.0                          |
| None                           |                      | 17.1                  |                               |
| <b>DATELINE</b>                |                      |                       |                               |
| South Korea                    | 67.7                 | 51.4                  | 84.0                          |
| Philippines                    | 14.6                 | 24.3                  | 2.2                           |
| USA                            | 1.8                  | 5.7                   | 3.5                           |
| Europe                         | 1.8                  | 4.3                   | 0.7                           |
| Other Asia                     | 3.1                  | 6.7                   | 2.1                           |
| Japan                          | 1.8                  | 2.4                   | 0.7                           |
| None                           | 9.1                  | 5.2                   | 6.9                           |

*Table 4. Media-actor across outlets*

### **Conclusion and Implication**

As Figure 11 shows, we find that Korea is articulated in the news through plot motifs and actor tropes which then present the character of the nation-state to the reader. International news flows linking the two

Koreas and the Philippines demonstrate the continuing power of wire agencies and reporters, with local readers getting wire-specific rather than source-diverse content. Finally, we find limited local mediation of international news as we find shoveling of news from wire agencies. To some extent, there is some intervention with pictorial imagery. But what we find is that there is focus instead on producing local content for lifestyle topics such as entertainment and sports.

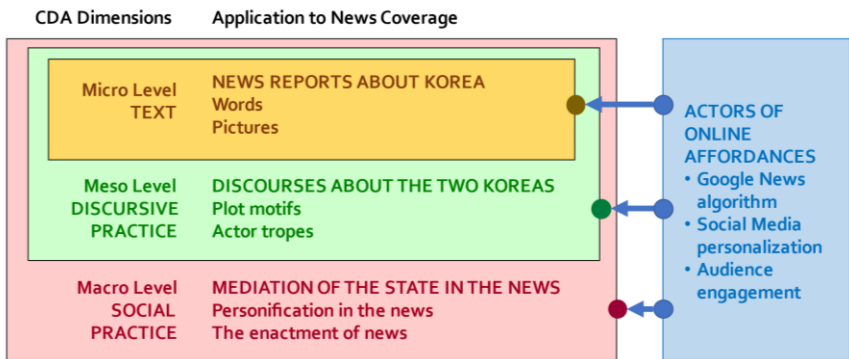


Figure 11. Data-informed CDA framework

Moreover, the study surfaces how the characterization (Burcio, Da Silva, & Alguiero, 2015) of the Koreas through their personification (Walenta, 2015) in the news reveals a dichotomy between one man in the North and the public mass in the South. Moreover, the two Koreas are depicted to be independent of, yet interconnected to, each other. They have stakeholders separately and collectively; unfortunately, however, in either case, the Philippines is not that very visible.

In terms of implications, there remains the need to disrupt hegemonic international news flows, though the emergence of the Korea Herald/Asia News Network is welcome development. Local newsrooms can be enjoined to produce content beyond the cultural and to help contextualize foreign news for Philippine audiences. The reality, however, is that the profit-orientation of news media flows in capitalist economies means the system is likely not going to change radically. News and editorial desks have limited resources to generate original content or modify coverage that comes from the wires. Moreover, so long as North Korea is accessible mainly through its state media, with little room to verify its claims, then the subjunctive tone of how it is covered in the news

is going to remain. Aelst & Walgrave (2017) have argued that news flows are contingent upon the system of government which is being reported.

Moving forward, we may look at the other actors who, through their behavior, help enact the news. Among these are Google and other search engines, the algorithms of which proffer which stories appear in results that then comprise databases that we construct for message analyses such as this one. Secondly are social media platforms the personalization techniques of which determine which news we see, supposedly according to our online behavior. Personally, however, my next project is to look at how readers engage with these stories online by way of their comments and reactions, which comprise another corpus that we have not been able to include in this project.

## References

- ABS-CBN News. (2020, March 5). North Korea hits South's 'deceptive' TV dramas, films: report. ABS-CBN News.
- Aelst, V. P., & Walgrave, S. (Eds.). (2017). How political actors use the media: a functional analysis of the media's role in politics. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Agence France-Presse. (2020a, March 8). North Korea releases 3,600 quarantined over virus: reports. ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/03/08/20/north-korea-releases-3600-quarantined-over-virus-reports>
- Agence France-Presse. (2020b, March 11). Coronavirus: Can S. Korea be a model for virus-hit countries? ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/03/11/20/south-korea-coronavirus-approach-model-country>
- Agence France-Presse. (2020d, August 27). South Korea central bank cuts growth outlook on virus fears. ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/business/08/27/20/south-korea-central-bank-cuts-growth-outlook-on-virus-fears>
- Agence France-Presse. (2020e, June 9). Some 'starving' in North Korea as virus measures deepen food crisis – U.N. expert. Rappler. <https://www.rappler.com/world/asia-pacific/un-expert-food-insecurity-north-korea-june-2020>
- Agence France-Presse, & Lavalley, G. (2020, February 22). WHO says window of opportunity to stem virus 'narrowing' as cases soar. Rappler. <https://www.rappler.com/world/global-affairs/world-health-organization-window-opportunity-stem-virus-narrowing>

- Associated Press. (2020a, March 18). North Korea's Kim calls for better health care in hospital speech. *Inquirer.net*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1244344/north-koreas-kim-calls-for-better-health-care-in-hospital-speech-2>
- Associated Press. (2020b, April 26). Satellite imagery finds likely Kim train amid health rumors. *Inquirer.net*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1265059/satellite-imagery-finds-likely-kim-train-amid-health-rumors>
- Baumgartner, F. (2017). Political Actors and the Media. In P. Van Aelst & S. Walgrave, *How Political Actors Use the Media: A Functional Analysis of the Media's Role in Politics*. (pp. v-viii). Springer Nature.
- Burcio C. M. S., Da Silva R. M. V., & Algueiro, M. F. S. (2015). The influence of country personality dimensions on intentions to recommend visiting: The preponderance of assiduousness and wickedness. *Transnational Marketing Journal*, 3(1), 61–80.
- Chung, C., & Broadbent, J. (2013). Introduction to Korean Society, Culture, and Politics. In *East Asian social movements: Power, protest, and change in a dynamic region*. 137-140. Springer.
- Clapham, A. (2017). THE CHALLENGE OF NON-STATE ACTORS. In *To be published in International Human Rights Law* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Da Costa, K. (2018). Global Non-State Actors. [https://doi.org/10.1163/26662531\\_00101\\_017](https://doi.org/10.1163/26662531_00101_017)
- Fredheim, N. A. G. (2021). Life, death or drugs: Actor framing power on the news media coverage of health care policy. *European Journal of Communication*, 36(3), 270–285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323120978721>
- Gomes, E. P., & Alencar, C. N. (2019). Media as Political Actor of the Public Sphere: A Textual Analysis of *Veja* Magazine on Corruption Cases. *Alfa São Paulo*, 63(1), 87-117. <http://doi.org/10.1590/1981-5794-1904-4>
- Lagoutte, S. 2019. The Role of State Actors within the National Human Rights System. *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 37(3): 177–94.
- Lavallee, G. (2020a, February 28). U.N. prepared to make humanitarian exemptions for North Korea on coronavirus. *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/world/asia-pacific/un-prepared-humanitarian-exemptions-north-korea-coronavirus>
- Lavallee, G. (2020b, April 2). North Korea insists it is free of coronavirus. *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-insists-coronavirus-free-april-2020>
- Lavallee, G. (2020c, February 25). South Korea 'very grave,' Moon says as coronavirus cases approach 1,000. *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/world/asia-pacific/south-korea-reports-new-coronavirus-cases-february-25>



- Lavallee, G. (2020d, March 3). South Korea coronavirus cases approach 5,000. Rappler.
- Rappler.com. (2020a, February 23). DFA advises Filipinos to 'delay non-essential travel' to South Korea. Rappler. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/dfa-advises-filipinos-delay-non-essential-travel-south-korea-february-23-2020>
- Melewar, T. C. (2003). Determinants of the corporate identity construct - A review of literature. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 9(4), 195-220.
- Melewar, T. C. & Karaosmanoglu, E. (2006). Seven dimensions of corporate identity: A categorization from the practitioners perspectives. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 846-869.
- Popoola, O. (2016). Actors in Decision Making and Policy Process. *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 5(1), 47-51. <https://www.longdom.org/articles/actors-in-decision-making-and-policy-process.pdf>
- Park, S.-H. (2019). Dueling nationalisms in North and South Korea. *Palgrave Communications*, 5(40), 1–8. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0248-3>.
- Stengel, F. A., & Baumann, R. (2017). Non-State Actors and Foreign Policy. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.456
- The Korea Herald/Asia News Network. (2020a, April 8). North Korea claims to be coronavirus-free—report. *Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1255804/north-korea-claims-to-be-coronavirus-free-report>
- The Korea Herald/Asia News Network. (2020b, May 14). South Korea reports 29 new COVID-19 cases. *Inquirer.net*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1274908/south-korea-reports-29-new-covid-19-cases>
- Walenta, J. (2015). Corporate personhood and the corporate body: the case of former energy giant Enron on trial for fraud. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 33(3), 545–559. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775815594302>.

### **Photo citations**

- Associated Press. (2020c, May 6). Seoul reports panic buying in North Korea amid economic woes. *Inquirer.net* <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1270852/seoul-reports-panic-buying-in-north-korea-amid-economic-woes>

- Agence France-Presse. (2020c, March 5). South Korea new coronavirus total nears 6,000. ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/03/05/20/south-korea-virus-total-nears-6000>
- Agence France-Presse. (2020, March 13). No mask amid COVID-19 threat, no mistake for North Korea's Kim. ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/03/13/20/no-mask-amid-covid-19-threat-no-mistake-for-north-koreas-kim>
- Shin, H., & Heekyong, Y. (2020, April 20). S.Koreans return to work, crowd parks, malls as social distancing rules ease. ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/04/20/20/skoreans-return-to-work-crowd-parks-malls-as-social-distancing-rules-ease>



# From K-Pop Concerts to the Olympics: Scrutinizing the Role of entertainment and Sports in Diplomatic Efforts

Erik Paolo Capistrano, Ph.D.  
*Cesar E.A. Virata School of Business  
University of the Philippines Diliman*

## Abstract

The year 2018 saw a historic and significant shift in the developing diplomatic relationship between South Korea and North Korea, seeing multiple occasions where people from both countries experienced significantly closer interactions. These were the 2018 Winter Olympics held in February in Pyeongchang, the two-day “Spring is Coming (봄이 온다)” concert held in April at the East Pyongyang Grand Theater and the August to September 2018 Asian Games held in Indonesia. To many observers, these events sparked hope that significant and favorable progress would finally be made in the relations between the two countries. This is because history is filled with rosy stories regarding improving international relations with softer power stances such as entertainment and sports. Through the theoretical lens of the “cult of the celebrity” and via the case study method, this research revisits the rationale behind the utilization of Hallyu and sports as soft power resources, examines the three events as mentioned above, and evaluates their respective effectivity in contributing to the South Korean efforts towards better relations with North Korea. Ultimately, this research provides lessons learned and further implications for future discourses on this issue.

**Keywords:** *North-South Korean relations; soft power; Hallyu; Korean Pop music; sports; Winter Olympics; Asian Games*

## Introduction

The presence of North Korean cheerleaders and athletes and a unified Korean women’s ice hockey team at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics have attracted massive worldwide attention, fueling hopes towards the improvement of North Korean-South Korean ties (Abdi, Talebpour, Fullerton, Ranjkesh, & Nooghabi, 2019; Herman, 2018; Rich & Lee, 2018). The unified team went on to place 8th overall in the

standings. Later on, South Korean and foreign media significantly went abuzz when a contingent of South Korean music artists was invited to perform at the two-day “Spring is Coming (봄이 온다)” concert held on April at the East Pyongyang Grand Theater. The South Korean contingent included veteran pop soloists Cho Yong-pil, Lee Sun-hee, and Baek Ji-Young, trot singer Choi Jin-hee, and one of the most popular K-Pop girl groups, Red Velvet (레드벨벳). In addition, Seohyun, the youngest member of the iconic K-Pop girl group Girls’ Generation (소녀시대), was also set to perform alongside North Korean singers. And if that was not enough, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was in attendance and even praised Red Velvet afterward (South China Morning Post, 2018). Furthermore, a joint team of 22 North Korean and South Korean Taekwondo martial artists also performed in the same event (Joint Press Corps-Yonhap, 2018). And later that year, from August to September, the Jakarta Asian Games saw North Korea and South Korea field a unified team, winning a gold medal in women’s canoeing, a silver medal in women’s basketball, and bronze medals for women’s and men’s canoeing (Kyodo News, 2018; News Desk (Agence France-Presse), 2018). Because of these events, many worldwide have expressed hope that the relations between North and South Korea would significantly move forward. In fact, for a while, there were accelerated efforts, including three high-profile inter-Korean summits, before things bogged down once more (Forgey, 2021; S. H. Kim, 2020; M. Lee, 2020).

These events triggered a surge of interest in South Korea’s diplomacy strategies and tactics outside the traditional hard power stances based on politics, economics, trade, foreign investments, security, and other related issues. Cultural exchanges have been an integral part of South Korean attempts to interact with the rest of the world (Borowiec, 2018; M. Lee, 2020). As the use of soft power to influence international images and relations becomes more prevalent, many sectors continue to find ways to make this an integral part of their strategies (Ayhan, 2017). An interesting angle on this is that South Korea faces a disadvantage in the hard power-driven international relations arena (Watson, 2012). On the other hand, the country has been at the forefront when it comes to soft power stances (Chung, 2019; K. Jang, 2019; Rich & Lee, 2018), largely due to the worldwide impact of Hallyu and its attractiveness to many diverse foreign audiences (Istad, 2016). This is a reflection of soft power’s “pull” factor (Vandenberghe, 2017), or in this case, how Hallyu celebrities “pull” audiences to make favorable views towards South Korea. And this

phenomenon became a major resource in crafting new diplomacy efforts, especially under President Moon Jae-In's administration (Ayhan, 2017).

To recall, the first initial attempts to thaw relations with North Korea after the Korean War was made in the late 1990s with then-President Kim Dae-Jung's "sunshine policy" that encouraged active and positive engagement with North Korea, which led to an inter-Korean summit with then-supreme leader Kim Jong-Il in 2000, and the opening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex in 2003 (Kunis, 2017). However, when issues arose that temporarily led South Korean authorities to shut down Kaesong in 2016, it was clear that new forms of diplomacy with the North Koreans were needed. In recent memory, some of these earliest efforts, dubbed "public diplomacy," were initiated by the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs as early as 2010. Initially envisioned to create a national branding strategy for the country, it later evolved to strive for more active engagement with domestic and international audiences that help to make South Korea's soft power more lasting and more meaningful (Gibson, 2020; K. Jang, 2019). This "public diplomacy" has allowed collaborations between the government and the private sector to develop strategies geared toward complementing formal diplomatic efforts (Ayhan, 2017; Kunis, 2017). Later, this would include the private organizations engaged in Hallyu and sports and the media (Ayhan, 2017; Gibson, 2020; Kunis, 2017; Vandenberghe, 2017). The passage of the Public Diplomacy Act of 2016, and the subsequent creation of Korea's First Basic Plan on Public Diplomacy, became the legal centerpieces to which President Moon Jae-In's administration would tap soft power resources, including the entertainment companies and sports organizations (Ayhan, 2017).

As a result of these efforts, several South Korean government and international association officials have been publicly seen supporting these efforts. For instance, the Ministry of National Defense even provided locations and logistical support for the production of the 2016 KBS Drama "Descendants of the Sun (태양의 후예)." Because of its increased importance, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism have also been giving substantial funding to Taekwondo efforts (Porteux & Choi, 2018). Particular to the North Korean corridor, this included then-South Korea's Culture, Sports, and Tourism Minister Do Jong-Whan for the April 2018 "Spring is Coming" concert (Borowiec, 2018), the international sports federation World Taekwondo president for South Korea Choue Chung-Won for the October 2018 performance of a South Korean Taekwondo team in Pyongyang (D.-h. Kim, 2018; Yonhap, 2018), and the announcement from both South Korea, represented by then-Culture,

Sports, and Tourism Second Vice Minister Roh Tae-Kang, and North Korea, represented by Deputy Minister of Sports Won Kil-U, expressing the desire for the two countries to host the 2032 Summer Olympics (D.-h. Kim, 2018).

But as previously pointed out, the effects of these particular soft power strategies on the direction of North Korea-South Korea relations are still unclear (Chung, 2019; K. Jang, 2019), whether for Hallyu or sports. While it is clear that Hallyu has been a game-changer in the international image-building of South Korea, especially towards countries where relations are weak or cold such as China and Japan (Oh, 2016; Vandenberghe, 2017), how is this helping North Korea relations remains unclear (Borowiec, 2018; Chung, 2019). This concern has been amplified by the fact that there has been very little progress made since then, even to the point that Pyongyang has resumed its missile testing programs that have worried some stakeholders in South Korea and recently elected South Korean president Yoon Suk-Yeol promising a tougher stance against North Korea.

Therefore, in the context of soft power approaches discussed in this study, the research questions are proposed as follows:

*RQ1: What are the respective roles of Hallyu and sports in South Korea's soft power strategies toward improving North Korean relations?*

*RQ2: What respective opportunities in Hallyu and sports can be maximized to enhance the present efforts toward improving North Korean relations?*

The rest of this research is structured as follows: Section 2, the literature review, first discusses the historical applications of Hallyu and sports as soft power resources, supported by some theoretical foundations and broader historical precedents to frame the subsequent parts of this research. This section is presented to discuss the conceptual requirements for Hallyu and sports to succeed as soft power resources employed for diplomatic purposes towards dealing with North Korea. Section 3 covers the methods, disclosing the sources of data and information, and briefly discusses the contents of these sources and their initial implications. Section 4 is the research analysis, scrutinizing what South Korea has done as documented in the context of these theoretical discussions and historical

applications. Section 5 presents the resulting arguments and conclusions and some suggestions moving forward, borne out of this research.

## **Literature Review**

### *Reliance on the “cult of the celebrity.”*

Many previous studies point to an interesting concept coined as the “cult of the celebrity” and its theorized effects on diplomacy in their respective attempts to explain how music and sports can be utilized as soft power resources. Celebrities are seen as elevated individuals who are empowered to represent people’s aspirations to take part in shaping public spheres, including foreign policy decision-making (Algan & Kaptan, 2021; Gibson, 2020; Park, 2017). This is why the likes of Bono, Angelina Jolie, Audrey Hepburn, and George Clooney work as ambassadors or activists for certain advocacies at an international level (Algan & Kaptan, 2021). For music and sports diplomacies to be effective, they heavily rely on the “cult of the celebrity”, defined as the abilities of individual celebrities to humanize their profession in ways that resonate with the general public (Park, 2017). While music and sports are already powerful by themselves because they can touch individuals, groups, and societies in ways to more traditional forms of diplomacy and diplomats rarely can (Chung, 2019; G. Jang & Paik, 2012; Park, 2017; Rofe, 2016), individual celebrities who are deemed as representatives of their respective music genres and sports amplify this influence. Their popularity empowers their ability to communicate and connect with many socio-economic levels, making them widely-accepted opinion leaders (Algan & Kaptan, 2021; Park, 2017). Furthermore, these celebrities command a significant following in and out of their respective professions, amplifying their influence on the general public (Chung, 2019; G. Jang & Paik, 2012; Park, 2017). This makes individuals’ ideal personalities to be “the face” of the desired endeavor. Hence, the identity of the music or sports celebrity is also used to project the desired image of his or her home country in the context of diplomacy (Algan & Kaptan, 2021; Rofe, 2016). In other words, on top of whatever symbolism, imagery, or message that a music event or a sporting event already communicates, the music or sports celebrity significantly contributes more by providing a physical humanized face to which people on the ground can more easily relate.

Its command of media attention amplifies this “cult of the celebrity” even further. Celebrities have tremendous media clout which can only get bigger as their fame reaches international, or even global,



status (Algan & Kaptan, 2021). Media has been instrumental in furthering the humanization of the music industry and the sporting world through exceptional storytelling, sometimes to the point of romanticizing documented events (Algan & Kaptan, 2021; Chung, 2019; K. Jang, 2019; Park, 2017). Garnering strong and significant multimedia coverage is important, as it draws ordinary people's attention to the dynamics of the event and makes them discuss topics that are related, and sometimes even unrelated, to the theme of the event itself. For instance, media coverage of music and entertainment events creates more dramatic narratives, veering away from any political, social, or cultural sensitivities that can be deemed too delicate to touch on (Chung, 2019; K. Jang, 2019). In the case of sports, media coverage enables personally relatable narratives to be created and communicated to the general public (Stevenson & Alaug, 2008). And the bigger the sporting event, the more impactful the media coverage becomes (J. W. Lee, 2019; Vandenberghe, 2017). Furthermore, for both music and sports, focusing on the celebrity enables the media to frame their reporting and commentaries around a well-known and relatable entity, making it easier to sell their narratives to the general public and earn generally positive feedback (Park, 2017). In addition, it can also direct general audiences who are previously unaware or underinformed of the actual political, social, cultural, or economic context that the celebrity is participating in to be more aware and more informed of what is going on and why the celebrity in question is there (Gibson, 2020).

Therefore, this "cult of the celebrity" concept is employed in this research to further scrutinize the use of music and sports as a means to further South Korean diplomatic efforts towards North Korea. In recent times, exploring other ways to use Hallyu aside from it being a propaganda tool against North Korea has been an interesting proposition. The same is true with perceiving sports as a complementary means to make progress between the two countries' efforts for better relations and at the same time to show to the world that progress is indeed being made.

### *Hallyu as a soft power resource*

Historically, as many other researchers have argued, South Korea's approach to soft power strategies is a now-classic and interesting case of the application of this type of power as a resource for international relations (G. Jang & Paik, 2012; Watson, 2012). Hallyu has become a continuously significant resource for South Korea's soft power base, specifically on cultural diplomacy, trade, tourism, and education, among other national-level interests (Chung, 2019; G. Jang & Paik, 2012; K. Jang,

2019; Watson, 2012). But it must also be kept in mind that the country's overall soft power strategy is not just about promoting its brand image, but also its ideologies (K. Jang, 2019). While the brand image angle has been widely successful, the ideologies angle has yet to receive as much attention. This is an important consideration since there are also far-reaching and complex implications involving South Korea's present ideologies when communicated with the rest of the world. Some suggestions bringing entertainment celebrities into traditional diplomatic events is one way to convert the country's powerful and influential contemporary pop culture into true soft power, such as enlisting them to communicate messages of support before major negotiations take place (Algan & Kaptan, 2021).

