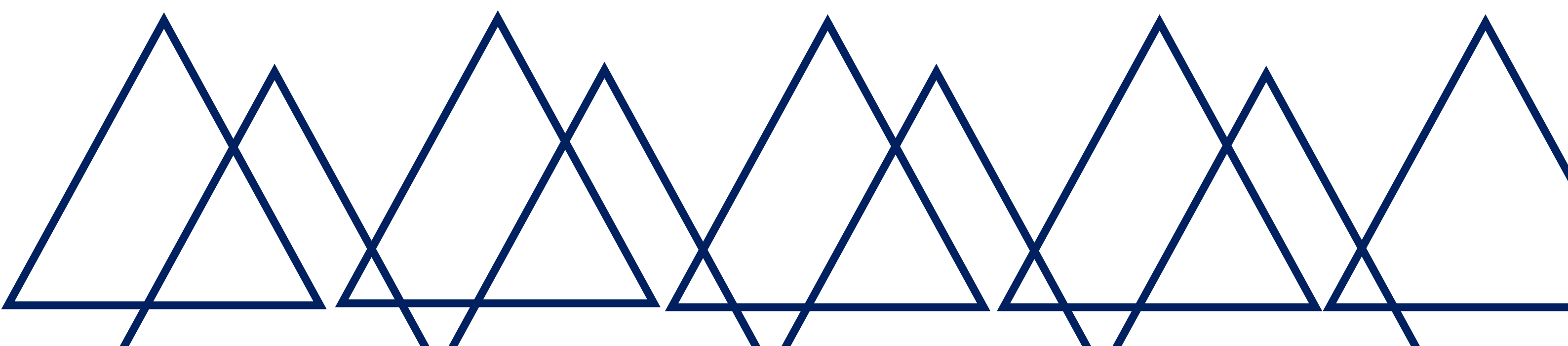
Teachers' Resource Book for EPQ on Korea



Edited by
Sojin Lim, Niki J.P. Alsford, and Ed Griffith

Published by International Institute of Korean Studies UCLan

Adelphi Building, University of Central Lancashire
Preston, Lancashire, PR1 2HE
United Kingdom
https://www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/international-institute-of-korean-studies

Copyright © 2022 by International Institute of Korean Studies UCLan

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction 3
Ed Griffith, Niki J.P. Alsford, and Sojin Lim

Chapter 2. History: Beyond Korean War 5
Michael Seth

Chapter 3. Global Politics: Korea as a Middle power 13
Ed Griffith

Chapter 4. Economics: Global Economy - A Case of South Korea 22
Sojin Lim

Chapter 5. Business: Change and Development in South Korean Business Structures 31
Jamie Doucette

Chapter 6. Sociology: The *Haenyeo* 해녀 of Jeju Island - A Sociological Inquiry 41
Niki J.P. Alsford

Chapter 7. Film Studies: A Case Study - Parasite 48
Ji-Yoon An

Chapter 8. Music: A History of Korean Music - From Traditional Sounds to K-pop and the Metaverse 57
David Tizzard

Chapter 1. Introduction

Ed Griffith, Niki J.P. Alsford, and Sojin Lim

Over recent years there has been an explosion of interest in Korea across the world, particularly among a younger generation that have become accustomed to listening to Korean pop music and watching Korean drama TV series. The editors have witnessed this explosion first-hand in their roles at the International Institute for Korean Studies at the University of Central Lancashire, home to the largest Korean Studies programme anywhere in Europe. While the gateway to an interest in Korea is frequently through popular culture, the editors have observed that this often leads to a wider interest in Korean language, history, culture, society and politics. Young people who have not had the opportunity to learn the Korean language in a formal educational setting at School have found their opportunity to engage with Korean Studies at university and have been grasping it with both hands.

An increasing number of these young people want to explore their interests in Korea before they reach university, both because of their own thirst for knowledge and also as a way to demonstrate their suitability for their chosen degree programme. The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) has long been used to make an application stand out in a number of fields and many young people have expressed an interest in completing one of these to enhance their position in Korean Studies before applying to university. We have received many enquiries from students in this position who indicate that not only do they need greater access to resources, but also that their teachers do not have access to specific platforms in order to gain the required knowledge and subject specific context. It is the editors' intention to provide a resource that assists the teachers of these young people to support them in their aims, introducing them to relevant fields of study in the context of Korean Studies.

Working with experts from around the world specialising in a variety of sub-fields of Korean Studies, we have created a resource book that introduces discipline-specific skills and contextual information on Korea. Each chapter begins with an overview of the relevant discipline, including an explanation of the most common methodological approaches to explain how a non-specialist can tackle a question in the field. The chapters all continue with a sample EPQ question and answer, designed to inspire both the student and teacher to conceive of an achievable and meaningful project. In addition to the reference list, each chapter concludes with further recommended reading and a list of useful online resources that will be helpful for both teachers and students.

Explanations of key terms are included in each chapter as a quick guide to understanding the reading both within the book and in the wider resources. Each of the authors is a specialist in the relevant field of study with a focus on Korea, but the book is not intended to be a purely academic one. It is deliberately constructed with discrete chapters that can be read on their own with no need to consult the rest of the book, allowing it to be a resource that teachers can dip into should they have a student that seeks support in a specific area. It is also for this reason that the chapters have been kept relatively concise, making the book simultaneously rich in resource and information but also brief enough to serve practically as a resource book for busy teachers.

In Chapter 2, Michael Seth provides a brief history of Korea. Currently, the UK secondary education system tends to address Korea only with reference to world history as a part of Second World War, specifically in relation to the UK's involvement in the Korean War. However, there is a much wider scope to discuss with students wanting to undertake an EPQ, and thus, the chapter poses a sample question of "Why is North Korea so much less economically developed than South Korea? How and when did this happen?" This allows an exploration of North Korea's historical development in comparison with South Korea.

In Chapter 3, Ed Griffith discusses Korea as a middle power within the context of global politics. Showing how explanations of international relations can be applied to questions about South Korea's role in the world, the chapter explores why South Korea remains committed to an alliance with the United States, despite the apparent costs.

In Chapter 4, Sojin Lim provides an understanding of South Korea's economic development. The chapter explores how the country has transformed from a fragile state that relied on aid after the Korean War to an aid donor country today. The sample question "Why and how has South Korea reduced poverty and become one of the middle power global economies?" can be not only used for the subject of economics but also can benefit students' logical thinking and critical analysis in line with the following chapter related to business chapters.

In Chapter 5, Jamie Doucette shows how government-business relations have contributed to Korea's development, approaching this from a business studies background. He proposes a sample question of "To what extent has the development of Korea's distinct business sector (with the *chaebol* at its centre) benefited its national economy?" *Chaebol* is a unique term used in Korean business and this chapter helps students and teacher to understand its special position in South Korea's economy.

In Chapter 6, Niki J.P. Alsford introduces Jeju Island's *haenyeo* using a sociological approach. He examines the history of the *haenyeo,* or female divers, on the South Korean province of Jeju and ascertains why they are representative of a semi-matriarchal family structure.

In Chapter 7, Ji-yoon An considers Korean film and specifically focuses on the case of the Oscar winning film Parasite. The sample answer in this chapter shows how students can explore particular Korean methods of filmmaking and identify these in their EPQ.

In Chapter 8, David Tizzard explores the history of Korean music. His sample question and answer show how students can approach the subject of K-Pop in an academic way that allows them to discuss their passion analytically. He locates the genre in the history of Korean music, demonstrating how this internationally successful style of music retains its roots in Korean culture.

The bringing together of discipline and area study is important as it provides knowledge of practical value concerning important areas of the world. This resource book provides an understanding of the social and cultural wholes of the Korean peninsula. Area studies, as a method, requires an understanding of local communities viewed through subject disciplinary lenses. Teachers and students need resources that allow them to explore their interests in this field and it is the role of academics to attempt to fill this gap. This resource book is one such attempt.

Chapter 2. History: Beyond Korean War

Michael Seth (James Madison University, US)

Overview of Subject

Korea is an ancient society that traces its origins to the tribal cultures of the Korean Peninsula. Agriculture began there about 3500 BCE and the first organised states appear around 300 BCE. Like Japan and Vietnam, Korea was heavily influenced by China. It borrowed Chinese writing, Chinese legal systems and ideas about government, and Confucianism. Buddhism came to Korea through China, and China deeply influenced the art, literature, dress and many customs. The Koreans themselves are linguistically and ethnically unrelated to the Chinese and remained culturally distinct. In 676, the Korean Peninsula was politically unified under the state of Silla (pronounced *Shilla*). Except for one brief period in the 10th century most of Korea remained politically unified until 1945. In the 17th century Korea imposed a policy of isolation much like its neighbour Japan did at that time. There was only limited contact with China and Japan and almost none with the West.

Korea's isolation ended during the heyday of imperialism in the late 19th century when in 1876 Japan forced Korea to open itself to trade and diplomatic relations. The Korean kingdom under the Joseon dynasty then made some attempts at modernizing reforms. This effort was hindered by the interference from three neighbouring empires; China, Russia and Japan which competed for control over the Korean peninsula. After defeating first China and then Russia in wars over Korea the Japanese annexed the peninsular state in 1910. For 35 years the country was a Japanese colony. Under the Japanese a programme of modernisation began including building a modern education system, a railroad network and establishing industries in the northern part of the country. Most of the benefit from these efforts went to Japan.

Most Koreans resented Japanese rule which they resisted in small guerrilla attacks and in sporadic demonstrations and calls for independence that were suppressed. In the 1930s and early 1940s the Korean population was mobilised for the war effort by the Japanese in Second World War which in Asia began with the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. Many Koreans were sent to Manchuria and to Japan where they made up one quarter to of the workforce in the factories and mines. During this period the Japanese made an attempt at forced assimilation requiring Koreans to change their names to Japanese ones, to worship at Shinto shrines, and to speak Japanese. Korean publications with a few exceptions were banned and students could be punished for speaking their own language at school.

The Japanese occupation created a powerful nationalism that first manifested itself in a nationwide uprising in 1919 known as the March First Movement. The nationalists split into more moderates that often looked to the West such as the United States (US) and Western Europe for inspiration and the radicals who looked to the Soviet Union and the international communist movement for inspiration and support.

The division of Korea was carried out in secret by the US and the Soviet Union in the closing days of World War II. It was designed to create a Soviet and an American occupation zone on the model of the occupation of Germany and Austria. No Korean was consulted on this

arrangement or even knew about it until later. While in theory only temporary the Cold War rivalry between the two superpowers led to the creation of two rival states. The Soviets fostered a communist government and system in their northern zone that in 1948 became the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), better known as North Korea. The Americans gave independence to an anti-communist Republic of Korea (ROK), better known as South Korea, in their southern zone. Almost all Koreans wanted a reunited independent country that would be militarily strong enough to protect its sovereignty, that would be a prosperous and progressive member of the international community. They regarded the division as temporary. In June 1950, North Korea under its leader Kim Il-sung invaded the South in an effort to reunite the country but failed when the US intervened to defend the South. The DPRK invasion force was defeated by the US and South Korea along with small contingents from a dozen other countries including the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, Thailand, and Turkey all operating under the United Nations (UN) flag. The UN forces then invaded North Korea. This brought about the intervention from the newly established People's Republic of China. The Korea War then became a war between North Korea and its ally China with South Korea, the US, and the other UN forces.

A truce was arranged in July 1953, but North and South Korea remain to this day (2021) at war. It is the longest war in modern history. Following the armistice, North and South Korea underwent rapid economic and social transformation while continuing their rivalry. North Korea under the Kim Il-sung regime became one of the world's most totalitarian countries. It had a total command economy with no private enterprise and emphasised the development of heavy industries rather than consumer goods. It also sought to be as self-sufficient as possible avoiding the kind of economic dependency that characterised many developing post-colonial states. It maintained good relations with both Moscow and Beijing using the rivalry between the communist giants to gain economic and military support from both without being under the control of either.

North Korea made impressive gains in building an industrial economy and a formidable military. Its foreign policy was based on eventually reuniting the country under its leadership. Its ideology gradually deviated from orthodox Marxism-Leninism into what it called *Juche*, a kind of socialism based on the teaching of its great leader Kim Il-sung. While originally it had a cult of the leader based on that of Stalin and Mao the cult of the leader became a cult of the leader's family and lineage what it called the "Baektu Bloodline." Kim Il-sung's family and its ancestors were venerated, and his eldest son was named his successor in 1980 and succeeded him in 1994.

South Korea in contrast to DPRK initially made only a modest recovery from the destruction of the Korean War, but in 1961 the military took power under General Park Chung-hee and it began a state-led economic development. It emphasised export-led manufacturing and foreign investment. This was a sharp contrast to North Korea's model of development. South Korea's foreign policy was to rely on the US for protection from a renewed invasion of the North. The US maintained troops in the country to deter the North from invading again. North Korea occasionally launched military provocations that brought to two Koreas the brink of full-scale armed conflict.

By the 1980s North Korea's economy began to slow down and then stagnate, and in the 1990s hurt by the collapse of the Soviet Union its most important ally and source of economic support its economy shrank, and the country suffered from a severe famine from 1995 to 1999 in which perhaps as many as two million died. The economy made a partial recovery in the early 2000s,

but the country remained isolated and very poor. In the 21st century it was the only nation not connected to the world wide web. The government tried to compensate for its weakness by developing nuclear weapons and missiles becoming a nuclear power in 2006 and successfully testing an intercontinental missile in 2017. This resulted in UN sanctions which further hindered its economy. Most of its trade and contact with the outside world was with China which allowed enough goods to flow between the two countries to prevent the state from collapsing. There was little change in its totalitarian government which was ranked last in most surveys of human rights. Kim Jong-un became the new "great leader" upon the death of his father Kim Jong-il in 2011.

South Korea in contrast in the 1980s and 1990s had one of the fastest growing economies in the world. South Korea became one of the "four little tigers" with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore as these dynamic countries on the Pacific Rim of Asia were called. It differed from the others in that it was a poorer country to begin with and its economic take-off surprised most outsiders. The economy was based on a partnership between the state and private conglomerates called *chaebols*. Eventually some of the big *chaebols* such as LG, Hyundai, and Samsung became among the world's largest manufacturing firms. Economic progress at first was accompanied by long hours, low wages and labour unrest, but from the late 1980s wages and benefits rose, the labour unions became stronger and politically more influential, and working conditions improved. In general, South Korea had a more equitable distribution of wealth than most developing countries.

Economic development was accompanied by educational development. In 1945 only half of Koreans had any formal education, and a mere 5 percent had a secondary education or higher. By 2021 South Koreans had among the highest education levels in the world. It successfully hosted the Olympics in 1988, and between 1987 and 1993 made a successful transition from a military-led authoritarian society to an open, democratic one. By the early 20th century, it had become one of the few developing "Third World" countries to join the ranks of rich, developed, democratic states with a living standard similar to the countries of Western Europe. It became a major exporter of consumer electronics, automobiles and after 2010 of entertainment and including the globally popular K-pop. It remained allied to the US which in 2021 still had troops stationed in the country. North Korea demanded the withdrawal of US forces in Korea which it regarded as a threat while most South Koreans still saw the presence of American troops in their country as deterrent to possible North Korean aggression.

South Korea for all its spectacular progress faced serious issues including among the highest levels of inequality among the rich, developed nations, and the world's lowest birth rate. South Koreans debated whether or not to accept immigrants as its labour force shrank a problem in what was still one the world's most homogeneous nations. South Koreans were also worried about North Korea's weapons programmes, the threat of renewed conflict, and the possibility that the economically troubled DPRK might suddenly collapse and flood the country with millions of refugees. It also had disputes with an increasingly nationalist Japan which it felt never took responsibility for its colonial oppression, and from a rising and aggressive China.

Some Key Terms

Economic dependency: Being economically dependent on another. Often used to describe the situation where poorer countries have economies that that are dependent on or dominated by richer ones.

Post-colonial state: A state what was formerly a colonial passion of another, especially those that became independent after 1945.

Juche: North Korea's official ideology that emphasizes self-reliance and that is based on the thought of its founder and long-term leader Kim Il-sung.

Four Asian Tigers: A term for South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore all of which underwent rapid economic growth from the 1960s through the 1990s.

Chaebol: South Korean business conglomerates such as Samsung or LG that dominate the country's economy.

Third World: A term for the countries that are less industrialised and economically developed relative to the richer states such as the US, Western Europe, or Japan.

Homogeneous: Being all the same. A term used for countries like Korea that have little racial, ethnic or linguistic diversity.

Han'gul: The Korean alphabet used to write the Korean language.

Confucian ethics: Ethics based on the teaching of Confucius and his followers which focuses on the importance of maintaining a harmonious social order with the family as the idealized model.

Aesthetics: Principles based on beauty in art, music, design and performance.

Methodological Approaches

Korean history can best be understood by both appreciating its distinctive culture and by placing it in regional and global context. As a nation (North and South) Korea is a more geographically and culturally defined unit than most countries. Many states such as India, Indonesia, and Nigeria are the products of colonial powers that created administrative structures uniting diverse peoples. Korea, however, has been a unified polity since the 7th century making it older than any European state. Until its partition in 1945 it was a highly homogeneous one, with no ethnic or linguistic minorities of any significance. It has its own language unrelated to any other, its own writing system *han'gul*, and a distinctive set of customs and traditions. The people of North Korea and South Korea today are of the same ethnic group, the division is political and does not reflect any traditional historical, geographical or cultural divide. To understand Korean history, therefore it is important to understand its unique history and culture. A list of books that will help is listed below.

Korea is also part of the larger East Asian cultural zone that includes China, Japan, and Vietnam. It shares many Chinese derived words and terms, Confucian ethics and ideas of society, many aesthetic traditions, and cultural norms with the other East Asian societies. It is useful to understand Korean culture and history by treating as part of East Asia. Books on East Asia such as Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Anne Walthall (2013)'s *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* can provide this larger cultural and political context for understanding Korean history.

Korean history can also be understood in the context of world history. Premodern Korea was part of the networks of exchange that link societies across Eurasia such as the Silk Roads. Modern Korea became part of the larger story of 19th century imperialism, colonialism, nationalism, the Cold War and the issues concerning economic development. Unfortunately, most world history texts give little attention to Korea. Unfortunately, most world history texts give little attention to Korea. However, useful information on the country's links with the rest of Eurasia can be found in Perter Frankopan *The Silk Roads* (2015). The surveys of Korean history by Kyung Moon Hwang (2016) and Michael Seth (2020) try to connect Korean history global developments. For example, Seth (2020)'s *A Concise History of Korea* contains a series of essays on "Korea in Global Perspective."

