

# The soft power implications of the new South Korean cinema: Approaching audiences in East Asia and Lithuania

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**Abstract.** South Korea's experience wielding soft power is usually associated with the Korean Wave, which swept the Asian region off its feet predominantly during the first decade of this century. In this article I will however argue that the phenomenon of the Korean Wave has never been intended as a calculated attempt on the part of the South Korean government to enhance the overall South Korean image worldwide and thus increase South Korean international might and prestige. To prove the validity of this hypothesis, I will provide a concise historical overview of the inception, development and spread of South Korean popular culture, while at the same time tracing its underlying soft power implications. I will likewise attempt to discuss the popular reception of the Korean Wave in three East Asian countries, i.e. Mainland China, Taiwan and Japan, and one European country, i.e. Lithuania. The scope of the endeavour has been largely restricted to the cinematic aspect of the Korean Wave, for I consider the creation of motion pictures and drama serials to be by far the most precious, influential and revealing form of art.

## **Soft power, hard power or smart power: The predicament of one-dimensional players in a three-dimensional game**

The political concept 'soft power' first appeared in Joseph S. Nye's book (1990) and has since drawn to itself a relatively significant amount of academic attention. Thus within the contemporary theory of international relations, one can roughly distinguish between not only military and economic but also soft power.

On the human plane, soft power, popularly defined by Nye as 'an ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion', rests on the skills of emotional intelligence, vision, and communication; on the state plane, it stems from the attractiveness of culture, the sincerity of values, and the legitimacy of policies (Nye 2004a).

While according to Nye, of the three modes of political power, soft power has the greatest potential to deal with critical global issues and foster multilateral cooperation among states, its application is usually unduly severely restricted due to

various preconceived assumptions on the part of both political scientists and political decision makers (ibid.). The scholar dismally observes that, largely disregarding the changing nature of power, political leaders internationally refuse to incorporate soft dimensions into their power-wielding strategies (Nye 2004b, 1).

When introducing the concept 'soft power', Nye starts by providing the prevalent definition of power, then goes on to correlate it with political context, subsequently discussing the changing nature of power in today's age of information revolution and finally positing why it is imperative to pay a higher degree of attention to the third dimension of political power, i.e. soft power, and in general see the contemporary political system as three-dimensional rather than one-dimensional (ibid.).

If, according to Nye, power *per se* can be defined as the possession of the capabilities to affect the behaviour of others in order to get a desired outcome, three ways of exercising political power can be discerned: (a) coercion with threats; (b) inducement with payments; (c) attraction and co-option (ibid., 2).

Besides the three modes of exercising political power highlighted above, both political decision makers and political scientists tend to directly correlate the presence of power with the possession of material resources. Consequently, according to Nye, a country is considered powerful if it has a relatively large population and territory, extensive natural resources, economic strength, military power, and social stability (ibid., 3). This way of defining power endows it with the characteristics of concreteness, measurability and predictability, all of which are somewhat misleading because having the assets mentioned above does not necessarily guarantee the desired outcome on the part of the possessor of the assets. To illustrate the weakness of viewing power as a direct manifestation of material resources, Nye touches upon the dire calamity of September 11, pointing out that it did happen despite the fact that back then in 2001 the United States of America was considered the world's only superpower (ibid.).

Speaking of the changing nature of power, Nye distinguishes between the pre-information age and the information age, arguing that before the information age power was much easier to assess and it was done so in international politics in terms of warfare (ibid.). Importantly, over the centuries alongside the industrial, technological and information revolution, means of warfare have evolved dramatically. Hence, it is downright misleading to assume that the contemporary distribution of political power can be accounted for by taking into consideration solely military or economic assets (ibid.).

The agenda of world politics, astutely observes Nye, has become like a three dimensional chess game, in which one can win only by playing vertically as well as horizontally (ibid., 4). In other words, to follow Nye's way of putting it and to use the

case of the United States of America as an example, on the top board of classic interstate military issues, the United States of America can still be viewed as the only super power with global military reach. On the middle board of interstate economic issues, the distribution of power is by all means multipolar, however. Lastly, on the bottom board of transnational issues like terrorism, international crime, climate change, and the spread of infectious diseases, power is widely distributed and chaotically organised among state and non-state actors (ibid.). Significantly, it is the latter set of issues or else the bottom board that the contemporary theory of international relations should pay a considerable amount of attention to, but unfortunately many political leaders still obstinately cling to classic military solutions. Nye refers to the latter set of injudicious political leaders as one-dimensional players in a three-dimensional game. In the long run, maintains Nye, their lack of perception is bound to produce a loss since obtaining favourable outcomes on the bottom transnational board often requires the use of soft power (ibid., 5).