As for music, some have pointed out how Western music has broken political barriers. Some good examples are when Soviet youths listened to illegal recordings of the Beatles and East Berliners gathered near the Berlin Wall to get a glimpse of David Bowie's live performance in West Berlin (Denyer & Kim, 2019). Other instances of contemporary music getting similarly involved jazz performances of Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong in the former Soviet Union, which was sponsored by the United States State Department from the 1950s to the 1970s, and British pop group Wham!'s 1984 performance in Beijing. Therefore, based on these historic events of music artists from one ideological society making their way to a significantly different one, it is only logical to form some parallel arguments for the case of Hallyu and North Korea. Furthermore, as evidenced by a plethora of academic research and media articles over the years, such documented events make for some inspiring stories that encourage engagements from many sectors offering their respective points of view on what transpired, why they transpired, and what the implications of these events transpiring.

The widespread utilization of Hallyu, K-Pop and K-Drama in particular, has significantly contributed to the drastic changes in the image of South Korea from negative to positive, especially in countries like China, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam where relations were previously weak or cold due to historical and ongoing confrontations (Chung, 2019; Oh, 2016; Vandenberghe, 2017). It also introduced South Korea to the rest of the world in a very positive light (G. Jang & Paik, 2012; Oh, 2016). But these changes are observed more at the individual level, where many studies have shown that individuals who have consumed K-Pop and K-Drama have developed favorable perceptions of the country, but not in every aspect. For instance, foreign fans of K-Pop and K-Drama may have favorable perceptions of South Korea's pop and traditional culture,

cityscapes and sceneries, and food, but still hold very strong opinions involving its government, issues on gender equality, and work ethics. In other words, these favorable perceptions borne out K-Pop and K-Drama consumption is not all-encompassing to all aspects of South Korea (Borowiec, 2018; Chung, 2019; G. Jang & Paik, 2012). It must also be emphasized that this phenomenon has been significantly buoyed by specific and identifiable actors and singers who are deemed “representative Hallyu stars”. Consistent with the “cult of the celebrity” argument, Hallyu is powerful because it is populated by celebrities who can command attention in their capacities as role models, opinion leaders, and ambassadors of brands, movements, advocacies, and even ideologies (Park, 2017). Across many academic and industry documentation, many ordinary persons who have come to know and be interested in South Korea identify themselves as fans of these individual celebrities. Hence, as intended in utilizing the “cult of the celebrity”, the imagery of South Korea presented through its creative content, and more importantly personified by these celebrities, of K-Pop, K-Dramas, and more recently, K-Movies, and through Hallyu celebrity endorsements of Korean food and consumer goods became a powerful force in attracting foreign audiences – ordinary citizens of foreign countries – and not just governments and country leaders. As a bonus, it also encourages Hallyu fans to get interested in whatever political, social, or cultural issue that the celebrities they follow are involved in as well.

What is interesting is Hallyu’s potential in contributing to North Korean relations. While leaders and top-level decision-makers of South Korea are having challenging times interacting with their North Korean counterparts, there is a growing number of anecdotal evidence, testimonies, and news reporting suggesting that South Korean media has made its way to many sectors of North Korean society, despite government intervention at times (Chung, 2019; Denyer & Kim, 2019; M. Lee, 2020; South China Morning Post, 2018). There are many reports of South Korean cultural materials being smuggled and secretly consumed in some pocket areas of North Korea (Chung, 2019; de Souza, 2021; Denyer & Kim, 2019; S. Kim & Kong, 2018). A 2019 survey of 200 North Korean defectors revealed that 91% of them consumed South Korean and other foreign content while in North Korea (de Souza, 2021). In another report, the fashion statement of white shirts and colorful skinny jeans, and hot pants popularized by the Girls’ Generation became an underground trend in several North Korean neighborhood areas (Denyer & Kim, 2019). More recently, despite toughened restrictions, smuggled copies of the popular South Korean

Netflix series “Squid Game (오징어 게임)” have made their way into the country as well, with some North Koreans calling the show relatable to their daily lives (Tan, 2021). Some anecdotal reports even report that there is a growing majority of young North Koreans who more regularly watch South Korean dramas and listen to South Korean music in secret, lest they get caught (Gibson, 2020).

Aside from the feedback from some North Koreans that K-Pop music looks, sounds, and feels refreshing, relatable, and liberating (Borowiec, 2018; Denyer & Kim, 2019), this potential is even more interesting if reports regarding Hallyu’s influence on North Korean housing prices and its contribution to the decline of North Korean creative industries are accurate (Chung, 2019). These reports make mention testimonials that housing complexes and residential areas that have access to aerial signals from South Korea, hereby enabling residents to watch South Korean television channels, are priced higher than in areas that do not have such access. But one of the most telling as well as pieces of survey data suggests that Hallyu is a major influence on North Koreans’ decisions to leave the country and that Hallyu can contribute to major changes in North Korea (M. Lee, 2020).

In addition, some have even argued that the use of South Korean popular and traditional culture as a means to improve North Korean relations should be an instinctive move since it is more likely to attract people and steer soft power more favorably in contexts where the two countries are culturally similar (Chung, 2019; Rich & Lee, 2018). But it has also been argued that employing Hallyu in the case of North Korea would fall under a passive and indirect soft power, rather than a proactive, strategic, and conscious public policy (Chung, 2019). Others have also pointed out that the overall soft power strategy was part of a broad ideological confrontation designed to counteract North Korean propaganda, such as the arguments about whether or not “Descendants of the Sun” was a propaganda tool or not (K. Jang, 2019). However, challenges do remain (Borowiec, 2018; Chung, 2019; Rich & Lee, 2018; Watson, 2012). While there is a growing number of sentiments that North Korea’s efforts to suppress the entry of Hallyu content are becoming less and less effective over time, it has traditionally prided itself in successfully resisting any outside influence that would affect its perceived national identity, absorbing external inputs it only deems necessary and acceptable. More recently, reports surfaced that a North Korean man caught smuggling copies of “Squid Game” was to be executed and six North Korean high school students caught watching the show were sentenced to

five years of hard labor (Tan, 2021). Furthermore, there have been efforts by North Korean propagandists to undermine South Korea's role in the far-reaching impact of Hallyu, repainting South Korean content in an unfavorable light (de Souza, 2021). Hence, it is not clear yet to date if this "cult of the celebrity" will have any significant effect in this particular context of the North Korean corridor.

### *Sports as a soft power resource*

Sports is a growing soft power resource (Abdi et al., 2019). But unlike music, sports as a means for intersociety relations has a very long history, even dating back to ancient times. One of the oldest, if not the oldest, recorded documentation of this is the Olympic Games participated in by the ancient Greek city-states (Bowra, 1966). Aside from being a significant sporting event honoring the Greek gods, it was also the venue where trade, commerce, and even tourism flourished (Murray, 2012), and, more importantly, peace treaties and alliances were negotiated and formed. So much importance was placed on the Olympic Games that wars were put aside when it was being held. There is evidence that the warrior city-state of Sparta was even heavily fined for violating the truce put in place for the Olympic Games during the Peloponnesian War of 431 to 404 BC (Bowra, 1966). And throughout history, there have been many other significant instances wherein sports and sporting events were utilized as a means to connect to other nations. There is the example of East and West Germany participating as a combined team under a common flag and a national anthem during the 1956 and 1960 Olympics (Stevenson & Alaug, 2008). Highlighting this particular example is important, as Germany is considered to be the role model for those working for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. Another example is the ping-pong diplomacy between the United States and the People's Republic of China in 1971. Albeit informal, this is considered an important overture in international relations not only between two countries but between two ideologies as well (Murray, 2012; Stevenson & Alaug, 2008). Furthermore, in the 1970s and 1980s, intra-Yemen football matches between the capitalist Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) under governmental supervision were held, eventually leading to amicable relations, and unification in the 1990s (Stevenson & Alaug, 2008). Similar to Germany, this also has some parallels with the situation in the Korean peninsula. Lastly, the 2002 FIFA World Cup, held in Japan and South Korea, brought historically old enemies together, even if only temporarily, to host the world in one of the

biggest sporting events (Murray, 2012). These examples are perceived as attempts to bridge different peoples and countries with different political and social ideologies. The examples of Germany and Yemen are of particular interest, as these show, at that time, different ideologies of essentially the same country. But what is also important is that consistent with the need to employ the “cult of the celebrity”, these events received much media coverage, making them known to the rest of the world, and garnering favorable sentiments and significant formal and informal exchanges from the general public. Mass media coverage, especially at the international level across a variety of easily accessible platforms is perceived as something very significant in pushing sports as a soft power resource (Abdi et al., 2019; Dubinsky, 2019; J. W. Lee, 2019; Park, 2017).

As such, because of the abundance of evidence, some governments have actively utilized sports as a new and promising diplomatic tool (Murray, 2012). Furthermore, sports can communicate and promote constructive values such as creating commitments and relationships, encouraging exchanges and dialogs, and calling for reducing tensions and conflicts (Abdi et al., 2019). For South Korea in particular, the hosting of the 1988 Summer Olympics was a significant turning point in terms of regarding sports as a means to generate and exercise soft power (Vandenberghe, 2017). As with any other Olympics, it showcased the many facets of the host country, politically, economically, socially, and culturally, among others. Furthermore, thanks to global media adeptly playing its role within the “cult of the celebrity” sphere, almost the whole world’s attention is on the events taking place in the host country while the Olympics are being held.

There have been several times when North Korea and South Korea made several efforts to show a unified front, under the watchful eyes of domestic and international media outlets. These include the 1991 World Table Tennis Championships where the two countries fielded a unified team (Kunis, 2017), the “North-South Reunification Football Games” where squads’ uniforms bore no national insignias (Stevenson & Alaug, 2008), joint Taekwondo demonstrations that clearly showed both similarities and differences of styles and skills between North Korean and South Korean martial artists (Joint Press Corps-Yonhap, 2018), and a joint handball team at the 2019 Handball World Championships in Germany (D.-h. Kim, 2018). Furthermore, there were instances as well when teams from the two countries marched under a common flag, such as the 2000 Sydney and 2004 Athens Summer Olympics, and the 2006 Turin Winter Olympics (Kunis, 2017). While this has generated much favorable buzz in

terms of being more hopeful that improving relations with North Korea were progressing, management of some high-profile sports in South Korea has also been rocked by scandals of corruption, bribery, embezzlement, sex trafficking, and even game-fixing, making its present position tenuous and delicate (Porteux & Choi, 2018).

Previous research has explained that sports ought to be entirely apolitical, and therefore a perfect tool for diplomacy (Stevenson & Alaug, 2008). But on the other hand, sports and politics are not necessarily mutually isolated from one another, as history has been littered with so many examples where sports were used to further political agendas (Park, 2017; Rofe, 2016). Furthermore, sports are filled with many nationalistic symbols and symbolic gestures and actions, and therefore foster some degree of national identity and pride (Stevenson & Alaug, 2008). Sports have also been argued to have a focus on culture and some peaceful values (Abdi et al., 2019; Dubinsky, 2019), such as sportsmanship and teamwork (Kunis, 2017). And by focusing on individual athletes, the media has enabled to use of the athlete's identity to project the image of the nation he or she represents in tandem with these nationalistic symbols and symbolic gestures and actions (Rofe, 2016). This is an important consideration, as this also draws non-fans of the sport who are engaged in the relevant social or political issues involved into the discussion.

All in all, there are ample discussions, at least in theory, that these two can indeed be potentially good resources of soft power employed towards the inter-Korean relations corridor. However, how can they be more effectively, efficiently, and sustainably utilized in the long run is the bigger question.

### **Case studies: Review of documented events and initial impressions**

This study relies on exploratory research, adopting the observation method to collect the data, drawing from several previous kinds of research, reports, and commentaries focusing on these large events of 2018. Furthermore, the case study method is employed to analyze the observations collected on these large events. Collating and integrating these different sources and comparing them with what theory posits provide evidence of varying perspectives that can collaboratively construct a bigger picture on this issue, as many of these sources come from different backgrounds and orientations as well.

*“Spring is Coming”*: Showcasing South Korean music artists to North Korean audiences

For Hallyu, music festivals facilitating and showcasing cultural exchanges have been an integral part of arranging state-level agreements (Oh, 2016), even with North Korea (S. Kim & Kong, 2018). The April “Spring is Coming” concert was seen by many as a significant step forward in thawing the diplomatic row between North Korea and South Korea, especially since the event was punctuated by Kim Jong-un’s favorable words and actions involving Red Velvet (South China Morning Post, 2018). The North Korean leader was even quoted saying:

“There had been interest in whether I would come and see Red Velvet. I had initially planned to attend a performance the day after tomorrow but I came here today after adjusting my schedule. I thank you for this kind of gift to Pyongyang citizens... Please tell (South Korean) President Moon Jae-in how great an event like this is... I am grateful for a gift like this (concert) to the people of Pyongyang” – Kim Jong-un, Supreme Leader of North Korea

It was also a far cry from the usual South Korean propaganda tactics of blasting K-Pop content from massive loudspeakers set up along the Demilitarized Zone (Rich & Lee, 2018). But what made this event more interesting is that it was held some weeks before a planned inter-Korean summit between Kim Jong-un and South Korean president Moon Jae-in (S. Kim & Kong, 2018; Rich & Lee, 2018; South China Morning Post, 2018). In some sense, it can be argued that was deliberately scheduled as well. Bringing together a contingent of widely-known South Korean music artists also caught the media’s attention (Gibson, 2020). Particularly for Red Velvet, their movements were photographed and reported, from their departure from the country to their arrival at their hotel, to their on-stage performance, and eventually to their face-to-face meeting with Kim Jong-un at the venue’s main lobby, highlighted by their shaking hands with the North Korean leader. The resulting media attention generated several domestic and international commentaries as well, all agreeing that this is something significant that may help push the reunification agenda, or at the very least the significant improvement of relationships, several steps ahead.

The perceived warmer reception from the North Korean audience was in stark contrast to a 2003 concert which had K-Pop groups Shinhwa and Baby V.O.X., where the audience was reported silent and had stony expressions (Denyer & Kim, 2019; S. Kim & Kong, 2018; South China Morning Post, 2018). Another striking difference was the fact that North Korean audiences, albeit the privileged ones, were allowed access to



popular representatives of what their government once branded as “decadent capitalism” (Rich & Lee, 2018). Such observations make for an interesting and inspiring story since there is a perception of progress that has transpired from the events of 2003 to that of 2018. Members of Red Velvet were quoted on their thoughts as well (South China Morning Post, 2018):

“The North’s audience applauded to our performance much louder than we expected and even sang along to our songs... it was a big relief,” – Red Velvet member Yeri

“I told myself, ‘Let’s do our best even if there’s no response (from the audience)’ ... but they showed so much reaction,” – Red Velvet member Wendy

Furthermore, some have even speculated that even the members of the contingent were carefully and strategically selected to subtly infuse a cross-generational soft power element into it (Herman, 2018). Red Velvet and Girls’ Generation’s Seohyun were representatives of the worldwide popularity of Hallyu, while the veterans were the rock-solid foundations that older generations know and love. The additions of Yoon-Do-Hyun from the rock band YB and R&B singer Jungin were there to showcase the diversity of K-Pop. This particular mix served to offer a sharp contrast to North Korean music. It can thus be further argued that the selection of Red Velvet was also designed to draw international attention to this particular event due to the group’s worldwide popularity, while the veterans were chosen to also lend increased credibility and familiarity to more domestic audiences.

Hence, based on all of the reports and commentaries as cited thus far in this research, the utilization of the “cult of the celebrity”, both in terms of the music artists themselves who performed in Pyongyang and how much domestic and international media attention they have attracted, is very much obvious. South Korea’s three main free television broadcasters, KBS, MBC, and SBS, racked up a combined 36.6% rating during the live telecast of the full show, while international audiences left a huge variety of favorable comments on online portals like YouTube (Gibson, 2020). Furthermore, it has sparked many other commentaries and conversations, all as previously cited in this research, both praising the efforts and the effects this has had on the North Korean audiences in attendance and questioning the actual authenticity of especially Kim Jong-un’s interactions and reactions to Red Velvet in particular. It even drew

insights and speculations if eventually, North Korea can become a viable market for K-Pop and K-Drama.

*Taekwondo: Finding a common ground between the North and the South*

Historically, this was not the first time Taekwondo has been used in the North-South diplomacy scene (Joint Press Corps-Yonhap, 2018). In 2002, a South Korean team held two performances as part of minister-level talks in Pyongyang. In 2014, the respective Taekwondo federations of the two countries signed a “Protocol of Accord” to facilitate the exchange of demonstration teams, kicking it off a year later in Chelyabinsk, Russia by holding a joint performance during the 2015 World Taekwondo (WT) Championships. In 2018, the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics played host to a North Korean exhibition team during the opening ceremonies. Later that year, the North Koreans sent a demonstration team to the June 2018 WT Championships in Muju, South Korea. And then in October, another joint performance was held during that round of talks between North and South Korea, this time in the presence of South Korean and foreign officials of World Taekwondo, the international federation governing the sport (Yonhap, 2018). The presence of such officials lends added perceived credibility to these events. Presently, there are talks between the two countries to finally integrate the sport, with plans to hold joint demonstrations around the world, and have the respective countries’ teams compete under the other’s rules (D.-h. Kim, 2018). *Taekwondo*, the widely-accepted fact that it is Korean has made many experts argue that it is a good platform to discuss the cultural similarities between the two Koreas (Porteux & Choi, 2018). In one such demonstration, South Korean media outlets have reported some interesting insights from North Koreans. One commentary involving the Pyongyang Taekwondo demonstration at the same April “Spring is Coming” concert mentioned that (Joint Press Corps-Yonhap, 2018):

“I realized that taekwondo is the same whether South Korea or North Korea, except that their content is slightly different,” – a North Korean audience member

“The South's performance is diverse and is reminiscent of a musical with storytelling, while the North's feels more like practical martial arts, and I can feel some strength from it.” – A member of the South Korean delegation

Many such reports on the performance of both South Korean and North Korean Taekwondo teams and the corresponding North Korean

audience reactions were generated as well. In the same way as how the K-Pop artists were covered by the media, the South Korean Taekwondo team's movements from Seoul to Pyongyang were documented as well. But more importantly, these recent events involving the sport in the context of the two countries have also similarly generated many commentaries and conversations that are open to the general public as well. These include historical accounts of the development of the respective Taekwondo associations of South Korea and North Korea, the differences between the approaches of the two countries towards the sport, and what has happened before in the sport involving the two countries, among many others, all as cited in this research.

*The Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and the Jakarta Asian Games: A show of unity to the rest of the world*

The presence of unified Korean teams in international sports competitions, especially in grand stages such as the Winter Olympics and the Asian Games, has always caught the attention of the media as well. To reiterate, the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics saw a unified Korean women's hockey team while the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games saw unified Korean teams in women's canoeing, women's basketball, men's canoeing, and men's rowing. An interesting fact regarding these teams is that because of sanctions placed on North Korea, the unified teams were unable to acquire branded and sponsored apparel and gear, forcing them to turn to local Korean suppliers and producers instead (News Desk (Agence France-Presse), 2018).

What is also very telling are the narratives formed during the opening and closing ceremonies of these events, where there is much fanfare involving communicating various forms of representing cultural heritages, social realities, and political messages (J. W. Lee, 2019). Hence, witnessing athletes from South Korea and North Korea marching together during the opening and closing ceremonies under a common flag creates powerful impressions towards the media covering the event, and hence towards the audiences watching. In addition, individual stories documenting the experiences of the unified Korean teams make for good media exposure. For instance, media reports of the Jakarta Asian Games provided several stories about how well the unified teams worked together despite limited training time in preparation for the Games (Kyodo News, 2018):

“We can all communicate as we are all Korean people. We have a strong

desire (to win) and we all came together. Even though it was a short time to make the chemistry, it still worked.” – Lee Moon Kyu, coach of the unified women’s basketball team.

Stories such as this make for favorable narratives designed to engage not only institutions that have vested interests in these events but also individuals who are interested not only in international sports events but also in the dynamics of the relationships between North Korea and South Korea. Therefore, the resulting conversations and commentaries cover themes that go beyond what happened during the Winter Olympics and the Asian Games.

A significant example of this is that the presence of these unified Korean teams in international sporting events of this scope and scale also sparked many commentaries hoping for more intensified high-level talks between the two countries and speculations that such presences would indeed lead to a significant improvement in the relations between the two countries (D.-h. Kim, 2018; Kyodo News, 2018; News Desk (Agence France-Presse), 2018; Vandenberghe, 2017).

But the most significant consideration here is that this saw worldwide multimedia coverage. This enabled the amplification of such stories and also generated new ones similar to the Taekwondo case where all of a sudden, articles on the history of the participation of unified Korean teams in international sporting events were made. These included the 1991 Chiba and 2018 Sweden World Table Tennis Championships, the 2018 International Table Tennis Federation Korea Open, the 1991 FIFA World Youth Championship in held Portugal, and the 2019 World Men’s Handball Championship held in Denmark and Germany.

### *Inter-Korea relations: Challenges for soft power approaches*

To provide some additional academic underpinnings to the feedback as documented by the media, some commentaries from past research are also considered here. Accordingly, many researchers have also quoted some commentaries reacting on how entertainment, sports, and other similar forms of soft power-driven approaches were employed concerning South Korea’s efforts towards North Korea. Some of these that are relevant to this research are as follows:

Some commentaries describing or characterizing the North-South relations (Watson, 2012):

“The solution to the inter-Korean crisis is to uncouple anachronistic beliefs inhomogeneity from unification talk and by promoting unification as

heterogeneity. Koreans do not have a concept of difference that evokes the sense of a melting pot, and the word used to explain cultural and political differences ‘ijil’ has a negative connotation. Because there is little interest or acknowledgment of diversity, one of the most important questions about Korea’s future is nearly impossible to ask. How are south and north Korea different?” – Roy Richard Grinker, Professor of Anthropology, International Affairs, and Human Sciences at The George Washington University, *Korea and its Futures: Unification and the Unfinished War*

“Reunification, however, comes in many different forms. If inter-Korean relations were to improve and create a climate for unification then a metropolitan Seoul-Pyongyang zone would be created which would further marginalize the rural areas in the North and the South, perhaps creating conditions for older regional enmities and ethnic nationalism. Ironically, the rural areas in the South could have their distinctive multiculturalism as assimilation whilst the urban areas would have their multiculturalism and reactions to this, whilst the Seoul and Pyongyang urban cosmopolitan elite would have their multiculturalism. The Northern regions near China would then have their cultural histories distinctive from the rural South.” – The RAND Corporation

On the worldwide image of North Korea and South Korea (K. Jang, 2019):

“We argue that images of DPRK among people worldwide are stronger than their images of South Korea, and this is one of the reasons why soft power is needed by South Korea. In other words, the consciousness of North Korea infuses South Korean national branding and soft power strategies. This reflects broader trends in Korean society. – Euh Yoon-Dae, Chairman, Presidential Council on National Branding

The immediate observation here is that while indeed the Hallyu-related and sport-related events of 2018 do bring some promise, the more extensive commentaries on North-South Korean relations insist that some pause must be given to all the excitement these have generated. As these past researchers have rightfully pointed out, one of the biggest challenges in forging closer ties between South Korea and North Korea, especially considering that reunification is the long-term end goal, is that there are too many social and economic differences between the cosmopolitan and capitalist South and the insular and communist North. There are concerns that these differences are currently too much for the perceived similarities in culture, language, and ethnicities, among others, to overcome using soft power approaches (Gibson, 2020; Watson, 2012). Unfortunately, it is through these perceived similarities that many Hallyu and sports events

bank on to establish their respective positions within the diplomatic efforts between South Korea and North Korea (Chung, 2019). In other words, the deployment of Hallyu and sports must go beyond banking on these similarities for it to be more meaningful, valuable, and effective in this particular case and be much broader in its messaging (K. Jang, 2019). Furthermore, it has been unfortunate that there have not been many other significant events to follow up on and reinforce what was achieved in 2018.