An excellent resource for learning about Korea and its history is the journal *Education About Asia* published by the Association for Asian Studies - its website is given below. This contains articles by specialists aimed at secondary school and undergraduate students. For primary sources the anthology Yongho, Lee and de Bary (1997)'s *Sources of Korean Tradition: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* is useful. Hildi Kang (2001)'s *Under the Black Umbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* is also a good source of oral histories and there are several good anthologies of modern Korean literature. For recent history, several South Korean newspapers have English language archives as does North Korea's news service. A comprehensive listing is found on Northwestern University's *Korean Studies: Primary Sources* - its website is provided below.

Sample Question

Why is North Korea so much less economically developed than South Korea? How and when did this happen?

Sample Answer

When Korea was partitioned along the 38 parallel by the US and the Soviet Union into two occupation zones there was little difference in the living standards between the northern and southern halves of the country. In general, Korea was a mostly rural and very poor country. Most of the modern industrial development it did have was in the North while the capital and cultural centre, Seoul was in the South. When the two zones became the independent countries of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) in 1948 they pursued very different strategies for economic development.

North Korea adopted a socialist, command economy where all businesses, farms, industries, markets were state owned. This was based on the model of the Soviet Union. The state set economic targets and mobilized the nation's people and resources toward achieving them in series economic plans. This started with a two-year plan 1949-1950, then after the Korean War a Five-Year Plan bean in 1957 completed one year early then a Seven-Year Plan 1961-1967

and so on. The state approached economic development much as it approached the mobilisation of the nation's population and resources for a total war. As was the case in Russia, China, Romania, Vietnam, and other poor communist countries initially this method produced impressive results. For about two decades after the Korean War in the 1950s and 1960s the state provided basic education, housing and healthcare for all citizens, constructed many industrial plants and transportation infrastructure, began modernising agriculture and provided electricity to almost every home. Since the state emphasised heavy industry and the production of weapons and equipment for its armed forces rather than consumer goods, the life for most North Koreans remained very basic but was better than before.

By the 1970s North Korea was the second most industrial and urbanized country in Asia after Japan; then North Korea encountered serious problems. Most were common to communist states: the socialist system did not provide many economic incentives for workers; rigid central planning did not allow managers much flexibility; and in general, without a free market, it was difficult to efficiently allocate resources. North Korea followed the path of other communist counties, initially making impressive progress at the cost of spartan living conditions but after a while achieving only modest or no economic growth.

North Korea pursued policies that made its situation even worse. Most communist countries allowed some private markets, such as allowing farmers to keep and sell part of their produce, but North Korea did not permit this. Perhaps more seriously, the state devoted too much of its resources to the military. By the 1980s although it had less than twenty million people it had one of the world's largest armed forces and may have devoted a greater share of its economy to the military than any other country in the world. North Korea also tried to be self-reliant, making everything it needed rather than engaging in international trade to purchase goods. Its small size made this impractical. These problems were compounded by Kim Il-sung, who ruled from 1948 to his death in 1994. He carried out grandiose but impractical projects such as the world's longest sea barrage that ended up serving no practical purpose or building the world's tallest hotel that was structurally flawed and never opened. Additionally, the state bureaucrats ignorant of local conditions made many bad decisions such as cutting down the trees on the mountainsides to provide more land for agriculture. Crops did no grow well there, and the deforestation led to flooding which destroyed much of the good farmland.

By 1980s the economy was stagnating and in the 1990s it was contracting. A big blow came with the fall of the Soviet Union. Despite the government of Kim Il-sung's efforts to be self-sufficient it relied on generous Soviet aid including petroleum at well below market prices. When its supply of nearly free fuel ended in 1991 the country suffered a severe energy crisis which it has not recovered from. Despite a severe famine 1995-1999 North Korea never carried out the kind of market reforms that China or Vietnam did. Consequently, it has remained impoverished.

Although equally poor at the end of the Korean War, South Korea followed a different pattern of development. Initially it relied on American aid, then in 1961 it pursued a strategy that combined state planning and Five-Year plans not unlike the ones in North Korea with private enterprise which implemented them. Thus, it mixed state planning with the profit motive. The partnership between the state and big private companies called *chaebol*s such as Lotte, Hyundai, LG, and Samsung resulted in a highly competitive industry although it did result in corruption and economic inequities. It also carried out land reform in the 1950s that made farmers small entrepreneurs growing crops for the market rather than salaried state employees as in North Korea. And rather than trying to be self-sufficient South Korea encouraged foreign

investment and used its competitive advantage of having a literate, low wage labour force to manufacture consumer goods for export. In other words, it had an export-oriented, market economy not a self-sufficient state owned and managed one.

Its mix of state own and private owned education and healthcare greatly improved the education and health of the people. By the 1970s, South Koreans were becoming better educated, healthier and better fed than their fellow Koreans in the North. High levels of educational attainment resulted in a skilled, competitive workforce. In the 1980s and 1990s it moved to a more open, consumer-oriented economy and the role of the state began to lessen somewhat. While North Korea's economy stagnated in the 1980s and declined in the 1990s South Korea during this time was one the world's fastest growing ones. After 2000 its booming economy slowed but never stopped growing.

Additional factors helped to account for South Korea's faster economic growth. The more open society including hundreds of thousands who studied abroad made it easier for South Koreans to learn about and adopt new ideas and practices. Its industries worked in partnership with some of the best Japanese, American, and European firms and learned how to compete with them. And partly because its population was twice as big and because the US had troops stationed to protect it South Korea devoted less of its resources on the military and more on improving living standards.

References

Ch'oe, Yongho, Peter H. Lee and William Theodore de Bary (eds) (1997). Sources of Korean Tradition: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries, 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ebrey, Patricia and Anne Waltham. (2013) East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History. New York: Cengage Learning.

Frankopan, Peter. (2015). The Silk Roads: A New History of the World. New York: Vintage.

Hwang, Kyung Moon (2016). A History of Korea: Second edition. New York: Palgrave Macmilllan.

Kang, Hildi (2001). Under the Black Umbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910-1945. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Seth, Michael J. (2020). A Concise History of Korea. Lantham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, Third edition.

Further Reading

Fulton, Bruce and Youngmin Kwon (ed) (2005). *Modern Korean Fiction: An Anthology*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hwang, Kyung Moon (2019). *Past Forward: Essays on Korean History*. New York Anthem Press.

Pratt, Keith (2006). *Everlasting Flower: A History of Korea*. London: Reaktion Books.

Peter H. (ed) (1990). *Modern Korean Literature: An Anthology*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Seth, Michael J. (2020). *Korea: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Seth, Michael J. (ed) (2016). *Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean History*. London: Routledge.

Shin, Michael D. (eds) (2014). *Korean History in Maps: From Prehistory to the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Useful Websites

Education about Asia: https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/

Korean Film Archive Youtube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/KoreanFilm/videos

Northwestern University's Korean Studies:
https://libguides.northwestern.edu/c.php?g=115263&p=748796

Kenneth Robinson, *Korean History: A Bibliography*:
http://www.hawaii.edu/korea/biblio/BiblioOpen.html

Chapter 3. Global Politics: Korea as a Middle Power

Ed Griffith (University of Central Lancashire, UK)

Overview of Subject: Global Politics

The study of Global Politics is normally considered to be a part of the academic discipline called International Relations (IR). It investigates the ways that countries interact with each other, particularly at the highest political level. Those involved in the study of global politics try to understand how and why countries come to conflict, including war. While some seek to find ways to prevent war and advance peace, others see conflict as an inevitable outcome of an international system that has not overarching governance.

IR was first developed as an academic discipline in 1919 when Aberystwyth University established the world's first Department of International Politics. Born out of a desire to find a way of preventing a repetition of the events of World War One, the study was still rooted in the centuries-old European philosophical tradition of liberal thought, particularly Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill.

By drawing on approaches from other subject areas, including politics, sociology, economics and history, IR has been developed its own schools of thought that approach the study of the international system in different ways. The approach taken depends on assumptions and emphasis placed on certain aspects under consideration. Although many consider themselves to 'belong' to one 'school' or another, it is possible to approach to the study of the international system from more than one standpoint and different approaches may be seen to have different strengths depending on precisely what is being studied.

IR has seen a series of so-called 'great debates' between these various schools of thought, or theories. Understanding the approaches of these theories is key to developing a sophisticated analysis in global politics.

Some Key Terms

States: The political entities that represent and control a specific and defined geographical area. Frequently used interchangeably with the word 'countries'.

International System: The patterns of interaction between the various states in the world.

Theories: A way of interpreting or explaining things that happen in international relations.

Power: The ability of one state to get another state to act in a particular way. Examples of power include military power, economic power and soft power.

Anarchy: The absence of an overarching government or system of control. This is not necessarily the same as chaos.

Normative: Establishing a standard of expected behaviour.

Neo-neo debate: A debate in the academic literature on IR theory between neo-realism and neo-liberalism, the two most influential schools of thought in the twentieth century.

Realism: A theory of IR that assumes states will inevitably come into conflict with each other simply by seeking self-preservation.

Liberalism: A theory of IR that sees inter-state cooperation, particularly through trade, as a possible way of preventing conflict.

Constructivism: A theory of IR that sees the world as socially constructed, with no fixed explanation for inter-state conflict.

Theories and Methodological Approaches

Since its inception the theoretical side of IR has been dominated by two schools of thought: realism and liberalism (originally referred to as 'idealism' because of the value placed on ideas, though the name came to be used to suggest that people were operating outside the realms of reality – in stark contrast to realism). The two schools differ fundamentally in their view of the international system, though they also share some important assumptions, particularly about the primacy of the state in international relations.

Liberalism focussed on the ability of states to accept the possibility of mutual interests, hoping to demonstrate that the seemingly perpetual state of conflict in the international system was neither natural nor inescapable. Liberals think that states can find common ground that enables them to cooperate for mutual gain instead of trying to restrict others. This system of mutual benefit would also increase the costs of military conflict making it less attractive for states to go to war with each other.

To deal with the problems brought about by an international system that is anarchical, liberalism focussed on the creation of formal institutions within which states could manage their relationships, ensuring that mechanisms were in place to enforce multilateral agreements. The earliest attempt at creating a global institution along these lines was the League of Nations that was established after the First World War.[1] Although this was a failure, it is considered to be the forerunner of the United Nations that came into being after the Second World War and which still exists today, with almost all countries in the world represented.

Instead of viewing states as trapped in a cycle of mistrust, liberals actively sought ways in which this could be avoided. Liberal IR theory can, therefore, be viewed as normative in that its aim was always to address an issue that existed within international relations and find practical solutions to it.

[1] The League of Nations came into being in 1920 and at its largest it had 58 member states. It was intended to provide a form of world government and had the power to authorise economic sanctions or even military action against states that broke the rules. It was considered weak because the United States never joined, and several prominent states simply withdrew when they did not want to keep to the rules. Ultimately it failed to prevent the onset of World War II and was formally abolished in 1946.

The development of **realism** as a theory of IR was motivated in part by the desire to challenge the apparent failings in liberal thought. Realists were inspired by classic texts and analytic works of the past such as *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes, and even going back to the great Greek historian Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War.* Realists argued that states were primarily selfish entities whose primary instinct was survival, and that to achieve this aim they sought to maximise their own power vis-à-vis any potential rival.

The analysis of the behaviour of states was based on the principle of human nature being selfish and egotistical. Therefore, states were considered to be inherently belligerent, and the international system could not be altered. In contrast to liberal theory, realists argued that power in international relations was a 'zero-sum' game, meaning that one side always won and the other always lost. Cooperation in alliances aimed at balancing mutual threats was possible but was always at the risk of being undermined by shifts in power. This meant that membership of international institutions was always a matter of convenience and could never be considered to be behaviour-altering. The failure of the League of Nations was viewed by many as proof of this. For realists, the failure of the League of Nations to stop the spread of fascism and to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War, demonstrated the naivety of liberals and the value of realism. The argument of realists such as E.H. Carr and also Hans J Morgenthau was to treat the world as it actually *was* rather than trying to mould it into something we would like it to be. That meant accepting the inevitability of conflict and power politics in international relations.

The 'Neo-Neo Debate' and Its Critics

While the failure of the League of Nations and the outbreak of the World War Two cemented realism's dominance, there were clearly aspects of international relations that were not satisfactorily explained in either school of thought, particularly as globalisation produced a much higher level of interconnectedness.

It was in direct response to this that Robert Keohane[2] and Joseph Nye[3] put forward their model of "complex interdependence", which became the basis of what has come to be termed '**neo-liberalism**'. Their idea emphasised the interconnected nature of the modern international system, and the great number of actors that were now involved – no longer limited just to states but also including multinational corporations, large non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other interest groups. While states remained the primary focus of their work, they considered other transnational actors to also have relevance and agency within a cobweb of interrelation. The international system was far more complex than had ever been previously estimated. While this model was ground-breaking, it continued a fundamental liberal assumption: that interaction could be regulated by the development of rule-based institutions, allowing for cooperation and mutual benefit in the international system and providing a mechanism by which to mitigate mistrust and fear.

Realist thought also developed and in what is arguably the most influential piece of work ever written on IR theory, Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*, [4] outlined what has

---

[2] An award-winning American scholar known for writing on International Relations.

[3] A famous scholar and political advisor who served as Assistant Secretary of Defense and the Chair of the National Intelligence Council under President Bill Clinton. He is most well-known for his theory of soft power.

[4] Although this is Waltz's most famous book, he published several others that were influential in IR.

come to be known as 'structural realism' or '**neo-realism**'. Waltz emphasised the anarchic nature of the international system and viewed it as *the* key factor in determining the behaviour of states. The absence of authority leaves all states in the position of having to assume the worst of all of one's rivals and prepare accordingly, for failure to do so may result in their own destruction. While the end result of this model – inevitable conflict – was not markedly different from classical realism, it did mark a fundamental shift in the explanatory aspect of the theory. For neo-realists, human nature was no longer the root of conflict in the international system; the centuries' old debate on whether man was inherently good or inherently bad was no longer relevant. What was relevant was the rationality of the state in seeking its own survival within a system of other states all seeking to do the same thing. Thus, seeking maximum power relative to other states within the system was the *rational* course of action. Given that all states would behave this way, conflict would be inevitable.

This model of IR theory challenged the previously held realist view on the most stable structures in differing international systems. Classical realists like Carr and Morgenthau thought multi-polar systems provided the greatest level of stability, where no one power could grow strong enough to dominate. Neorealists now argued that the most stable is the bi-polar system in which two superpowers balance against each other, keeping alliances of roughly equal strength and neither capable of threatening the other's security without endangering its own.

The development of neo-liberalism and neo-realism marked both a new phase in the long debate between the two schools of thought, and a notable shift in the focus of that as the two theories came to be seen as closer to each other than had ever been previously accepted. Indeed, the 'neo-neo debate', as it came to be called, was criticised for being too narrow in its focus, and it was noted that both apparently competing theories had the same *epistemological* and *ontological* foundations. Both are rationalist and positivist theories that take the nature of the state as a given, without any need for deconstruction or reflexivity. That is to say that both neo-liberalism and neo-realism assume that the state's core interests are fixed and that they pursue a *rational* course of action in order to achieve their aims. Both theories consider the primary and overriding aim of all states to be that of survival. The weakness of the neo-neo debate, at least for some, is that such state interests are *assumed* and not deconstructed.

Out of the frustration with this debate emerged a new basket of theories that came to be known as **constructivism**. Constructivists identified the need to acknowledge the social production of knowledge and to deconstruct it. In other words, they considered that there was not one single truth based solely on an objective reality, but one that is produced through interaction and power in any set of relationships. This allowed for the development of IR theories that no longer relied upon on basic state interests that were assumed; instead, they were socially produced and, crucially, fluid. Given that interests are socially constructed – that is, expectations of what is both possible and desirable determined by social interaction – the interests of states across the international system may differ and may alter across time.

This development in IR theory certainly has not ended the debate, and it is reasonable to say that neorealists still dominate both the academic realm as well as the policymaking field, but constructivism has become one of the largest fields in IR theory. As with any IR theory constructivism is not a uniform bloc, and within it there are distinguishable strands of thought that differ fundamentally in their ontological assumptions. Systemic constructivism was the

first to emerge in IR literature, and is most closely associated with Alexander Wendt,[5] who wrote a famous article called *Anarchy is What States Make of It*. He argued that a "society" of states allowed for the possibility of relationships to develop among its members but accepted that Waltz's structural realism also played a role in shaping these relationships. Wendt outlined his vision of a state-centric theory of IR that concentrated on the social interaction within the international system. Other approaches of constructivism take the state as the main focus. In other words, the construction of a particular individual state is considered from within, rather than taking it as an assumed entity existing in a system that determines its actions. By looking inside, the state, analysts can consider the actions of individuals, companies, NGOs, and media organisations as well as the political classes. The overall culture and values of a society can be taken into account to assess the impact on a state's foreign policy. These two approaches to constructivism (which either analyse the system or the state level) are not mutually exclusive and are frequently combined. States as entities can conduct their affairs in the international system, thus developing their interests and identities from social interaction with other states, organisations, and entities. At the same time the society-driven identity creation feeds into this process and influences the way that a state behaves in any given situation.

When assessing foreign policy decision making or the interaction between states in the international system, these theories provide us with the tools to explore questions that we want to answer to better understand the world in which we live. It is not always necessary to stick rigidly to one theory or another, but it is useful to maintain an awareness of the assumptions you are making in your analysis and the implications of these assumptions in taking your analysis forward. It is possible to identify aspects of more than one approach that help us to understand facets of international relations and the following sample answer will show you one way this can be achieved, providing a broadly neo-realist analysis of the US-South Korea alliance but including a constructivist insight that leaves the overall analysis more complete.

Sample Question

Why does South Korea maintain its alliance with the United States?[6]

Sample Answer

For centuries the Korean peninsula has had a strategically important position but one that has left the country vulnerable to invasion, occupation and interference from the two great powers of China and Japan that are located on either side. This geographic proximity to larger, more powerful states has left Korea to sometimes be described as "a shrimp between two whales", referencing an old Korean proverb which warns the shrimp will have its back broken when two whales fight (Economy, 2017). Throughout history, competition between China and Japan has resulted in invasion, aggression and occupation of Korea. For Korea, and for Koreans, these experiences have left an indelible mark on the approach to the region that policymakers are expected to take. By far the most significant example of this was the annexation, and subsequent occupation, of the Korean peninsula by Japan in the first half of the twentieth

---

[5] A prominent and well-respected political scientist.

[6] The following sample answer draws on some, but not all, of the discussion from the earlier part of the chapter about IR theory. This is intended to give an illustration of how a student can go about applying this theory in answering a question on South Korea's role in global politics. Students may wish to use different theories to discuss different issues. They might also use a particular issue to test one or more of the theories by exploring their success (or failure) to help explain what we observe in South Korea's foreign policy.

century. The sometimes-brutal nature of this occupation has left the relationship with Japan particularly uneasy.