Nye suggests that a successful strategy for wielding the soft power of a country results in (a) its values being admired, (b) its example being emulated, (c) and its level of prosperity and openness being aspired to (ibid.).

All in all, according to Nye, soft power is primarily an attractive power. Nye refutes the Machiavellian perception of power, which stresses fear rather than admiration as the inherent component of power, and argues that in today's world the wisest way to perpetrate politics requires both components. Consequently, a well-balanced application of both soft power and hard power results in what Nye refers to as 'smart power'.

### **The soft power implications of the contemporary South Korean film industry**

South Korean cinematic production, first and foremost including television dramas and film, has today become a widely consumed cultural commodity not only in Asia but also in Europe, the Americas, and other parts of the world. South Korean television dramas such as *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Jewel in the Palace* (2003), *Full House* (2004), *You're Beautiful* (2009), etc. and South Korean movies such as *Shiri* (1999), *Joint Security Area* (2000), *My Sassy Girl* (2001), *Oldboy* (2003), etc. have enchanted daily increasing audiences not only domestically but also internationally. To borrow an observation made by Shim Doobo, the overwhelming popularity of South Korean contemporary culture in Asia, for once, is evidenced by the fact that it has even become material for the Malaysian song 'I am not... Song Seung-Heon', where two male singers express the feelings of a man whose girlfriend is infatuated with the South Korean actor Song Seungheon (Shim, Doobo 2008, 16). This part of the article will attempt to account for the unprecedented international appeal of South

Korean cinematic culture by closely tracing the soft power implications underlying the Korean Wave. Besides governmental policies, the business initiatives of domestic conglomerates will also be taken into consideration, because the latter factor has been considerably significant in redefining the trajectory of South Korean cinematic culture.

### **The inner transformation of the South Korean film industry**

#### ***Media liberalisation***

The period of the late 1980s and early 1990s was an important juncture for the South Korean cinema industry because of the market opening to foreign distributors. In 1986 the South Korean government finally amended the Motion Picture Law (MPL) to respond to demands from the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) and alleviated the regulations on foreign investment in the South Korean film industry. What is more, the import quota and the tax imposed on foreign films were also abolished that same year (Choi 2010, 7). After the governmental measure had been implemented and direct distribution by major Hollywood studios had been granted, the annual number of local film productions began to gradually decrease and that of foreign film imports started to increase. Consequently, in 1993 poorly performing local movies accounted for a record low of 15.9% of the domestic market share. Observers predicted the inevitable demise of South Korean cinema (Shim, Doobo 2008, 16).

When in 1994 the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was transformed into the World Trade Organization (WTO), all former member states of GATT, including South Korea, were soon obliged to open their markets in media communications and culture. Significantly, this sector had been protected from foreign competition since the early days of GATT (Shim, Doobo 2008, 16; Shim, Sungeun 2008, 207). Subsequently, the South Korean press began to write that while culture was emerging as a new sector in global economic competition, South Korea was in danger of its indigenous culture being debased by foreign media. On the other hand, the cultural industry's contribution to national economies in the coming 21<sup>st</sup> century was also stressed (Shim, Doobo 2008, 17). In other words, South Korea perceived the inevitable media liberalisation as both a crisis and an opportunity (Shim, Sungeun 2008, 209).

#### ***Substantial contribution of chaebols***

Also in 1994, the Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology proposed to President Kim Youngsam that South Korea should develop cinema and other

media content production as a national strategic industry. Interestingly, what the proposal highlighted was that the total revenue of the Hollywood movie *Jurassic Park* (1993) amounted to the foreign sales of 1.5 million Hyundai cars (Shim, Doobo 2008, 17; Shim, Sungeun 2008, 210). Significantly, according to Shim Doobo, the South Koreans, who had strongly believed that it was the heavy and chemical industries—including automobile, construction and electronic industries—that would lead their country to a more prosperous future, found this information ground-breaking (Shim, Doobo 2008, 17). Thus in 1995 the National Assembly replaced the existing Motion Picture Law with a new one, which stated that the government would provide tax incentives for film production in order to attract corporate capital into the South Korean cinema industry (ibid.).