The next section further scrutinizes this collection of reports and commentaries, diving deeper into the initial set of insights generated by these three significant events within the frame of the theoretical foundations of the “cult of celebrity” and the historical precedents of Hallyu and sports in diplomacy.

### **Further analysis**

To reiterate, the important role of celebrities in these soft power approaches must be scrutinized regarding their actual role in the state’s diplomatic agendas (Algan & Kaptan, 2021; Watson, 2012). Celebrities are supposedly ideal tools for diplomacy because they possess appeal to the masses and command the attention of the media and other important stakeholders (Algan & Kaptan, 2021; Chung, 2019; G. Jang & Paik, 2012; Park, 2017; Rofe, 2016). However, there are questions regarding their credibility as diplomats and as influential personalities in politics. This is because celebrities’ respective environments are oftentimes far different from the environment involving politics and diplomacy (Algan & Kaptan, 2021; Park, 2017; Watson, 2012). What celebrities represent within their respective professional personas is also oftentimes different from the social, cultural, and economic realities important in diplomatic exchanges (Watson, 2012).

#### *The effectivity and impact of Hallyu in diplomatic efforts*

The use of Hallyu in this case is a very interesting one. Hallyu can entice continued consumption through a balance of Western modernity and Asian sentimentality that has great mass appeal (G. Jang & Paik, 2012). However, Hallyu also embodies a deeply anti-communism and pro-capitalist ideology, running counter to North Korean ideologies (K. Jang, 2019). For this particular instance, Red Velvet’s image that was showcased in Pyeongyang is a very important consideration (Borowiec, 2018; S. Kim & Kong, 2018; Rich & Lee, 2018). Red Velvet is perceived to be an embodiment of something modern and cosmopolitan, infused with

Western influences. This is very different from what North Koreans are used to seeing and consuming. To temper this, the South Korean delegation, as pointed out, included other artists that present either toned-down versions of what Red Velvet portrays or more relatable images that are more compatible with North Korean impressions. But more importantly, the perceived acceptance of such an image by North Korean audiences seems like a favorable step forward and provides some validation of earlier testimonies on the appeal of Hallyu imagery towards some North Korean denizens. However, regardless of the positive domestic and international feedback that the “Spring is Coming” concert earned, this does not necessarily translate immediately to any diplomatic success (Gibson, 2020).

Some experts have pointed out that South Korea was probably being played by the North Koreans in that concert (Borowiec, 2018; Rich & Lee, 2018). In fact, despite these events, North Korea has still demonstrated contradictory and impulsive actions that push for Korean unification but at the same time discourage cross-cultural and cross-societal initiatives (Denyer & Kim, 2019). In addition, North Korean authorities have protested about how some Hallyu content such as the K-Dramas “Descendants of the Sun” and tvN “Crash Landing on You (사랑의 불시착)” have portrayed North Koreans and life in North Korea. Some conservative South Koreans have also criticized these two dramas for glamorizing North Korea. Complicating matters further are the controversies surrounding the recent JTBC drama “Snowdrop (설강화)”, especially touching on accusations involving supposedly North Korean spies. These incidents are examples of the complexity of utilizing Hallyu's soft power resource, especially relying on the “cult of the celebrity”. While the likes of Song Joongki and Song Hye Kyo in “Descendants of the Sun” and Hyun Bin and Son Yejin in “Crash Landing on You” have attracted foreign audiences and helped paint a favorable picture of South Korea, the plot and character biographies of “Snowdrop” vis-à-vis its main actors Jung Hae-in and Jisoo of BLACKPINK have earned split sentiments. Furthermore, this adds another layer of complexity brought about by utilizing “the cult of the celebrity” in soft power engagements, since it is very unclear as to how sentiments from both the domestic and the international communities, especially from the general public who are actual consumers of Hallyu content, actually matter in the issue of South Korea’s approach to North Korea. But overall, assuming a more formal, structured, and sustained framework and execution process, this seems like

a significant step forward by the South Korean government to improve its use of Hallyu towards North Korean relations.

Some researchers have given several suggestions on how to build on this perceived good start and create significant follow-up opportunities (Gibson, 2020). One of the most significant is taking advantage of the subtle paradigm shifts in communication, such as some YouTube comments praising the performances of Baek Ji Young, Seohyun, and Red Velvet on stage, and at the same time also expressing hope that South Korea and North Korea would at the least establish warmer and closer relations. This presents an opportunity where the general public can also educate themselves on South Korea's dealings with North Korea.

### *The effectiveness and impact of sports on diplomatic efforts*

On the other hand, the utilization of sports to unify states with clashing ideologies has been an interesting subject for discussion. It is therefore inevitable that the efforts of South Korea and North Korea will draw parallels to histories, such as the case of North Yemen and South Yemen involving football (Stevenson & Alaug, 2008). However, fans, as one of the sports' biggest stakeholders, are widely disapproving of such approaches, perceiving its use in diplomacy as sacrilegious because it deviates from what they believe sports should be: An entity free from the corruption and divisive elements of politics and diplomacy (Murray, 2012). There is much concern that what are supposedly safe spaces for people to come together are being turned into tools with complex agendas that are detrimental to the athletes and the fans.

But as far as South Korea is concerned, Taekwondo has been a successful means to conduct sports diplomacy, because of its distinct Korean uniqueness (Abdi et al., 2019; J. W. Lee, 2019; Porteux & Choi, 2018). Furthermore, as seen in the media reports, South Korea finds a lot of common ground with North Korea because Taekwondo functions as a shared cultural bridge between the two countries (Joint Press Corps-Yonhap, 2018; J. W. Lee, 2019). Hence, sports as a tool for diplomacy is a conscious political decision to fulfill policy goals (Kunis, 2017). Through the years, the South Korean government actively worked to globally promote Taekwondo, eventually achieving significant milestones as an exhibition promoting the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympics hosted in Seoul, as a demonstration sport in the 1992 Barcelona Summer Olympics, and as an official event at the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics (Porteux & Choi, 2018).



As for the Winter Olympics and the Asian Games, the utilization of sports for diplomacy is targeted to entice international audiences. This becomes more prominent as previous research has also highlighted the fact that there were some past attempts to field a unified Korean team that failed, including the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, where talks proved to be unproductive because of Cold War tensions, and the 1988 Seoul Olympics, where talks only worsened the hostilities between the two countries (J. W. Lee, 2019). Hence, because of the historical back-and-forth tenuous positioning, there are still concerns about whether or not this route will be sustainable.

*Other areas for consideration: Potential confounding effects*

Many researchers and practitioners have cautioned on the misuse of the word “diplomacy” when discussed in the context of fundamentally non-political situations (Abdi et al., 2019; Murray, 2012; Rofe, 2016), such as entertainment media and sports. Many also caution against drawing conclusions that will affect these inter-Korean relations based on the romanticization of these events (J. W. Lee, 2019). Therefore, this present analysis of current efforts opens up further questions (Borowiec, 2018; Rofe, 2016; Vandenberghe, 2017; Watson, 2012):

*How representative and consistent are entertainment and sports being employed as soft power resources for the government’s official positions involving North Korea?* The backgrounds, affiliations, and beliefs of those who employ these soft power strategies influence their ultimate motivations (Forgey, 2021; S. H. Kim, 2020; Watson, 2012). What makes these very challenging is the fact that they can involve many public and private stakeholders who machinate behind the scenes. For Hallyu, there is an entire ecosystem of producers, writers, actors, broadcast partners, and government representatives, among others, who work with celebrities (Ayhan, 2017; Chung, 2019; G. Jang & Paik, 2012; K. Jang, 2019). For sports, these are the sports clubs and organizations, sports leagues, associations, governing bodies, and sponsors and investors, among others, who work with individual athletes (Murray, 2012; Rofe, 2016). And these become more complicated when government officials, and even world leaders, become involved as well (J. W. Lee, 2019). Hence, what the celebrity ultimately portrays may be completely different from what these other groups of people have in mind.

*How capable and credible are Hallyu and sports celebrities in their respective roles in diplomatic efforts involving North Korea?* Questions regarding if these celebrities truly appreciate their positions

have been raised as well (Park, 2017). Many celebrities have no formal training, orientation, and disposition as demanded by formal diplomacy channels. Furthermore, unless strictly mandated, celebrities are not limited in what and how they communicate and can therefore create controversies by going “off-script”. In other words, their credibility as messengers of diplomatic efforts is not sustainable and can be called to question at almost any time.

*Is pushing for the images that South Korean entertainment and sports respective projects appropriate in the context of the North-South relations corridor?* Ultimately the biggest consideration that must be further scrutinized is that despite the similarities in heritages, cultures, histories, and even languages, these South Korean celebrities represent ultimately an ideology and a society that is significantly different from what North Korea is. Hence, such exchanges involving entertainment and sports between the two countries must be perceived as ground-level efforts to build familiarity and trust, rather than to directly contribute to producing high-level agreements (Borowiec, 2018; Gibson, 2020), contrary to the initial impressions that general audiences have made. In other words, if the South Korean government is to effectively and sustainably employ these channels of Hallyu and sports soft power resources, their respective roles, and the role of soft power in general, in these inter-Korea diplomatic efforts must be more defined.

## **Conclusions**

The “cult of the celebrity” serves as a powerful concept to examine the advantages and disadvantages of using certain soft power resources for diplomacy. This research attempts to explore further the use of soft power by the South Korean government in its efforts to improve relations with North Korea, particularly involving Hallyu and sports. To this end, this research posed two questions to define the scope and to frame the analyses and discussions.

*RQ1: What are the respective roles of Hallyu and sports in South Korea’s soft power strategies towards improving North Korean relations?* Based on this research’s discussions, it is very risky to simply infer that how South Korea employs K-Pop and K-Drama to enhance its international relations with the rest of the world can be done with North Korea. As mentioned, the present constructs of K-Pop and K-Drama reflect more Western perspectives of capitalism

and cosmopolitanism. It is then of little wonder that many countries have embraced South Korean imageries. However, North Korea is a fundamentally different situation, despite many ethnic and cultural similarities. The differences in ideologies and political perspectives at present far outweigh the similarities.

Therefore, at present, the respective roles of Hallyu and sports are more of to tease its way into trying to win North Koreans over. As documented, most of the favorable effects of Hallyu and sports in this context have been observed in individual cases, such as North Korean defectors and individual South Korean and North Korean actors, and other stakeholders who are on the ground. Being able to extend this to develop more favorable perceptions of South Korea at a larger scope and scale is a different matter. Hence, these are tools to build familiarity and trust from the ground. But as more permanent fixtures within South Korean diplomatic efforts with North Korea, the sports diplomacy route presently stands to have a more significant presence. Hallyu, on the other hand, needs some rethinking and retooling.

*RQ2: What are the respective opportunities in Hallyu and in sports that can be maximized to enhance the present efforts toward improving North Korean relations?* The post-Cold War generations saw a rise in the number of non-political and non-government stakeholders contributing to their respective home countries' efforts on improving international relations with the rest of the world (Murray, 2012). After years of cold relations and even direct hostilities, the presence of the North Korean Taekwondo team during the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics was considered a significant event, since it happened on a very high-profile world stage conveyed through the global media. So did the "Spring Has Come" concert and the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games. It cannot be emphasized enough how much of a big leap forward it was to witness a significant contingent of South Koreans and North Koreans marching together under a unified Korean flag in some of the biggest and most widely documented international sports events in the world or to witness the South Korean girl group Red Velvet perform in front of a North Korean audience. The biggest opportunity is to build on these successes, especially now that the rest of the world is watching and is being more

educated about Hallyu and sports celebrities being involved in international affairs (Gibson, 2020).

Therefore, these particular soft power resources should tread carefully to overcome the more significant differences between the two countries, rather than trying to exploit the similarities. While the events of 2018 are indeed considered to be significant developments, the fact that things have significantly bogged down since then should also serve as a stark reminder that there is so much more to be done. For starters, any more rounds of high-profile talks should include more of these concerts and demonstrations as opening and closing acts, or even as intermissions, just to have more North Koreans and South Koreans familiarized with what their respective countries can do. The objective is to slowly and gradually get more people to a favorable position with Hallyu and sports.

#### *Suggestions for future discourse*

Harnessing the “cult of the celebrity” produces significant value. But it also needs to be reevaluated according to the context where it will be employed. It is clear that this present research merely explored some of the facets of employing Hallyu and sports in the inter-Korean efforts. It is easy to get swept up in all of the excitement these have all generated, especially given how much international media attention these events have garnered. While these events may be packaged as historic, they do not guarantee that they will lead to something permanent, let alone long-term (J. W. Lee, 2019). As mentioned, this research has opened up more questions, primarily geared toward the sustainability of using these two sources of soft power. From these, three major considerations are presented here for future extensive discourse.

A significant weakness in these present efforts is the obvious gap between what is showcased in Hallyu and what is real life in South Korea (Borowiec, 2018; Chung, 2019; de Souza, 2021; Istad, 2016). Since both Hallyu and sports appeal to mass audiences significantly more than to country leaders and decision-makers, the tendency to embellish certain aspects of reality in South Korea is prominent. As part of the efforts of building this national brand image through public diplomacy and soft power efforts, the imagery of South Korea that Hallyu and sports respectively depict often offer the best of the country, risking distortions of accurate realities (Istad, 2016). While there is a continuous and growing call for more audiences to be more discerning in separating fact from fantasy, many ordinary foreign individuals, including newer generations

of fans, still inaccurately make their assessments of South Korea based on what Hallyu brings. For example, based on the comments made on the official YouTube videos of the “Spring is Coming” concert, many international fans naively expressed their favorable thoughts about the influence of idols such as Seohyun and Red Velvet as key to improving relations between the two countries, failing to appreciate that the whole issue significantly requires more than that, and risking overestimating or oversimplifying the actual influence that K-Pop idols hold in shaping South Korean policy towards North Korea (Gibson, 2020). The fact that many stakeholders have different, and potentially even clashing, agendas provides potential confounding effects.

Secondly, there is also a lack of an overarching policy framework that would strategically institutionalize these efforts and more constructively harness this “cult of the celebrity” potential (Istad, 2016; Kunis, 2017), ensuring that employing Hallyu and sports as soft power resources are in line with national agendas on international relations. A framework for this purpose is necessary, especially since the use of music and sports celebrities in soft power and diplomacy carries many risks (Park, 2017). For starters, identifying the correct celebrities to participate in such events based on the intended audiences is critical to mitigating these risks (Gibson, 2020).

But what is also critical is the reactions from the international community, since the reconciliation between North Korea and South Korea and the reunification of the Korean peninsula remain to be hotly debated topics among influential global powers (Chung, 2019; K. Jang, 2019). The United States has made several attempts to intervene on top of pursuing a separate deal with North Korea but to little effect (S. H. Kim, 2020). Such is the case of how former United States President Donald Trump attempted to use his celebrity status to augment his foreign policy approach toward North Korea (Forgey, 2021; S. H. Kim, 2020; J. W. Lee, 2019). This particular context with Mr. Trump presents an interesting opportunity where a prominent celebrity was placed in a position of power and has used his celebrity status to further political agendas, including foreign policy. Also, one cannot discount the influence and intentions of China, North Korea’s most powerful ally, in these talks as well (de Souza, 2021). But as mentioned, while indeed what the international community says about inter-Korean relations should be considered, what the North Koreans and the South Koreans say should take precedence. Especially now as South Korea transitions once again into a new regime from the more liberal Moon Jae-In-led administration to the more conservative

Yoon Suk-Yeol, changes in the government's policies and stances regarding North Korea should be keenly watched as well.

## References

- Abdi, K., Talebpour, M., Fullerton, J., Ranjesh, M. J., & Nooghabi, H. J. (2019). Identifying sports diplomacy resources as soft power tools. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 15(3), 147-155. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00115-9>
- Algan, E., & Kaptan, Y. (2021). Turkey's TV celebrities as cultural envoys: The role of celebrity diplomacy in nation branding and the pursuit of soft power. *Popular Communication*, 19(3), 222-234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2021.1913494>
- Ayhan, K. (2017). Korea's soft power and public diplomacy under Moon Jae-In Administration: A window of opportunity. In K. Ayhan (Ed.), *Korea's soft power and public diplomacy* (pp. 13-32). Hangang Network.
- Borowiec, S. (2018). Commentary: Do K-pop stars hold the key to moving North Korean leader Kim Jong Un? *Channel News Asia*. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/red-velvet-k-pop-move-north-korea-leader-kim-jong-un-10107198>
- Bowra, C. M. (1966). *Classical Greece: Time-Life International* (Nederland) N.V.
- Chung, K. Y. (2019). Media as soft power: The role of the South Korean media in North Korea. *The Journal of International Communication*, 25(1), 137-157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2018.1533878>
- de Souza, N. (2021). Commentary: North Korea's efforts to suppress K-pop are too little, too late. *Channel News Asia*. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/north-south-korea-k-pop-drama-kim-jong-un-crash-landing-bts-1932881>
- Denyer, S., & Kim, M. J. (2019). How K-pop is luring young North Koreans to cross the line, *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/how-k-pop-is-tempting-young-north-koreans-to-cross-the-line/2019/08/19/0f984654-839f-11e9-b585-e36b16a531aa\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/how-k-pop-is-tempting-young-north-koreans-to-cross-the-line/2019/08/19/0f984654-839f-11e9-b585-e36b16a531aa_story.html)
- Dubinsky, Y. (2019). From soft power to sports diplomacy: A theoretical and conceptual discussion. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 15(3), 156-164. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00116-8>
- Forgey, Q. (2021). South Korean president: Trump 'beat around the bush' on North Korea diplomacy. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/04/21/south-korean-president-trump-north-korea-diplomacy-483930>
- Gibson, J. (2020). YouTube diplomacy: A sentiment analysis of global reactions to the 2018 concert in Pyongyang. In *Global Public Diplomacy Center*

- (Ed.), Collection of essays on Korea's public diplomacy: Possibilities and future outlook (pp. 15-39). Seoul National University Press.
- Herman, T. (2018). Red Velvet, Cho Yong-pil, and other South Korean stars to perform in North Korea. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tamarherman/2018/03/20/south-korean-stars-red-velvet-cho-young-pil-others-to-perform-in-north-korea/>
- Istad, F. (2016). A strategic approach to public diplomacy in South Korea. In K. Ayhan (Ed.), *Korea's public diplomacy*. Hangang Network.
- Jang, G., & Paik, W. K. (2012). Korean Wave as tool for Korea's new cultural diplomacy. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 2(3), 196-202. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2012.23026>
- Jang, K. (2019). Between soft power and propaganda: The Korean military drama Descendants of the Sun. *Journal of War & Cultural Studies*, 12(1), 24-36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2018.1426209>
- Joint Press Corps-Yonhap. (2018). Two Koreas hold first-ever joint taekwondo demonstration in Pyongyang. Yonhap News Agency. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20180402014000315>
- Kim, D.-h. (2018). South and North Korea to integrate respective branches of taekwondo, *Hankyoreh*. [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_northkorea/868668.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/868668.html)
- Kim, S., & Kong, K. (2018). K-pop stars turn diplomatic envoys with concert dates in North Korea. *The Japan Times*. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/04/01/asia-pacific/k-pop-stars-turn-diplomatic-envoys-concert-dates-north-korea/>
- Kim, S. H. (2020). The assessment of President Donald Trump's North Korean policy. *North Korean Review*, 16(2), 121-128. <https://doi.org/10.2307/NKR.16.2.121>
- Kunis, S. (2017). Teamwork makes the dream work: Assessing the potential of sports as a tool of public diplomacy in inter-Korean relations. In K. Ayhan (Ed.), *Korea's soft power and public diplomacy*. Hangang Network.
- Kyodo News. (2018). Asian Games: North, South Koreans compete together for 1st time. *Kyodo News*. <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2018/08/7e67eb45331b-update1-asian-games-north-s-koreans-compete-together-for-1st-time.html>
- Lee, J. W. (2019). Olympic ceremony and diplomacy: South Korean, North Korean, and British media coverage of the 2018 Olympic Winter Games' Opening and Closing Ceremonies. *Communication & Sport* 9(5), 761-784. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519886544>
- Lee, M. (2020). Landscape of the minds of South and North Koreans: Unification perception, mutual recognition, and the possibility of cultural integration. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 21(3), 465-475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2020.1796355>