Since the division of the Korean peninsula this geographic vulnerability has been exacerbated. South Korea has a unique geostrategic position, sharing its only land border with a nuclear power with whom it remains technically at war, whilst it has volatile relations with the other great powers of the region. South Korea has periodically had disputes with China over trade, among other issues, while with Japan there remains tension over a perceived failure to atone for Japanese occupation among other bilateral issues. All of this means that South Korea continues to occupy a precarious position in the Asia Pacific.

To analyse a country's foreign policy, it is necessary to understand the options that might be open to policymakers in that country. South Korea is frequently referred to as a 'middle power', suggesting that it is in a tier of countries that cannot be classed as 'great' or a 'superpower', but which do have the economic and military weight to exercise some influence in the international system (Kim, 2016). South Korea is unquestionably neither a superpower nor a powerless state in the international system. It ranks in the world's ten largest economies and spends on its military to a similar extent. It has wide-reaching cultural influence with the spread of the so-called *hallyu* or Korean Wave, and it is a member of a number of influential international organisations and groupings, including the G-20.

Nevertheless, the previously described geostrategic vulnerability of South Korea has left it with a strategic dilemma of how to manage its relationships with its more powerful neighbours. This is where the alliance with the United States (US) comes in. The US has pursued a 'hub and spoke' strategy in the Asia Pacific, in which it seeks to have strong alliances with a number of small and middle powers, each of which strengthens its own overall position in the region (Yahuda, 2004). This has never been joined up into a wider, multilateral organisation or alliance and each alliance remains bilateral, with the US the senior partner in each. The US-South Korea alliance is one of the most important in the region, with South Korea being host to almost 30,000 US military personnel, the second largest of any host in Asia.

On the face of it, there are many negative aspects of this alliance for South Korea and for the Korean people. Among the many costs of being one of the US' key pillars is the burden of hosting the military in South Korea. This burden is not only financial, but also something that has been perceived by some in the country as a source of national humiliation and shame, with the US perceived in some quarters of Korean society as almost an occupying force. There is also a potential strategic cost for South Korea in maintaining the alliance. While the motivation for it clearly lies in providing a deterrent to perceived threats, particularly North Korea but also China, the presence of the US on the Korean peninsula is viewed by some as making South Korea a potential target and a source of provocation (Snyder, 2012). Although opinions fluctuate over time, the US has been viewed in national opinion polls to constitute a greater threat to the South than North Korea. Similarly, the emergence of China as a superpower has given many in the country a reason to be concerned about South Korea's role as a lynchpin of US power projection on the doorstep of its greatest rival. If a new Cold War is really beginning, then South Korea would find itself on the frontline.

South Korea is more than just a shrimp between two whales. It exercises significant agency in its foreign policy making, though it is clearly constrained by the structures of the international system that leave it vulnerable to a number of threats, most notably from North Korea and China. Any traditional analysis of power in international relations would conclude that a

country in South Korea’s position is left with a series of choices and that the only sensible course of action is for it to maintain strong alliances with states that can deter its potential enemies. For this reason, despite the costs associated with the US alliance, it is an entirely rational decision for South Korea to maintain it. Balancing against the growing threat of China and providing a protective guard against another invasion from the North make the alliance the outcome that any analyst would predict.

However, there are some nuances to this relationship that deserve a little more attention. South Korea is not alone in facing the potential threat of a growing China and an antagonistic North Korea. Both countries are perceived threats to Japan as well and are similarly major motivations for Japan’s own alliance with the US that comes with, arguably, even greater costs for Japan. It might be expected that such an overlap of interests would develop into a broader coalition that involved at least the three countries of the US, Japan and South Korea. However, this has not emerged and so the question needs to be asked: why not?

The answer to this question lies in the historical experiences of the Korean people and their shared memory of the trauma felt at the hands of Japan. It is worth noting that this is, partly, a shared memory with China too (Saito, 2017). The modern national identity of South Korea is rooted in the struggle against Japanese colonialism and this collective view prevents a closer relationship between the two states even where purely rational approaches to contemporary power balances would suggest it be in their mutual interest. There is, then, a greater level of complexity in the Korea-Japan relationship than we would expect from a straightforward neo-realist analysis of Korea’s place in the Asia Pacific.

While the structure of the international system is the overarching factor in South Korea’s calculation of the value of the US alliance, the collective memory of the history with Japan underpins a national identity that also impacts the foreign policy choices of the state in ways that a purely neo-realist interpretation of international relations cannot predict. South Korea acts rationally in alliance formation but also demonstrates its own national identity and values through the nuances of its relationships with allies and rivals such as Japan and China. Therefore, South Korea’s foreign policy is both evidence of the value of the most dominant theory in International Relations but also a challenge to some of that theory’s key assumptions.

References

Carr, E. H. (1964). *The Twenty Years Crisis 1919-1939*. New York: HarperCollins.

Economy, Elizabeth (2017). Podcast: A Shrimp and Two Whales. *Asia Unbound*. Available: https://www.cfr.org/podcasts/podcast-shrimp-and-two-whales

Hobbes, Thomas (1981). *Leviathan*. London: Penguin Books

Keohane, Robert & Nye, Joesph (1977). *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. Boston: Little Brown.

Kim, Sung-Mi (2016). *South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: Challenges and Changes*. Chatham House Research Paper.

Machiavelli, Niccolò (2003). *The Prince*. London: Penguin Books.

Morgenthau, Hans J. (1968). *Politics Among Nations.* New York: Alfred A Knopf.

Saito, Hiro (2017). *The History Problem: The Politics of War Commemoration in East Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Snyder, Scott (2020). *South Korea at the Crossroads*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Thucydides, (1954). *The Peloponnesian War*. London: Penguin Books.

Waltz Kenneth (1979). *Theory of International Politics.* Illinois: Waveland Press

Wendt, Alexander (1992). 'Anarchy is What States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics'. *International Organization.* 46 (2): pp 391-425

Yahuda, Michael (2004). *The International Politics of the Asia Pacific*. London: Routledge.

Further Reading

Chung, Jae Ho (2007). *Between Ally and Partner: Korea-China Relations and the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press

Kim, Sung-Han (2010). From Blood Alliance to Strategic Alliance: Korea's Evolving Strategic Thought toward the United States. *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*. 22 (3): 265-281.

Kim, Ellen and Victor Cha (2016). Between a Rock and a Hard Place: South Korea's Strategic Dilemmas with China and the United States. *Asia Policy.* 21: 101-122.

Snyder, Scott (2012). *The US-South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner Publishers.

Ye, Min (2017). *China-South Korea Relations in the New Era*. London: Lexington Books.

Useful Websites

Center for Strategic and International Studies, Korea Chair[7]: https://www.csis.org/programs/korea-chair

Chatham House[8]: https://www.chathamhouse.org/regions/asia-pacific/korean-peninsula

The Council on Foreign Relations[9]: https://www.cfr.org/asia/south-korea

The Diplomat[10]: https://thediplomat.com/

E- International Relations[11]: https://www.e-ir.info/

[7] A non-profit research institute for foreign policy

[8] The UK's most influential think tank on international affairs

[9] A non-profit think tank based in the United States specialising in US foreign policy and international affairs

[10] An analytical website on contemporary political and security issues around the Asia Pacific

[11] A free resource that contains articles on contemporary issues as well as introductions to theories of IR

Foreign Policy[12]: https://foreignpolicy.com/tag/south-korea/

[12] A current affairs and comment website on international relations

Chapter 4. Economics: Global Economy – A Case of South Korea

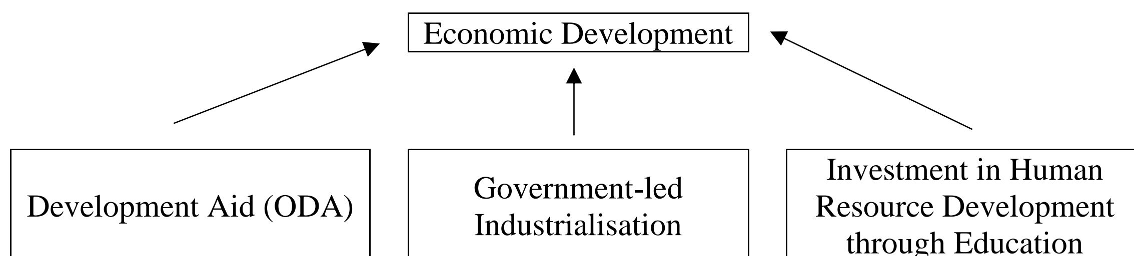
Sojin Lim (University of Central Lancashire, UK)

Overview of Subject: A Success Story of South Korea in Global Economy

As a consequence of the impact of the Korean War (1950-1953), South Korea became a very poor county. The gross national income (GNI) per capita was that of Ghana; however, the country achieved fast economic growth whose GNI became 200 times higher in the 2000s than in the 1950s. It has been a very famous anecdotal story in South Korea that United States (US) General Douglas MacArthur who led the Korean War victory said that it would be a miracle if South Korea's economy grew in 50 years' time. However, South Korea has achieved very rapid economic growth, and thus, it has been called as the Miracle of Han River – river in the middle of Seoul. Also, South Korea is one of the four Asia Tigers that became newly industrialised countries (NICs) – South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

The factors accounting for economic success in South Korea can be found in three major pillars: development aid; government-led industrialisation; and investment in human resource development through education (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Three Main Factors Accounting for South Korea's Economic Development



Source: Author's Own Compilation

After the Korean War, South Korea initially received grant aid from mostly US and United Nations (UN). Japan and Germany also provided grant aid to South Korea in its early stage of economic growth, but most of Japanese aid was a part of Japanese colonial compensation again South Korea's property claims. It also constituted mixture of grant and concessional aid. In its later stage of economic development, the government of South Korea received more concessional aid than grant aid, and more from multilateral banks like World Bank than bilateral donor countries. With its heavy dependency on development aid, the country is known as a one of the best cases where official development assistance (ODA) was effective in a country's development. South Korea is the very first country which turned into donor country group, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), from the status of aid recipient.

The government of South Korea started its industrialisation process in the 1950s with heavy dependence on import substitution. South Korea is not a country which has fluent natural resources and minerals. In the 1905s, not only natural resources, but also the country lacked both capital and skills. In comparison, its sister country North Korea enjoys heavy mineral and natural resourced mountains. However, for South Korea, it was not a case. Thus, the government had to import necessary items for industrialisation. Based on this, the government could successfully start export-oriented industrialisation from the 1960s, based on its own 5-year economic development plans. During this period, agriculture-based society transferred into textile manufacturing focused economy. With this change, the government could begin to attract more concessional loans from multilateral banks, which came into at larger monetary package than grant aid. While the 1960s saw the development of its light industry, the economy turned into heavy and chemical industry in the 1970s. The business sector rapidly developed heavy and chemical manufacturing and export, and again, the whole industrialisation process between the 1950s and 1970s was not fully achieved without external aid endowment.

In the 1970s, along with heavy and chemical export-led industrialisation, the government also conducted so-called '*Saemaul* Undong', which means 'new village movement' in Korean. Later, *Saemaul* Undong became a unique brand name in other countries – rather than naming it new village movement, governments call *Saemaul* Undong as it is. It is because when former President Park eun-hye, daughter of former President Park Chung-hee, revived *Saemaul* Undong in the government policy, it was formed as one of South Korea's ODA package to recipient countries. *Saemaul* Undong was originally created by former President Park Jung-hee in the 1970s as a rural development policy. President Park considered widening income gap between urban and rural places in the course of industrialisation, and thus, introduced *Saemaul* Undong for community empowerment in rural villages.

In the 1980s, South Korean government imposed industrial rationalisation, which means, strong government-led industrialisation in previous years had become less government involvement, and the business sector enjoyed more autonomy in their business activities. Based on its successful hosts of both 1986 Asian Game and 1988 Olympic Game in Seoul, South Korea opened up its globalisation process. In the 1990s, South Korean economy began to see evolution of high-tech industry. However, with Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, South Korean the speed of economic growth became quickly slowed down. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis was a shocking event in many ordinary families in South Korea as many of their breadwinners lost jobs all of sudden. It was just a year ago when people in South Korea celebrated the achievement of joining so-called rich country's club, OECD in 1996. Many adults in South Korea thought their endless efforts and sacrifice by giving up their leisure life but focusing on work life was finally paid off. While they themselves still lived under the wartime and aftermaths trauma, they did not want their children and next generation lived in the same fragile status. This 'success-motivated' mindset led the 'fever of education' in South Korea, which will be discussed below. Critics predicted that South Korea would not be able to reverse this economic downturn, and thus, would remain in the 'middle income trap'. This assumption was made due to the fact that countries have barely overcome middle income trap in their economic development paths.

However, South Korea has become another rare exemplar of the best practice that ODA helped a country to escape from the middle-income trap. This time, it was mainly International Monetary Fund (IMF) who provided financial support to South Korea – loan aid. When the IMF agreed to provide monetary support to Korean economy against the Asian Financial Crisis, the business sector had to restructure its *Chaebol* system; a few conglomerate companies

(*Chaebol*), which had strong government-business nexus, used to run a number of subsidiary companies that contributed to overexpansion of business sectors of one *Chaebol*. Under the IMF emergency loan scheme, they were required to give up some of their subordinate companies. In this process, many of smaller subordinate and outsourcing companies in chain collapsed, and it affected the economy as a whole. However, South Korea overcame this difficult situation, and achieved economic recovery soon. Accordingly, in the 2000, workforce in South Korea opened more venture companies, especially in the IT sector which South Korea has shown competitive advantage in the global market. Based on this, the country joined OECD DAC, which is basically a group of ODA donor countries, in 2010.

The main reasons behind of the strong IT industry as well as competitive skilled labour market in South Korea can be found in government's investment in human resource development during earlier period. Also, parents' extraordinary fever to get their children receive better education opportunity contributed to human resource development in South Korea. In the 1960s and 1970s, the government emphasised the importance of research and development (R&D), and it was well associated with education fever. South Korea experienced education explosion in the 1960s. While parents believe that higher education level would bring better life for their children, the government believed that investment in education and vocational training could become an effective survival strategy from the country's lack of natural resources, but with relatively cheap labour situation.

Based on this, the government not only focused on labour skill training, but also created specialised research-intense national think-tanks. For example, the government introduced Vocational Training Act in 1967, Vocational Training Special Measures Act in 1974, and established Korea Vocational Training Management Agency in 1982, which is today's Human Resource Development Service. At the same time, Korea Institute of Science and Technology (KIST) was established in 1966, Korea Development Institute (KDI) in 1971, and Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade (KIET) in 1976, which all contributed part of R&D in South Korea. The government's investment in education attributed to the rapid expansion of heavy and chemical manufacturing export in the 1980s as skilled workers absorption capacity increased. In other words, government policy worked successfully in linking education to production in its economy in the context of labour mobility and labour quality enhancement.

In light of this, in 2021, President Moon Jae-in of South Korea was invited to G7 meeting held in Cornwall, United Kingdom (UK), along with Australia, India and South Africa. Based on this recent invitation, it has been examined that it was an occasion where South Korea, mainly due to its economic development, was officially recognised as a middle power country. Once a war-torn fragile country has now become a high-income middle power county within 70 years. As seen, South Korean case can be a good example to study for A-Level students in relation to the 'The Global Economy' theme of the 'Economics' subject. Accordingly, when students analyse South Korea's economic development, a student can focus on, for example, how ODA helped South Korea's economic growth, and/or how human resource development contributed to the rapid economic development. The following shows an example of possible student led EPQ question, and a sample answer to it. References used for in-text citations have been intentionally selected as online accessible as possible.

Some Key Terms

GNI: GNI is defined as gross domestic product, plus net receipts from abroad of compensation of employees, property income and net taxes less subsidies on production. This indicator is based on GNI at current prices and is available in different measures: US dollars and US dollars per capita (both in current PPPs).[13] In a simpler way, it can be understood as total income earned by a nation's people and businesses.

GNI per capita: GNI per capita is the income groupings in US dollars. While it is understood that GNI per capita does not completely summarize a country's level of development or measure welfare, it has proved to be a useful and easily available indicator that is closely correlated with other, nonmonetary measures of the quality of life, such as life expectancy at birth, mortality rates of children, and enrollment rates in school.[14]

GDP: GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products.[15] It is a measure of the size and health of a country's economy over a period of time.[16]

OECD: OECD is an international organisation that works to build better policies for better lives. It considers economic strength and prosperity are essential for the attainment of the purposes of the United Nations, the preservation of individual liberty and the increase of general well-being.[17] Becoming a member of the OECD is a complex procedure which goes beyond signing its founding Convention. Countries wishing to become OECD members must demonstrate a "readiness" and a "commitment" to adhere to essentially two fundamental requirements: (i) democratic societies committed to rule of law and protection of human rights; and (ii) open, transparent and free-market economies.[18]

DAC: DAC is a group of ODA donor countries as members of the OECD.

IMF: IMF promotes international financial stability and monetary cooperation. It also facilitates international trade, promotes employment and sustainable economic growth, and helps to reduce global poverty. The IMF is governed by and accountable to its 190 member countries.[19]

ODA: ODA is government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries and is flows to countries and territories on the DAC List of ODA Recipients and to multilateral development institutions.[20]

---

[13] https://data.oecd.org/natincome/gross-national-income.htm
[14] https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/378831-why-use-gni-per-capita-to-classify-economies-into
[15] https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/jobs/series/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG
[16] https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/knowledgebank/what-is-gdp
[17] https://www.oecd.org/
[18] https://tuac.org/news/oecd-membership-and-the-values-of-the-organisation/
[19] https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/IMF-at-a-Glance
[20] https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/official-development-assistance.htm

Methodological Approaches

A country's economic development can be seen in two different disciplines: economics; and development studies. Economics subject somewhat embraces component of development studies in the context of global economy, while there is no separate subject on the latter. In the global economy chapter of the economics subject, for example, one of the A-level textbooks covers ODA and donor-recipient relations as the UK has been a leading traditional donor country which contributed to development of many developing countries in the world. However, the textbook does not comprehensively deal with this agenda in the context of aid effectiveness, which is a crucial part in understanding of country's economic development by aid support. Thus, it is necessary for teachers who guide EPQs for their students to understand how scholars in development studies as well as economics explain aid effectiveness discussion.

In general, the aid effectiveness debates can be found in two main approaches: aid works; and aid does not work. On one hand, the most well-known argument has built upon Jeffrey Sachs (2005)'s *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* and Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee (2007)' *Making Aid Work.* Sachs strongly argues that aid is effective, he emphasises a very important 'BUT'. According to Sachs (2005), aid works but when it is provided in a big push – as enough financial vehicle for developing countries to achieve the level of take-off for economic growth. In comparison, Banerjee (2007) claims that aid effectiveness is evident, especially when we look at the cases of smallpox and polio, which have been completely removed from poor countries thanks to aid provision. The former can be interpreted well in the case of South Korea as the country has been a best practice of which ODA effectively helped the economic development process. On the other hand, William Easterly (2006)'s *White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* and Paul Collier (2007)'s *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* examined under what circumstances aid does not work. Both do not reject the effectiveness of aid, but rather criticise that wrong policies or certain circumstances attribute to aid ineffectiveness (Lim, 2021a).