Shim Doobo further asserts that major domestic conglomerates, called *chaebols*, (including Samsung, Daewoo and Hyundai) had already been planning for cultural content production, taking cues from the Japanese company Sony Electronics' acquisition of Columbia Pictures and CBS Records in 1989 and 1988, respectively (ibid.; Inoue 2003, 39). Hence, at no time did the *chaebols* make use of the governmental assistance while advancing into the cultural industry (Shim, Doobo 2008, 17). However, when after several years of operation these ventures proved to be loss-making, the *chaebols* started to look for opportunities to exit from the cultural industry, and the financial crisis of late 1997 provided them with excuses to do so (ibid., 19).

Importantly, despite its short-lived and seemingly unsuccessful character, the *chaebol* age of South Korean cinema industry, points out Shim Doobo, actually laid the foundation for a renaissance in the South Korean cinema industry due to the following reasons. First, by holding independent film festivals and film scenario contests with considerable cash prizes, *chaebol*-run film companies recruited fresh talent. Second, *chaebols* supported young directors who had graduated from prestigious film studios all over the world and who would otherwise have had to wait for many years for their debut film. Third, many highly competent *chaebol*-staff members from diverse fields of business were put into the cinema business (Shim, Doobo 2008, 19). All in all, to borrow Anthony C. Y. Leong's words, the *chaebols*' contribution transformed South Korea's film industry into a more professional and business-oriented infrastructure that integrated it all: production, distribution and exhibition (Leong 2006, 9). Furthermore, even after the *chaebols* had folded their film businesses, a great number of former *chaebol* employees remained in the cinema industry, and it is common knowledge that many successful South Korean movies in recent years have been planned and marketed by these very people (Shim, Doobo 2008, 19).

### *Sponsorship of venture capitalists*

More or less simultaneous with the withdrawal of the *chaebols* from the South Korean film industry was the appearance of fast-profit-oriented venture capitalists (Shin, Stringer 2005, 43). Shim Doobo ironically observes that right after the Samsung Entertainment group had officially announced its breakup, the action thriller *Shiri* (1999), which Samsung had planned and funded as its final project, proved to be a big hit, attracting 5.8 million cinema goers nationwide and thus setting a new box-office record in South Korea. That *Shiri* was likewise partly funded by a venture capitalist, further argues the scholar, gave many prospective investors the cue to finance film productions. Shim Doobo adds that in 1999 the South Korean government revised the Motion Picture Promotion Law, thus facilitating venture capitalists' funding of film productions. Due to these reasons, venture capitalists funded (partly or exclusively) twenty-three out of fifty-eight South Korean movies produced in 2000 (Shim, Doobo 2008, 20).

Once it was possible for individuals to finance film productions, the South Korean cinema industry managed to churn out more blockbusters. According to data gathered by the Korean Film Council and highlighted by Shim, in 2001 the box-office record of *Shiri* (1999) was broken by that of *Joint Security Area* (2000). Several months later *Friends* (2001) sold the unprecedented amount of 8.2 million admission tickets. In 2004 *Silmido* (2003) set a box-office record by selling 11.08 million tickets, and in 2006 *King and the Clown* (2005) attracted more than 12 million viewers (ibid.). Upheld by these and other well-performing local movies, the South Korean cinema's domestic market share continuously increased from 15.9% in 1993 to 35.5% in 2000 to over 50% in 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2005 (ibid.).

Due to its considerable transformation and subsequent domestic success, the South Korean film industry has managed to attract large overseas audiences.

## **The international spread of South Korean cinematic culture**

### *Exports of South Korean film and drama*

When the blockbuster *Shiri* was sold to several Asian countries, it received both critical and commercial acclaim. Specifically, it earned US\$14 million from 1.2 million Japanese cinemagoers alone. Since the international success of *Shiri* (1999), many South Korean movies have been released for commercial run in foreign theatres and won prizes at such prestigious film festivals as Cannes, Berlin and Venice (ibid., 21). In 2004 a total of 193 South Korean films were exported to 62 countries, earning approximately US\$58 million, while in 1995 only a relatively moderate total of 15 South Korean movies reached foreign audiences, earning approximately US\$200,000.