- Murray, S. (2012). The two halves of sports diplomacy. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23(3), 576-592. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2012.706544>
- News Desk (Agence France-Presse). (2018). Sanctions push unified Korea teams to go no-brand at Asian Games. *The Jakarta Post*. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/07/31/sanctions-push-unified-korea-teams-to-go-no-brand-at-asian-games.html>
- Oh, S. (2016). Hallyu (Korean Wave) as Korea's cultural public diplomacy in China and Japan. In K. Ayhan (Ed.), *Korea's public diplomacy* (pp. 167-196). Hangang Network.
- Park, M. K. (2017). Long shot: The prospects and limitations of sports and celebrity athlete diplomacy. *InMedia: The French Journal of Media Studies*, 6(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.4000/inmedia.855>
- Porteux, J. N., & Choi, K. J. (2018). Hallyu as sports diplomacy and prestige building. *Culture and Empathy: International Journal of Sociology, Psychology, and Cultural Studies*, 1(1-4), 70-87. doi: <https://doi.org/10.32860/26356619/2018/1.1234.0006>
- Rich, M., & Lee, S.-H. (2018). Can North Korea handle a K-pop invasion? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/30/world/asia/north-korea-k-pop-red-velvet.html>
- Rofe, J. S. (2016). Sport and diplomacy: A global diplomacy framework. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 27(2), 212-230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2016.1169785>
- South China Morning Post. (2018). Kim Jong-un is a Red Velvet superfan, praising K-pop girl band who serenade him with 'Bad Boy' and 'Red Flavour', *South China Morning Post*. <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2139857/kim-jong-un-red-velvet-superfan-praising-k-pop-girl-band-who>
- Stevenson, T. B., & Alaug, A. K. (2008). Sports diplomacy and emergent nationalism: Football links between the two Yemens, 1970-1990. *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 3(2), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ame.2008.030202>
- Tan, H. (2021). A North Korean man who smuggled 'Squid Game' into the country is to be executed by firing squad and a high-school student who bought a USB drive with the show will be jailed for life, report says. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/north-korea-execution-life-sentence-hard-labor-squid-game-2021-11>
- Vandenbergh, P. (2017). PyeongChang 2018 and South Korea's strategic use of soft power. In K. Ayhan (Ed.), *Korea's soft power and public diplomacy* (pp. 125-144). Hangang Network.
- Watson, I. (2012). South Korea's state-led soft power strategies: Limits on inter-Korean relations. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 20(3), 304-325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2012.748972>



Yonhap. (2018). S. Korean taekwondo demonstration team arrives in N. Korea for performances, Yonhap News Agency.  
<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20181031001600315>

# **ASEAN-ROK Cooperation on Regional Security in a Changing Strategic Environment**

**Herman Joseph S. Kraft**

*Department of Political Science  
University of the Philippines Diliman*

## **Abstract**

Since 2010, the Republic of Korea (ROK) has recognized the need to strengthen relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) across different areas of engagement. Particular attention has been given to increasing cooperation on regional security. In a period of shifting power relations and distribution, the attention given to regional security cooperation is well merited. The heightened strategic competition that characterizes relations between the United States and China already dominates a significant part of the geopolitical environment. It potentially constrains the strategic options of different countries in the region. The ROK appears to be considering a strategy of building a middle power coalition revolving around cooperation between itself and ASEAN to mitigate the more egregious effects and implications of this strategic competition. The effectiveness of such a strategy, however, requires both policy consistency on the part of the ROK, and strong cohesion among and the adoption of a common appreciation of the strategic situation by the ASEAN states. This is going to be an uphill climb given the internal political dynamics in South Korea and undercurrents in intra- and extra-ASEAN relations.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, ASEAN centrality, US-China strategic competition, middle power, New Southern Policy

## **Introduction**

The issuance of a Joint Declaration on ASEAN-Republic of Korea Strategic Partnership and Prosperity in 2010 signaled the considered intention of the ASEAN states and South Korea to intensify cooperation across multiple areas of mutual concern. This intention was already influenced by a strategic environment reacting to the emergence of China as an emerging power in the Asia Pacific region and perceptions of a US distracted and stretched thin by its commitments in different theaters. Since then, however, that relationship has turned into a more competitive one that is pushing countries in the region into making strategic decisions that are increasingly locked into a binary choice between the two superpowers. This paper argues that the building of a strategic partnership between ASEAN and South Korea is geared towards creating a middle power coalition as a buffer against the more alarming aspects of this rivalry. South Korea and the different ASEAN states have strong economic relations with China (with some engagements bordering on dependency). Still, they are simultaneously involved with the United States in some form of political-security partnership at varying levels. At the same time, however, this project is contingent upon the extent to which the ASEAN states can define and sustain a common approach to the evolving strategic environment and on the consistency with which South Korea can maintain the significance of the approach built around its strategic partnership with ASEAN across different Presidential administrations.

This paper is organized around four key themes. First, the evolution of the strategic partnership is discussed with its antecedents in the Joint Declaration of 2010. The key element in this strategic partnership is the increasing importance given to regional security and the role played by ASEAN Centrality in maintaining the regional security architecture built around multilateral arrangements and dialogue fora. These are discussed as separate but constituent themes in the approach behind the Strategic Partnership. Despite its lack of conceptual clarity, ASEAN Centrality has been a key element in how ASEAN defines its role and approach to the construction of the regional security architecture. It is an approach that converges with the ROK's sense of the need for middle-power intervention in a regional strategic environment increasingly dominated and influenced by the competition between China and the United States. The fourth theme tries to bring these aspirations together regarding its prospects. In particular, challenges emerging from consistency and the sustainability of the initiatives making up the

partnership need to be recognized. Whether the operationalization of the Strategic Partnership as envisioned will provide an affirmation of the self-identification that is key to its vision will largely depend on the extent the partners involved will be willing to identify it as being fundamental to their national interest.

### **An Evolving ASEAN-Republic of Korea Strategic Partnership**

In October 2010, the ten ASEAN countries and the Republic of Korea (ROK) signed a Joint Declaration on the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Hanoi. A key element of this Strategic Partnership was the emphasis given to strengthening political security cooperation between ASEAN and the ROK. (ASEAN-ROK Plan of Action, 2016) Before this, issues in this domain were largely raised within the broader context of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus). With the Joint Declaration, however, regional security matters had become a key pillar of the relationship between ASEAN and the ROK. In 2019, this was re-emphasized in the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Joint Vision Statement for Peace, Prosperity, and Partnership – a document that placed peace and security as a foremost concern of the ASEAN-ROK relationship.

Building a more extensive relationship between ASEAN and the ROK has been a key element of the ROK's strategic framing of how it would like to approach international relations in the region since the signing of the ASEAN-ROK Strategic Partnership. President Moon Jae-In further strengthened his country's commitment to this course when he unveiled the New Southern Policy of the ROK during a state visit to Indonesia on 9 November 2017. His declared intention was to guide the "Korean government...to dramatically improve cooperative ties with ASEAN" that would elevate it to the same level as its relations with the four major powers around the Korean Peninsula. (Sohn, 2017) Easley (2018) emphasizes that the NSP is an "economic and diplomatic diversification strategy" to lessen dependence on the great powers. At the same time, however, the declarations behind the NSP tend to emphasize the need to cooperate on regional peace. In a regional environment that is increasingly characterized by the growing pre-eminence of great power rivalry and the consequent uncertainty it engenders, there is a growing imperative to find ways of making certain that cooperative measures between players are similarly made vulnerable by the intensifying

competition between the US and China are not limited to balancing or bandwagoning strategies (Lee, 2020).

ASEAN-ROK relations have always strongly emphasized economic cooperation. At the 16th AEM-ROK Consultation Meeting held in Bangkok in September 2019, the Joint Statement emphasized that

- two-way trade between ASEAN and Korea grew by 4.4 percent, amounting to USD 160.5 billion in 2018. This accounts for 5.7 percent of ASEAN's total merchandise trade.
- there was a strong surge of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows in 2018 amounting to USD 6.6 billion. South Korea remained ASEAN's fifth largest trade partner and source of FDI among ASEAN Dialogue Partners.
- Strong commitments were expressed to the Regional Cooperation and Economic Partnership (RCEP) even as progress in the ASEAN-Korea Free Trade Area was noted.

Similar advances in people-to-people relations had also contributed to the deepening of ties. The Chairman's Statement of the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1 Session with the Republic of Korea issued on 9 September 2020 mentioned:

- The ROK's continued support in promoting cultural cooperation and closer people-to-people ties, including through the expansion of scholarship programs and the activities of the ASEAN Korea Centre (AKC) in Seoul and the ASEAN Culture House in Busan;
- enhancing cooperation on digital education and human resource development and encouraging the ROK to support strengthening ICT programs for schools in the ASEAN Member States; and
- the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ASEAN Cultural Centre in Bangkok and the ASEAN Culture House in Busan in 2019, as well as the significant progress in advancing cooperation in film development and organizations between ASEAN and the ROK.

Perhaps more notably, Korean soft power has been making inroads in the region. Korean dramas, pop music, language, and food have been part of what is commonly known as the Korean Wave. (Ho & Ho 2019; Cruz, 2020) Increasingly, opportunities are being made available to increase these engagements.

## **The Security Context of the ASEAN-Republic of South Korea Strategic Partnership**

Economic and people-to-people relations have been essential to strengthening ties between the ASEAN states and the ROK. These have contributed significantly to the process of community building, a continuing project of countries in the region. Much of the work in this area that has gone on in the last 30 years has emphasized the role of ASEAN as a hub of regional integration in Southeast Asia and the broader context of East Asia. The establishment of the ARF opened the door to developing ASEAN-driven multilateral arrangements that have been a key element of the East Asian/Asia Pacific security architecture. (See Huisken, 2009; Tan, 2013) This became the basis of the idea of “ASEAN Centrality.” Its meaning still escapes rigorous operationalization, but “ASEAN Centrality” and its maintenance (whatever it might mean) have been adopted by ASEAN itself as an aspiration to make an essential contribution to regional cooperation. It revolves around the fact that ASEAN is a focal point for networks of dialogue seeking to build consensus on common regional concerns and responses. The ASEAN countries have become a favored venue for these meetings. (Caballero-Anthony 2014) The two Summit meetings between President Donald Trump of the United States and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), meetings that were encouraged by President Moon, took place in Hanoi in 2019 and Singapore in 2018 under the aegis of the East Asian Summit (EAS) – one of the multilateral meetings constituting the regional architecture. In this context, “ASEAN Centrality” is a way of locking in ASEAN’s role as the institutional hub of overlapping multilateral processes that directly include the ARF, the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), and the EAS mentioned above, among others.

The ROK’s approach to building its relationship with ASEAN as indicated in the NSP is not new. As noted above, the interaction between the ROK and the ASEAN states has been expanding at different levels and in various ways, especially since the establishment of the ASEAN-Korea FTA in 2006. Economic and socio-cultural exchanges have grown to the extent that the ROK has become one of the top partners of the different ASEAN states. Consequently, the ASEAN “region” has become a geographic space where the need to promote and protect the ROK’s national interests more actively has been steadily growing. In this context, the expansion and strengthening of ROK-ASEAN cooperation have become the favored approach toward attaining this goal. The ROK has sought to build upon this foundation of strong relations to expand its

engagement with ASEAN in the regional security domain. Strategically, the imperative for this cooperation has increased as the region's security situation is increasingly dominated by the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China.

In 2019, the ROK hosted a Commemorative Summit celebrating 30 years of cooperation with ASEAN. In the series of meetings during that celebration, regional political and security affairs constituted a significant part of the discussions. The extent of cooperation between the ROK and ASEAN on matters involving regional political and security issues could be seen in the extensive list of activities, dialogues, and meetings on different issues involving regional security (Overview, 2019). Nonetheless, a deeper assessment of that engagement would note that a significant part has largely taken place recently. An example is the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The ROK has been a part of it since its inception in 1994. Nonetheless, its more direct involvement in these mechanisms can largely be dated to the last ten years. This may have something to do with the number of cooperative activities that have taken place within the ambit of the ARF or any of the multilateral arrangements within the ASEAN network. What is not in question is the increase in the ROK's involvement in the last ten years. Furthermore, the ROK has sought to expand its involvement with ASEAN to go beyond discussions that used to be dominated by developments in the Korean peninsula, particularly the moves towards denuclearization. The most important point, however, is the increasing support that the ROK has given to the ASEAN-led security architecture of overlapping multilateral arrangements.

### **The Building of a Middle-Power Coalition**

The approach taken by South Korea in building relations with and support for ASEAN and the regional security architecture built around the regional association constitutes a significant element of what seems to be South Korea's growing self-awareness of being a "middle power." Discussions over the middle power status of the ROK have largely revolved around either alliance politics (See for example Kim, 2015) or its diplomatic role in the Korean peninsula. (Such as in Cha & Dumond, 2017) However, Robertson (2018) has noted that the ROK has yet to take the lead on the development of "sustainable and intellectually creative middle power policy initiatives," even in the Korean peninsula, which has largely been dominated by other players other than the ROK. This is where the NSP and its approach to building a stronger partnership with ASEAN on regional security matters come in.

As part of that self-identification as a “middle power,” the ROK introduced the NSP and its pursuit of strengthening ASEAN-Korea relations to intervene in the evolving regional dynamic, particularly its security element. Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal (1993) pointed out that middle powers are identified through their consistent support for multilateral approaches to international issues, their attempts to find a compromise, and their general desire to be seen as good international citizens. The peace component of South Korea’s NSP is very much directed at maintaining and even strengthening support for the existing regional security architecture that is largely based on ASEAN-led multilateral arrangements and “ASEAN Centrality.” The ASEAN-South Korea Strategic Partnership makes this clear as it clearly states the aspirational basis for cooperation on political-security matters (ASEAN-ROK Plan of Action, 2016). The ROK has committed itself to strengthen these mechanisms and actively participating in their operational aspects. These mutual commitments were emphasized again during the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit in Busan in November 2019.

At the Commemorative Summit in 2019, the ASEAN-ROK Joint Vision Statement for Peace, Prosperity, and Partnership came out among the different outcomes. This document emphasized the need for the ASEAN states and the ROK to cooperate on:

1. strengthening and supporting ASEAN Centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms in the evolving regional architecture.
2. enhancing cooperation in addressing traditional and non-traditional security challenges.
3. deepening strategic relations, promoting mutual trust and confidence, and pursuing a peaceful resolution of disputes following universally recognized principles of international law.
4. enhancing maritime security and safety, freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the region and other lawful uses of the seas and unimpeded lawful maritime commerce; and
5. promoting the peaceful resolution of disputes following universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The NSP and the discussions at the Commemorative Summit showed strong convergence on the idea of strengthening cooperation and collaboration on activities that would enable the nascent Strategic



Partnership between ASEAN and the ROK to contribute in some way to shaping the regional environment in the face of the US-China rivalry. The urgency behind making the Strategic Partnership more operative than just normative is emphasized by the release of the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance of the Biden Administration in March 2021 (Biden, 2021). In this document, within its first 100 days in office, the Biden Administration has already affirmed the status of China as a “strategic competitor,” or as a “peer competitor,” as others have described China. This is explained in terms of China being “the only competitor capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.” (Biden, 2021, p. 8)

In an interview with CBS’ 60 Minutes, US State Secretary Anthony Blinken noted that China’s actions in the Asia Pacific region seem to be indicative of its ambitions to be the “dominant country in the world.” (O’Donnell, 2021) Re-emphasizing the theme of China as a “peer competitor,” he noted that “[i]t is the one country in the world that has the military, economic, diplomatic capacity to undermine or challenge the rules-based order that we...care so much about and are determined to defend,” and that the challenge is that China has in the last few years been “acting more repressively at home and more aggressively abroad.” (O’Donnell, 2021) The Trump Administration had worked hard to reorient threat perceptions in the US from Russia to China. In emphasizing the threat posed by China, the Trump Administration imposed tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars of Chinese products over what President Trump had referred to as unfair trade practices and the theft of U.S. intellectual property. Blinken acknowledged that the Biden Administration had kept these tariffs in place. In fact, with the “Guidance” noted above, the Biden Administration has signaled that it is taking essentially the same line as the Trump Administration (perhaps without the more childish aspects) as outlined in the latter’s 2017 National Security Strategy in the US relationship with China. This only emphasizes the intensification of the US-China rivalry as both dominant powers keep on upping the ante on the nature of their relationship – a relationship at the heart of strategic calculations being made across the region, including that of the ROK and the ASEAN states.

In the context of this strategic calculus, Choe (2019) points to the significance of the NSP as an attempt to reinvigorate regional cooperation policy to create space that would allow it to ease pressure from having to take sides in the rivalry. Working with ASEAN, whose member-states

share the same dilemma, strengthens its diplomatic position “to hedge against and buffer against the pitfalls” that the strategic competition between the US and China creates. (Choe, 2019; Hoo, 2019) It also represents the more inclusive regional architecture for which both ASEAN and the ROK have indicated their preference. The nature of this regional architecture is outlined in the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (AOIP).

The AOIP was adopted at the 34th ASEAN Summit in 2019. It emphasized four points. First was the recognition that the region of development and prosperity that had become the basis for talks about the 21st century being the “Asian Century” had now given way to a more expanded geographic scope. India’s steady economic development and increasing engagement with Southeast Asia made it impossible to ignore developments west of the Andaman Sea, their impact on Southeast Asia, and the spillover effects of these developments on the rest of the Asia Pacific. Secondly, India’s principal engagement is focused on Southeast Asia and its involvement in ASEAN-led multilateralism. This plays into the centrality of ASEAN in the creation of a more integrated and interconnected region, but this time broader in its geographic scope. Thirdly, it emphasizes the key element of “ASEAN centrality” in the context of its emphasis that the Indo-Pacific is a “region of dialogue cooperation instead of rivalry.” In this way, the AOIP is set up in contraposition to the concept of the Indo-Pacific pushed by the US, or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, which is seen in several circles as framing a strategic plan for Chinese dominance. (Harvey, 2020; Greer, 2020) And in this context, it fits in nicely with the “inclusive regional architecture that promotes multilateral norms and institutions” that the ROK finds more to its taste in its geopolitical calculations. (Choe, 2019).

One of the key elements in the AOIP is its emphasis on the Indo-Pacific, a maritime domain. Among the areas identified as key areas of cooperation is maritime cooperation. This area of concern mentions the need to cooperate in matters concerning transnational crime, the environment (considering this is about maritime cooperation then it is primarily about fisheries and marine ecology), and research (particularly baselining of resources in these maritime domains). The primacy of maritime cooperation in the AOIP is a strong point of convergence with the ASEAN-ROK Joint Vision Statement for Peace, Prosperity, and Partnership where enhancing maritime security and safety is one of the key objectives. In this particular Statement, however, the emphasis is given to free access and movement across this maritime domain. The fact that the AOIP emphasizes these three areas of cooperation extends the

scope of what ASEAN-ROK cooperation in the maritime domain could be about.

### **Strategic Convergence: But is it sustainable?**

The convergence of the strategic calculations behind the NSP, the AOIP, and the different declarations made at the 2019 Commemorative Summit show why and how the ROK might find it important to deepen ASEAN-ROK cooperation on regional security and how the rationale behind this appreciation might coincide with the sense of the regional situation largely shared by the ASEAN states. Hence the significance of the Co-Chairs Statement at the 2019 Commemorative Summit that contained an acknowledgment of the ROK's continued support for ASEAN Centrality in the evolving regional architecture, the ROK's support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and the use of the Outlook as a guide in promoting possible cooperation within the existing and future initiatives of ASEAN and its external partners, including the ROK.

All these declarations are well and good as far as the idea of making statements committing the ROK and ASEAN to cooperate on matters of regional security whether as a hedge against what Hoo noted as “uncertainties from the emerging US-China strategic competition” or as a buffer against great power pressures to “take sides,” or even both. (Hoo, 2019; Choe, 2019) The actual effectiveness of the underlying strategy to the ROK (with the calculations it has made regarding the NSP) and to ASEAN (with its continuing emphasis on “ASEAN centrality”) rests on several issues.

First is an assessment of the elephant in the room, i.e., finding a common appreciation of what the intensifying rivalry between the US and China means for the region. There seems to be a collective sense that this is not a development that is best for the immediate and medium-term security of the region. At the 53rd ASEAN Day Commemoration on 8 August 2020, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Phan Bin Minh noted the “new dynamism in the geo-strategic landscape” and the uncertainties this implied for the region. (Phan, 2020) More to the point, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi noted the unwelcome feature of “the intensification of great power rivalries” in the region. (Marsudi, 2020).

Operationally, this rivalry is finding expression in the naval operations conducted by the United States in the South China Sea and the insistence of China that states external to the region have no business meddling in issues regarding territorial jurisdictions. And yet, the

involvement of these “external parties” become an issue precisely because of China’s excessive claims of sovereignty over a significant part of the South China Sea and the absence of any basis for this claim based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) to which it is a signatory. There are concerns about how activities on the disputed waters and land features could lead to unintended and unwanted consequences. ASEAN itself (and with its support for ASEAN and the ROK) also places great importance on the Code of Conduct being drafted between the ASEAN states and China. However, whether this will be seen as covering the behavior of the United States is a possible issue.

However, the case of the South China Sea disputes only exhibits the degree to which the rivalry has become a fact of regional security that lies outside the ambit of the existing regional architecture. The ASEAN Leaders’ Vision Statement of June 2020 reaffirms “the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflights above the South China Sea, as well as upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, in the South China Sea.” (Vision Statement, 2020) Whether this reaffirmation can be upheld in the face of the great power dynamic between the US and China and would establish the efficacy of the existing regional architecture is open to question.

The last point above shows the second consideration in the effort of an ASEAN-ROK strategy to manage the impact of the US-China rivalry and how this rivalry reduces the options for regional states navigating around or through it. A key element in the calculus is the issue of the actual sustainability of “ASEAN centrality” in the face of an intensifying great power dynamic. It is a statement of obvious to say that ASEAN’s approach to regional security has evolved. When it was established in 1967, the objective of regional cooperation as far as it mattered to security was to insulate the region from great power competition. This meant cooperating to keep Southeast Asia from being an arena of rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this context, non-interference had significance to the region that was about keeping the region as a whole and the five members of ASEAN in 1967 free from the ideologically-based machinations of the two superpowers. (Kraft 2012) When the ASEAN Regional Forum, or the ARF, was established, however, it represented a shift in regional security dynamics which moved through concentric and overlapping circles of multilateral arrangements that emphasized cooperation on multiple issues at multiple levels. These arrangements formed part of the regional security architecture based on multilateral

arrangements, and cooperative dialogue and activities.

As a working framework for regional security, the success of this architecture (so much so that ROK and ASEAN cooperation is premised on strengthening it and furthering its success story) was arguably a function of the extent to which the great powers were willing to accede to these regional arrangements and the decisions reached therein. A multilateral and inclusive approach to regionalism (which is what is represented by the AOIP) could ensure that all the major players were similarly rooted in the region and have their respective contributions to make in shaping its future. However, the cooperation of the most powerful states was necessary for the “success” of this kind of regional architecture. At best, this meant that their core interests could be accommodated or, at the very least, would be left unaffected by actions and decisions relating to or emanating from the different elements of that regional architecture. Cooperation will always be a matter of balancing national perspectives and regional relationships. In the Indo-Pacific region, however, the regional security architecture is less about guaranteeing that the interests of all the regional players will be provided for than ensuring that a regional-level initiative does not threaten national preferences. In a regional situation increasingly dominated by intense great power competition, is it a reasonable expectation for the regionalism represented by the AOIP and the ASEAN-led multilateral arrangements to be sustainable? Is the expectation that regional peace and security can still be built with “ASEAN centrality” as its foundation?