Sample EPQ Question

Why and how has South Korea reduced poverty, and become one of middle power global economies?

Sample Answer

Republic of Korea (ROK), or South Korea, was once a fragile country after the Korean War (1950-1953). Its gross domestic product (GDP) level was similar to Ghana in the early 1950s, but it increased almost 200 times higher in 2000 (Lim, 2021a). Based on its rapid economic growth, South Korea has become the very first state which turned into an official development assistance (ODA) donor country from recipient status (UNDP Seoul Policy Centre, 2020). South Korea joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996 and became a member of Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which is a group of aid donors, in 2010.

When the Korean War ended, South Korea received development aid mostly from the United States (US) and the United Nations (UN). Also, the amount that US provided to South Korea during its early economic development period was a lot higher than to other countries. For example, it was said that: "the Korean total of USD 6 billion in US economic grants and loans, 1946-1978, compares to USD 6.89 billion for all of Africa, and USD 14.89 billion for all of

Latin America (Woo, 1991:45, cited in Sial, 2018)". One thing outstanding in the case of South Korea's aid recipient experience for economic development is that it received most of grant aid in its early period while more loan aid was given in the later stage of economic growth (Lim, 2021a).

As South Korea did not have enough natural resources, capital and skilled workers in the 1950s, the government started to use grant aid as impetus of industrialisation process (Oh, 2010). Eventually, light industry, which focused on textile manufacturing, was developed, and export-oriented industrialisation became active in the 1960s. According to Frank (1975, cited in Kim, 1991), industrialisation in South Korea depended on import substitution in the 1950s, and began to see more export expansion throughout the 1960s and 1970s. This was possible because the government invested vocal training and education, which was coincided with parents' eager to have their children more educated (Lim, 2021b). From the 1960s and onwards, South Korea received both commercial and loan aid, with less portion of grant aid (Lim, 2021a).

Before it joined OECD DAC membership in 2010, the government of South Korea began to provide aid to other countries in the 1960s (Calleja and Prizzon, 2019), and its initial aid to other recent countries was not from its own national budget but mostly from external sources like US aid or aid from international organisations to South Korea, but earmarked for South Korea's aid for others (Lim, 2021a). As seen, South Korea from the 1960s to the 2000 was a recipient country but a donor country at the same time. With its inception of OECD DAC membership in 2010, South Korea is now an official donor country.

This achievement of South Korea has been examined as one of the best practices of ODA's effectiveness to overcome poverty in a country (Calleja and Prizzon, 2019; UNDP Seoul Policy Centre, 2020). Heavy endowment of ODA made it possible for South Korea to achieve rapid economic growth, and also has helped to expand its diplomatic footprints in other recipient countries. In this way, the government of South Korea has enhanced its diplomatic power within the international relations and also become a middle power country of the global economy (Lim, 2021a & 2021b). For instance, South Korean President Moon Jae-in was invited to the recent G7 meeting held in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2021. With this invitation, we could confirm the increasing importance of South Korea 's trade power as a country of 'economic coercion' against China (Smith, 2021).

Yet, this does not mean that South Korea did not experience difficulties in development pathway. When the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis occurred, just a year after from South Korea's OECD membership commenced, South Korea was also seriously influenced by the event. Many businesses went into administration or bankrupt. It was questioned whether South Korea could overcome this period, which could lead the country stuck in the middle-income trap. However, with a rapid financial support – loan ODA - by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and with massive restricting in the business sector, the country achieved another miracle in the due course. In other words, South Korea has become another exemplar of a country that overcame the middle-income trap (Lee, Hanningan and Mudambi, 2015).

In conclusion, South Korea's economic development has benefitted throughout its development paths from the early 1950s to the late 1990s. After the war, South Korea received grant aid, mostly from the US and the UN, and the ODA scheme was eventually converted to the concessional loan during the industrialisation period in the 1960s and 1970s. As ODA amount into South Korea decreased, and the country provided aid to other recipient countries, the OECD welcomed South Korea as one of its members in 1996, as a high-income country.

However, when the Asian Financial Crisis happened in 1997, South Korea had to receive another ODA package from the IMF – loan aid. With this financial injection into the country, South Korea managed to overcome the middle-income trap, and has become one of the OECD DAC donor countries, since 2010. In 2021, by being invited to G7, South Korea has proven its global middle power economy. Even though South Korea showed quite systemic and strategic national development plans and favourable domestic environment that enabled economic growth in the country, its economic achievement of today would not have been possible if there was not sufficient external financial support, ODA.

References

Banerjee, Abhijit Vinayak (2007). Making Aid Work. Cambridge, MIT Press.

Calleja Rachael and Annalisa Prizzon (2019). Moving Away from Aid: The Experience of the Republic of Korea. London, ODI.

Collier, Paul (2007). The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It. New York, Oxford University Press.

Easterly, William (2006). White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good. New York, Penguin Press.

Kim, Kwan S. (1991). The Korean Miracle (1962-1980) Revisited: Myths and Realities in Strategy and Development. Working Paper #166. Kellogg Institute.

Lee, Ahreum, Thomas J. Hannigan and Ram Mudambi (2015). Escaping the "Middle Income Trap": The Divergent Experiences of the Republic of Korea and Brazil. ARTNet Policy Brief No 46. Bangkok, UNESCAP.

Lim, Sojin (2021a). The Evolution Story of South Korea from a Fragile State to an International Actor. In: Sojin Lim and Niki Alsford (eds). Routledge Handbook of Contemporary South Korea. London, Routledge.

Lim, Sojin (2021b). Two Nation States in the Korean Peninsula. In: Porsche-Ludwig, Markus and Ying-Yu Chen. Handbook of Asian States. LIT Verlag Berlin.

Oh, Kongdan (2010). Korea's Path from Poverty to Philanthropy. Brookings, 14 June 2010. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/koreas-path-from-poverty-to-philanthropy/. Accessed: 25 August 2021.

Sachs, Jeffrey (2005). The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time. New York, Penguin Books.

Sial, Farwa (2018). Historicising the Aid Debate: South Korea as a Successful Aid Recipient. Developing Economics, 12 November 2018. https://developingeconomics.org/2018/11/12/historicising-the-aid-debate-south-korea-as-a-successful-aid-recipient/. Accessed: 25 August 2021.

Smith, Josh (2021). S. Korea's Moon Heads for G7 Summit Overshadowed by China. Reuters, 11 June 2021. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skoreas-moon-heads-g7-summit-overshadowed-by-china-2021-06-11/. Accessed: 25 August 2021.

UNDP Seoul Policy Centre (2020). The Transformation of the Republic of Korea's Development Cooperation: Reflections from the First Decade of OECD-DAC Membership.

Further Reading

Lim, Sojin and Niki Alsford (eds) (2021). Routledge Handbook of Contemporary South Korea. London, Routledge.

Useful Websites

Export-Import Bank of Korea – Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF): https://www.edcfkorea.go.kr

Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA): http://www.koica.go.kr

ODA Korea: http://www.odakorea.go.kr

OECD DAC Peer Review: https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/peer-reviews-of-dac-members.htm

UNDP Seoul Policy Centre:
https://www1.undp.org/content/seoul_policy_center/en/home.html
World Bank: https://www.worldbank.org/en/home

Chapter 5. Business:
Change and Development in South Korean Business Structures

Jamie Doucette (University of Manchester, UK)

Overview of subject

For a small country, Korea has a large economy (sitting around 10th-13th largest in recent years). This large size is due to its role as a prominent export-led economy. Exports are a major source of income for Korea, and Korea businesses produce industrial and consumer goods that are used throughout the world: Samsung smartphones, Hyundai automobiles, LG televisions to name a few. Because Korea's economy is so dependent on exports to drive it, it is very sensitive to fluctuations in global demand. The recent downturn in global shipbuilding in the mid-2010s is one example, while another is the recent trade tensions in Northeast Asia between the United States (US), Japan, and China.

For many observers, Korea's business environment is synonymous with its large, diversified conglomerates that include firms such as Samsung, Hyundai, Lotte, LG, Kia, among others. These are collectively known as the *chaebol*. The word *chaebol* is a compound noun formed with characters for wealth or property and faction or clan. It used to describe these large firms, which are often controlled, formally or informally, by a ruling family, such as the Lee family which controls the Samsung group, or the Chung family that controls Hyundai, and so on. Coincidentally, the Korean word for '*chaebol*' uses the same Chinese characters as the Japanese word 'Zaibatsu.' This term was used to describe similar large Japanese, family-led firms that predated WWII (for example, Mitsubishi). These firms were broken up and turned into industrial and corporate groups ('kigyo grupu') in its aftermath by removing the ruling families from active management. In the last few decades, economic reformers in Korea have advocated for breaking up the *chaebol* in a similar manner. They fear that the current system gives ruling families too much power. A stronger separation between ownership and management of the *chaebol*, they argue, would help to tackle corruption and professionalize management, removing the unnecessary influence of ruling families over the decisions of their many subsidiaries.

There are many debates about the positive and negative roles that the *chaebol* have played in the Korean economy. Regardless of their analysis, however, most observers attribute the rapid growth of these Korean firms to the broader political and economic environment that Korea found itself in during and after the Korean War. Scholars have found that aid, military procurement contracts, pre-existing networks with Japanese firms and control of assets seized after WWII helped stimulate the initial development of these firms (see Glassman, 2018 for a review).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the political environment in Korea was highly supportive of export-led growth. This period is often associated with what is called 'the developmental state' in the academic literature. In general, scholars have argued that this form of state (one they argued can be seen in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan) played an active role in nurturing export firms. To do so, the state used policy loans to support firms that invested in new products and expanded their market share. The state supported businesses, often *chaebol*, that fulfilled

performance targets such as upgrading technology, expanding production into new types of industries, and increasing connections between the national and global economy (these are often called backward and forward linkages).

In short, the Korean economy was governed by the long-term, developmental priority of fostering new industries rather than simply a short-term profit-motive. Developmental state theorists argued for these policies to work, however, a developmental alliance between big business and the government was necessary. Such an alliance could provide vital networks of communication and coordination. These were seen as necessary for setting priorities, monitoring performance, and allocating resources. In short, the *chaebol* was seen as a junior partner in the government, though the relationship between the two were not always cordial.

The material result of Korea's developmental policies was that Korean firms were able to quickly move up the production ladder. Starting from simple primary and manufactured consumer goods such as wigs, tungsten, and garments, they economy quickly advanced towards more complex products and forms of manufacture. These included white goods (refrigerators, ovens, and washing machines), automobiles. Gradually, Korea would begin to produce significant intermediary products (for example, steel and microchips) and eventually highly valued capital goods themselves (for example, heavy machinery).

The *chaebol* itself was an enormous beneficiary of industrial policies designed to support development, by engineering the Korean economy's take off from simple manufacture to export-oriented and heavy and chemical industries. Often the *chaebol* would use their own political connections and diversified group structure to attract financial support and to cross-invest in new industries by starting subsidiaries in new sectors. Because each *chaebol* forms a chain of inter-linked firms, by cross-investing they effectively supported the investments of their subsidiary firms. In short, the *chaebol*'s industrial expansion was supported by both 'patient capital' in the form of government loans and subsidies and from 'tunnelling' other resources (managerial and financial) across the broader conglomerate. The result was an intricate cross-ownership structure (for example, Samsung Electronics partially owns Samsung Life Insurance, which partially owns Samsung Engineering, and so on) with the ruling families at the centre.

The authoritarian governments of the 1960s and 1970s were generally supportive of the rapid growth and diversification of the *chaebol*, although, at times, they felt uneasy the growing power of these businesses. This uneasiness is perhaps because they may have seen the *chaebol* as a potential political rival, and indeed in later years some *chaebol* heads would seek to run for elected office. More recently, scholars have argued that since the late 1980s, the *chaebol* have increasingly left the secure 'nest' provided by industrial policy and became active players in the global economy on their initiative. The economic geographer of global production networks and supply chains Henry Yeung (2016), for instance, argues that firms like Samsung Electronics have undertaken considerable networking and partnering up with lead firms (for example, Apple) in the global electronics sector. This networking and partnership have allowed it to continue to expand and become a global player on its own accord. While the policies of the Korean state help explain the original take-off of many *chaebol* firms, their continued success has as much to do with their own active participation in global production networks. This participation includes joint production, partnership, and the *chaebol*'s cultivation of their own global production platforms through expansion and internationalisation of production. Samsung's investments in Vietnam and Hyundai's in India are two such examples.

In recent years, the behaviour of the *chaebol*'s ruling families and the extreme diversification of their conglomerates have received public attention. Korea's experience of the Asian Financial Crisis (1997-98) was seen by many to have been caused by 'crony capitalism' (Kang, 2002). In this case, the *chaebol* were seen as taking on excessive debt, supported by the state, in order to prop-up what many critics regard as unsustainable business ventures. These scholars argue that the 'octopus-like' structure of the *chaebol*, with its tentacles in multiple industries stifles innovation and drives small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) out of the market. For instance, Samsung makes semi-conductors, white goods, apartments, and food additives, and has an amusement park, engineering, advertising, and life insurance branches, and in the past has manufactured automobiles, aircraft engines and more. Instead of seeking to monopolize on multiple activities, some argue that the *chaebol* should concentrate on its core industries to enhance productivity and maximise innovation.

Conversely, other scholars argue the opposite. They see such diversification not as a sign of collusion or cronyism allows the *chaebol* to bring considerable expertise and internal resources (such as capital, technology and managerial know-how) to new industries (Chang, 2012). For pro-*chaebol* scholars, the conglomerate structure of the *chaebol* facilitates 'competitive advantage' against other firms. The *chaebol*'s 'dynamic capabilities' (the ability to deploy the resources listed above) allows these firms to build competencies in new industries. In other words, some see diversification as having potentially negative consequences for market performance, but others argue that such diversification can play an important *developmental* role. Nonetheless, most observers agree that the *chaebol* exercise a considerable amount of power in the Korean economy and point to the fact that the *chaebol*'s sales are equivalent about 80 percent of Korea's annual gross domestic product (GDP) as a cause for concern. Some observers have called Korea, the Republic of Samsung, or 'Korea Inc.' to note the power of its large conglomerates and close state-business relations.

Concerns about *chaebol* power are not simply confined to corporate governance issues such as diversification and family control (and by extension the lack of separation between ownership and management). They are also directed towards both the labour and environmental practices of the large *chaebol* firms. The *chaebol* in general have been criticized for hierarchical and, at times, militaristic workplace culture (the classic study is by Janelli and Yim, 1995). Within popular culture, abuses of power by *chaebol* heads and their children have generated controversy (for instance, the 'nut rage' controversy around Korean Air's vice President Cho Hyun Ah in 2014 and similar incidents). Samsung has a reputation for being an 'anti-union' firm and for going to great depths to avoid collective bargaining with unions. However, the struggles of workers affected by rare cancers in its semiconductor arm have led to public pressure for it to improve its labour practices and to pay greater attention to occupational health and safety. It is not only Samsung that has been placed in the spotlight when it comes to social, health, and environmental issues in Korea's large industrial clusters. Other *chaebol* firms such as Hyundai and SK, among others, have received similar scrutiny.

While large firms (with greater than 500 employees) in Korea tend to have decent union density (representation for employees by unions), the use of non-standard or 'precarious' forms of employment contract (such as limited term contract, temporary, and day labour and outsourcing) have increased since 1998, leading to large protests by workers for the rights of 'regular' employment status. Hyundai Motors, for example, has had several prominent struggles in these regards. Liberal and conservative governments alike have put pressure on the *chaebol* to improve labour standards, especially at their suppliers. For smaller firms and their workers both lack strong bargaining power over the contracts with big firms. Moreover, labour protests at

chaebol firms' global affiliates (for example, Hyundai Motors India and Samsung Electronics Vietnam) have at times put their brands in a negative spotlight.

In conclusion, the *chaebol* are important actors in Korea's business eco-system. They have benefited from government policy geared toward expanding the presence of Korean business on international markets and have evolved from producers of simple goods to become complex, diversified industrial giants. They have sought to maintain and expand this position through continued interaction in the global economy and the cultivation of their own global production networks. In sum, the development of the *chaebol* has been an evolutionary, sequential, and expansive process. Nonetheless, the *chaebol* is not without controversy in terms of their corporate governance, labour, and environmental practices.

Some Key Terms

Developmental state*:* a state that prioritizes development (often above profit) and channels key resources (money, technology, expertise) towards expanding its economy. Many export-oriented economies in East Asia (Japan, Taiwan, Korea, China and Singapore) have been called developmental states.

Corporate governance*:* The manner in which a firm is controlled, particularly in regard to ownership and management. In the case of the *chaebol* the ruling families (though not the only 'owners' of the firms, exercise considerable discretion in the management of their firms.

Industrial policy*:* Policies that are oriented towards developing industrial sectors in the economy. Examples include subsidies, low-interest loans, export credits

Dynamic capabilities: Particular skills and resources such as investment capital, technology and managerial expertise that firms might apply to succeed in particular activities.

National business systems: Distinct cultures of doing business that vary between country. Implies that economies have distinct institutional systems.

Import substitution industrialization (ISI): This is an economy development strategy geared toward the replacement of imported products with domestically produced ones.

Export-oriented industrialization (EOI)*:* An economic development strategy centered around exporting goods to speed up the industrialization process. Korea has used both ISI (especially in heavy chemical industries) and EOI, but is more associated with the latter.

Methodological Approaches

There are several literatures that have analysed the development of Korean businesses and business groups over the last 70 years. One of the most prominent has been the literature on the East Asian Miracle. Korea is often regarded as a paragon case of a miracle economy

national business systems scholars, traditional economists, and political economists of development. The World Bank (1993)'s East Asian Miracle report, in particular, heralded the success of East Asian business in the global economy. It provided significant validation to East Asian governments and business groups that their strategies of investment and governance had been successful. The reasons for this success mentioned in the report are diverse and suggestive of some of the many different perspectives on East Asian business. Some observers such as the American economist Anne Krueger (1990) credit trade liberalisation – and export-oriented strategy – with this success. Others stress that trade liberalisation is only part of the story and that industrial policy should not be ignored. Such policies allowed the state to pick 'national champions' and assist them by providing resources such as loans, foreign exchange credit, and other incentives (Woo, 1991).

Whatever the explanation, the Miracle report and subsequent literature on East Asian business recognised that East Asia's rapid development has produced large, diversified firms – such as Korea's large, family-led conglomerates known as the *chaebol* -- that can compete successfully in the global economy and are major players that help shape it. For many, this result reveals the importance of diverse *national business systems* (sometimes called varieties of capitalism) in shaping economic success in the 20th and 21st Century.