As of 2004, Japan was the biggest importer of South Korean films, accounting for 69.3% of all South Korean film exports. With 33 South Korean films released in Japan in 2004, South Korean movies took a 10% share of the Japanese film market (ibid., 21–2). According to Kim Meehyun, head of the Film Policy Division at the Korean Film Council, the majority of Japanese viewers of South Korean films in 2004 were middle-aged women whose interest was piqued by their fandom of the television drama *Winter Sonata* (2002) (ibid., 22). Importantly, Minwha Han et al. contests the insight above, arguing that while *Winter Sonata* was especially popular among middle-aged Japanese women, the Korean Wave cut a boarder swath across Japanese socio-demographic groups, including men and women of all ages and notably teenagers (Han, et al. 2007, 156).

Notwithstanding the remarkable popularity of South Korean films abroad, the most successful export commodity from the South Korean audio-visual industry has been television dramas (Shim, Sungeun 2008, 205).

It was around the turn of the 1990s when the South Korean television industry began to export television dramas. Around 1992 Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) sold *Eyes of the Dawn* to Turkiye Radyo Televizyon (TRT), Turkey's national broadcaster, marking the first South Korean television drama to be exported to a European country, and *What Is Love All About* to Hong Kong's Asia Television Ltd. (ATV) (Shim, Doobo 2008, 24–5). Significantly, it is generally agreed that the Korean Wave started in Mainland China with the broadcast of the latter television drama. In 1997 it was aired by China Central Television (CCTV) and was rebroadcast by the same broadcaster in 1998 by popular demand (ibid., 25).

In the late 1990s, when the popularity of Japanese television dramas began to wane in Taiwan, Taiwanese importers began to purchase cheaper South Korean television dramas. In so doing, they helped South Korean television dramas penetrate into markets in Hong Kong and Mainland China (ibid.).

In addition, in the late 1990s the economic downturn in Asia made the cheaper South Korean cinematic goods a popular alternative in the aforementioned media markets. Interestingly, as of 2000, South Korean television dramas were a quarter of the price of Japanese ones and a tenth of the price of Hong Kong television dramas (ibid., 28). What is more, East Asian governments had for a long time been on the defensive against cultural influences from foreign countries, but in the 1990s, following the global trend, they began to open their television markets. Even the previously tightly controlled television markets in Mainland China and Vietnam, points out Shim, loosened their television programming import policies. The scholar adds that at the same time economic development among many Asian countries afforded their citizens leisure and facilities to consume more cultural artefacts (ibid., 25–6).

After their initial popular reception within the pan-Chinese pop sphere (comprising Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia) and Vietnam, South Korean television dramas gradually expanded their reach.

Produced by the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) in 2002, *Winter Sonata* was first broadcast on the Japanese satellite channel NHK BS2 in April 2003 and was re-aired on the same channel in December of the same year. Goaded by surging audience demand, NHK BS2 aired it for a third time on the NHK general channel from April to August 2004. In late December 2004, the uncut version of the South Korean television drama in the Korean language with Japanese subtitles made a fourth run, which was a record for a foreign programme on the Japanese public broadcasting network (*ibid.*, 26; Han et al. 2007, 157).

As the popularity of South Korean television dramas was gradually weakening in the pan-Chinese pop sphere, *Jewel in the Palace* rekindled the craze for South Korean popular culture (Shim, Doobo 2008, 26). For instance, in May 2005 the drama's final episode became the most watched television broadcast in Hong Kong's history, with more than 40% of Hong Kong viewers glued to the TV set (Kim, Ryoo 2007, 140).

The reasons as to why South Korean television dramas are popular among foreign audiences vary depending on the scholar.

Shim Doobo notes that, for audiences in developing countries such as Mainland China and Vietnam, South Korean television dramas are more acceptable than Japanese or American ones because the former retain traditional values while having achieved the technical sophistication comparable to that of the latter. South Korea is therefore viewed by the Chinese and Vietnamese as a prominent model to follow or catch up to, both culturally and economically (Shim, Doobo 2008, 27).