However, the NSP and its regional security leg stand equally (and arguably more so) on the ROK’s commitment to it. As noted from the beginning, the NSP has a strong strategic element stemming from the sense that a significant part of the ROK’s engagements is concentrated on its relationship with the great powers. The economic diversification at the forefront of the rationale behind the NSP is very much connected to the strategic rationale of building space that could sustain autonomy of action for the ROK in the face of the US-China geopolitical contestation (Hoo, 2019). Yet, there is still a sense that the ROK’s interest in ASEAN and the individual Southeast Asian states is too “mercantile” in its orientation. (See Lee, 2020) In this context, it is less about strengthening cooperation with ASEAN than building commercial and economic ties with the individual ASEAN states. These are not necessarily the same as the latter could build up the intra-ASEAN competition while the former tries to emphasize unity and cohesiveness in intra-ASEAN relations. Balancing the two is not easy, but the ROK has committed itself to strengthen

ASEAN and its mechanisms, and the actual engagement it requires might mean greater investment than what was first intended. This is why an increasing emphasis is being made on the need to be involved in building up ASEAN connectivity and infrastructure. This is also true of the political-strategic aspect of the relationship where the ROK has committed itself not only to help strengthen ASEAN mechanisms but to actively participate in their operational aspects.

According to Lee (2020), there is skepticism within ASEAN on the sustainability of this policy of increased engagement. There is little confidence among Southeast Asian observers on regional security about their expectations of the ROK as a partner in this area of cooperation. A survey of opinion-makers, policy-makers, and thought-leaders in the region conducted between November 2020 and January 2021 by the ASEAN Studies Centre of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute showed very little sense of the ROK playing an influential role regarding political-security matters in the region. Neither was there strong confidence that it could contribute leadership to sustaining the rules-based in the region. (State of Southeast Asia 2021, pp. 22-25), Bilahari Kausikan, former permanent secretary of the Singapore Foreign Affairs Ministry, pointed to the “commerciality, transaction perspective” of the ROK’s ASEAN policy in a lecture hosted by ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in August 2019, and with stinging candor noted that “Korea’s policy is the least consistent among the United States, China, Japan, India, and Australia.” (Bilahari as quoted in Lee, 2019, p. 36) It is precisely this inconsistency that is of concern to ASEAN, the extent to which the ROK could sustain it even in the context of changing Presidential Administrations. Will the NSP and the commitment to deepen ties with ASEAN even on regional political-security matters find traction even beyond the term of President Moon?

### **Conclusion: Being overtaken by events**

The NSP and the ROK’s aspirations for building deeper and more extensive relations with ASEAN and the ASEAN countries on all policy fronts must set a “new milestone for the future.” (Choe, 2019) Its inclusion of a regional security dimension signals the ROK’s interest in keeping the ASEAN-led multilateral, regional architecture in place. This is essential not only for the Korean Peninsula but also for maritime cooperation in East Asia, cooperation on global issues, diversification of the international community, and strengthening diplomacy in mid-sized countries. (Lee, 2020) Conversely, ASEAN also recognizes the need for cooperation with South Korea. As this paper has made clear, however, the importance of

building on the Strategic Partnership entered into in 2010 is a key element in keeping the constraints effected by the intensifying competition between the United States and China on the conduct of international relations in the Indo-Pacific region within manageable levels. The ASEAN states and the ROK are concerned about how this rivalry is shrinking the space for strategic autonomy of countries in the region. The Strategic Partnership and the series of policies and agreements intended to emphasize cooperation in the political-security realm is seen as a way of keeping this space open.

Commitments on both sides, however, need to be sustained. On the part of ASEAN and its member states is the need to maintain an ASEAN perspective on how to respond to the emerging strategic situation. ASEAN's principal weakness lies in its member states' inability to develop and sustain a regional perspective whenever there is a crisis, particularly within the ASEAN geographic sphere. This lack of cohesion makes ASEAN's position as a strategic partner less than compelling. The converse is true, however, with the ROK. Questions about the sustainability of its commitment, engendered by the ROK political structure of term limits on Presidential Administration and its willingness to sustain cooperation on all policy fronts (particularly on security). These limitations do not speak well of seeing the Strategic Partnership expanding in scope and remaining meaningful over the long term. Nonetheless, the fact of its being in place is in itself something of value that could be built on. Perhaps, what could be considered now is building on this middle power partnership to include other like-minded countries to participate. Perhaps India might be interested?

## References

- ASEAN Leaders' Vision Statement on a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN: Rising above Challenges and Sustaining Growth.*  
<https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/16.-Final-ASEAN-Leaders-Vision-Statement-on-a-Cohesive-and-Responsive-ASEAN-final.pdf>
- ASEAN-Republic of Korea Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2016-2020).*  
<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ASEAN-ROK-POA-2016-2020-FINAL.pdf>
- Biden, Joseph, Jr. R. (2021) *Renewing America's Advantages: Interim National Security Strategic Guidance.* The White House.
- Caballero-Anthony, Mely. (2014) "Understanding ASEAN's centrality: bases and prospects in an evolving regional architecture," *Pacific Review*, 27:4, pp. 563-584.
- Cha, Victor & Marie Dumond. (2017) *The Korean Pivot: South Korea as a middle power.* <https://medium.com/center-for-strategic-and-international-studies/the-korean-pivot-south-korea-as-a-middle-power>
- Choe, Wongi. (2019) "Why South Korea Wants to Tie In with ASEAN," *ASEAN Focus* 6, pp. 12-13
- Cooper, Andrew F., Richard A. Higgot, and Kim Nossal. (1993) *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order.* University of British Columbia Press.
- Cruz, Frances. (2020) "Prospects for Soft and Middle Power Projection in the New Southern Policy", in Hoo Chiew Ping, ed. *The New Southern Policy: Catalyst for Deepening ASEAN-ROK Cooperation.* Institute of Strategic and International Studies, pp. 44-58.
- Easley, Leif-Eric. (2018) "South Korea's "New Southern Policy: Economic Diversification with Strategic and Social Dimensions," *IIR-CSEAS-CSSAS Asia Insights* No. 5 (December).
- Greer, Tanner. (2020) "The Belt and Road Strategy Has Backfired on Xi," *Palladium: Governance Futurism.*  
<https://palladiummag.com/2020/10/24/the-belt-and-road-strategy-has-backfired-on-xi/>
- Harvey, James. (2020) "China's Belt & Road Initiative: economic prosperity or hegemony?" *Global South Development Magazine.*  
<https://www.gsdmagazine.org/chinas-belt-road-initiative-economic-prosperity-or-hegemony/>
- Ho, Shawn and Samantha Ho. (2019) "South Korea's Soft Power in ASEAN: What's Next?" *ASEAN Focus* 6, pp. 16-17.
- Hoo Chiew-Ping. (2019) "The New Southern Policy: Catalyst for Deepening ASEAN-ROK Relations." *ASEAN Focus* 6, pp. 14-15.



- Huisken, Ron. (2009) "Chapter1: Introduction" in Ron Huisken, ed. *The Architecture of Security in the Asia-Pacific*. ANU E-Press, 2009, pp. 1-10.
- Kim, Woosang. (2015) "Rising China, pivotal middle power South Korea, and alliance transition theory." *International Area Studies Review*, Vol. 18(3): pp. 251 –265.
- Kraft, Herman Joseph S. (2012) "Driving East Asian Regionalism: the reconstruction of ASEAN's Identity," in Ralf Emmers, ed. *ASEAN and the Institutionalization of East Asia*. Routledge, pp. 61-74.
- Lee, Seong-hyon, (2020) "A South Korean Perspective on ASEAN-ROK Relations: Past, Present, and Future," in Hoo Chiew Ping, ed. *The New Southern Policy: Catalyst for Deepening ASEAN-ROK Cooperation*. Institute of Strategic and International Studies, pp. 27-43.
- Marsudi, Retno. (2020) Keynote Speech on the Occasion of the 53rd ASEAN Day Online Celebration. <https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/2.-Indonesia-FM-Retno-Marsudi-Keynote-Speech-for-ASEAN-Day-53.pdf>
- O'Donnell, Norah. (2021) Secretary of State Antony Blinken on the threat posed by China. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/antony-blinken-60-minutes-2021-05-02/>
- Overview of ASEAN-Republic of Korea Dialogue Relations. <https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/Overview-ASEAN-ROK-Dialogue-Relations-as-of-August-2019.pdf>
- Pham Binh Minh. (2020). Remarks by the ASEAN Chair 2020 on the Occasion of the 53rd ASEAN Day Online Celebration. <https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/3.-Viet-Nam-DPM-FM-Pham-Binh-Minh-remarks-for-ASEAN-53-Day.pdf>
- Sohn Ji Ae. (2017). President Moon unveils New Southern Policy for ASEAN. Korea Net. <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/policies/view?articleId=151092>
- Tan See Seng. (2013). "ASEAN Centrality," *CSCAP Regional Security Outlook 2013*.
- Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, pp. 26-29.
- "The State of Southeast Asia: 2021 Survey Report," *ASEAN Focus* (February 2021), pp. 22-25.

# **A Show of Soft Power: “Crash Landing on You” and Representations of Inter-Korean Relations**

**Michelle Camille Correa**

*Communication Department  
Ateneo De Manila University*

## **Abstract**

This paper examines representations of inter-Korean relations in the Korean drama “Crash Landing on You” (CLOY), the meanings that are created through these representations, and what these reveal about notions of power relations between the North, which is being represented, and the South, which is doing the representing. Using Stuart Hall’s concept of representation, this paper looks into the meaning-making accorded by the South in depicting itself and the North. This paper explores the ideological frame that emerges due to the choices made by the creators of the drama series in representing the North and the South. This study finds that although efforts were made to present a well-rounded image of the North, hegemonic conceptions and verisimilitude abound in the form of Southern superiority in economy, politics, and leadership. By emphasizing the economic prosperity of the South, the attractiveness of South Korean culture among North Korean youth, and by giving a glimpse of the inner workings of trade in the North, CLOY points to South Korea’s soft power that is slowly conquering the North’s youth culture, as well as the bottom rungs of North Korean society. Beyond entertainment, CLOY shows that the South’s soft power is subtly and silently conquering the North. Ultimately, CLOY’s North Korean representations reinforce the idea and meaning of Southern superiority and power.

**Keywords:** *representation, Korean Drama, inter-Korean relations, hallyu, Korean wave*

## **Introduction**

“Crash Landing on You” (CLOY), also known as “Love’s Emergency Landing” or 사랑의 불시착, is a South Korean television drama about forbidden love between two people from the two Koreas - a soldier from the North and a businesswoman from the South. The 16-episode series was aired from 14 December 2019 until 16 February 2020 on the South Korean television network tvN and the global streaming platform Netflix.

The story begins with female lead character, South Korean Yoon Se-Ri, a successful businesswoman, who encounters a strange tornado blowing her straight to the northern side of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) while paragliding and testing her business’s new sporty clothing line. She meets the male lead character Ri Jeong-Hyeok, a military officer from the North. Kind-hearted man that he is, he helps Se-Ri to safely make her way back to the South. In the process, they get to know each other and then fall in love.

What imbues this K-drama with geopolitical meaning is that the actual site of the emergency landing is a strip of land (the DMZ) that divides Korea into North and South. In a nutshell, the DMZ exists as a buffer zone between the two Koreas, which are still technically at war. The two sides are on cease-fire or armistice. The other side is off-limits as the two Koreas are technically at war. This is why the initial encounter between the dramas characters was marked by suspicion and fear.

CLOY is a Korean television drama praised for its meticulous attention to detail in its portrayal of the two Koreas, especially the not-so-often-seen North. Overall, the daily life in a small village and the life in Northern capital Pyongyang that was presented in CLOY was deemed to be meticulously portrayed, well-researched, and nuanced, from the language used in the script, to the props used in the set, speech patterns of the people, and even in terms of make-up style - thus humanizing North Koreans in viewers’ eyes (AP, 2020; Kim, 2020; Choon, 2020). This very high attention to detail was made possible because of painstaking research involving books, consultation with experts such as a North Korean language expert who reviewed the drama’s script, and interviewing North

Korean defectors which included soldiers, doctors, wives of military officers, and merchants (AP, 2020; Choon, 2020).

The writing team included a North Korean defector named Kwak Moon-Wan. He was a former member of North Korea's Supreme Guard Command, which protected the Kim family, and was a film student at Pyongyang University of Dramatic and Cinematic Arts (Kim, 2020). CLOY is said to be inspired by a real-life incident that happened to actress Jung Yang in Incheon sometime in 2008. During this time, bad weather caused the boat that the actress was riding to almost cross the Northern Limit Line, separating the two Koreas (Choon, 2020).

Much has been said about CLOY's representation of North Korea in newspapers, Youtube videos, blogs, and online discussions, with conversations mainly revolving around how accurate the show's depiction of the North is. North Koreans themselves, especially Youtubers and media personalities who defected to the South, and North Korean media in North Korea, found themselves comparing and contrasting the perceived authenticity (or not) of CLOY. They kept tabs on what was perceived as real and not and which aspects of the drama matched with reality. While the North Korean defectors generally agreed that CLOY represented the North realistically, North Korean media viewed the TV drama as propaganda that did not depict the North in a flattering light (Sung-mi, 2020; Kang & Twigg, 2020).

However, representation in media is more than keeping tabs on what is real or not, and whether a portrayal is accurate or not. This in itself implies that the representation of the North and the South have only one meaning. Hall (1997) asserts that representation has no one fixed meaning because we are the ones who imbue things with meaning within our cultures, which makes meanings many, varied, and ever-changing. Therefore, rather than scrutinizing a representation's accuracy and correctness, Hall asserts that although meanings are varied, plentiful, and different, representation must be examined according to what it is trying to say through the choices made in production to justify it. Things, therefore, can potentially mean various things. The privileged meaning, or the preferred meaning, is set by those in power.

Even defectors cannot agree on what is real and accurate in CLOY's North Korean portrayals. For example, they had different and clashing views on using a make-shift "water heater" shown in CLOY, which consisted of putting together a plastic shower stall. The portrayal drew flak from a defector who viewed the portrayal as "too condescending" (Associated Press, 2020). However, another defector who was consulted for this TV drama said that this makeshift plastic shower stall was used in the 1960s. Still, another defector believed that this makeshift plastic shower stall is being used in the rural North (Associated Press, 2020).

The North Korean government, too, called recent portrayals of North Korea in South Korean media "immoral", "insulting," and an "atrocious provocation" for portraying the North in what they perceive to be negative images (Kang & Twigg, 2020; Ahn, 2020). Although the North didn't specifically name CLOY, it is widely believed to be one of the portrayals. Whereas most South Korean and international viewers welcomed CLOY's humanizing portrayal of North Korean daily life, for the North, being depicted as an underdeveloped country plagued by blackouts is "propaganda" (Kang & Twigg, 2020; Ahn, 2020).

Representation entails choice and consequence – creators choose which elements to include and exclude, which elements are connected and related to what, and what something is all about (Hall, 1997). Since the creators of CLOY are from the South, they have the power and privilege to choose what kind of representation is made and shown, while at the same time doing a balancing act between accuracy and avoiding glorifying and misrepresenting North Korea (Associated Press, 2020; Choon, 2020; Kim, 2020). This very act of balancing between making an effort to make portrayals accurate and at the same time avoiding misrepresentation shows that choices have been made by the creators in portraying the North.

Using Hall's theory of representation, this paper seeks to examine how representations of North and South were constructed in CLOY, analyze the meanings that emerge from these representations, and explain what these representations say about notions of power relations between the North, which is being represented, and the South, which is doing the representing. This study likewise seeks to answer: "Whose reality?"

“What reality? “According to whom?” (Gledhill, 1997, p. 346) That is, the examination of the reality represented and constructed by CLOY’s creators—a reality co-created by both native South Koreans and North Korean defectors—from the South Korean perspective of telling a story. In so doing, this paper aims to re-direct the discourse from representation as accuracy and correctness towards representation as choices made in constructing images imbued with meaning.

This study systematically examines the representations of inter-Korean relations in CLOY by analyzing the following factors: the overt and covert messages embedded in all 16 episodes of CLOY for its intended audience, what was included and excluded by CLOY’s creators in constructing images of North and South, the power that creators hold in content creation, and technical aspects such as camera shots and angles, editing, audio codes, visual codes, and intertextuality.

On the surface, representations of inter-Korean relations in CLOY appear to have one, single meaning. It is especially lauded for its portrayal of the North and attempting to break Northern stereotypes. This paper does not seek to discredit nor devalue the meticulous research and effort in re-creating the North as faithfully to the facts as possible for CLOY’s audiences. Instead, this paper examines the choices made in representing inter-Korean relations in CLOY and, ultimately, the meanings created and conveyed through it. It is by examining these choices that conceptions of the North, and subsequently, of inter-Korean relations, that the South holds in its mind can be seen. That is the production of meaning by an entity that holds a certain degree of power in communicating and influencing representations that are manifested in media (Media Education Foundation, 2005).

This study finds that although there appears to be an effort to construct a well-rounded image of the North, hegemonic conceptions and verisimilitude abound in the form of Southern superiority in the things that matter – economy, politics, leadership. Moreover, representations of the South’s economic prosperity, its cultural attractiveness among North Korean youth, and covert consumption of South Korean products in the North point to South Korea’s soft power.

***How the North has been represented thus far***

According to Shim & Nabers (2011):

North Korea is simultaneously seen in rather contradictory terms when it comes to international affairs: it is strong yet weak, rational yet irrational, and deserving of either international condemnation, isolation, and sanctions, or commiseration, cooperation, and assistance. (p. 6)

Moreover, representational patterns and key visual themes of the North's representation in Western media included: "backwardness, bleakness, madness, dangerousness, isolation, poverty, scarcity, and weakness", which is, according to them, the opposite of globalization (p.14).

In South Korean media, Cho (2018), who studied representations of North Korean migrants on South Korean television, found out that North Korean defectors are represented as "national conservatives" meaning that they are portrayed as liberal, capitalist, anti-communist, cultural nationalism. Moreover, Cho also noted that images of North Koreans in South Korea are "stereotypical and gendered", often portraying rustic North Korean men. North Korea is represented as the docile wife in the patriarchal marriage. Ultimately, the representations show the superiority of South Korean citizens over North Korean migrants.

Epstein & Green (2020), in their study of representation and reception of CLOY, stated that it is "the fullest, most varied, and even most sensitive portrayal of North Korea yet seen in South Korean popular culture". Moreover, they also found out that:

As a device to gain viewer attention, then, the portrayal of Jeong-hyeok specifically, and North Koreans and North Korea more generally, in *Crash Landing*, tries to accomplish a variety of tasks simultaneously, which do not always neatly come together: the show strives for a romanticised and vaguely exotic hero as an object of fantasy, but then seeks to render the country as a concrete and realistic backdrop and humanise its populace, all whilst accentuating North Korea's idiosyncratic aspects for dramatic effect." (p.6)

## **Methodology**

This paper examined representations of North and South Korea in the Korean drama “Crash Landing on You” using Stuart Hall’s notion of representation to look into the meaning-making accorded by the South in depicting itself and the North. In particular, this paper examined the choices that were made by CLOY’s creators in constructing representations of the North, analyzed the meanings that are created through these representations, and explained what representations say about notions of power relations between the North, which is being represented, and the South, which is doing the representing.

The researcher made use of Stuart Hall’s (1997) definition of representation, which is “the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (p. 1). This is because the ways in which knowledge is produced through “ideas, images, and practices” subsequently set the tone on how things are talked about in a certain culture, which brings to light the power dynamics between “the people who are represented and the cultures and institutions doing the representing (p. 225). According to Hall, something has “has no fixed meaning, no real meaning in the obvious sense, until it has been represented” (Media Education Foundation, 2005).” It must be noted that representations that veer away from stereotypes attempt to assign meanings to things, too, which means that a certain entity can be represented as bad or good, depending on who is affixing meanings (Stilesguilborough, 2019).

In relation to representations of North and South in K-drama CLOY, its creators chose the following: what to show about North Korea, what to show about North Korea in relation to the South, and what is being said about North Korea by the South. As aforementioned, making these choices produces meanings that are imbued with ideology. These constructed meanings carry no single and fixed meaning. Moreover, these meanings are also ever-changing.

In this sense, rather than looking at a “right” or a “wrong” representation and whether it is accurate or not, Hall (1997) highlighted power, that is, the role of representation in making certain meanings more dominant over many other meanings. Rather than realism, Hall looks at verisimilitude, not what is right or wrong portrayal, but what the dominant culture believes to be credible, suitable, and proper representation. Therefore, rather than trying to measure the distortion and accuracy of a representation, this paper looked at the choices that the drama series’ creators made in representing the North and the South, the ideological



frame that emerged as a result, presence and absence in the representations made, and who holds the power and resources to produce this series and its subsequent implications.

It is important to examine representations because what people see through the various media that they consume molds particular ways of seeing and constructs “reality”. The representations of things result in political and ethical consequences. What people learn about and know about things through the media affects how people respond to whatever happens in the world. With regards to representations in CLOY, North Korea tends to be a very closed country. The average viewer knows so little about it, and what little they know about it depends on what they see on film and TV, what they read in the news and other literature, and speeches (Cho, 2018).

In collecting the data for analyzing how inter-Korean relations were represented in CLOY, the researcher focused on the following factors in analyzing it (Gallardo, 2015; John, 2017):

### **Text (Message)**

The researcher examined the content and what it essentially says (overt content) and what it implies and assumes (covert content). The examined content enabled the researcher to identify the ideology behind CLOY.

### **Intended audience**

The researcher examined the audience, the messages communicated to them through CLOY, and the beliefs and values emphasized to them.

### **Exclusions and inclusions in the representations**

The researcher examined what was left out and what was inserted in the choices that were made in representing the North and the South in CLOY. Also examined were the complexities and differences between the two Koreas that were missing in the drama.

### **Power / Resources**

Power refers to people and connections and analyzing this includes determining who funded the media project, who developed it, and who agreed to create it. Resources refer to monetary factors, talent, and access.

### **Camera shots and angles**

Shots and angles and what they mean and convey were also analyzed.

### **Editing**

Transition of image and sound were analyzed.

### **Audio codes**

The researcher examined the dialog, accent, background music, and sound effects.

### **Visual codes**

The researcher examined production design, location, set design, costumes, and the like.

### **Intertextuality**

The researcher examined intertextual links employed in CLOY to previous texts on the two Koreas. After which, the researcher examined how these intertextualities were used to represent inter-Korean relations.

CLOY is composed of 16 episodes. The researcher watched all 16 episodes while collecting the data detailed above. After which, the collected data were grouped into common patterns and themes. What follows is the researcher's interpretation of the meanings produced in representations of the North and the South in CLOY.