Scholars of Korean business use many different forms of data and explanation, including both qualitative and quantitative data. Databases from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Bank, and Korea's National Statistics Service, as well as firm surveys, among others, are useful for finding primary data about general trends. Such trends include trade volumes, investments, wages, welfare, and indicators from various industrial sectors. An advanced student might be able to illustrate their answer with some statistics from these sources if it accords with their argument. For example, they might be able to show how Korea has witnessed high levels of GDP growth, or show that exports are a major component of Korea's GDP. Alternately, they might look at other data such as Korea's low welfare spending, average wages, and/or household debt.

For those interested in the *institutional* environment of Korean business, policy documents from the Korean government and international organizations, in addition to a range of think-tanks, and materials from popular and academic authors can also be useful. These may help students to get a picture of the issues affecting Korean businesses such as the *chaebol*. Secondary literature on Korean firms from broad fields of business and management, international political economy, economic history, and economy geography scholars can also provide valuable insight into Korean firms. This literature is good for grasping critical issues that stem from their structure and organisation such as concerns about corruption and cronyism, as well as labour exploitation and environmental consequences of economic growth. This literature examines how Korean firms have developed and are active in a national, regional (for example, East Asian) and global context and is sensitive to the organisation particularities and specificities of Korean business.

Sample Question

To what extent has the development of Korea's distinct business sector (with the *chaebol* at its centre) benefited its national economy?

Sample Answer
Answers to this sample question can take a number of strategies. Some might focus more on the evolutionary dynamics of *chaebol* firms, examining upgrading and the policies and activities of firms that supported it. Some might focus on the time period from the origins of the *chaebol* to the present, while other might look at a formative period such as the 1960s-1980s (the time of the developmental state). Some answers might focus on one particular firm (for example, Hyundai or Samsung). Others might focus on the institutional and political environment that makes Korea's national business system unique. Some might foreground normative concerns about the *chaebol* (for instance, labour, corporate governance, and collusion), while others might prefer to focus on questions of firm capabilities and innovation. In short, there is wide latitude here for a successful answer.

After the Korean war, the Korean economy was left in a state of devastation. By the mid-1950s, its gross domestic product (GDP) remained similar to many poor economies. One common observation is that South Korea's GDP was roughly the same as Ghana's in 1957, although the two countries shared vastly different international, geopolitical and historical contexts. As such, the comparison should not be overstated. While the origins of the *chaebol* are to be found in pre-war trading companies active in food production and distribution, the growth of large Korean business really began to expand in the mid-1950s. It was aided b the dispersal of Japanese colonial assets (Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and ruled it until 1945) and the help of significant foreign aid for reconstruction following the war. Foreign currency loans for economic activity in relation to textile, foodstuffs (sugar), and fertiliser in particular benefited firms such as Samsung, which got its start in these industries. Meanwhile, firms such as Hyundai benefited from wartime and post war contracts for infrastructure and housing. Both firms were able to turn capital accumulated from foreign aid and military procurement into investments in manufacturing that would fuel their rapid growth in the subsequent years.

Chaebol groups also benefitted from the *import substitution industrialisation* (ISI) policies promoted by President Syngman Rhee. These policies provided incentives (for example, funds for facility construction) for firms to manufacture consumer goods that Korea would otherwise need to import. While these policies provided the *chaebol* with capital and facilities that would prove useful for their expansion, relations between the Rhee administration and the *chaebol* were considered corrupt and collusive. This perception played a role in the April Revolution (1960) that toppled Rhee. The April Revolution was quickly followed by the dictatorship of General Park Chung-hee (1961-1979). Park initially took a disciplinary approach towards the conglomerates. However, *Chaebol* expansion accelerated further during his dictatorship as it pursued *export-led industrialisation* (EOI). The *chaebol* cooperated with the Park administration's plans for industrial upgrading, and were provided with generous bank loans and access to foreign currency and technology for investment.

The Park dictatorship is the beginning of the period known in the literature as 'the developmental state.' This form of state was characterised by industrial planning by the economy and finance ministries (the Economic Planning Board was seen as the nodal planning ministry) and financing from state-controlled banks. Some scholars speak, in fact, of a state-bank-*chaebol* nexus as undergirding Korea's rapid growth in the 1970s and 1980s (Doucette, 2016). The point here is that firms were financed largely through bank loans (underwritten by the state) rather than institutions such as the stock market (which is often associated with corporate finance in Anglo-American economies). These industrial policies allowed the *chaebol* to move from simple manufacture of food stuffs and textiles to more complex industries, including automobiles, aerospace, shipbuilding, and defence, among others.

To finance investment in strategic industrial sectors, the *chaebol* was often highly indebted to the domestic banks that lent them the funds for investment. Nonetheless, this system was remarkably resilient until the 1990s. At that point deregulation allowed the *chaebol* to finance themselves using short term loans on the international market. These loans were often provided by what are called non-bank financial institutions such as international investment funds and other sources. It was this change that helped produce the 1997-98 financial crisis as interest rates increased and many *chaebol* found themselves unable to pay back debts denominated in foreign currency.

The Asian Financial Crisis became a watershed moment that resulted in the destruction of many smaller *chaebol* firms and the emergence of even larger 'super-*chaebol*' (Samsung, Hyundai, LG, Lotte, SK, Kumho, and so on) who were able to purchase the assets of many of their competitors. It was also a moment that saw the expansion of non-standard or precarious forms of employment. As such, the crisis, the response of the government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and its effects on the chaebol and labour remain hotly debated.

Since the Asian financial crisis, Korea's largest *chaebol* have continued to grow. They have done so through networking with lead firms in global industries, and in part by fostering their own global production networks. This has led scholars such as Henry Yeung, a scholar of global value chains and production networks, to recognize the continued success of the *chaebol*. He argues that such success now has less to do with the initial government support of the 'developmental state' but with the dynamic role that firm strategy plays in the globalised economy. That is, the role that *chaebol* firms play in 'strategically coupling' (Yeung, 2016) with new regions, sectors, and places of production. Samsung's expansion into both Southeast Asia and North America is one example of globalisation of the *chaebol*.

Nonetheless, the relationship between the *chaebol* and the Korean government remains important, especially when it comes to issues such as corporate governance and the ability of ruling families to pass on control to their sons and daughters. The relation between business and the state has even been the source of controversy in recent years with cases of collusion between *chaebol* heads and the government officials (including impeached president Park Geun-hye). Thus, Korean governments have often identified *chaebol* reform as a core part of their economic strategy so that the monopoly power (the ability of the *chaebol* to control economic sectors and squeeze out smaller competitors) and often collusion practices of the *chaebol* can be addressed. This task has taken on a greater urgency in recent years as the size of the super *chaebol* have swollen, with Samsung's revenue equal to almost 20 percent of Korea's GDP. The size of the *chaebol* has thus made many observers worried about the unbalanced power they hold over the economy.

Criticism of the *chaebol* focuses on three major issues: corporate governance; labour policies; and environmental and health concerns. Some see the monopoly/oligopoly structure of the *chaebol* as a distortion of the market economy. The *chaebol* is able to set prices in ways that prevent small and mid-sized business from branching out into new sectors or making larger profits. Many see the interlinked cross-ownership system of *chaebol* firms (for example, where company A owns a large share of company B, which owns a large share of company C, and so on) as a big problem. For this ownership structure allows ruling families to unlawfully control their web of interconnected firm. This structure is also one that is also associated with tax evasion and collusion related to the ruling families' need to pass down control (through stock ownership) over the conglomerates to its younger generations.

As a solution, Korean politicians have tried to put limits on the expansion of the *chaebol* into new sectors occupied by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They have also tried to strengthen the rights of minority shareholders in the *chaebol* to prevent distortions of shareholder value (for example, undervaluation of stock to avoid taxes on inheritance). By making the *chaebol* responsive to their shareholders, some politicians feel that corporate governance can be professionalised. Such policies, however, have met with mixed success as ruling families have been able to maintain a considerable level of control over their firms and subsidiaries. Observers continue to debate the merits of the *chaebol*, with many divided over family-controlled cross-ownership. As discussed above, some see it as the source of dynamic capacities (for example, their ability to innovate by sharing managerial, financial and technical expertise across subsidiaries) and others as a negative influence for growth an innovation (for example, by crowding out SMEs).

The corporate governance of the *chaebol* is not the only topic related to the *chaebol* that has generated controversy. The high incidence of industrial accidents in Korea and the often-exploitative labour practices of the *chaebol* have generated significant attention from scholars and other observers. The growth of Korea's *chaebol* during the anti-communist Park dictatorship was accompanied by repressive labour policies. As such, Korea's democracy movement embraced labour rights as one of its core concerns. Despite rapid growth of independent unions, especially at large workplaces, since the democratic transition in 1987, there are still concerns about labour rights and health and safety concerns.

In recent years, *chaebol* such as Samsung have agreed on settlements with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Supporters for Health and Right of People in Semiconductor Industry (SHARPS) following concerns about health and safety at its semiconductor factories. Other larger Korean conglomerates such as SK, Hanjin, POSCO, SSamgyong, and Daewoo, among others, have faced similar controversies over both labour rights and health and safety. More recently, the environmental record of Korean industries has received attention due to environmental pollution such as toxic yellow dust generated through industrial activity (the sources of which are both domestic and international) and the activities of Korean firms internationally. For example, the collapse of Laos dam under construction by SK E and C. Thus, the environmental record of the *chaebol* is also a cause for concern. In summary, while the *chaebol* have grown into prominent global firms over the last 40 years, often with the support of the state, important questions remain about the manner in which they are governed. Moreover, the social, environmental, and labour practices of the *chaebol* demonstrate that not everyone has benefitted equally from their rapid growth.

References

Chang, H.J. (2012). *23 things they don't tell you about capitalism*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing

Jamie Doucette (2016) The Postdevelopmental State: Economic and Social Change since 1997. In: M. Seth (ed). *Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean History.* New York: Routledge, 343-356.

Evans, P.B. (2012). *Embedded autonomy*: States and industrial transformation. Princeton University Press.

Glassman J. (2018) *Drums of War, Drums of Development: The Formation of a Pacific Ruling Class and Industrial Transformation in East and Southeast Asia, 1945-1980.* Leiden: Brill.

Janelli, R.L. and D. Yim (1995). *Making capitalism: The social and cultural construction of a South Korean conglomerate*. Stanford University Press.

Kang, D.C. (2002). *Crony capitalism: Corruption and Development in South Korea and the Philippines.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Krueger, A.O. (1990). Asian trade and growth lessons. *The American Economic Review*, *80*(2), pp.108-112.

World Bank (1993). *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Yeung, H.W.C. (2016). Strategic Coupling East Asian Firms in Global Production Networks. In *Strategic Coupling* (pp. 54-82). Cornell University Pres

Further Reading

Albert, E. (2018). South Korea’s Chaebol Challenge. *Council on Foreign Relations*. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/south-koreas-chaebol-challenge.

Amsden, A.H. (1992). *Asia's next giant: South Korea and late industrialization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cain, G. (2020). *Samsung Rising: The Inside Story of the South Korean Giant that Set Out to Beat Apple and Conquer Tech*. New York: Broadway Business.

Chun, J.J.Y. (2009). *Organizing at the margins: The symbolic politics of labor in South Korea and the United States,* London: Cornell University Press.

Gray, K. (2009). *Korean workers and neoliberal globalization.* London: Routledge.

Haggard, S. (2018). *Developmental states*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kim, E.M. (1997). *Big business, strong state: collusion and conflict in South Korean development, 1960-1990*. Binghampton: Suny Press.

Kim Y.T. (2008). *Bureaucrats and entrepreneurs: The state and the Chaebol in Korea*. Seoul: Jimoondang.

McNamara, D.L. (ed) (2012). *Corporatism and Korean Capitalism*. New York Routledge.

Shin, J.S. and H.J. Chang (2003). *Restructuring'Korea Inc.': Financial Crisis, Corporate Reform, and Institutional Transition*. New York: Routledge.

Steers, R.M. (2013). *Made in Korea: Chung Ju Yung and the Rise of Hyundai*. London: Routledge.

Woo, J.E. (1991). *Race to the swift: State and finance in Korean industrialization*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Useful Websites

Asia Monitor Resource Center[21]: https://www.amrc.org.hk/
Korean Statistical Information Service: https://kosis.kr/eng/
OECD stats: https://stats.oecd.org/
SHARPS [22] : https://goodelectronics.org/organisations/sharps-supporters-health-right-people-semiconductor-industry/
World Bank Open Data: https://data.worldbank.org/

[21] A reputable NGO that monitors issues related to labour and transnational corporations in Asia
[22] Supporters for Health and Right of People in Semiconductor Industry

Chapter 6. Sociology:
The *Haenyeo* 해녀 of Jeju Island - A Sociological Inquiry

Niki J.P. Alsford (University of Central Lancashire, UK)

Overview of Subject: What is Sociology?

Sociology is the study of society and how people interact within it. It investigates patterns of social relationships, social interaction, and aspects of everyday life. Sociological research is evidence-based and is not about a researcher's personal opinion. Evidence is collected and backed by facts. In order to understand these facts, the evidence is interpreted through different sociological lenses known as social theory. As well as producing theory, sociological research has practical applications. If we understand a social issue or problem, such as inequality, sociologists are able to use their knowledge to contribute to social policy that could improve or even eradicate said social issue.

Sociological research uses various methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis. This is used to understand and develop a body of knowledge that concerns social order and social change. This might be understood on a micro-level (individual agency and interaction) or a macro-level (of systems and social structures). It may also be combination of micro and macro; a meso-level (the individual's interactions within a social structure).

Before sociologists begin researching aspects of a chosen society, they first need to understand certain key words or phrases. These might differ in interpretation (the theory) but they tend to agree on their essence. The most important keyword is 'culture'. This is a loaded term and is one that is difficult to define, as different societies think of this word in different ways. For simplicity, culture can be defined as things that are transmitted by one generation to another, and that are shared by a society or group of people. These may include customs, traditions, skills, language, beliefs, norms, and values.

How data is collected may also vary. There is a range of social scientific methods that draw on a variety of qualitative (with a focus on discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships) and quantitative (with a focus on the collection and analysis of data) techniques. Again, research might incorporate a combination of both methods.

Some Key Terms

Empirical: Observable study (experience) rather than rely on theory.

Critical analysis: A deep understanding about an issue and an analysis of the quality of evidence provided.

Micro-level investigation: Study of human interaction to understand what people do, say, and think.

Macro-level investigation: An emphasis on the study of social systems and institutions at a structural level.

Meso-level investigation: A combination of macro and micro analysis. A study of group membership for example.

Structure: Patterns of social arrangements in society whereby individuals are grouped to sets of rules that have different functions, purpose, and meaning.

Agency: The capacity where individuals can act independently and make their own choices within society.

Methodological Approaches: Social Theory

Although most sociological theory draws on the founding of the discipline based on Western/European thought, sociological reasoning, in fact, predates the foundation of the discipline itself. The term 'sociology' was first coined by Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, a French essayist, in the 18th century, but was defined in its modern concept by French philosopher Auguste Comte in 1838 as a means of looking at society. The institutionalisation of the discipline was led by Émile Durkheim, who along with Karl Marx and Max Weber, are cited as the three principle architects of the field of study.

It is here that we will explore each 'school of thought' in the context of the 'big three dichotomies'. Sociology, as with other academic disciplines, has progressed significantly beyond the 'big three' and very few sociologists would claim to be traditionalists in any one of these schools of thought. For the purposes of this inquiry, I will be a traditionalist, not because I believe that it best captures the discipline in the twenty-first century, but because it provides a useful foundation on which to begin unpacking an understanding of society and how people both shape and are shaped by their surroundings.

To get started, we will explore the first of the 'big three dichotomies': **Structure** and **Agency**. The simplest difference is whether you believe that individuals are shaped by the institutions that surround them. This could be the state, education, the workplace, religion, or the family. Each of these 'institutions' is a **structure**. This is a top-down (macro) study of society at large. On the other side of the debate is a belief that as individuals we have the power to shape these institutions. We are able to achieve this because we have **agency**. This line of debate centres on a bottom-up (micro) approach to understanding our interactions within society. It is, however, important to add that this 'dichotomy' is not an "either/or" proposition, but rather a spectrum. Sociologists such as Anthony Giddens (English Sociologist, 1938-) argue that society is a combination of a bit of structure and a bit of agency (a meso-level approach). Giddens offers a perspective that is based on a synthesis of structure and agency: A combination he refers to with the term 'duality of structure'. Here he acknowledges the interaction of human constraints by societal structures and the function of individual expression and posits that human society functions as a combination, a synthesis, of both.

The debate on whether **structure** or **agency** shapes human behaviour is a question of social ontology.

This debate raises numerous questions for sociologists. Questions such as:

- What causes society and what is its effect?
- What is society made of?
- How does it function?
- Do social structures determine human behaviour, or does human capacity govern us to act independently from these social structures?
- Is it possible to live outside of societal structures?

Structural functionalists, such as Émile Durkheim (French Sociologist, 1858-1917), see **structure** as a necessary tool in establishing the existence of society. Karl Max (German Philosopher, 1818-1883) emphasises that the social structure acts to the detriment of the majority of individuals (the proletariat) in a society. For Marx, these structures may refer to something material (economic) and cultural (norms, values, traditions). Such theorists argue that social existence is determined by the overarching structures of society and that any perceived agency that individuals have can be explained as operating only within the structure. This collection of schools of social theory is often referred to as 'holism': the 'whole is greater than the sum of its parts'.

Those that stress the capacity of individual 'agents' to construct their words see the individual as having more influence: 'the sum of its parts are greater than the whole'. Although Max Weber never spoke of a relationship between the 'micro' and the 'macro', his approach led to the theory of symbolic interactionism, and as a result he is often compartmentalised as a theorist of **agency**, and hence placed within the micro-level camp of social thought.

The second of the 'three big dichotomies', **Subjectivity** and **Objectivity**, has less to do with the functioning of society, but rather the method of understanding it: The knowledge of social interaction. **Subjectivity** guides research. It aids in the choice of research, it helps us to formulate a hypothesis, and assists us in interpreting meaning. It positions the researcher intimately within the framework of study. **Objectivity**, on the other hand, renders the researcher as merely a passive recipient of information in an attempt to remove, as much as is possible, the researcher's biases, emotions, and personal prejudices from the analysis. It presupposes an independent reality that can be understood in isolation. For example, **objective** reasoning would understand profit in business practice as a numerical measure of performance. The result would be a standardised question to prove or disprove this hypothesis. **Subjective** analysis, however, would focus on the hidden or inherent meaning in business practice that would lead a company to be successful, i.e. to make a profit. Research might focus on the understanding of employee motivation or company leadership. The **subjective** analysis is an observation and understanding of the root of social interaction. Success, or failure, in business is understood in terms of social categorisation. The results of which the **objective** researcher is asking whether profit is a measure of performance. In other words, 'is this true, or not?'. The **subjective** researcher, on the other hand, is asking, 'what the root of profit is?' 'How is it calculated?' and 'whose interest does its serve?' The **subjectivity**, therefore, comes about because of the nature of sociological inquiry. The **subjective** experience of the researcher is thus embedded within the process, rather than detached from it. **Objective** research would thus claim to be truer and a more correct reality since it has removed this bias. This is of course clearly an oversimplification of the dichotomy, but it raises several questions regarding the role of the observer (researcher) in research.

American Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) once posited that social action is not just physical behaviour, but that the environment of the actor must also be interpreted so that an 'outsider' (the researcher) can better understand the context in which the action occurs. Geertz refers to this as 'thick description'. Thick description adds a **subjective** explanation and a meaning provided by those being researched so that greater value can be added to the research. Geertz used the notion of winking to best illustrate this: Winking, as just something that your eye does, is an **objective** understanding of a body movement. However, Geertz believed that there is more to it. He argues that winking is culturally embedded: There needs to be a reference to the context in which the 'wink' took place. A distinction is needed to separate a 'wink' (voluntary) from a 'twitch' (involuntary). The research thus needs to evaluate the hypothesis of the environment of the wink. The researcher uses **subjectivity** to interpret the meaning of the wink based on an understanding the context. A wink could be an expression of how much I like you; it could be a signal that the winker is being cheeky or unserious; or it could simply be a bit of dust in the eye that the subject is trying to remove, and not an interpersonal engagement *per se*.

The last of the 'big three dichotomies' that needs exploring is **Synchrony** and **Diachrony** and this has to do with the concept of time. Both **synchrony** and **diachrony** are in fact complimentary viewpoints in social analysis. The difference is that **synchrony** considers society at a specific moment in time without consideration of its history. This is most often the present period. It seeks to concern itself only with the treatment of events that exist or occur at a given time, rather than seeking an understanding of their historical roots. By contrast, diachrony considers the evolution of a society. For example, in linguistics (the study of languages), if a researcher is analysing the writing systems in Korea and focused on the use of classical Chinese characters (*hanja* 한자) alongside local phonetic writing systems such as *idu* 이두 and *hyangchal* 향찰, this would be **synchronic**. If the researcher looked at how local phonetic writing systems and use of *hanja* evolved into *hangul* 한글(the writing system used in present-day Korea) this would be **diachronic**. Another way of looking at: If a researcher was looking at the Sewol ferry disaster, on the morning of 16 April 2014, and sought to understand this in isolation, this would be **synchronic**, but to understand the cause, course, and consequence of the event, this would be **diachronic.**

It is clear that the study of society and human interaction within it is complex. This is expected. All ideas expressed in a variety of social theories seek to explain the same thing: what are the characteristics of social and cultural life? What does it mean to be human? As you have seen, there is a variety of competing perspectives which have influenced sociology over time.

Sample Question

To what extent can one use social theory to provide an understanding of the *Haenyeo* 해녀 of Jeju Island?

Sample Answer

In a matriarchal social system, women hold a position of power. This power is socially organised whereby the female is the head of a specific social structure. This could be as head of the family or as political leaders or could even be a genealogical understanding of where dominance is placed in the descent and the relationships within the female ancestral line. It can be within both a culture and a community. It is a system or structure of family, society, or an organisation that is dominated by women. **For the purpose of this essay, this paper will**

examine the history of the *haenyeo* 해녀, or female divers, on the South Korean province of Jeju and will then ascertain why they are representative of a semi-matriarchal family structure.

The diving traditions of Jeju Island date back to the fifth century AD. The profession was for most of its recorded history dominantly male. The livelihood of the practitioners depended mostly on the maritime harvesting of abalone, sea urchins, molluscs, and sargassum. The first recorded mention of female divers appeared in a seventeenth century monograph that explored the geography of Jeju (Sunoo, 2011:21). Here the author described the women as *jamnyeo* [diving women]. However, by the following century, the term *haenyeo* had become more commonplace, and female divers had begun to outnumber their male counterparts. Although there are number of factors behind this shift, a commonly accepted narrative is that the period of the seventeenth century witnessed a significant increase in maritime disasters and men killed or lost at sea (Choe, 2014). From this perspective, women began dominating the diving industry out of an economic need. As the gender profile of the industry shifted, women began replacing men as the primary source of labour. This shift, most notable after the colonisation of Korea by Japan in 1910, would witness a greater demand in the market for harvested produce. The primary factor behind this was that, during the Joseon Dynasty, *haenyeo* produce was used as a tribute. The Japanese dismantling of the Sino-Korean tributary system after defeating the Qing in the First Sino-Japanese War enabled the *haenyeo* to sell their catch at market. This raised the amount of income that could be derived from the maritime produce, providing a strong economic incentive to increase harvesting. On average, the wages of the *haenyeo* constituted close to 50 per cent of the typical household income (Gwon, 2005: 120). As families became dependent upon this lucrative business, a semi-matriarchal system began to develop within the family structure.

Having established the history behind the *haenyeo*, this essay will next consider the extent that one could argue that the role of *haenyeo* was semi-matriarchal. The question of matriarchy among the *haenyeo* is one of status. As with any form of status, this gender-ascribed status affects the relationship of people within a given society. The other ascribed status that can be placed on the *haenyeo* today are age (the majority of the female divers are older women) and the background into which the *haenyeo* were born (this tends to be economic, and in its simplest form would be referred to as class). Although arguably the latter can now best be described as an achieved status, since many young female members of the community have left their villages to become more socially mobile on the South Korean mainland, these structures have nevertheless affected the *haenyeo*.

According to Judith Butler, the repetition of an ascribed status of gender is a stylised performance, an act of miming the dominant conventions of gender (Butler, 1990) In other words, it is *what you do* rather than *who you are*. The case of the *haenyeo* on Jeju Island is interesting in that the island, like the South Korean mainland, has been greatly affected by the rapid transformation from an agrarian economy to a digital economy. A consequence of this impact has been the reshaping of the Korean family. This is particularly noticeable in the assignation of status within the domestic space. Structurally, this space is ordered as a representation of authority and relationships: Each individual occupies a space based on their status. This occupation may be determined according to the ascribed statuses discussed above, or it could be literal—the structural layout of the home. Within this layout, people are placed in the home based on their age, status, role, and gender. When the spatial organisation changes, we witness a reshaping of a conceptual part of a society.

South Korea, based on specific ideas of traditional values (namely Confucian) sees men as occupying the superior position in the hierarchy (patriarchy) within Korean society (Sechiyama, 2013). In this system, the female, or wife, performs her duties as a subordinate to the producer. Her role is to engage in domestic labour and rear children. Yet within modern South Korean society, women are pushing back against this. A number are choosing to occupy their own domestic space without male members. Some push for equality whereby both adults are breadwinners. Although domestic labour is still more often female, the workload of the female adult may be supplemented by outsourcing to domestic labour; a role most often occupied by migrant female labour (Lan, 2006). The difference is that there is a growing rejection of the traditional family structure that only benefits when the patriarch is at the head of the household. The *haenyeo* of Jeju is a reminder that this is not the case.

In many ways, the *haenyeo* is unique in the South Korean context. The shifts in the labour market and the changing roles within the domestic space are not a result of industrialisation or a movement toward a modern economy. Arguably, the role of the *haenyeo* is part of traditional heritage on Jeju. It is recognised as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (Markelova, 2017). The semi-matriarchal system exists because the diver's performance is not solely as producer, but rather exists in a hybrid form of domesticity. The diver engages in domestic labour, occupies the 'female space' of the household, and produces half of the income of the family. Her identity is both performative and constructed as an expression of being both *haenyeo* and Korean.

Having proposed that the *haenyeo* community was mostly semi-matriarchal, the essay with now explore the reasons behind its decline. Starting from the 1960s, the South Korean government began implementing economic policies that would subsequently lead to rapid economic development, earning the nation recognition as one of the four 'East Asian Tigers'. Jeju Island, not suitable for industrial development, was instead turned into a chief exporter of mandarin oranges (Gwon, 2005: 127) By the start of the 1970s, the majority of rural work on the island was geared towards this sector. Towards the end of the decade, coupled with a growing middle-class on the South Korean mainland, the government started to promote the island as a key tourist destination. By the end of the decade, tourism had surpassed agriculture as the main economic driver of the island. These changes had a significant impact on the *haenyeo*: Many of the female divers simply abandoned the profession. Educational opportunities both within and without Jeju, as well as alternative economic opportunities, deterred young Jeju women from entering the industry.

This essay has focussed on semi-matriarchal status of the Jeju Island female divers known as *haenyeo*. It has been established that although the income generated by the *haenyeo* accounted for half of the family income, Korean society at large is predominantly patriarchal. This has meant that the *haenyeo* family structure, rather than being matriarchal, could be termed semi-matriarchal, and that this status could have played an important role in the wider community. Since the decline of the industry in the 1960s, the remaining *haenyeo* today form a significant part of Jeju tourism, rather than a significant industry in itself. Research into the *haenyeo* is important as it provides evidence of the economic contribution of women and the gendered role of the family in one part of South Korea.

References

Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender Trouble.* London: Routledge.

Choe Sang-Hun (2011). Hardy Divers in Korea Strait, 'Sea Women' are Dwindling, *New York Times*, accessed 18 August 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/world/asia/hardy-divers-in-korea-strait-sea-women-are-dwindling.htmlp.

Giddens, Anthony (1989). *Sociology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York NY: Basic Books.

Gwon Gwi-sook (2005). Changing Labor Processes of Women's Work: The Haenyo of Jeju Island, *Korean Studies.* 29 p.p. 114-136.

Lan Pei-Chia (2006). *Global Cinderellas.* Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Markelova, Katerina (2017). The Haenyeo: Living Legends of Jeju Island, *The UNESCO Courier,* accessed 19 August 2021, https://en.unesco.org/courier/april-june-2017/haenyeo-living-legends-jeju-island

Sechiyama Kaku (2013). *Patriarchy in East Asia.* Leiden: BRILL.

Sunoo, Brenda Paik (2011). *Moon Tides: Jeju Island Grannies of the Sea.* Seoul: Seoul Selection Publishers.

Further Reading

On Social Theory:

Best, Shaun (2003). *A Beginners Guide to Social Theory.* London: Sage.

Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York NY: Basic Books.

Giddens, Anthony (1989). *Sociology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hendry, Joy (1999). *An Introduction to Social Anthropology.* London: Palgrave.

Seale, Clive (ed) (2018). *Researching Society and Culture.* London: Sage.

On Korean Society:

Lim, Sojin and Niki Alsford (2021). *Handbook of Contemporary South Korea.* London: Routledge.

Seth, Michael (2016). *A Concise History of Korea.* London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Cumings, Bruce (2005). *Korea's Place in the Sun.* New York NY: Norton.

Useful Websites

Sociology Central, http://www.sociology.org.uk/index.htm

Culture of Jeju Haenyeo (Women Divers), https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/culture-of-jeju-haenyeo-women-divers-01068

The Island of the Sea Women, https://www.lisasee.com/islandofseawomen/haenyeo/

Haenyeo: The Last of the Greatest Generation of Women Divers, https://www.tdisdi.com/sdi-diver-news/haenyeo-women-divers/

Chapter 7. Film Studies: A Case Study – Parasite

Ji-Yoon An (University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong)

Overview of Subject: Korean Film and Media

Film first entered "Joseon" (the name for Korea before it was divided into North and South Korea) in the early 1900s in the form of travelling lantern shows. With the soon-after Japanese colonisation of Korea from 1910 until 1945, the beginning of Korean cinema came to be muddled with politics. Take, for example, the first Korean movie. For a long time, the first Korean film was considered to be *Fight For Justice* from 1919. However, since this film was a screen-and-stage play, the honour was transferred to the 1923 film *The Vow Made Below the Moon*. However, some historians argue that *The Border*, which was released earlier in the same year of 1923, should be considered the first film. But since this film was made by a Japanese production company, most Koreans do not accept this film to be Korean. In such ways, the films produced during the colonial times are clearly distinguished between colonial products and "Joseon films," that is, films made by Koreans for Koreans with nationalist themes in mind.

It was only after the Korean war (1950-53) that a film industry developed. From the mid-1950s for a decade or so, Korean cinema went through period of immense popularity and productivity, known as the "Golden Age" of Korean cinema. To give an idea of the extent of growth, annual film production increased from mere 15 in 1954 to 111 in 1959. Although many genres proliferated at this time (romance, comedy, drama, thriller), the most dominant was melodrama. Whether a story about a woman's struggle between her newfound modern identity/sexuality and traditional social expectations (*Madam Freedom*, dir. Han Hyung-mo, 1959) or a tragedy about the endless dead-ends endured by two veteran brothers (*Aimless Bullet*, dir. Yu Hyun-mok, 1960), melodrama proved to be the most apt mode for displaying the disorienting, affective experiences of everyday Koreans at this time of much change. Another film worth mentioning from this period is Kim Ki-young's *The Housemaid* (1960)—sometimes referred to as the first Korean horror—which has recently seen a renewed global interest after Bong Joon-ho mentioned the film to be his inspiration behind *Parasite*.

Although there was a brief window of freedom when censorship was lifted in the early 1960s between the administrations of Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee, government control over the film industry returned stronger with the Motion Picture Law of 1962, which enacted a series of increasingly restrictive measures. Censorship reached its peak in 1973 when the Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation was created, with the aim of promoting "politically correct" films that advocated government ideals. As expected, much of the creativity seen in the early 1960s were extinguished by this point and the unpopularity of such "policy films" led to the 1970s and 1980s being labelled the "dark ages" of Korean cinema. Paradoxically, the government at this time became lenient with sexual content, harbouring the logic that such films would provide escapism from political repression. As a result, the 1970s came to be filled with "hostess films," where the tragic lives of prostitutes and bargirls offered the perfect excuse to newly display sexual content. A typical example is *Yeong-ja's Heydays* (dir. Kim Ho-sun, 1975), where the distinctly Korean characteristics of an inherently kind and sacrificial—yet tainted and thus "punished"—fallen woman were established.

A figure who displays the gradual grasp of the government's iron fist from the golden age to the dark ages is Shin Sang-ok, perhaps better known today for having been kidnapped by the late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il for the purpose of reviving the North Korean film industry. Like many of the first-generation filmmakers, Shin was born in the colonial period and studied in Japan before returning to Korea to start his film career. During the golden age, Shin worked prolifically under a production company called Shin Films, which produced over 300 films in the 1960s alone, earning the nickname of "the prince of South Korean cinema." However, Shin's activity lessened significantly in the 1970s under increasing censorship rules, and eventually his studio was closed down in 1978 when Shin ran afoul of the repressive government. (Shin and his former wife Choi Eun-hee were abducted and taken to North Korea in 1978 until 1986 when they escaped).

The 1980s saw a new dictatorship come into power, who famously adopted the "3 S" policy where sports, sex, and screen were fostered to divert attention away from the democratisation movements that were taking place country-wide. As part of this policy, the first professional baseball and soccer leagues were created, alongside a plethora of soft pornographic films now known as "madam films." Madam films evolved from their predecessor hostess films by focusing no longer on prostitutes whose sex lives were a consequence of some tragedy, but on housewives who fantasized and/or acted on extramarital affairs. Not only were the madams of the 1980s agents of their own sexual desires, unlike the previous decades' hostesses who were essentially victims nonetheless punished for their sexual behaviour, madam films indulged more saliently in male sexual fantasies, explicitly using voyeuristic camera techniques. The first and exemplary madam film is *Madam Aema* (dir. Jeong In-yeob, 1982), which was incidentally also the first film to be screened at midnight, marking a new era of erotic filmmaking and filmgoing.

Korean cinema's recovery came about gradually through a series of policy changes from the mid-1980s onwards. First, the Motion Picture Law of 1984 relaxed censorship rules, allowing a new generation of cinephiles, such as Park Kwang-su and Lee Myung-se, to produce politically charged independent and arthouse films. A representative work is Park's *Chil-su and Mansu* (1988). Furthermore, Korean films began to gain international traction, with works by Im Kwon-taek being invited and even winning awards at international film festivals. With the government's growing focus on international attention, conglomerates began to enter the film industry, cultivating an integrated system of financing, producing, and distributing films. The first of such films was Samsung-backed *Marriage Story* (dir. Kim Ui-seok, 1992). Such structural changes slowly revived the film industry, sparking creativity and diversifying genres once again.

Although the 1997 Asian financial crisis led to the conglomerates scaling back their involvement, the government's interest in the film industry did not die down. With a newly democratically elected government in office, new policies were adopted with the aim of supporting and promoting—as opposed to regulating (which had been the previous function)—the film industry. With the creation of the Film Promotion Fund to support local filmmaking, along with the elimination of pre-censorship and a reorganisation of the ratings system, Korean cinema entered an age of commercial boom. It is said that the trigger behind the Korean government's backing of the film industry had been the success of *Jurassic Park* in 1993, about which president Kim Young-sam famously remarked "this movie is worth the sales of 1.5 million of Hyundai Sonata sedans." After all its efforts, Korea finally produced its first blockbuster in 1999: *Shiri* (dir. Kang Je-gyu), an action-thriller about a North Korean spy living in contemporary South Korea. Combining Hollywood's generic formulas with distinctly

Korean themes, like the North-South division, Korean filmmakers discovered the recipe for blockbuster success.

Since then, despite a slight dip in the industry in the mid-2000s, Korean cinema has grown stronger each year, transcending national boundaries. A handful of auteurs have been at the crux of this movement. In 2011, film critic and author Darcy Paquet offered an easy formula of "3+3": Lee Chang-dong, Hong Sang-soo, and Kim Ki-duk are the three filmmakers who lead Korean cinema in the arthouse/international circuits, with their works usually premiering at Cannes, Venice or Berlin; Park Chan-wook, Bong Joon-ho, and Kim Jee-woon, on the other hand, make significant impact at the domestic box-office, with their commercial style being actively courted by Hollywood. More than ten years since this formula was first suggested, there have been some changes, though many aspects remain the same. The first three filmmakers remain active in the international circuit (although Kim Ki-duk died in 2020). Park Chan-wook, however, seems to have transitioned over to this group with his works also receiving much international acclaim. For instance, his latest *Handmaiden* (2016) created as much international buzz as Lee Chang-dong's *Burning* (2018). As Paquet observed ten years ago, Park Chan-wook, Bong Joon-ho, and Kim Jee-woon did all engage in transnational co-productions, but Bong has clearly become the face of Korean cinema through *Parasite* winning the Best Picture prize at the Oscars as the first ever non-English film. In this sense, Korean cinema seems to have entered a new phrase where not only its arthouse but also its commercial films are finding global success. Unsurprisingly, transnational co-productions are exponentially increasing, with filmmakers engaging in television shows as well as films. As many new auteur filmmakers join the honorary six in finding acclaim both domestically and internationally—names such as Na Hong-jin, Yeon Sang-ho, and Ryoo Seung-wan—it does not seem like Korean cinema will slow down anytime soon.