In her article, Sung Sangyeon, a lecturer of philological and cultural studies in the Department of Musicology at the University of Vienna, discerns four reasons for the popularity of the Korean Wave in Asia: (a) South Korean popular culture most delicately and eloquently expresses Asian values and sentiments, (b) the economic decline in Asia in the late 1990s forced television producers to dispense with the conventional expensive cultural goods and to seek out cheaper South Korean cultural commodities, (c) South Korean popular culture expresses a considerable amount of healthy self-confidence and nationalism, (d) South Korean popular culture has managed to borrow the best of its Western counterparts while at the same time retaining distinct Korean characteristics (Sung 2008, 14).

Significantly, Kim Eunmee and Ryoo Jiwon argue that the commonly available explanations for the success of *hallyu* in the Asian region, including (a) cultural proximity, (b) common historical and cultural legacy, (c) common 20<sup>th</sup> century experience of rapid industrialisation in the region, etc., cannot adequately explain

why *hallyu* has taken Asia by storm while popular cultures from other Asian nations have not (Kim, Ryoo 2007, 117).

Be that as it may, the dramatic aspect of the Korean Wave is now expanding to Europe, Africa, the Americas, and other parts of the world. For instance, the total amount of exports of South Korean television programmes dramatically increased from US\$5.5 million in 1995 to US\$71.4 million in 2004 (Shim, Doobo 2008, 27).

***The popular reception of the cinematic aspect of the Korean Wave in the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China, and Japan***

Cai Jian, an associate professor in the Centre for Korean Studies at the Institute of International Studies of Fudan University of China, is confident that even though the Korean Wave has touched many countries it has found the greatest success in the People's Republic of China, especially when the South Korean TV drama *Jewel in the Palace* (2003) was aired in the People's Republic of China in 2005 (Cai 2008, 100–1). The professor even accounts for the huge popularity of the Korean Wave in the People's Republic of China by recounting the response of top Chinese leaders to this very South Korean drama.

When Hu Jintao, general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, met with the leader of Korea's Uri Party, points out Cai, he expressed his regret that he could not watch *Jewel in the Palace* every day because of his tight work schedule. Further speaking of the popularity of the South Korean drama among high ranking Chinese officials, China's Vice President Zeng Qinghong also admitted to having watched several episodes of this drama and Wu Bangguo mentioned that both he and his wife watched the show whenever they had time to do so, a remark leading to extensive Chinese media coverage of the unprecedented surge of South Korean popular culture in the People's Republic of China (*ibid.*, 101–2).

The professor posits the Chinese affection for all things Korean on the premise of mutual cultural affinities. He asserts that over thousands of years China and Korea have had a close historical relationship that has led to a common cultural background. In Cai's view, both China and Korea belong to the East Asian Confucian circle of culture in the sense that the civilisation of Han has deeply influenced not only the Korean language and values, but also Korea's etiquette, customs and social structure. According to Cai, it is for these reasons that the Chinese find it easy to accept and understand the cultural commodities produced by the Korean Wave (*ibid.*, 103).

Importantly, Cai finds the dissemination and popularity of the Korean Wave among Chinese audiences very significant for the following causes.

First, the social influences of *hallyu* might encourage contemporary Chinese to reassess their own cultural legacy, because traditional culture in the People's Republic

of China is experiencing a substantial decline. Cai observes that Chinese people admire contemporary South Korean culture because it awakens a distant memory of their own traditional civilisation. The professor expresses the hope that the substantial impact of the Korean Wave in the People's Republic of China will give rise to a renaissance in traditional Chinese culture (*ibid.*).

Second, according to the professor, the social impact of the Korean Wave in the People's Republic of China might aid Chinese people in successfully merging Oriental and Occidental elements not only in an economic context but also in a cultural one, since contemporary South Korean culture is a most eloquent example of such a cultural blend, borrowing the best of Western pop cultures and recreating it according to Korean tastes (*ibid.*, 105).

It is said that before the surge of the Korean Wave the dominant image of Korea for the Taiwanese had been one filled with roughness, violence, and a lack of cultural refinement. Due to their cheerful background music, special emphasis on visual imagery, and overall professional cinematography, not to mention impeccable acting, South Korean dramas have revised the former unfavourable Taiwanese opinion about Korea (Sung 2008, 14). For instance, Jennifer Pai, a journalist at the Central News Agency of Taiwan, admires South Korea's ability to enhance its international image by emerging from the financial crisis relatively unscathed and simultaneously giving birth to the graceful Korean Wave (Pai 2008, 33).