## **Representations of North and South in CLOY**

### ***A decadent south and the covert triumph of capitalism and globalization in the north***

In terms of CLOY's message as text, CLOY's overt content is that of a love story between a woman from the South and a man from the North and how they make it happen despite the odds. Its covert content implies that the South, through the image of Se-Ri, is an economically advanced nation that is part of a globalized and cosmopolitan world. Her self-centered self at the beginning of the drama is later on tamed by interactions with the North. Therefore, the drama implies that the North's traditional Korean ways can teach the South a bit of humanity.

Another covert content implied is that the North, despite being more backward than the South, holds conceptions of the pure and traditional Korean culture and society through the image of Ri Jeong-Hyeok and the people in the military village. However, Pyeongyang's image in the drama implies that the North's capital functions within the inner workings of capitalism despite its more backward socioeconomic status. The elite carries the image of worldliness, sophistication, and a certain degree of business savvy. This extends to the images of the North in the black market in the military village, wherein goods from the South are covertly preferred, bought, and sold.

A common theme in CLOY is that of a developed, cosmopolitan, decadent South and a backward and traditional North with a heart of gold. This also appears to be CLOY's overarching representation. The broader ideological frame, therefore, seems to be of the covert triumph of capitalism and globalization. Despite the North's pronouncements of rejecting capitalism, its inner workings say the opposite.

To further illustrate, the following are examples of scenes showing comparisons between a developed South and an underdeveloped North where undercurrents of capitalism and globalization exist in CLOY. The visual code opening credits show the parallel lives of the main leads and second leads. Viewers get a glimpse of what the two main characters, Jeong-Hyeok and Se-Ri, eat (Korean vs. Western), what they drink (unidentified beverage in a white cup vs. wine), what they wear (soldier's uniform and a briefcase vs. business suit, heeled shoes and luxury handbag), and where they go (they cross paths but not interact in a city that seems to be Seoul).

For the second lead characters, Seo Dan and Gu Seung-jun, viewers see that both have hints of Western influences. For the other supporting characters, viewers see that North Korean characters are shown in their neighborhood outside of Pyongyang with men wearing soldier's uniforms and women wearing seemingly outdated clothes. In contrast, South Korean supporting characters are seen in a park, with men wearing suits and women wearing dresses.

The first few scenes of Episode 1 show the South's economic prosperity through skyscrapers, electricity, and lights even through the night. Viewers also see Seri's life of seeming excess and scandal. In contrast, the viewer's first few glimpses of the North are connected to the military, such as soldiers at the northern limit line engaged in a military confrontation with the south due to suspected looters allegedly stealing

South Korean historical artifacts at the southern limit line. Viewers also see a soldier at the guard post, whom viewers later know as Kim Ju Muk, a soldier infatuated with Hallyu, particularly in older Korean dramas by South Korean actress Choi Ji-Woo. Moreover, the viewer's first glimpse of a North Korean village is a place with no lights and no smartphones. It is something akin to a farming community.

Episode 2 is where viewers first glimpse the North Korean way of life, specifically, life outside of the North's capital Pyongyang. Viewers see a slow, provincial kind of life where there is no internet and residents communicate through landline phones instead of cellphones. Viewers are then shown Captain Ri's house, the interior of which calls to mind design styles in the 1970s or 1980s (South) Korea.

These comparisons between a developed South and an underdeveloped North where undercurrents of capitalism and globalization exist continue throughout the succeeding episodes of CLOY. Succeeding episodes zoom in on the Northern way of life dichotomy between the North's rural villages and Pyongyang. That is the dichotomy between the North's rural villages and local market as a secret site for the trade of Southern consumer goods vis-à-vis the portrayal of Pyongyang as a site of internationality and inner-workings of capitalism. These are elaborated in the following sub-sections.

***North's rural villages and local market: A site for trade and secret southern admiration***

Episode 2 is where viewers first see scenes from a local market in rural North Korea where South Korean goods such as cosmetics and clothes can be bought in secret. South Korean goods, notably skincare and makeup, are preferred in this local market over European ones. Inside houses are appliances deemed illegal by the state, such as a South Korean talking rice cooker.

CLOY also shows that gifts from the South are much appreciated during birthdays, specifically a high-ranking military wife's birthday. Fashion trends from the South are likewise praised. Even men are not spared from the South's charms, as viewers see master sergeant Pyo Chi-Su trying Southern shampoo, conditioner, and body wash, and liking it.

These visual codes of South Korean consumer goods being secretly bought and sold at a local market and the accompanying secret preference of North Korean rural villagers for Southern goods indicates that the meaning imbued in the idea of markets and private North Korean homes in these scenes is that of a secret Northern admiration for the South.

Beyond CLOY, black markets exist in the North not just as a site for buying daily necessities, including South Korean consumer goods such as household items, clothes, and the like, but also as an access point to information and cultural products from the South and beyond, pointing to the emergence of a North Korean consumer culture despite living within an authoritarian regime that tightly regulates the flow of information, culture, and even the internet (Kim Y., 2021). The K-drama thus shows viewers a facet of North Korea where the Mother Party's hold on economic affairs is declining compared to the political and ideological power it still manages to hold (Choi, 2013).

***Pyongyang: A site for the inner-workings of capitalism; a site of internationality***

In contrast to CLOY's depiction of rural North Korea, the drama paints a picture of the North's capital Pyongyang as a place of cosmopolitanism with its hotels, skyscrapers, and transportation such as cars and trains—by North Korean standards.

Pyongyang is also where viewers see big business in the form of a department store owned by Dan's mother. Moreover, the drama also directs the viewer's attention to this character, who has a penchant for throwing around her newly-learned English words. In Episode 4, for example, Dan was surprised that her mother learned English, a language tied to their enemy, the Americans. Her mother then claims that she learned the "enemy" language out of necessity. That is, to engage in international business and trade.

Aside from business, the drama also teaches viewers that in the North, political families have ties to the military. Wealth is likewise tied to the military. Such is the case with Jo Cheol Gang, a Lt. Commander in the North Korean Armed Forces' Security Bureau, who leads a criminal operation providing a secret hiding place (inside state property, nonetheless) to international fugitives.

Another manifestation of capitalism's inner workings in North Korean people occurs in Episode 14 when villain Jo Cheol-Gang suffers injuries after a face-off with the male lead character. While treated at a makeshift clinic, he declares, "Capitalism saved my life". His broker likewise admitted that the only reason why he saved Cheong-Gang was because he hasn't received his broker's fees yet. Even the doctor who removed the bullet from his body viewed it as a job in exchange for money. With the character of Jo Cheol-Gang who has no qualms in saying that he hates people born with a silver spoon, viewers see people from the lower

rungs of North Korean society subverting socioeconomic class both through military hard power and monetary power.

Even coffee contributed to the portrayal of Pyongyang's cosmopolitanism. CLOY showed viewers that Pyongyang residents are as dedicated to their coffee as their Southern counterparts. From sweet instant coffee sent as relief goods from the South to the North (which CLOY depicted as products drunk mainly by high military officials) to coffee served in a Pyongyang hotel (in the drama, caramel macchiato is considered sophisticated but is a regular drink anywhere else, like in the South), viewers see that coffee consumption in Pyongyang is linked to a certain degree of social status.

CLOY, then, constructs Pyongyang as both a site for the inner workings of capitalism and as a site of internationality. Like CLOY's depiction of the rise of consumerist culture in rural black markets, CLOY likewise depicts Pyongyang as the capital city where consumerist culture is emerging. Pyongyang is thus depicted as a site of covert capitalism and overt cosmopolitanism, albeit of a lower level than the South. Beyond the world of CLOY, Pyongyang is an "elite region" in North Korea (Cho, 2018) where the upper class resides.

### *The Hallyu Effect*

Throughout CLOY, viewers see various images of North Koreans being enamored by the South's culture through Hallyu, also known as the Korean Wave. These Hallyu products include K-dramas, K-pop, games and various consumer goods. These images point to the South's soft power, implying that the South has managed to attract the hearts and minds of Northerners even without firing a single bullet (Nye, 2022).

The construction of Kim Ju Muk's character, one of Captain Ri's soldiers, is the first example viewers see of this Hallyu effect in Episode 1. In this episode, he is depicted as a soldier assigned at a guard post in the DMZ, but who was unable to heed the call of his comrades for back-up when trouble ensues, primarily because he was too emotionally invested in watching K-drama "Stairway to Heaven" by his favorite actress Choi Ji-Woo. His infatuation with K-dramas, especially old releases from the 2000s, enabled him to learn the Southern way of life, including how to speak with a Seoul accent. This knowledge of South Korean culture likewise enabled him to serve as interpreter for his comrades in CLOY's succeeding episodes.

Episode 7 depicts North Korean youth as fans of BTS and K-pop. As such, they can speak in the South Korean way, specifically the Seoul

dialect, because of their consumption of K-drama and K-pop. They even know South Korean slang. Even the North's elite is somehow shown riding the Korean Wave in this episode as Seo Dan's wedding dress is inspired by a photo from a South Korean fashion magazine smuggled by Northerners via Shanghai.

In Episode 12, when Jeong-Hyeok's soldiers went to Seoul intending to rescue him, Geum Eun-Dong, the youngest member of his unit, became addicted to South Korean computer games. This action is consistent with the construction of his character as a teenage soldier required to serve ten years of military service. Viewers' initial encounter with Eun-Dong in Episode 1 already painted him with an air of innocence as he read his mother's handwritten letter to communicate with his family, whom he missed. CLOY implies that computer games and high school are what someone like Eun-Dong should be preoccupied with instead of guns.

Lastly, CLOY's depiction of the Hallyu effect is its depiction throughout the K-drama of South Korean goods as the goods of choice in local markets, even if bought secretly. In CLOY's world, the North is conquered by the capitalist South through the soft power of the Korean Wave. The youth devours South Korean popular culture and secretly live a semblance of the South Korean way of life even while in the North. The drama gives insight into Hallyu's soft power over young North Koreans who secretly consume alternative foreign lifestyles through the black market, consequently influencing their generation (Chung, 2019; Yoon, 2015; Choi, 2013).

### ***Northern Country Bumpkins in the South***

Episode 10 played a pivotal role in CLOY. This was the episode where the tables were turned. If in Episodes 1-9, it was Se-Ri who adjusted to North Korean life, Episode 10 is where the Northerners adjusted to life in the South.

Jong-Hyeok traveled to South Korea to protect Seri against Jo Cheol-Gang. Jong-Hyeok's comrades, in turn, traveled to South Korea to protect him and to bring him back to the North safely at the behest of his father. His comrades traveled to South Korea under the guise of belonging to the North Korean track team of the Military World Games.

In terms of visual cues in representation, it was in Episode 10 that viewers see them outside of their military clothes for the first time. Moreover, their first impressions of the South make them look like country bumpkins. When they see a South Korea filled with cars on the bus, Chi-Soo immediately assumes that the South filled the roads with vehicles just

for show. At the convenience store, they are amazed at the abundance of food such as rice and noodles. Other things that amazed them about South Korea were non-stop electricity, the automatic door in Se-Ri's house, free-flowing water from the faucet, and a warm floor without a furnace.

Overall, the idea constructed by CLOY is that of Northern country bumpkins amusingly learning the ways of a cosmopolitan and affluent South. This North Korean image is consistent with stereotypes of them as "rustic Korean men" (Cho, 2018) and "bumpkins" (Epstein & Green, 2020) who are less superior to South Koreans.

### ***Presence and absence: Things said and left unsaid by the creators of CLOY***

This section identifies and discusses the presence (what was included by CLOY's creators in the drama) and absence (what was excluded) in representing North and South. This section likewise identifies and discusses the complexities and differences between the two Koreas that were left out of CLOY.

### ***Absence/ exclusion of governments of the North and the South at the highest levels***

A representative example of an episode showing governments' absence and/or exclusion at the highest levels is Episode 14. Here, North Korean soldiers came to South Korea not for politics but for a private individual - Seri. Because Jo Cheol-Gang came for personal revenge against Jong-Hyeok by plotting to kill Se-Ri, Se-Ri's North Korean friends and Jong-Hyeok came to save her.

Perhaps the reason behind this absence and exclusion can be attributed to how mentioning top-most leaders is a complex and sensitive issue. This absence is a choice that the creators most likely consciously made. Moreover, the time in which CLOY was made is also significant. The year 2018 was when former President Moon Jae-In enjoyed a positive public perception of his efforts in reaching out to the North, but this later on turned into the usual inter-Korean tensions the following year, involving a balancing act by President Moon in dealing with former United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un, which consequently landed CLOY in a sensitive situation (Epstein & Green, 2020).



### ***Presence/ inclusion of business-led south and a militaristic north***

CLOY's creators chose to include the following images of North and South – Of business-led south and a militaristic north. The South being business-led was shown through the family-owned mega conglomerates called the chaebol (Albert, 2018).

In CLOY, the South dealt with the North predominantly through the chaebol, as with the case with Se-Ri's father in bringing Se-Ri back to the South. There were no scenes of government intervention in bringing a South Korean citizen like Se-Ri back to the South. In the world of CLOY, the power and influence of the chaebol are far-reaching and immense. This was likewise the case when Se-Ri's brother and sister-in-law tried to keep her stuck in the North by contracting Cheol-Gang and using monetary payment as a means to an end.

The North, in contrast, dealt with the South predominantly through its military. Talks and negotiations with the South happened through them. Coupled with the absence of governments in CLOY, the idea and meaning put forward appear to be who holds power on both sides – the chaebol in the South and the military in the North.

### ***Exclusion/ absence of the actual defection***

In CLOY's final episode (Episode 16), Captain Ri and his soldiers chose whether to remain in the South or return to the North. Although Captain Ri's soldiers seemed to enjoy their time in the South from Episode 10 onwards, they chose to return to the North. The reason was not explicitly mentioned. Captain Ri himself admitted to Se-Ri that he did not want to return to North Korea. He said he wanted to marry Seri in South Korea and have twins. However, how the youngest soldier Eun-Dong missed his hometown provided a clue.

Although they were enamored with the cosmopolitan and affluent South, their decision to return to the North implied loyalty to one's roots. Moreover, defection is a sensitive and controversial issue, and the exclusion seems to be a conscious choice that the creators made. This can also be seen in the political climate in which CLOY was developed and produced, wherein a delicate diplomatic balancing act by the South Korean president between North Korea and the United States was needed (Epstein & Green, 2020).

### ***Presence/ inclusion of neutral ground: Switzerland***

The end of CLOY's opening credits show the two lead characters face to face in a nature-filled place, which viewers will later learn is

Switzerland. They seem of equal status here if one looks at the visual codes provided by their appearance, clothes, and backdrop.

In Episode 9, viewers learn that Switzerland is where they first encountered each other through music and art. Although Seri, as a South Korean, would usually be preoccupied with business and Jeong-Hyeok, as a North Korean, would be preoccupied with military matters, at their core, they turn to art as humans. Art connects them to humanity. Jeong-Hyeok's music saved Seri from death.

Therefore, the meaning accorded to Switzerland in CLOY is that of a neutral ground where they can be their human and authentic selves. Moreover, Switzerland is one of the few countries adopting armed neutrality as a policy in international affairs (Andrews, 2018). Therefore, the inclusion of Switzerland as a neutral ground is imbued with significant meaning both in enabling CLOY's main characters to be true to themselves and in terms of what is possible between the two Koreas when situated in a place of armed neutrality.

***Gender: A smart and sassy female south and a tender-hearted but strong male north***

Regarding gender, CLOY depicted the female lead character Se-Ri as a smart and sassy woman from the South and the male lead character Jong-Hyeok as a tender-hearted but strong male from the North. Se-ri has no military power but brains and a business that raises financial power. She comes from a chaebol family, which is probably a conscious choice to show the economic might of the South.

Jong-Hyeok is the son of a high-ranking official in the North. He is a military man with a heart of gold, with pure and traditional values that tames the decadent tendencies of Se-Ri. His physical and mental strengths are balanced with his sensitivity, consistent with K-drama conventions for male leads. His elite background makes him compatible with Se-Ri, who is also an elite, despite being born and raised in the North. This character construction and emphasis on elite status in CLOY calls to mind South Korea's notion of power hierarchies, how the strong match with the strong, and how the upper class from the North suits this notion (Cho, 2018).

***Intertextuality: The village idiot and the owl***

There are two manifestations of intertextuality in CLOY which are both from Korean films about the two Koreas, namely "Secretly Greatly" and "Joint Security Area" (JSA).

One manifestation of intertextuality is the appearance of a North Korean spy in the guise of a village idiot named Won Ryu-hwan / Bang Dong-gu from the Korean film “Secretly Greatly” in Episode 10 of CLOY. In this episode, the village idiot comes across Captain Ri’s soldiers who traveled to the South disguised as Military Olympics athletes to bring Captain Ri back safely to the North. Sensing that Captain Ri’s soldiers are newcomers to the North, the village idiot gives them tips on how to blend well in the South. This invokes the similar role that the village idiot played in “Secretly Greatly” when two other North Korean spies settled in the same town as him. Moreover, the crossing of paths between the village idiot and Captain Ri’s soldiers also invokes parallelisms between their comedic situations as Northerners trying to blend in the South but instead sticking out like a sore thumb.

Another manifestation of intertextuality is the shot of the owl in CLOY’s Episode 1, which calls to mind a similar owl shot at the beginning of “Joint Security Area (JSA)”. This reference to JSA is significant as JSA portrayed North Koreans as friends and sympathetic characters. CLOY is widely praised for its humanizing portrayals of North Koreans. This humanizing aspect appears to take off from JSA where two soldiers from the South and two from the North become friends and protect each other until the end. The owl’s presence in CLOY then referenced and foreshadowed the friendship that will blossom between Se-Ri and Captain Ri’s soldiers and the love that bloomed between Se-Ri and Captain Ri.

## **Conclusion**

By consulting North Korean defectors in the creation of CLOY, the show’s creators made an effort to construct images of the North as North Korean defectors know it. Although there seems to be an effort to humanize the image of the North, hegemonic conceptions and verisimilitude ultimately abound in the form of Southern superiority in the things that matter – economy, politics, and leadership.

By emphasizing the economic prosperity of the South, the attractiveness of South Korean culture among North Korean youth, and by giving a glimpse of the inner workings of trade in the North, CLOY points to South Korea’s power. It is not necessarily military power, but a soft power that is slowly conquering the North’s youth culture and the bottom rungs of North Korean society. It is a display of soft power in the cultural sphere, as seen in CLOY’s emphasis on showing images of the North’s

attraction to South Korean culture and media and exclusion of political aspects in the K-drama.

Moreover, underneath the hard North Korea stance seen in the news, what is further seen in CLOY are cracks within the system in terms of trade and economy. Cracks, in this case, mean Pyongyang's hidden inner capitalist leanings, common people's preference for Southern-made goods, and the youth's adoration of South Korean pop culture products. In CLOY, the North is essentially capitalist despite its veneer of being against it, and of a projected military might. Beyond entertainment, CLOY is subtly educating audiences that the soft power of the South is in the process of subtly and silently conquering the North. Ultimately, CLOY's North Korean representations reinforce the idea and meaning of Southern superiority and power.

## References

- Adreana, I. (2020, April 17). *North Koreans Don't Think 'Crash Landing On You' Star Hyun Bin Is Handsome. Here's Why!* Rojak Daily: <https://rojakdaily.com/entertainment/article/9210/north-koreans-don-t-think-crash-landing-on-you-star-hyun-bin-is-handsome-here-s-why>
- Albert, E. (2018, May 4). *South Korea's Chaebol Challenge*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/south-koreas-chaebol-challenge>
- Andrews, E. (2018, August 22). *Why is Switzerland a Neutral Country?* History. <https://www.history.com/news/why-is-switzerland-a-neutral-country>
- Associated Press. (2020, February 21). *Creators of 'Crash Landing on You' explains making the film*. The Korea Herald: <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200221000253>
- Cho, E. A. (2018). "Becoming" North Koreans: Negotiating Gender and Class in Representations of North Korean Migrants on South Korean Television. *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 7(2), 266-293.
- Choi, C. (2013). "Everyday Politics" in North Korea. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 72(3), 655-673.
- Choon, C. M. (2020, March 1). *South Korean drama Crash Landing On You offers glimpse of daily life in North Korea*. The Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/s-korean-drama-offers-glimpse-of-daily-life-in-north-korea>
- Chung, K.-Y. (2019). Media as soft power: the role of the South Korean media in North Korea. *The Journal of International Communication*, 25(1), 137-157.

- Dukalskis, A., & Lee, J. (2020). Everyday Nationalism and Authoritarian Rule: A Case Study of North Korea. *Nationalities Papers*, 1-17.
- Epstein, S., & Green, C. K. (2020). Crash Landing on You and North Korea: Representation and Reception in the Age of K-Drama. *The Asia-Pacific Journal*.
- Gallardo, S. L. (2015). *Analyzing media representation*. Gender, Race & Sexuality in Media: [http://prof.chicanas.com/5Q/?page\\_id=811](http://prof.chicanas.com/5Q/?page_id=811)
- Gledhill, C. (1997). Genre and Gender: The case of soap opera. In S. (. Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (pp. 337-386).
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*.
- Hall, S. (1997). The spectacle of the other. In *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (p. 7).
- Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 2, 13-74).
- John. (2017, April 25). *Methods for Analysing Media Representations* . A2 Media Studies. <http://keca2media.blogspot.com/2012/10/methods-for-analysing-media.html>
- Kang, T., & Twigg, K. (2020, March 4). *North Korea blasts South's 'insulting' dramas and films*. BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-51740826>
- Kim, S. (2020, February 22). *Crash Landing on You: The defector who brought North-South Korean romance to life*. BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51526625>
- Kim, Y. (2021). *The Soft Power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Drama*. Routledge.
- Media Education Foundation. (2005). *Stuart Hall: Representation & the Media*. Mediaed.org. <https://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Stuart-Hall-Representation-and-the-Media-Transcript.pdf>
- Nye, J. (2022, January 11). *Whatever Happened to Soft Power?* From Project Syndicate: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/whatever-happened-to-soft-power-by-joseph-s-nye-2022-01>
- Shim, D., & Nabers, D. (2011). North Korea and the Politics of Visual Representation. *Giga Working Papers, No. 164, German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA)*.
- Stilesguilborough. (2019, June 12). *Stuart Hall – Representation Theory*. Media Studies @ Guilborough Academy: <https://guilboroughschoolmedia.wordpress.com/2019/06/12/stuart-hall-representation-theory/>
- Ahn, S (2020, March 5). *Pyongyang calls fans of hit TV drama 'Crash Landing on You' 'immoral'*. The Jakarta Post: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/03/04/pyongyang-calls-fans-of-hit-tv-drama-crash-landing-immoral.html>

- Twigg, T. K. (2020, March 4). *North Korea blasts South's 'insulting' dramas and films*. BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-51740826>
- Yoon, S. (2015). Forbidden audience: Media reception and social change in North Korea. *Global Media and Communication*, 11(2), 167-184.