It must be noted that Korean cinema's globalisation over the past two decades has coincided with the *hallyu* wave. Looking beyond cinema, at the centre of the *hallyu* wave has been Korean popular culture: from pop music, variety (*yeneung*) shows, K-drama, webtoons, YouTube videos, to make-up and fashion. Often taken to reflect Korea's "soft power," the implications of this global movement, though outside the domain of film studies, is an important and growing field that is finding its significance in media studies.

Some Key Terms

Auteur: A film director who is so actively involved throughout the filmmaking process that they are liked to an "author," whereby their films can be recognized by their unique style or signature sensibility.

Advocacy: An activity taken by an individual or a group that speaks in favour of, recommends, or supports a cause, usually with the aim to influence decisions within political and social institutions.

Art-house: Originally a type of cinema but now used as an adjective to describe a type of film that is intended to be an artistic (or experimental) work, rather than a piece of popular entertainment.

Globalisation: The process by which an organization (or even nation) start to operate on an international scale with international influence.

Glocalisation: A practice of conducting business to be universal/global and yet also sensitive to local considerations, ultimately meeting both the local and global needs of intended customers.

Soft power: A persuasive approach typically involving culture and history to influence to international relations, in opposition to hard power which utilizes military and economic means.

Transnational: The act of extending operations across national boundaries.

Voyeuristic: A type of action that derives sexual pleasure from watching others, typically engaging in sexual activity or in pain/distress.

Methodological Approaches

Korean cinema can be best framed by the concept of a national cinema, though transnational co-productions have been increasing since the early 2000s. Like many national cinemas, the Korean film industry developed alongside its modern history, with films being heavily influenced by socio-political developments. For example, the first films to be produced on the Korean peninsula were in the 1920s. However, since this was during the Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), there is a clear distinction between the films produced by/for the Japanese settlers and those produced by/for Koreans, known as "Joseon films" (the name for Korea at that time). In such ways, history is a crucial lens for understanding Korean cinema's patterns and trends, as well as the changing approaches to certain topics. As a result, the most obvious methodological approach to Korean cinema is a historical one. In books like *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema* (Yecies and Shim, 2018), a historical overview of the Korean film industry is provided from the 1960s to the 2000s, describing the changing censorship rules and the leading figures/films of each decade. Other books examine a specific period in depth, such as Dong Hoon Kim's *Eclisped Cinema* (2017), which looks at film culture during colonial Korea, or Darcy Paquet's *New Korean Cinema* (2009), which focuses on the revitalising process of the Korean film industry from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. Jinsoo An's *Parameters of Disavowal* (2018) similarly connects postcolonial discourses to Korean films from 1945 to the 1970s.

The films that we relate more commonly to Korean cinema are from the new millennium, the likes of Park Chan-wook's *Old Boy* (2003) and Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019). Indeed, Korean cinema's "renaissance" from the late 1990s onwards has been led by a new generation of filmmakers whose works have transcended national boundaries. Many of the scholarship available in the English language address this new phenomenon and its newly creative works. Some take an industrial approach, looking at various aspects of the industry's revival. Jinhee Choi's *The South Korean Film Renaissance* (2010) is one such example, providing an insightful overview of the genres that have allowed the industry to come back as a "glocalised" force. Others, like *New Korean Cinema* (Stringer and Shin, 2005) and *Seoul Searching* (Gateward, 2007) are edited volumes that offer detailed insights into specific films, genres, and movements. There are also other books that investigate one auteur-filmmaker in depth. In fact,

the first book to be published on Korean cinema in English is *Im Kwon-Taek: The Making of Korean Cinema* (James and Kim, 2001), a filmmaker whose filmography of 102 films encapsulates Korean cinema's journey from the 1950s to the present. This tendency to explore the signature style of one auteur is currently growing, as can be seen with Nam Lee's latest *The Films of Bong Joon Ho* (2020).

Another way to study Korean cinema is through film theory. The best example of this is Kyung Hyun Kim's *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (2004), where the author draws from psychoanalytic film theory—Lacan, Zizek, Deleuze, to name a few—to explore the theme of masculinity as it appears in both commercial and arthouse films of the 1980s and 1990s. A thematic approach is also found in Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient's works, both *Movie Migrations* (2015) and *Movie Minorities* (2021), where the former explores transnational genre flows from Hollywood to Korea and the latter focuses on the prevalent theme of rights advocacy in contemporary works. These books approach Korean cinema from the context of Film Studies, revealing the ways that these Korean works are in conversation with Hollywood and other world cinemas.

With the increasing global popularity of Korean culture in the 21st century—otherwise known as *Hallyu* or the Korean Wave—Korean media studies has grown exponentially in recent years, with Korean dramas/television shows, webtoons, and other visual mediums receiving much (scholarly) attention. What can be deemed "Hallyu studies" differs from Korean cinema studies as its methodology tends to be rooted in the social sciences: conducting evidence-based research using qualitative and/or quantitative data. Such research is often found in the form of journal articles that examine, say, the effects of one K-drama in reflecting and implementing social change, or the socio-political effects of a cultural movement, whether it is the emerging webtoon market or the global export of Korean cultural goods.

As evidenced above, Korean film and media studies is an interdisciplinary field, where the methodology can range from historical overviews to theoretical textual readings to even statistical analysis.

Sample Question

List and explain the various ways that Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019) exemplifies the 386 generation's approach to filmmaking.

Sample Answer

Parasite made history when it won the Best Picture award at the 92nd Academy Awards of 2020, as the first non-English film to do so. Since then, Bong Joon-ho has become a household name and his films have become representative of contemporary Korean cinema. Critics praised Bong's captivating storytelling and symbolic cinematography, while also commenting on the film's fresh genre-blending, where social ills—such as class disparity, ultra-capitalism, and the myth of social mobility—were tackled through a combination of dark comedy and thriller. While *Parasite* is in many ways a distinctly Bong Joon-ho film, Bong's style as seen in this film is also largely representative of his generation of Korean filmmakers' approach to filmmaking. In this essay, I will first contextualise Bong as a distinct filmmaker of the "386 generation" who played a crucial role in the revival of Korean cinema in the new millennium. Then I will offer three ways in which *Parasite* is characteristics of this generation's approach to filmmaking, namely: a combining of Hollywood generic formulas with Korean themes, genre-blending, and a subtle social criticism that is embedded in visuals.

Bong is a part of what is called the "386 generation," a phrase that was coined in the 1990s in reference to those who were in their 30s at the time of coinage, who had been politically active in the democratic movements as university students in the 80s, and who were born in the 60s. The 386 generation of filmmakers were instrumental in leading the Korean film industry's revival since the new millennium. A change in government in the late 1990s allowed the Korean film industry to enjoy not only governmental funding that supported domestic film production, but also an uplifting of censorship which sparked a new creativity to be explored. At the centre of this new creativity were the 386 generation filmmakers, who, as Darcy Paquet (2009: 63) notes, were "youth-oriented, genre-savvy, visually sophisticated and not ashamed of its commercial origins". In short, they were cinephiles. As Bong has said in interviews, this generation's first encounters with films were often Hollywood films seen through the United States (US) military television network (Armed Forces Korea Network-TV) in the 1970s and 80s, a period that was the peak of censorship in Korean film history (Klein, 2012: 21). Hence, this generation grew up with Hollywood films and genres as the basis for their future endeavours.

The 386 generation brought a breath of freshness to Korean cinema, distinguishing themselves from the nationalist filmmakers of the 1980s who had felt an obligation to produce politically challenging films. Although Bong Joon-ho and Park Chan-wook are now the representative filmmakers of this generation, another filmmaker E J-yong clearly explains this motivation when he says: "Filmmakers from the 80s and 90s, like Park Kwang-su, Jang Sun-woo and Chung Ji-young, carry a great burden on their shoulders, in terms of history and politics. So they make very 'heavy' films, and they can't free themselves from the weight of their generation's social issues. But directors in my generation feel free of such pressures. They pursue individual interests, rather that make films that speak for Korean society" (quoted in Paquet, 2009: 66). Therefore, unlike the realism films of the late 1980s and early 1990s that were politically charged, this generation began to make genre-based films like those of Hollywood that they saw growing up Yet, having grown up in a politically tumultuous time in the 1980s when Korea was undergoing a transition from decades of dictatorship to democratization, a subtle awareness of social ailments and politics comes through in their films (which will be discussed later). Most of the leading auteur-filmmakers of contemporary Korean cinema are from the 386 generation.

Choi (2010: 35) writes that the success of Korean cinema since the new millennium can be contributed to the Korean blockbuster, what she defines to be a locally produced culturally distinct work that is still familiar through its resemblance to Hollywood's spectacular formula. Indeed, arguably the most foundational commonality among the filmography of the 386 filmmakers is their combining of Korean themes with Hollywood's generic formulas. This characteristic has been present throughout Bong Joon-ho's films. Take, for example, Bong's three most successful films: *Memories of Murder* (2003), *The Host* (2006), and *Parasite* (2020). All three films clearly adhere to a familiar genre but base their narratives on an explicitly Korean setting. *Memories of Murder* is a typical crime thriller in that it follows a pair of detectives' hunt for a serial killer, but the film is made distinctly Korean by basing its narrative on a famous real-life case of serial murders during the late 1980s and early 1990s. *The Host* is, in some ways, a typical monster film but its narrative incorporates so many distinctly Korean social issues, such as the taut relationship with the US, citizens' lack of support and trust in the Korean government, and a reliance on the family as a key social unit in Korea. *Parasite* too (despite its genre-blending) broadly plays into the thriller genre. Moreover, it takes the global issue of wealth polarization and visually metaphorizes it into a distinctly Korean phenomenon

of half-basement homes. Such combining of the "local" culture with Hollywood formulas can be seen as a typical characteristic of the 386 generation.

Even in the above three examples, however, it can be a struggle to easily categorize Bong's films into one genre. Although there tends to be an overarching genre, the narratives often tread between several genres, frequently incorporating black humour into even serious scenarios. Such generic hybridity is also a prominent characteristic of contemporary Korean cinema. Whether its gangster-comedies, melodrama-actions or even war-comedies, many of the successful Korean films of the contemporary era have engaged in generic hybridity (Choi, 2010: 84). Bong's genre-blending, while pushing boundaries to new levels, can be framed around this tendency of the 386 filmmakers to play with generic formulas. In this sense, *Parasite* is exemplary of this style. The film begins as a thriller, where the narrative clearly sets up two families: the unemployed Kims who live in a dirty semi-basement apartment and the posh Parks who live in a beautiful split-level villa. As the narrative progresses, tension builds as the Kims infiltrate into the lives of the Parks. Just as the audience begins to anticipate a confrontation followed by a wrapping up of loose ends, another party is introduced into the equation: the previous housekeeper and her family. As it becomes known that there is a hidden bunker in the Park's home where the housekeeper's husband had lived for decades, the thriller takes a darker turn, transforming into a horror where a violent ending offers more heartbreak. Despite lingering in the territories of the thriller and the horror genres, the narrative remains rooted in the characters, and their interactions with one another are embedded with light-hearted humour, which has the intended effect of casting a shadow of dark comedy over the entire narrative. The complex combination of thriller, comedy, and horror is an epitome of not only Bong's own signature style, but also of the 386 generation's attempt to creatively transform Hollywood genres into new forms.

The 386 generation directors' commercial style must not be misunderstood as mere entertainment forms that do not have a political edge. As Choi (2010: 37) notes, these directors did not simply succumb to commercial pressures, but rather engaged in "active negotiation" between the global film scene and the domestic audience. As the generation whose political activism played a key role in Korea's democratization, socio-political awareness is a part of their worldview and thus is not entirely absent from their films. With emphasis laid on storytelling through character developments, social criticism is subtly embedded into the narratives. In many of Bong's films, although it is entirely possible to enjoy the films without any political framing, criticism—at times stronger than others—can also be read into subtle (often visual) references. In *Parasite*, for example, social inequality is never addressed in the narrative as an infrastructural problem. The narrative instead concentrates on the endeavours of one family. The characters too remain focused on their diegetic storyline—focusing simply on getting the "next job" within the Park family—which leads to an absence of dialogue that is outwardly political. Such a lack of spoken criticism, however, works in juxtaposition with the film's visuals and symbolism that subtly communicate social criticism towards capitalism. The most obvious example is in the settings of the two families' homes, where vertical urban space becomes a metaphor for wealth polarization. With the Parks living in a mansion on top of a hill and the Kims living in a cramped basement space, a deeper criticism towards the effects of capitalism (and society's inability to protect against extreme wealth polarization) is conveyed through the contrasting visuals of a beautiful light open space versus a dark cramped space. Even nature, like the rain, is shown to treat the two families so differently, with heavy rainfall creating a beautiful ambience in the garden of the Park family while flooding the Kims' home. In this sense, the rain acts as a metaphor for the unfairness of the "natural" order of a capitalist society. In such ways, Bong engages in socio-political criticism (usually but not

exclusively of Korean society), not through apparent methods such as the narrative and dialogue, but through the language of cinema, using cinematography and mise-en-scène.

This short essay has introduced the ways in which *Parasite* can be seen as exemplary of the 386 generation of filmmakers' approach to filmmaking. Although Bong pushes and alters each characteristic into his own styles, his general tendency to create genre-blending films that mostly adhere to Hollywood's generic formulas, while embodying a subtle socio-political criticism in the visuals, can be understood within the historical framing of the 386 generation directors and their cinephile backgrounds.

References

Choi, Jinhee (2010). *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Klein, Christina (2012). The AFKN Nexus: US Military Broadcasting and New Korean Cinema. *Transnational Cinemas* 3(1): 19-39.

Paquet, Darcy (2009). *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves*. London: Wallflower Press.

Further Reading

Ahn, Soo Jeong (2012). *The Pusan International Film Festival, South Korean Cinema, and Globalization*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Choe, Youngmin (2016). *Tourist Distractions: Travelling and Feeling in Transnational Hallyu Cinema*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Choi, Jinhee (2010). *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Chung, Hye Seung and David Scott Diffrient (2015). *Movie Migrations: Transnational Genre Flows and South Korean Cinema*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Chung, Steven (2014). *Split Screen Korea: Shin Sang-ok and Postwar Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gateward, Frances (ed) (2007). *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

James, David and Kyung Hyun Kim (eds) (2001). *Im Kwon-taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State Press.

Jeong, Kelly Y. (2011). *Crisis of Gender and the Nation in Korean Literature and Cinema: Modernity Arrives Again*. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.

Kim, Dong Hoon (2017). *The Eclipsed Cinema: The Film Culture of Colonial Korea*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

McHugh, Katherine and Nancy Abelmann (eds) (2005). *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama*: *Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Paquet, Darcy (2009). *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves*. London: Wallflower Press.

Peirse, Alison and Daniel Martin (eds) (2013). *Korean Horror Cinema*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Shin, Chi-Yun and Julian Stringer (eds) (2005). *New Korean Cinema*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press. Yecies, Brian and Ae-Gyung Shim (2011). *Korea's Occupied Cinemas 1893–1948*. London: Routledge.

Yecies, Brian and Ae-Gyung Shim (2016). *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema: 1960– 2015*. London: Routledge.

Useful Websites

A website started and maintained by Darcy Paquet with key facts and reviews of key works from each year of Korean film history: http://koreanfilm.org/

The Korean Film Archives' main website, with searchable database on films, people, news, reports, and publications: http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/main/main.jsp

A YouTube channel maintained by the Korean Film Archives, where a range of digitalized/restored Korean films are made available for free streaming: https://www.youtube.com/user/KoreanFilm

Chapter 8. Music:
A History of Korean Music
— From Traditional Sounds to K-pop and the Metaverse

David Tizzard (Seoul Women's University)

Overview of Subject

The Origins of Korean Music

While K-pop is one of the world's most talked about genres today, it stands on the shoulders of many giants that have come before it. Korean music has a rich history which has been greatly affected by political, social, and technological changes. The country has experienced what scholars call a 'compressed modernity'. This means that in only a few decades in the late twentieth century, Korea went through everything that many other countries took centuries to experience.

In the past, the Korean Peninsula was home to a variety of sounds. The rhythmic chanting of shamanistic music; the story-telling nature of *pansori* (sometimes described as Korean opera)*;* and the inspirational beating of *nongak* (farmer's music). All of these contrasting musical styles are unique and, more importantly, very different to western music. Collectively, they are referred to as *gugak* (national music). The instruments associated with *gugak* are the *gayageum* (a 12-string plucked zither played horizontally) and the *janggu* (an hourglass-shaped two-headed drum). These traditional Korean musical forms adopt patterns, melodic intervals, and vocal deliveries that are not common in western music. Because of this, they can sound rather peculiar when we first hear them and it takes some time to become accustomed to them. Even young Koreans today who grow up listening to pop music might find the traditional Korean music rather strange at first. There have been many successful efforts to modernize *gugak* and create a fusion of old and new sounds: Jambinai combine avant-garde rock with traditional instruments while Leenalchi have achieved great success in taking the *pansori* vocals of old Korean stories and placing them on modern house beats.

Although South Korea is a thriving democracy today, from the 1950s to the 1990s there were many restrictions on free speech, art, culture, and music. Having experienced colonization (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953), South Korea was still economically undeveloped in the 1950s and 1960s. The music in South Korea, therefore, was primarily found on American army bases. There are still about 28,000 American troops in South Korea. Back in the 1950s, these military bases pumped out the emerging western modern rock of Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Elvis Presley. The music was centred on a 4/4 beat and played by guitars, drums, and pianos. This regular western rhythmic pattern, similar to the beating of a heart, was very different from the looser, slower, temporal rhythms of *gugak* (which some say is based more on the concept of breath).

Early Modern Korean Pop

Korean performers such as Shin Joong-hyun and Choi Hee-jun performed covers and renditions of popular western songs to military audiences and, at the same time, introduced this music to the local Korean population. The Kim Sisters, a three-piece female singing group, even reached #7 on the United States (US) Billboard singles chart in 1962. Though initially just copying and performing western songs, Korean artists soon began to create their own unique versions of this music. Shin Joong-hyun wrote many hits for other artists, including Pearl Sisters' "A Cup of Coffee" (1968), Kim Choo-ja's "Returning Corporal Kim" (1969), and Park Insu's "Spring Rain" (1970). Shin's 1974 song "Beautiful Woman" remains a staple of many public events held in Korea today.

Popular music was heavily regulated, however. After a coup d'état, military generals ruled Korea from 1961-1988. This meant there was a focus on creating 'morally upright popular songs' that aligned with the military government's values. Rock music and foreign pop songs were often banned for their associations with sex, drugs, and a decadent western lifestyle. This government suppression ultimately affected what music dominated the Korean mainstream. Despite some later brief resurgences, rock is still sadly seen as a sub-genre in Korea and rarely heard in mainstream music charts.