According to Pai, it was due to the import of professionally made South Korean TV dramas that the Korean Wave hit the island of Taiwan. However, temporarily putting the high quality of the South Korean creative goods aside, Pai adds that the popularity of the Korean Wave in the Republic of China likewise owes its existence to the fact that Taiwan never had a homogenous deep-rooted culture of its own and therefore lacks the social stamina to resist foreign influences (*ibid.*, 34).

Another major factor that Pai discerns as crucial in determining the success of South Korean cultural produce is the popularisation of Korean music by Taiwanese singers long before the Korean Wave swept the Taiwanese off their feet. As a typical example, Pai sets forth the Taiwanese pop-singer Hsu Huaiyu, also known as Yuki Hsu, who came to prominence in 1988. On her first and second albums, 4 of 10 and 5 of 11 songs were of Korean origin (*ibid.*, 35).

The following is a personal account of a certain Miss Chuang, a Taiwanese office worker in her 20s, on her first encounter with South Korean pop culture:

When I was a ninth-grader I first saw on cable TV what was being broadcast on Korea's Channel V: hit songs and music performed by H.O.T., Fin.k.l., Sechs Kies, Shinhwa, and other bands. I was intoxicated by the Korean performers' cool and dizzying styles; I immediately fell in love with their looks, singing and dancing. I have been enamoured with them ever since. (*Ibid.*, 35–6)

In order to further contribute to the spread of the Korean Wave in Taiwan and thus recruit new fans, many of Taiwan's cable TV channels and radio stations air programmes about news pertaining to South Korean entertainment culture. Pai lists the following broadcasters: Channel V, MTV, ICRT (International Community Radio Taipei), HitFM, etc. (ibid., 37).

Besides the above mentioned Miss Chuang, Pai introduces a certain middle-class Taiwanese widow who, according to the journalist, is a great fan of the South Korean singer Rain (Jung Jihoon), the male protagonist in the South Korean TV drama *Full House* (2004), and would therefore would like to fly to South Korea on a buying spree before CDs and MVs containing his artistic output are exported to Taiwan. The Taiwanese widow accounts for her seemingly irrational behaviour and almost adolescent fervour by pointing out that K-pop and South Korean dramas are 'miracles' that have added spice to her life and made her feel much younger (ibid.).

Further elaborating on the first-hand experiences of the devoted fans of the Korean Wave, Pai discusses the case of a certain Mrs. Shen, a successful career woman in her late 40s, who continued to ignore the seeming omnipresence of the Korean Wave in Taiwan until she was strongly recommended to give it a try by the parents of her son's classmates. Consequently, she rented the whole series of *Jewel in the Palace* (2003) and was immediately bewitched by the historical drama (ibid., 38).

Kathleen Morikawa, a writer living in Japan, equates the climax of the Korean Wave in Japan with the Japanese frenzy over the South Korean drama *Winter Sonata* (2002). In November 2004, thousands of Bae Yongjoon fans clogged Narita Airport in order to welcome the visiting actor. Morikawa notes that as many as ten people were injured as a crowd gathered outside his Tokyo hotel to catch a glimpse of him (Morikawa 2008, 83). According to the writer, today the *hallyu* boom within the borders of Japan has transformed into a much calmer but at the same time widespread interest in South Korean popular culture, including South Korean customs, lifestyle and cuisine (ibid.).

Morikawa emphasises that it would be downright misleading to believe that each and every Japanese rides the Korean Wave, for some remain stubbornly uninterested, but it is true that the social influences of the Korean Wave have encouraged the Japanese to widen their perceptions about Korea and thus to better understand their neighbouring country (ibid.).

In Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan where the writer presently resides, South Korean dramas are especially popular and signs of the Korean Wave can be seen virtually everywhere: local bookstores sell a wide array of *hallyu* magazines, local terrestrial TV broadcasts five to six South Korean TV series each week, etc. Morikawa further notices the amazing effect of the Korean Wave in Japan by highlighting that

due to popular demand the South Korean dramas in Japan are showed with Japanese subtitles and not Japanese voice-overs. Besides, a great many South Korean dramas are aired on Japan's dozens of satellite TV channels (ibid., 84).