---

# BOOK TALK

---



UP KRC BOOK TALK:

# Pachinko (파친코)

A NOVEL BY MIN JIN LEE

## UP KRC BOOK TALK PANELS



**Dr. Shin Dong Kim**

The Media School,  
Hallym University

**Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco**

Dept. of Political Science,  
University of the Philippines Diliman



**Ms. Nicole Tablizo**

MA Comparative Literature,  
University of the Philippines  
Diliman

**KRC BOOK TALK**  
**||**  
**25 MAY (WED) 2 PM (Philippines)**

**<PACHINKO>**  
**||**  
**A Novel by Min Jin Lee**

- Moderator: Dr. Kyung Min Bae, OIC Director, UP KRC.
- Panels:
  - ✓ Dr. Shin Dong Kim, The Media School, Hallym University
  - ✓ Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco, UP Diliman Department of Political Science
  - ✓ Ms. Nicole R. Tablizo, MA Comparative Literature student, UP College of Arts and Letters
- Transcription: Ms. Pamela Anne Jacar, UP KRC
- Copy editing: Ms. Diana Cassandra Almarez, UP KRC

The event was organized by the UP Korea Research Center (KRC), in partnership with Fully Booked, Korean Cultural Center in the Philippines, UPD Department of Linguistics, and Ateneo Korean Studies Program. The whole program was livestreamed via Fully Booked and UP KRC's YouTube and Facebook pages.

**BAE:** 안녕하세요! Magandang hapon sa inyong lahat! Good afternoon, good evening, and good morning – wherever you may be. Welcome to today's book talk! I'm Kyung Min Bae from UP Korea Research Center, and I will be your moderator for today's event.

We are very much delighted to welcome our participants to join us in the safety of their homes through Facebook and YouTube live streaming. We wish to greet everyone and hope all will have a fruitful learning experience this afternoon!

Today's event is very meaningful especially for UP KRC, because this is in collaboration with various institutions. UP KRC is very honored to co-host today's event with Fully Booked. Every one of the team is behind the studio and they're manning and running technical support. Thank you so much Korean Cultural Center in the Philippines, UP Department of Linguistics, and Ateneo Korean Studies Program. Thank you everyone for joining us and making the event more meaningful!

Today, we will have three panel members who will share their interesting insights on the book PACHINKO. Let me introduce each one to our audience first.

First is Dr. Shin Dong Kim. He's currently in Korea. Dr. Kim is a professor at the Media School, Hallym University, Korea. He founded the Institute for Communication Arts and Technology (iCat) and served as the Vice President for International Affairs for the university. He has been an active advocate and innovator for the globalization of higher education throughout his professional career. His area of research and teaching covers culture and creative industries, media policy and political economy, global communications, and film or social history. He recently managed a five-year national research project on modeling Korea's ICT developments. Let us meet Dr. Kim later on.

Next is Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco, Ph.D., an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science in UP Diliman. She was a Faculty Associate of the Women and Gender Institute in Miriam College previously where she also taught in its International Studies Department. Her research interest is in gender and politics, particularly on discourses of gender and migration. Thank you, Dr. Jean.

And last but not the least, we have Nicole Tablizo. Nicole is pursuing a master's degree in comparative literature focusing on Asian literature at the University of the Philippines-Diliman. She's writing a thesis on publishing translations of Indonesian literature. Nicole currently works at a news agency for the global development and humanitarian community.

So, we have three valuable resource persons today. Are we all ready? We have a few warming-up questions because reading is a very personal activity, right? We will just talk about how you will choose the book and what made you deal with the book.

Just to share about the book itself, everyone knows this novel by Min Jin Lee was published in 2017. It was already very sensationalized and attracted many readers around the globe including in Korea. I think the Korean-translated version was published early in 2018 and recently, Apple TV also produced the adaptation of this book in a drama series. I think more readers chose the original book rather than or aside from the screenplay.

### *Question 1*

#### *How did you know about this book?*

**Kim:** Hi! [I'm] Shin Dong Kim from Korea. I was introduced to this wonderful novel by my former student who attended a workshop in Greece where I gave lectures. She's not Korean, she's not American but from the Czech Republic and studying at Temple University in the US. We had a chance to briefly talk about my teaching interest which is about reconstructing colonial memories in the public media including film and TV dramas. Somehow, she remembered my research interest and sent me information about the book with a note on how she was fascinated. So, I immediately ordered that book on Amazon, and needless to say, I was fascinated with it too, especially with the way how the book described the colonial experience.

I also checked with a Korean translation in the bookshop but frankly speaking, I didn't like it, perhaps, because the book was originally written in English. When you read the book in English, you feel the flow is a lot more natural and the rich English is well impacted in the book. When I check with the translation, you always feel that it was a translated one. We needed this translation, not something originally creative. It doesn't mean that the translated books are always bad but for this particular translation, I felt a bit uncomfortable.

***Encinas-Franco:*** Thank you for that question. Because I'm always fascinated by Korean pop culture, my journey brought me to Korean literature and also Korean politics. So, when I first heard about Min Jin Lee, I finished her book first, <Free Food for Millionaires> and then after reading it, I also bought the Pachinko on Amazon. It was truly fascinating, and it is well within my purview of interest which is feminist international relations. I am particularly interested in themes that link colonial regimes, identities, and patriarchy, and these are the themes articulated in the book.

***Tablizo:*** I first stumbled upon the term Zainichi in my Japanese Society and Culture class at UP Diliman's Asian Center where I took my elective class. The term Zainichi was only mentioned in passing when we were discussing Japanese culture. But, I was curious about the Zainichi because I didn't know much about Japan and Korea. Being a literature major, the most accessible thing for me would be to read novels or other literary texts about the Zainichi experience. I was lucky enough that around that time Min Jin Lee's Pachinko hit the shelves.

***Bae:*** There were some recommendations and I think there was also personal curiosity especially for our two Filipino panels because of the class and their research interests.

## *Question 2*

***Who was your favorite character in the book and why the character resonates with you?***

***Tablizo:*** My favorite would be Noah. I feel for the character because he's naive. He just wants to stick to his values and morals despite the environment not being particularly warm or receptive to Koreans in Japan. He just wants to be a good person. We always hear that line from him. He's just trying to be good. He's just trying to be excellent so the Japanese would be accepting of him and would not look down on him. He kind of lives with this Kantian ethics of "I'm going to be good because I want to

see good in society". He has that kind of idea. But in the end, we know what happened to him. I also feel for him because the danger with the types of Noah is that they cannot accept alternatives to what they religiously believe in. In his case, he has this straight as an arrow thinking that just by being good, he'd be accepted, and he can't see other alternatives to it unlike his brother Mozasu.

Mozasu says that he's not trying to be good. He says, "I'm not trying to be good like Noa" and in the end, he was asked, "What do you think happened to Noa?" He says, "I think he stopped trying to become a good Korean." There's this contrast between the two brothers but I think Noa is my favorite. In a way, he embodies this idea of Nihonjinron, the single race or the homogeneous idea of identity in Japanese society. The problem is that he wants to be Japanese, but we all know that he cannot be Japanese because he's a Korean and he just cannot accept that.

**Bae:** Let us hear from our two other panelists. How about Dr. Jean? Would you share anything?

**Encinas-Franco:** For me, it is, of course, Sunja. She exemplifies the traditional roles of women at the time, especially when she said, "A woman's lot is to suffer." From what I've read about Korean history, women played a very big role in Korean nation-building and Sunja exemplifies that. It's not just suffering; it's also overcoming patriarchy and trying to defy the tradition that makes her character very admirable. But you see from what I've learned over the past, probably over 10 years already about what Korea is all about, her journey to overcoming tradition and patriarchy is very Korean from what I know of Korea so far.

**Kim:** Noa, for maybe a little different reason. The novel provides us with a lot of interest in the characters. Noa, to me, is the prime example of identity troubles. If we are thinking of the colonial space which is complicating almost everything but especially for the people who are colonized – in terms of how they identify their status, nature of social existence, or the relationship with other people within the same society – identity trouble is one of the most difficult and traumatic problems in colonialism. That's why colonialism is something [that needs to be] perished because it's causing identity trouble almost as a kind of violence.

Noa is exactly the one who is going directly through that identity conflict. Perhaps, because he's learning differently from his brother Mozasu who is not bothered by a struggle against the violent colonial system, but instead trying to get by developing his instinct for skill as a Pachinko manager. But differently from Mozasu, this lured man who endeavored modern life in the colonial space yet knowing that whatever effort he favored, still he's not able to capture that colonizer's identity as a colonized Korean. He was a successful and recognized achiever in the Japanese imperial system by becoming a student in an elite institution, Waseda. But still, he could not escape from the fact that he is always captured as a Korean by anybody he is related to. He was already unbearable with violence fo discrimination I guess and then he tried to get out of that systematic and structural violence only to find out which is impossible — that eventually led him to commit suicide.

Another reason I thought Noa is the quickly interesting character made by Min Jin Lee is that out of so many different narratives of colonial pasts; it's very rare to meet with this kind of character. For example, thinking of Korean films about the Japanese colonial period, these commercialized films, popular films, and popular narratives, are usually providing you with very simplified characters usually like traitors or patriots, but in reality, the majority of colonized people or in between were neither patriots nor traitors. That's usually the identity that they had to build in reality. In popular narratives, these realistic characters are all gone and fantasized or demonized but, in this case, Noa is a much more realistic and very rare character successfully set by the author.

***Encinas-Franco:*** I was fascinated by your discussion Dr. Kim because I noted the way how Filipinos have also sort of exhibited colonial mentality over the years that we were colonized by the United States. People say that we are more American than Americans. In a sense, although they were there for just more than 50 years, our society still, there are a lot of things we owe to the US colonial regime particularly, our brand of politics for instance.

***Bae:*** I think what Nicole said earlier and what Dr. Kim explicitly explained to us make sense because identity cannot be defined in one phrase or a fixed definition in society. Their lives, especially the



contrasting brothers' lives show how their life was really in limbo. No matter how much they struggle or no matter how much they assimilate in whatever ways, it was not projected positively or projected romantically in their real life. Just to add, I also felt with some other characters. I also fully agree with each of you mentioned and I also personally felt about Sunja's sister-in-law, Kyunghee, because during the time I was reading the book, I also went through some personal struggles not compared to their struggles in the book. I was having emotional turbulence in life. I think that was the reason why I was immersed in the personality and how the fragile woman was in Japan, and she had no child to raise so she was doing other things to Sunja and her kids. That also showed me some kind of Korean women or the role of the women and then some suffering whether physical or emotional. I think we can talk about some other characters as well as go deeper into the narratives of the novel.

### *Question 3*

*Do you also have any quotes or any pages you always remember, and you can share with us today?*

**Kim:** I read this book around 3-4 years ago. In preparation for this talk, I tried to visit the book again and then just randomly opened several pages. I looked again at the parts on Noa, and I felt that I have already forgotten many parts of each narrative, but I also watched Apple TV's dramatized series a couple of days ago. I was very sorry that if the original novel is like a hundred percent, then Apple TV is making ten percent out of it. The richness of Pachinko as an original novel was never fully appreciated in the dramatized version. For example, Noa's story is completely missing. Not only Noa's story, but many other parts are either missing or recreated differently. Some parts were not even mentioned in the book. That doesn't mean that it is all bad. It has its recreation, you know. They may be linked to each other, but not necessarily the same narrative – especially on the weight of how these two narratives are being constructed in a colonial manner.

I used to speak at my Asian cinema classes in which I picked films for Asian countries on their colonial experiences. Interestingly, it is very difficult to find any chapter on the story of colonial imperialism. It's likewise very difficult to find genuine films on the Second World War or the Jewish problems from German productions. So, in a way, it's understandable when Japanese filmmakers try to embark on that kind of project, it'd be very difficult to deal with the popular Japanese viewers. They just hand off, not even touching that issue and leaving it in complete oblivion. That's a kind of unspoken consensus on this forgetfulness and the entire history is just disappearing from the particular society.

On the other hand, on the Korean side or Chinese side, that particular brutality, and brutal history of the colonial period are exaggerated sometimes, amplified, or closely focused when repeated. It's like the narrative attention on that particular period becomes easily distorted with intention – with very strong intention. So, one other critical reason why I highly acclaimed Min Jin Lee's approach to reconstructing the colonial experience is that the novel is giving us a very close account and very close to the reality as much as possible out of thick, thick research and with the real people who went through all these hardships. She jotted down every detail which we can immediately feel from the reading of the novel. There's no dramatic exaggeration in her novel. But if you see the Apple TV version, it's closer to the typical Korean popular film from the colonial period.

In this popularized and commercialized narrative, colonial history is turning into a fantasy in which a group of Korean people is bravely fighting against the weaponed army, and this handful of Korean people, even farmers and women, are crashing a battalion of the Japanese professional army. These kinds of popular narratives are easily inviting us to a world of fantasy and the reality of history is not contested at all. In best terms, I could see the gain of the show or the value of the original copy.

**Bae:** I think this is a very important point even if we didn't watch the drama adaptation on Apple TV. Usually, when books are adapted into musicals, dramas, or movies, that is missing because maybe it's inevitable to attract general viewers and audiences around the globe. While listening to Dr. Kim, I was wondering how the western viewers will react to this dramatized adaptation? After all, this is westernized. The media is western centered. It's Apple TV, and we can see how people from different

continents will react differently. How about Nicole? Do you have any quotes or any pages you always recall or remember?

**Tablizo:** My favorite would be the opening line of the novel. It's easy to find because it's the first line. It says that "history has failed us but no matter." It already gives you the sense that the characters in the novel are not the victors in history, these are ordinary Koreans who bear the brunt of historical changes. In the case of the historical context of the novel, they're the ones bearing the brunt of the colonial system. During colonial times, 85% of Koreans worked in agriculture or were farmers. The Japanese introduce laws wherein they can acquire Korean lands, which displaced farmers. And these farmers are the ones who had to migrate to Japan to work in burgeoning factories mainly in Osaka and Tokyo. But mostly in Osaka, because these are small- to medium-size enterprises in Osaka which require little Japanese language proficiency.

I like that line because it presents us with the stoic resolve the characters in the novel have. We follow characters of poor economic backgrounds who live to survive each day which then carves their character to choose practicality over sentiments. These are the characters that are not named in official histories but only appear as statistics. But as I've said, they are the ones who suffered the most.

I guess building up on what Dr. Kim said, the novel as a space, provides alternative history to official accounts. Sometimes, the problem with popular films is they tend to follow what the popular particular account is. Since it's mass media, it tends to always make the product palatable to most. Whereas novels, I'm not saying that novels are inaccessible but compared to films, [the latter] is more accessible. [Novels] can be more intimidating to process compared to films, but they offer us alternative histories. They offer us different narratives that are most of the time not included in history. When I was reading about Min Jin Lee's process in writing the book, she started writing this in the 1990s, she was living in Tokyo at that time and since she has a degree in history, she tends to document. She interviewed Zainichi matriarchs and quoted [their] accounts. That's why as Dr. Kim has observed, this seems to be a very realistic account of what the Zainichi or Koreans did during the Japanese occupation experience.

**Encinas-Franco:** Just to add to what Dr. Kim and Nicole had said, I think her first degree in history, and you know, she is writing a novel about Hagwon in Korea, especially the young Americans to be in hagwon or review centers. For that novel, she has been interviewing people just to write about that novel. Concerning films that have gotten their inspiration from literature or novels, I think that's the case. The substance is diluted primarily because they are for the ratings. They also do not wish to have ambiguities because they fear that they might be misconstrued. If I remember correctly, someone said a long time ago that the novel that has been best translated into a movie is <The Godfather>, and that was very accurate.

I was struck by what Dr. Kim said about films because of their colonial occupation focus. I would like to believe I'm an avid consumer of Filipino films, but I cannot think about Filipino films about Spanish, American, or Japanese colonial regimes. We have a lot of movies in the '60s and the '70s about World War II but they're B movies. They were just action movies, as we call them.

Actually, I read the novel early last year, so I had to look for my favorite quote. It's when Han Su and Sunja were talking, the quote says something "People are rotten everywhere you go. They're no good. Do you want to see a very bad man? Make an ordinary man successful beyond his imagination. Let's see how good he is. When he can do whatever, he wants." I like it because it's such a classic universal quote and it resonates with politics and power, and how people's character can change if you give them power. I like it very much because it just doesn't talk about what happened in the novel itself, but it can also apply in any setting.

**Kim:** May I add, because you were asking about memorable pages or quotes, this is the quote by the author herself from the famous anthropologist from his renowned book <The Imagined Community>? This part is placed right at the Noa part. It's a very condensed part from Anderson's main argument on the nature of the political community which we imagine as a nation. Even in the smallest nation in the world, no one can actually know everybody in the same community and yet, in the largest imagined community like China, so many people hold onto each other than believe that somehow, they belong to one community. This interesting characteristic of what we believe as a nation is troubling in the case of Noa. So, I think Min Jin Lee intentionally placed that conflicting idea on the nation from Benedict Anderson's place in the chapter of Noa and seeing

how Noa is being troubled with the notion of this nation. If you are being asked, let's suppose that all of us are living under the Japanese colonial community whether it was in the Philippines, the Second World War, Hong Kong, or China, as a part of this Japanese empire, the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity, how would we be able to identify ourselves if you are being asked whether we are Japanese or not? Would you say you're Japanese who colonized Korea for almost 36 years? If I was born and grew up in colonial Korea, and someone is asking me, "Are you Japanese?" What would be the relevant answer to that question?

The majority, a large number of Korean people at that time identify themselves as Japanese as a matter of fact — legally, not ethnically. Just like when I was staying in Hong Kong last year, I asked the question to my Hong Kong students, "Are you Chinese?". Many students denied, "No, I am not Chinese". When I changed the question, "Are you not Chinese?", then they would say, "Yes, we are Chinese". Being Chinese yet at the same time not being Chinese is a conflicting idea for Hong Kong students today. Likewise, this identity conflict intensified not only through Noa alone but through many characters in the novel. Noa is by far the prime example of that.

**Tablizo:** Just like to add on that, the quote from Benedict Anderson would be the Horizontal Comradeship which assumes that [everyone in the] nation has the same rights. These are all the same under the same nation. But then, Min Jin Lee also presents us with Japanese characters who are deviants, who are considered outcasts in Japanese society. For example, you have Etsuko, who is a divorced woman and was banished by her family just by being a divorced woman even though she's ethnic Japanese. Another example is Haruki. When they were young, he was Mozasu's best friend. His peers bullied him because he is burakumin, which is an outcast caste in Japanese society. We found out that he's homosexual which is another deviancy in Japanese society. You should be straight in Japanese society. So, it's this illusion of nationhood. I guess, this illusion that we're all the same, we're all equal but then it betrays the fact that even those who are ethnic Japanese can still be outcasted in their society.

Also, to add to what we've discussed before, since Dr. Jean and Dr. Kim mentioned movies and historical films. History is always so malleable when we fashion it into art. Since it happened in the past, it's so easy to form narratives about it with little verification. Well, we can verify historical facts, of course, but it's so easy to mold it into something else,

especially in the idea of nationhood when you can easily form an imagined community by putting an 'us versus them' narrative. So, I guess in the case of Japanese colonialism and imperialism, it's so easy for former colonized countries or subjects to put up a 'us versus them Japanese', and that builds up to the nation-building narrative.

**Bae:** I think what everyone said interweaves and shows the same message at the same time. Just for some readers who are still reading or wishing to choose the book, I will also share one of the pages I found interesting. It was by Mozasu and Haruki as Nicole mentioned Haruki as well.

The quote says "Listen, man, there's nothing you can do. This country isn't going to change. Koreans like me cannot leave. Where are we going to go? But the Koreans back home aren't changing, either. In Seoul, people like me get called Japanese bastards, and in Japan, I'm just another dirty Korean no matter how much money I make or how nice I am."

The reason – when I was reading the books, sometimes I stumbled upon very heart-aching depictions and then the memory that Min Jin Lee was narrating – is because this is still happening. If we talked to Korean descendants or Zainichi people in Japan, this still happens. It's not forgotten history but it's just undocumented and unrecorded because it was the common people's ordinary life. I think if you haven't chosen the book, I think it's worthwhile reading it after this book talk.

#### *Question 4*

***Did you also find any Korean or Japanese words in the novel interesting or some cultural artifacts? For instance, when Sunja and Kyung Hee are trying to make a living, they always produce some homemade Kimchi, and the process of homemade Kimchi or pickled cabbage was very meticulous on some pages. So, maybe I would ask Dr. Jean and Nicole first because you read this as a non-Korean reader. Were there any Korean/Japanese you found interesting or particularly attracted to?***

**Tablizo:** There are these different Japanese terms for names: "honmyō", and "tsūmei", at first I got confused. For example, I think all of the characters have Japanese names that they will use in official transactions. In school, Noa needs to go by Nobuo Bando, his Japanese name. Even Sunja has her Japanese name which she sometimes forgets in the novel. But that fascinated me, then showed this suppression in the colonial system where you are really molded to fit into this idea of what your identity should be. It seems that they can only use their Korean names within the confines of the home, or the Korean ghetto but outside of it, they must pass as Japanese. The assumed Japanese name or tsūmei helps them pass as Japanese.

Another cultural thing would be the jesa. Kyung Hee and Sunja mentioned towards the end of the book when they reminisce about their homeland that they wished to perform the jesa to honor their ancestors. Since they are now in Japan, I think they cannot perform it and at the same time, they are now Christians. So, their new religion forces them to not perform those. They cannot perform cultural rituals.

**Encinas-Franco:** I remember the candy they sell in the market. I forget the name of the candy but how the candy was described was so detailed that you can taste it. Of course, there are Korean terms that I am already familiar with, but I am still surprised. There is also a Yangban, a word for the upper class, that's new to me. What is familiar to me is the term, yakuza. Because Filipinos came to know about the yakuza in the '80s when there were lots of Filipino entertainers who went to Japan and later were abused, in which people usually said it because of the yakuza employer. It's the first time that I am seeing another way in which yakuza are involved in a story.