1960s-1970s: Trot and Acoustic Folk

Trot is a reimagining of a Japanese popular music genre called *enka*. It is known colloquially as *ppongjjak*, which describes its unmistakable 2-beat rhythm (just say "one-two" out-loud over and over again and that's the *ppongjjak* rhythm). Lee Mi-ja's 1964 hit "Camellia Girl" is one the genre's best known songs. Nam Jin, Na Hun-a, and Cho Yong-pil all achieved great success as trot singers, too. The arrival of the television in the mid-1970s meant trot became the dominant musical form in South Korea because it was seen everywhere. It has not gone away either: television programs featuring trot performances (Mr. Trot and Miss Trot) are still popular in modern South Korea and a whole new generation of listeners have fallen in love with the genre.

As South Korea fought for democracy and freedom from the military rulers, its music tastes began changing. Different demographics now listened to different genres and styles, often according to their age, economic status, or location. Acoustic folk music (*t'ong guitar)*, for example, was enjoyed by office workers and progressive university students. Musically, it was rather simple and often just had a guitar and harmonica. Aesthetically, it was associated with long hair and blue jeans. It was often political and the singers and listeners supported liberal democracy rather than the 'morally upright popular songs' demanded by the military. Kim Min-gi's song "Morning Dew" was banned in 1975 and quickly became an anti-government anthem. Other acoustic folk artists such as Han De-su and Kim Gwang-seok are also associated with the democracy movement in Korea.

Towards Modernity: Ballads and Heavy Metal

Seoul was selected as the host for the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics. With the country in the international spotlight, citizen protests resulted in the president finally opening democratic elections. One sound that grew to prominence during this period was the Korean ballad. Whereas many might point to *gugak* as the traditional sound of Korea and to K-pop attracting international attention, it is the ballad that often best reflects contemporary Korean

listening tastes, transcending age, gender, and class. The ballad is a development of trot but it is slower and more emotional. The music is performed on piano, violins, and acoustic guitars, written in minor keys, and in a standard 4/4 meter. The lyrics centre on love and the songs, like trot, are performed by solo artists. The singers are normally dressed in suits and long dresses which mark a contrast to the aesthetics of the acoustic folk music of the previous decade. Singers such as Lee Yong, Lee Sun-hee, Lee Seung-chul, Lee Moon-se, and Lee Gwang-cho helped establish the ballad as the primary sound of Korea in the 1980s. In particular, Byeon Jin-seop's mega hits "Being Alone" (1987) and "Wish List" (1989) were representative of this new dominant sound.

The1980s were a golden age for both ballad music and a far more aggressive genre: heavy metal. The lessening of government censorship allowed rock to adopt the heavy metal sounds that had begun in the United Kingdom and United States. Korean acts such as Boohwal, Baekdoosan, Magma, and Sinawe (the latter formed by the son of Shin Joong-hyun) started the movement. These acts then paved the way for more thrash-influenced acts such as Crash and the pioneers of Chosun Punk, Crying Nut and No Brain. These groups have a passionate and committed fan base but the music is rarely seen or heard on mainstream television.

The Birth of K-Pop and Entertainment Companies

K-pop was born in the early 1990s. There are a host of reasons for this: globalisation, the digitisation of music and technology, economic development, urbanisation, and young people with disposable incomes. Together they formed a perfect storm. The arrival of K-pop in Korea was as revolutionary as punk and hip hop had been elsewhere in the world. The pioneers of this Korean musical revolution were Seotaeji and Boys. Despite all the success K-pop has achieved since, few have impacted Korea in the way these three young men did. They released their debut single "Nan Arayo" in 1992 which shocked audiences with its electronic New Jack Swing sound. Seotaeji and Boys' impact in terms of fashion, dance, and presentation divided the nation. While many older Korean people found it unintelligible, the younger generation loved it. Moreover, the group were writing their own music and, in their 1995 hip-hop track "Come Back Home", Seotaeji and Boys' lyrics directly addressed social issues. This was a stark contrast to the soppy ballad love songs of the previous decade. With Seotaeji came the creation of the first-generation K-pop groups. These included boy groups such as Sechs Kies and G.O.D. and girl groups like F.in.K.L. and Baby Vox.

Entertainment companies that would dominate the industry for decades to come were also born at this time. Lee Soo-man founded SM Entertainment in 1995. Now, rather than just music and performance, idols would also undergo a demanding career that controlled their language, dating, and physical appearance. The first group from SM was H.O.T., a five-piece male idol group. Shinhwa then debuted in 1998 and are K-pop's longest running male group. Other entertainment agencies such as YG Entertainment (1996) and JYP (1997) followed a similar approach. YG was founded by Seotaeji member Yang Hyun-suk and focused on hip-hop. Early success was achieved with the groups JINUSEAN and 1TYM. Park Jin-young took a more pop-focused approach at JYP, with G.O.D. the standout act.

The controlling nature of the entertainment companies proved very successful. As society became more liberal, the companies in the music industry became more controlling. Rather than simply another passing fad, K-pop was here to stay. Korean music would never be the same again.

Second Generation K-pop: YouTube and PSY

Prior to 1996, songs with more than a third of lyrics in English were banned by the Korean Public Performance Ethics Committee. K-pop now, however, started looking abroad for its success. The next generation saw the emergence of artists such as Rain (JYP) and BoA (SM) who achieved some international success. Idol groups from this period include TVXQ! (SM), Beast (Cube), Wonder Girls (JYP), Super Junior (SM), and KARA. K-pop stars began appearing in the Billboard Hot 100 and collaborating with American artists. Although the success overseas was limited, it demonstrated that the Korean entertainment companies were seeking to explore new markets. The idols also began to appear in different mediums, starring in television shows, reality programmes, and dramas.

Having survived the Asian Financial Crisis (1997) and successfully co-hosted the 2002 World Cup, South Korea was secure as an established democracy in East Asia and driven by the financial and technological might of Samsung, Hyundai, and SK. A further technological development affected the K-pop industry as dramatically as Seotaeji's arrival had in the early 1990s. Psy was not an idol in the traditional sense. His 2012 mega-hit "Gangnam Style" was a global phenomenon that no-one predicted. What he did have, however, was YouTube. People all over the world now had instant access to the incredible choreography and production of the latest K-pop videos. For many international fans, these groups were similar to what they had before. They had electronic sounds with a 4/4 beat and English hooks, but, at the same time, there was something different. Something they had not seen before. It was this combination of K-pop as both universal and unique that helped establish it around the world. The local entertainment companies were only too happy to provide the content.

The Third and Fourth Generations: Social Media, Fandom and the Metaverse

The third generation K-pop groups took everything that had come before, including the control of the entertainment companies and the growing presence of the idol across various mediums, and they now added a new element: international fan groups. EXO (SM), BTS (Big Hit), Red Velvet (SM), Twice (JYP), BLACKPINK (YG), and GFRIEND (Source Music) all raised the bar in terms of vocal performance, choreography, and visual aesthetics. Moreover, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms allowed fans to not only communicate with each other, but also talk to the world about their love for various groups. To increase this interaction and help transform fans from consumers to prosumers, entertainment companies created universes, compelling backstories, narratives, and character arcs for the fans to immerse themselves in. Korean entertainment companies came up with an ever-growing collection of glocalised products. No longer was the K-pop industry driven by remote stars; now it was more akin to the world building of fantasy novels and role-playing games.

K-pop was also supported during this phase rise by an increasing global demand for Korean movies, Korean dramas, and Korean cosmetics. This popularity of Korean products overseas is known as *hallyu* (the Korean wave). The K label is associated with high-quality goods and products. Cross-over effects are very common, with stars featuring in entertainment programs, dramas, or advertising products.

Now, in the fourth generation of K-pop, we are seeing the breaking down not just of barriers between countries but finally in the barriers of reality itself. Groups use metaverse concepts and NFTs to attract their fans into a digital space where music, video, and idols can all be accessed virtually. Aespa (SM), ITZY (JYP), Stray Kids (JYP), and ATEEZ (KQ) are at the

forefront of this latest wave. Where it will stop is not yet known, but K-pop has gone from strength to strength and will likely continue to adapt to the world around it, garnering new fans and shaping new realities as it does.

Some Key Terms

Compressed modernity: This is when a country experiences great economic, political, cultural, or social change in a very short period of time.

Gayageum: This is a 12-string instrument played horizontally and commonly heard in traditional Korean music.

Glocalization: This is a combination of two words: globalization and localization. It occurs when products are created for an international market by adapting them to local cultures.

Gugak: This literally means "national music" but in Korea it used to refer to all the different traditional types of music.

Hallyu: This refers the global popularity of Korean cultural products (such as music, movies, cosmetics) overseas. It literally means the "Korean wave".

Pansori: Traditional Korean storytelling set to music and performed by a singer and a drummer.

Prosumer: The word is a combination of producer and consumer. It means someone who consumes and produces, like many K-pop fans online today.

Trot: This popular Korean music genre is based on an up-tempo 2-beat style and performed by a solo singer. It has recently seen a resurgence in popularity thanks to programs such as Mr Trot and Miss Trot.

Mythological Approaches: Music as Universal and Specific

Music is a universal phenomenon. Every country has a national anthem and a host of traditional songs associated with its history. You can hear music in nightclubs, at political rallies, temples, churches, mosques, and synagogues. Music is played in homes, schools, farms, and prisons. You can even hear it in nature if you listen carefully enough. Despite this universality, or perhaps *because* of it, music is interpreted, produced, and created in many different ways in different times and places. The traditional music of Russia is very different from the modern music of Senegal. Each type of music has its own individuality, characteristics, history, and traditions. Yet at the same time, all of these different types of music point toward a broader concept of music itself.

But what actually *is* music? Is it just the sounds we hear? Is rain music? Or a doorbell? To study music and to understand what it means, there are different approaches we can take. These are known as methodologies. When the starting point of our study is classical music, like Beethoven, Chopin, and Wagner, and how it evolved from that point, this is often referred to

as *historical musicology*. One attempt to break away from this exclusionary western approach is *systematic musicology*, a broad term that includes the study of aesthetics, gender, and critical race theory. Another method is to focus on the actual music itself as it is recorded through notation and scores. This is known as *music analysis* (or the *analytical method*) and it normally ignores the broader social context in which the music is created. The approach taken by this chapter is the *critical method*. This tries to explain what music means in its historical, political, sociological, economic, and aesthetic context. Essentially, it places music inside a living history. It is part of a broader methodological movement also seen in other disciplines such as anthropology and philosophy that seeks to describe the humanize experience as it is lived, rather than in theoretical forms. Therefore, we ask ourselves questions like "What does music mean to the people who listen to it?" and "Why was it popular at that time?" Korea is very much part of this story: Its music contains unique qualities as well as sounds heard elsewhere.

Sample Question

Is K-pop simply a genre of music, or is it something more than that? How can we best understand and describe this recent global phenomenon?

Sample Answer

K-pop is both incredibly hard and very easy to describe. We know it when we see it, or even when we hear it. Yet many people disagree on what the defining characteristics are. Does K-pop mean all Korean music that is *popular*? Does it include acts such as Epik High, Jang Gi-ha and Park Hyo-shin? Or does it refer to the highly-stylised choreographed idol music produced by large entertainment companies? Is the key word "K" for Korean? Or should we focus on the "pop" element? What about the actual music itself? Does that provide any clues? The term K-pop was not originally used by Korean people. Domestically people categorized the popular dance music performed as *daejung gayo*. Then, in the mid-to-late 1990s, Korean music and dramas began to be popular in other parts of Asia, including China and Japan. By 1999, the term *Hallyu* (Korean Wave) was used widely in Chinese media and also began appearing in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The South Korean male pop group H.O.T. topped charts in both China and Taiwan. It was around this time that journalists and consumers in other Asian countries began to refer to Korean music as K-pop to differentiate it from Japanese and Chinese music. In Korea, K-pop did not really become an established term until as late as 2008.

What can be agreed on is that modern K-pop is vastly different to any of the traditional music forms of Korea. Some scholars have even suggested that, because of this, K-pop is not really *Korean*; instead, it's a combination of different foreign music genres. BTS' global smash hits "Dynamite" and "Butter", for example, don't sound Korean. If one were to analyse the actual sounds of these songs and try to put them in a genre, the results wouldn't point to K-pop. Neither "Dynamite" nor "Butter" contain any Korean language. They sound like western dance pop with heavy elements of the synthwave/retrowave sound which has become popular in the last few years. But these songs *are* K-Pop according to most of the international media. So we cannot adopt a musical analysis methodology to understand what K-pop is. It is something more than the sounds that we hear. K-pop is not a specific sound like jazz or grime. K-pop is an umbrella term that includes hip-hop, dance, ballad, rock, flamenco, and many other genres.

For some people, what makes K-pop is often the identity of the performers rather than the sounds that we hear. Thus because "Butter" and "Dynamite" are performed by Korean people, the song can be classified as K-pop. If a boy group from Mexico sang the same lyrics and

created the same music video, it wouldn't be K-pop. But it is not just Korean people that perform K-pop. Rosé and Lisa from Blackpink were both born outside of Korea. EXO's Lay is from China, Twice's Tzuyu is from Taiwan while Mina, Momo, and Sana are from Japan. Aespa are one of K-pop's biggest groups at the moment and Ninging is Chinese and Giselle is Japanese-Korean. There are countless other examples. So, if it is performed by people based in Korea and working for Korean entertainment companies, it is K-pop. When Kaachi try to do something similar in the U.K., however, people are reluctant to call it K-pop. Again, this makes it different from other genres such as rock or techno which are performed all over the world by people of different nationalities and ethnicities. Inherent in the definition of K-pop, therefore, is the idea that it is *from* Korea even if it is not always necessarily Korean.

Sometimes it is neither the music nor the location that defines K-pop. It's something more aesthetic and technology based. K-pop can be identified by its visuals, video production techniques, strong choreography, and very high beauty standards: a vision of modernization. K-pop is seen as a full multimedia sensory experience that cannot be understood just by the music or the identity alone. It must be seen, felt, interacted with online, and shared and discussed across various social media platforms. The music videos on YouTube reach into the tens of millions of views. Some even reach as high as a billion. So K-pop is the product of a technologically developed, modern, and urbanised South Korean culture. It is a representation of what Seoul is today in the 21st Century. This is why it has adapted so readily to the emerging concepts of NFTs, digital avatars, and the metaverse.

But then there is also the dance. Most popular K-pop tracks feature a recognizable dance or set of moves that people associate with the track. The movements are carefully planned, choreographed, carried out in formation with various changes, and designed to be addictive and support the song's concept. It is hard to sing Super Junior's "Sorry Sorry" without doing the accompanying gestures, and the same might be said for Twice's "TT" and Blackpink's "Ddu Du Ddu Du". The outrageous horse dancing moves from "Gangnam Style" were copied by celebrities all over the world and many think of the peace signs thrown up in BTS' "Permission to Dance". Because of the emphasis on dance, the internet is filled with fancam videos of idols dancing on stage, rehearsal footage, themed costume performances, and fans showing their dedication by learning and sharing their interpretation of the K-pop dances. Celebrities often take to social media to perform each other's moves, too.

The themes of K-pop are also recognizable. Some people suggest that K-pop promotes clean middle-class values. While occasional K-pop videos and performances might be somewhat risqué, it generally avoids glamorizing or making explicit references to sex, drugs, and violence. For the most part, the idols do not date. Their songs, videos, and lyrics can be watched and discussed comfortably in front of young children or grandparents alike. K-pop is also largely apolitical. Instead, it can be bubbly, cute, sophisticated, mature, flirtatious, artistic, saccharine, or bright. What attracts many people to K-pop is this romantic and pure nature of the music and presentation, devoid of overt sexual references often found elsewhere.

A final idea about what defines K-pop comes from one of its biggest stars, Jennie from Blackpink. In the group's 2020 documentary "Light Up the Sky", she said that K-pop is defined by the training process the idols and groups go through. What makes something K-pop is *how* you produce it, not *what* you produce. The entertainment companies founded in the mid-to-late 1990s still dominate the K-pop music industry and while some restrictions on idols are being loosened, there is still a great expectation placed on them in terms of lifestyle, appearance, and training. K-pop is therefore a process, a route that one takes.

As we can see, many people have a different understanding and definition of what K-pop is. All of the above ideas have some validity. There is not a single truth of what K-pop is. It is everything and it is nothing. It is what you want it to be. And that's probably why it is so popular.

References

Chang, K-S. (1999). 'Compressed modernity and its discontents: South Korean society in transition', *Economy and Society*, 28(1), pp. 30-55.
Gibson, J. (2019). 'What Puts the K in K-Pop', *The Diplomat*, 15 August [online]. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/what-puts-the-k-in-k-pop/ (Accessed: 26 March 2021).
Hahn, M-Y. (1985). 'The Origin of Korean Music', *The World of Music*, 27(2), pp. 16-31.
Ki, W. (2020). *K-Pop: The Odyssey*. Washington: New Degree Press.
Lie, J. (2012). 'What is the K in K-pop? South Korean Popular Music, the Culture Industry, and National Identity', *Korea Observer*, 43(3), pp. 339-363.
Provine, R. (1985). 'Korean Music in Historical Perspective', *The World of Music*, 27(2), pp. 3-15.
Romano, A. (2018). 'How K-pop became a global phenomenon', *Vox*, 26 February [online]. Available at: https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/2/16/16915672/what-is-kpop-history-explained (Accessed 09 February 2022).
Tizzard, D. (2020). 'BTS and hyper-reality of K-pop', *The Korea Times*, 6 December [online]. Available at: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2020/12/197_300425.html (Accessed 28 March 2021).
Tizzard, D. (2021). 'The death of K-pop', *The Korea Times*, 24 January [online]. Available at: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinon/2021/01/197_302945.html (Accessed 09 February 2022).

Further Reading

Howard, K. (2006). Korean Pop Music: Riding the Wave. Kent: Global Oriental.
Jin, D.Y. and Hong, S.K. (2021). Transnational Convergence of East Asian Pop Culture. New York: Routledge.
Kim, Y. (2022). The Soft Power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Drama. New York: Routledge.
Park, G.S., Otmazgin, N., and Howard, K. (2019). Transcultural Fandom and the Globalization of Hallyu. Seoul: Korea University Press.
Russel, M. (2009). Pop Goes Korea: Behind the Revolution in Movies, Music, and Internet Culture. Berkley, California: Stone Bridge Press.

Useful Websites

Korea Deconstructed Podcast: https://koreadeconstructed.libsyn.com/
Platform Magazine: https://www.platform-magazine.com/
Regina Kim Homepage: https://www.reginakim.com/

1828
University of
Central Lancashire
UCLan

INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTE OF
KOREAN
STUDIES