**Kim:** In my case, what attracted me to the picture was not the Korean or the Japanese but the names of the characters — their Christian names like Solomon, Yoseb, Isaac, and Noa — all these Christian names which are not necessary, especially in the case of Yoseb and Isaac. He was serving as a pastor, but all these Christian names are not necessarily reflected in their religious society. Then in a way, the name, like this western name, created an image of more westernized or modernized onto these people. Sometimes, it's neither Japanese nor Korean. Even if they are continually being called Korean but then their names are not Korean, it doesn't sound

like Korean. Eventually, the family, especially Solomon, is migrating from Korea via Japan to America as if the name has carried some kind of prophecy. That was something alluding to me. I even think that the author never probably intended that kind of thing or western kind of images on these characters but somehow it attracted my attention.

**Bae:** As our panels have mentioned, there are some words I think Min Jin Lee intentionally uses in Korean or Japanese. Those words provoke the readers into thinking about why it was not translated; whether the original meaning is attached to any emotions; or the events the characters are going through.

Maybe the next question can talk about what the characters experienced in the story. The story evolves to dealing with home because everyone has a different concept or background to call their home.

### *Question 5*

***In your understanding or sentiment, what does home mean to each of the characters in the story? Do you think it will ever change? If so, in what ways does yearning for home color the tone of the novel?***

**Kim:** I don't think I particularly remember the weight or significance of home to the main characters. Different from my hometown, the home was where family gathers, I guess. The lives of these people were on the road but that doesn't mean they didn't have a home. Their home moved along with that trajectory. So, when we tend to think home is a fixation, location, or place where you turn into yourself, especially when you are in difficult times. For resting, for love, for support, for nourishment but their home was always on the move. Perhaps, squarely reflecting on the faith of these colonized people fighting in a way to finally build a proper home. That doesn't mean they don't have a home. They have a home but, in a way, they keep fighting to establish something they properly name and believe and take as a home.



**Tablizo:** Part II of the novel is titled Motherland. I think the idea here is what's interesting is that it's titled Motherland, but its setting is in Ikaino, Osaka, a Korean ghetto. I guess it represents this 'shift' between the first generation Zainichi, the parents, Sunja, Yoseb, Kyung Hee, Isak, and Hansu versus the second generation, the sons, Mozasu and Noa. For Mozasu and Noa, the motherland would be Ikaino. Ikaino is their home. It's where they grew up and Korea is just being told to them by the adults or their parents. Whereas for the first generation, motherland would be — in the novel they chose the term Chosun. They interchange Chosun with Korea in the novel. Maybe Dr. Bae and Dr. Kim can correct it. Is Chosun the Japanese name?

**Kim:** When they left their country, it was Chosun. But after the war, Chosun disappeared and then, as a matter of fact, Korea was constructed as a new nation. They are the same country, yet they are not the same country.

**Tablizo:** I guess with the first generation, it's them — Yoseb and Hansu are the ones using Chosun when they describe [Korea]. When they say they want to go back, they don't say "they want to go back to Korea," it's Chosun. I guess the first generation's idea of motherland is still the mainland, it's still the peninsula but for the second generation, it's no longer that and it only exists in memories for them, hand me down memories. The character of Noa believes in the idea of Korea as a place where he could just be free. There's a part in the novel wherein Hansu is telling him to study well because he might be needed to rebuild the homeland after World War II. After the war, they can go back to Korea, and they can rebuild the motherland. Noa has imbibed the idea that he needs to study, and I think that's part of the reason he is a scholar. And then, he imagines that maybe in Korea, he would be — the author used the word 'normal,' — "in Korea maybe 'I would be normal.'" I guess for him it's probably paradise because there he won't be bothered in Korea. He's just Korean. Later on, in the novel, he has been to Korea, but he didn't feel anything about it. He said to Sunja, "I've been to Korea, my supposed motherland." He doesn't say much about it and the same goes for Mozasu. He's been to Korea multiple times, but he doesn't also feel anything for the supposed motherland. He even said, and Dr. Bae has quoted the line, that he feels like an outsider in Korea. He also feels like an outsider in Japan.

I guess it's a question of home here [that] is tied to a question of identity again. How would they fashion identity in a space that is not receptive to them or is keen on placing them as another?

Japanese society is very homogenous when it comes to its identity. It's single-race nationhood. So, with that idea of nationhood you always have, you always pose other people as "other" who are non-ethnic Japanese. Unfortunately, it's the Zainichi and other indigenous minorities that get placed as the other.

**Kim:** You know Zainichi is Zainichi? Zainichi are the people who occasionally stayed with the disappeared nation of Chosun because they came from Chosun. But after the war, Chosun was divided and then disappeared. Now, we only have North Korea and South Korea. Zainichi people denounced the idea of choosing either North or South Korea and they want to choose a unified Chosun which does not exist anymore. The Japanese government in a way has changeably classified these people who belong to Chosun which does not exist, but imaginary Chosun cannot issue them passports or visas. So, that's why Zainichi people are still having problems traveling abroad. When they travel abroad, they [need] to have a special permit from the Japanese government, or if they want to make travel free, they have to choose a South Korean passport.

But just as you mentioned, these people do not link themselves to South Korea, they feel nothing to this nation, and they don't feel that this is their proper home.

**Encinas-Franco:** I think the idea of home is there in Min Jin Lee's novel. For instance, in <Free Food in Millionaires>, identity and home were also a topic and I guess in part also of her identity as a Korean-American. That's why in <Pachinko> she emphasizes this trope.

For me, the novel is really about the home; whereas Nicole said, everyone is free to exercise his/her identity because even if they were in Korea as long as it was occupied by the Japanese, then they were not exercising their identity. However, when they finally returned to Korea, they realized that [while] they were also in the process of the struggles [whether] to make their country free, or to wait for the time when their country would be free, they've also been changed by the process. Like what Dr. Kim said, the beauty of the novel is that it doesn't give us fantastic presentations because if it were probably in a film, when they return to

Korea, the scene would probably be where they were kissing the soil as soon as they land on the airport or something like that.

**Bae:** Very interesting and maybe we can add one relevant question to this discussion because we spoke about Zainichi and Dr. Kim also explained to our viewers what Zainichi means, the word itself. So, in the story, many of the main characters struggle with shame throughout their lives and maybe we can see it due to their ethnicity or family, life, the choices they made, or other factors.

### *Question 6*

***How did you feel shame driving both their successes and failures in some of their lives?***

**Tablizo:** There are a lot of changes in the novel. The novel starts with Sunja's journey, which sets off the novel and it starts because she was shamed for being a single mother, and having a baby with somebody twice her age, Ko Hansu and it starts with that. That's the reason why she chose to marry Isak and go to Osaka. It starts with shame and lots of characters get shamed for their ethnicity and the poverty they experience — most usually the poverty where they experience. The young Noa says that he is ashamed of going to school not only because he's Korean but also because he smells of garlic. Because his mom sells kimchi, and garlic is one of the ingredients, and he reeks of garlic, his schoolmates bully him for that, and they also know he lives in the ghetto. It seems to me that shame in the novel is particularly used in marginalized characters because it's used as a means by the Japanese — those who “others” — to put them in their place and to remind [them] of their position in society. [In] Sunja's case, it's to remind her [that] there's a line in the novel but I guess it can discuss later ‘a woman's lot is to suffer.’ It's all about her carrying the shame of having a relationship with a *yakuza*. I think I'll leave it there.

**Encinas-Franco:** The novel tells us that shame can be a source of vulnerability and empowerment for the characters. For example, they have to hide their identities to overcome shame, but at the same time, shame also guides them on how to go through life. Especially for instance, when her brother-in-law of Sunja did not want them to work in the market because he did not want to be ashamed that he was supposed to be the breadwinner of the family and yet two women were going to work. But then, they have to overcome this just to be able to meet their basic needs and I thought that was remarkable.

**Kim:** The question says that many of the characters, not all, are struggling with the shame of their personal history. This change, while I was reading the book, is time conditioned or sort of framed within the historical time. For example, for having a baby with Hansu, it was shamed at that time for a Korean lady that she even had to give up her hometown and then leave for a new world where nobody would know her background. But if the same thing happened today, would that be much more shameful or crashing up? Because that would be in a way even deceived by the man and that's something that she has to be feeling shameful, not only for her smelling like kimchi or garlic or whatever. The feeling of shame is imposed by the dominant ideologies, values, or ideas of the given time - the way how the people are granted. So, to internalize value and in those generations, they took it for granted and forecast shameful but something not really to be feeling shameful.

**Bae:** There are so many layers and I think if there are some questions later during the open forum, maybe we can go back to this related discussion? Because [in] this part, it was comprehensive with our panels but there's still a lot much to talk about. Let's see if our audience will give us any questions. We are now approaching the last part of today's event.

### *Question 7*

***Let's go back to the title: why do you think the author chose Pachinko for the title? Although, there were so many interview clips and interview articles with the author Min Jin Lee, and I think it was already explained. Did you see how it relates to the book's central plot? If you have any personal sentiment or insight you wished to share?***

***Kim:*** I guess I like the title. Honestly, Pachinko carries very strong negative realms in Japan and not necessarily in the west or even in Korea. But in Japan, Pachinko is a place where everybody goes to Pachinko, but you're not supposed to be there. It's something bad. In a way, Pachinko is a kind of castle that lost Koreans built and found a way out of colonial oppression by accumulating their wealth. It's still a way of signifying the status of Zainichi people discriminated against in Japanese society even today, yet the power of Pachinko through his money is allowing them to finally escape from that aggression and oppression. It gives a sort of not necessarily a contradiction, but very contrasting aspect of Zainichi people in the society.

***Bae:*** I never thought of it that way but it's profound to think of the image of the castle. How about Dr. Jean?

***Encinas-Franco:*** I think this was in one of Min Jin Lee's interviews. She said Pachinko reflects how the game is played and how the life of the characters was influenced or shaped by their lives during their colonial regime. I don't know how to play Pachinko, but it was described extensively in the novel.

***Tablizo:*** Pachinko is like a pinball arcade game — I never played it. I guess the title reflects how Zainichi has lived. It's a push and pull, and it's

this metaphor of gambling. They need to gamble; they need to negotiate their existence in Japan. Also similar to the Zainichi, pachinkos exist in Japan because of gray areas in the law. Gambling is illegal in Japan, but Pachinko parlors are allowed to operate because of loopholes for the Zainichi. Pachinko parlors are not only entertainment but also a means to earn money. They have always been precluded from joining companies from the start. They're precluded from joining other professions, so the Zainichi had to build their own business or had to be self-employed. One such thing would be the Pachinko and the other is the yakinikuya or Korean barbecue establishments historically. Up to now, three-quarters of this is a statistic from Professor Nitsuka. He said that an estimated three-quarters of Pachinko parlors are still owned by the Zainichi.

So, we have this idea of, as Dr. Kim said, Pachinko is the one that made them rise out of poverty but also this aspect of Pachinko as a game of chance and luck. It's a way [that] we have this game that lets you have agency to control even though it has a grand design. I think this also ties perfectly with how the characters are named in the novel. They are named with these Christian names: Isak, Yoseb, Noa, Mozasu, and Solomon. So, it's nice to juxtapose those. We have uncertain gambling and then you have this promise of salvation history which is always certain, and the generation ends with Solomon who biblically is the wisest man [who] has ever existed. You have Mozasu whose namesake would be Moises, the one who lifted the Jewish people from slavery. In the novel, his Pachinko wealth lifted them out of poverty. We have this nice, allegorical meaning in the novel.

At the end of the novel, we see Solomon taking over the Pachinko business even though he knows that he'll be shamed for it. His father doesn't want him to take over Pachinko because he knows people have negative perceptions of being a Pachinko parlor owner, but he says he doesn't care what people think. So, we now have this character who has wisdom, and he could have the solution. He has the wisdom to see beyond this identity problem of being a Zainichi. In the end, we see him accepting that a part of him is Japanese too. His Korean-American girlfriend, Phoebe, tells him that they can marry so he can work in the US and possibly become an American citizen, but he refuses because he finally acknowledges that I am Japanese too. I am Korean and Japanese. This is something previous generations in the Baek family didn't realize. Mozasu and Noa come to a dead end. For Noa, it's a literal dead end in solving the identity problem but in Solomon, we have a chance.

**Bae:** I think Nicole mentioned the names of the characters, and also symbolically give us some different meanings and ways of life, and how their lives unfold in the story. Maybe the last question because earlier Dr. Jean also mentioned another book by Min Jin Lee.

### *Question 8*

***Would you recommend reading for our audience if there are any other books either Korean or international or Filipino that people who enjoyed Pachinko could enjoy further?***

**Kim:** That's a sudden question and I am not prepared. There are Korean writers, not only Min Jin Lee. but some Chinese-American writers or other Korean-American writers, especially Chang-Rae Lee is one of my favorites. Out of many novels, his <Native Speaker> is something that I highly recommend, or <A Gesture Life> might be more relevant to the <Pachinko> story because the main character of <A Gesture Life> is also connected to the Japanese colonial period and is a memory of who is trying to escape from that colonial trauma, hiding in the American society, and keeping low profile life as became <Gesture Life>.

**Encinas-Franco:** Aside from Min Jin Lee, I've also tried reading Chang Rae Lee, and also books about comfort women. I've become very interested in this because of what I teach and also my interest in feminism and all sorts of women's movements all over the world particularly those who were colonized.

**Tablizo:** If you want to read about another Zainichi experience, then the novel <Go> by Kazuki Kaneshiro is a good jumping board. If you are interested in alternative histories or novels acting as alternative histories that tackle postcolonial traumas like Pachinko, I suggest <A State of War> by Ninotchka Rosca. It's a local novel but I am afraid it's more cerebral compared to <Pachinko> because it shifts time, and it even touches upon the pre-colonial Philippines — pre-colonial to the time of the dictatorship.

## - Open Forum -

**Bae:** I think we have some lists of books that some of our audience can get for their vacation or school break. Thank you so much everyone! We can now start our quick open forum and have some questions from Facebook and YouTube comment sections. I will read the questions shown in the banner, and if you wish to add more things, just feel free to say some words.

**First question:**

***What do you think a good Korean or Japanese should be in the context of the book?***

**Tablizo:** I think it was Noa who was preoccupied with the idea of being a good Korean. I don't think it means a certain set of qualities but it's more following this idea of being a model colonial subject which means to pass as Japanese, pretending to be a Japanese, and erasing any Korean remnants in you.

**Kim:** A good Korean in the context of colonized space means someone who accepts the colonial occupation and is willing to become a subject of the Japanese empire.

**Second question:**

***Many Korean media outlets have praised Pachinko for giving the international audience a chance to find out how Korea suffered during Japan's colonial rule. Do you think the novel also has lessons for Korea today?***

**Kim:** I think at some point I mentioned that the novel is great, and the reason is that the novel is providing a very balanced, thoughtful, and well-researched account of the cultural experience which is not necessarily demonizing Japan or Japanese people — unlike many others including Apple TV's drama version of Pachinko which is already demonizing Japanese people and Japan in its entirety. In that aspect, I see a sharp



departure of difference between the two narratives. I think as many Korean films and TV dramas vilify Southeast Asian and ethnic Korea from China. The beauty of the Pachinko novel is not trying to vilify either Japanese or Korean. So, that's why we need more attention rather than close attention to the norm on the way we construct the colonial experience and colonial trauma.

**Tablizo:** Just to add to what Dr. Kim said. Phoebe, the Korean-American girlfriend [of Solomon], has this tendency in the novel to also pass the Japanese as the sole criminals in World War II. To this, Solomon answers that the Japanese also suffered during World War II. You cannot discount the fact that ordinary citizens suffered too. I guess it also presents what Dr. Kim says as a balanced view of both sides.

**Encinas-Franco:** Indeed, the book presents us more with a nuanced way of looking at identities. Looking at, for instance, the colonial struggle and how situations of communities and individuals, then [these] are hard to describe in binary terms. I guess the lesson is that things are not black and white. Discriminating against another human being is outright wrong, and we should not do it.

**Bae:** Among all of us, I think Dr. Kim watched the adaptation series. Maybe next time we can watch it if we also access the adaptation. I think some news mentioned that there would be a season 2. Am I correct, Dr. Kim?

**Kim:** It seems that Apple TV invested a lot of money in creating that adaptation and they think it was a big success. I read in the news that they are already in preparation for season 2. And as I also pointed out, the adaptation version of the drama is only showing a part of the novel, so they need to find a lot more sources for the story.

**Last question:**

***How did you interpret the ending of the novel? Did you like it?***

**Tablizo:** For me, it was a very sad ending. The novel ends with Sunja visiting the grave of her husband, Isak. She buries the locket she has of Noa in the grave. She digs a bit of a hole and buries the locket she has. I think we can interpret that as far moving on from Noa's death after a decade has passed. Moving on from the death of her son but at the same time, it's also an acceptance of what happened to Noa — because, in the end, Sunja is still heartbroken with what happened to Noa. She still regrets what happened to her son because she says, “how could [she] have stopped her son from believing foolish ideas of ethnicity, identity, and nationhood.” I liked it because it offered closure and a sense of acceptance. I also liked it because, in the end, it's her and Kyung Hee. She says at the end that Kyung Hee will be waiting for her at home. So, it seems that women in the end are the ones who are strong enough to still live to see the successes of the next generations.

**Encinas-Franco:** For me, the ending focuses on Sunja and her struggle. It is very obvious that it is written by a woman if you know what I mean.

## - CLOSING -

**Bae:** This concludes our open forum, and this is the end of our event today. Thank you so much for joining us every day and after this event. For our other updates and events, you can just visit the official social media pages of Fully Booked, UP KRC, and our partner institutions. If you missed any part of today's event, you could visit our channels later on and you can re-watch the whole program.

It was nice meeting all of you even if it was a virtual meeting. Hopefully, we can have Dr. Kim in Manila very soon; hope to see Nicole in person; and Dr. Jean, as always, thank you so much!

We hope to see all of you again at our future events. Thank you so much and be safe! Have a lovely day! 감사합니다! Maraming salamat po!



## **RESEARCH ARTICLE CONTRIBUTORS**

**DR. FERNANDO PARAGAS** is a Professor at the Department of Communication Research of the College of Mass Communication of the University of the Philippines Diliman. He completed his PhD degree in Mass Communication at Ohio University as a scholar of the Fulbright program of the United States of America. Dr Paragas earned his MA in Urban and Regional Planning, for which he received a Dean's Medallion, and BA in Communication Research, where he received the Best Undergraduate Thesis Award, at UPD. Prior to returning to UPD, Dr Paragas taught at the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Dr. Paragas was a recipient of the 2019 Gawad Tsanselor sa Natatanging Guro, the highest award bestowed by UPD on its faculty members. He is the Convenor of the Program on Higher Education Research and Policy Reform at the UP Center for Integrative Development Studies and the President of the Philippine Association of Communication and Media Research, Inc.

**BEA MAE CALOYLOY** is a graduate of BA Communication Research at the University of the Philippines Diliman College of Mass Communication. She and her thesis partner, Queenie Chico, received the Best Undergraduate Thesis Award in 2018. She is currently employed by the leading data, insights, and consultancy firm Kantar Philippines, Inc. as an Associate Research Manager.

**QUEENIE ROSE CHICO** is a graduate student of Demography at the Population Institute of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy of the University of the Philippines Diliman. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Communication Research at the same university, for which she graduated Magna Cum Laude and received the Best Undergraduate Thesis Award.

**DR. ERIK PAOLO CAPISTRANO** is the Antenor S. Virata Professor of Business Administration from the University of the Philippines Cesar E.A. Virata School of Business (UP VSB). He is also a Principal Investigator for the University of the Philippines Korea Research Center (UP KRC), and the Editor of the Philippine Management Review, the official academic journal of the UP VSB. He earned his PhD. in International Management from National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan. His teaching, research, and professional experience and expertise covers topics in Operations Management, Management of Information Technology, E-Commerce, social media, and the Korean Wave. His research appears in publications such as International Journal of Human-Computer Interactions, Computers in Human Behavior, International Journal of Market Research, Asian Journal of Social Science, Kritika Kultura, Philippine Management Review, HanPil, and others.

**HERMAN JOSEPH S. KRAFT** is a Professor of Political Science at the University of the Philippines at Diliman, Quezon City. He is at present the Convenor of the Strategic Studies Program of the Center for Integrative and Development Studies at the same university. He has been working on issues that involve the ASEAN, regional security in Southeast Asia, security sector reform, and intra-state conflict in the Philippines. His latest publications include: “ASEAN and the Protection of Migrant Rights” (2019); and “Korea's New Southern Policy, ASEAN, and the Philippines: Middle Power Dynamics in Southeast Asia” (2020); and Teaching International Relations in the Philippines: Opening Spaces while Maintaining Traditional Approaches (2022).

**MICHELLE CAMILLE CORREA** teaches the Korean Film and Korean Wave electives at the Department of Communication, Ateneo de Manila University. She holds a M.A. in Korean Studies from Chulalongkorn University. She also holds a M.A. in Communication from Ateneo de Manila University. She was a recipient of the Korea Foundation's Korean Language Training Fellowship where she studied at the Korean Language Institute of Yonsei University in Korea.

## **BOOK TALK PANELS**

**DR. SHIN DONG KIM** is currently a professor at the Media School, Hallym University, Korea. He founded the Institute for Communication Arts and Technology (iCat) and served as the Vice President for International Affairs for the university. He has been an active advocate and innovator for the globalization of higher education throughout his professional career. His area of research and teaching covers culture and creative industries, media policy and political economy, global communications, and film or social history. He recently managed a five-year national research project on modeling Korea's ICT developments.

**DR. JEAN ENCINAS-FRANCO** is an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science in UP Diliman. She was a Faculty Associate of the Women and Gender Institute in Miriam College previously where she also taught in its International Studies Department. Her research interest is in gender and politics, particularly on discourses of gender and migration.

**NICOLE TABLIZO** is pursuing a master's degree in comparative literature focusing on Asian literature at the University of the Philippines-Diliman. She's writing a thesis on publishing translations of Indonesian literature. Nicole currently works at a news agency for the global development and humanitarian community.





On April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the University of the Philippines launched the Korea Research Center, with the support of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS) Korean Studies Promotion Service, aiming to provide Filipino scholars and researchers with opportunities to widen their interest in Korean studies. The Center hopes to be a venue for students and professionals to produce meaningful comparative research and to promote collaborative partnerships among Korean and Philippine institutions.

The Center serves as a university-wide hub that helps promote and develop Korean Studies in the University and the country. It sponsors interdisciplinary and inter-college research and educational activities on Korean studies, as well as facilitates the training of the next generation of Koreanists in the country.

- Address: University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Metro Manila 1101 Philippines
- Email : [pkrc@up.edu.ph](mailto:pkrc@up.edu.ph)
- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/UPKRC](http://www.facebook.com/UPKRC)
- Website: <https://upkrc.wordpress.com>