Morikawa notes that it was due to the South Korean historical dramas and lighter comedies that were both broadcast on satellite TV or available for sale or rental on DVD that the number of fans of the Korean Wave expanded to include both sexes and all age groups (ibid., 86). Interestingly, the insatiable appetite of the most dedicated fans has led major publishers in Tokyo to issue an impressive array of *hallyu* magazines, glossy photo-heavy magazine-like books known in Japan as 'mooks' (ibid.). Even quicker access to South Korean entertainment news is available via cell phones, and truly devoted *hallyu* fans can even check their intelligence in the field by taking an online introductory-level 'Hallyu Kente', a Japanese-like proficiency test on the Korean Wave, successful completion of which entitles one to a certificate of proficiency and might earn a special TV tour to South Korea (ibid., 86–7).

Morikawa stresses that the most popular South Korean dramas in Japan are the following: *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Jewel in the Palace* (2003), *Stairway to Heaven* (2003), *Beautiful Days* (2001) and *Hotelier* (2001). The Japanese fans of the Korean Wave perceive the South Korean dramas to be of overall high quality, marked by a sincere and straightforward style, embellished with free expression of emotions, and endowed with romantic male protagonists (ibid., 87–8). Considering the aforementioned category of overall high quality, one should mention excellent camera work, underlying passion, professional direction, and witty and original dialogue and plots. The distinctness of the South Korean dramas likewise lies in their special regard for fashion and beautiful background music (ibid., 88–9).

All in all, contrary to some scholars, Morikawa predicts that the Korean Wave will die neither in Japan nor in other East Asian countries and that the Japanese fans of *hallyu* will continue to ride the Korea Wave, thus bringing the peninsula and the archipelago even closer together through couch-potato or soap-opera diplomacy (ibid., 90).

### ***The narrow manifestations of the cinematic aspect of the Korean Wave in Lithuania***

Unless one has been specialising in the East Asia region or has otherwise been confronted with Korean issues, the average Lithuanian would describe Korea as an extremely distant and politically divided nation in which its citizens eat dogs. In terms of South Korea, the overall description would be compounded of such attributes as high-tech and prosperous. Concerning North Korea, one would invoke the imminent and lethal threat that the socialist regime poses to the international political system.

Lithuania severely lacks Korea-oriented specialists of any nature much as Lithuanian libraries lack academic material covering Korea. Of the three East Asian cultures, i.e. pan-Chinese, Japanese and Korean, the latter is by far the least known to Lithuanian audiences, its cinematic aspect being no exception. No South Korean television drama has ever been aired by any Lithuanian broadcaster. Virtually all of the South Korean films that have ever been screened in Lithuanian cinemas have been subsumed under the schedule of local film festivals, which are rare and lack proper advertising. Essentially no DVD containing any South Korean cinematic goods can immediately be purchased in any Lithuanian store.

Despite these impediments, the interest of Lithuanian audiences in the cinematic aspect of South Korean popular culture is gradually growing, which is displayed by the relatively modest yet steady proliferation of online blogs and chat rooms discussing the merits and shortcomings of the new South Korean cinema.

Data provided on the internet website [www.kinas.info](http://www.kinas.info), which is by far the largest online informational site assessing the overall performance of foreign films in the Lithuanian market and allowing visitors to evaluate selected cinematic pieces of art by means of either voting on a ten-point scale or contributing a comment or both, suggest the following: (a) of the sixteen South Korean movies broadcast by the four largest Lithuanian broadcasters from 2005 to 2009, six were directed by Kiduk Kim; (b) the channel Baltijos (Baltic) TV (BTV) has been the most Korea-oriented Lithuanian broadcaster, with a total of nineteen broadcasts of South Korean cinema from 2006 to 2009; (c) *Hwal* (2005) by Kim Kiduk, *Out Live* (2000) by Kim Youngyun, and *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (2003) by Kim Kiduk have drawn the greatest amount of Lithuanian viewers' attention with 288, 121 and 109 votes, respectively.

The data gathered on the official website of the Vilnius International Film Festival show that, of fourteen South Korean movies screened in Lithuanian theatres from 2004 to 2009, five were directed by Kim Kiduk and three by Park Chanwook. The screening location of the South Korean movies was predominantly Vilnius and the screening duration of the films in question was restricted to a single screening or a modest amount of showings over a period of several days. It was extremely rare for any film to attract more than a few thousand viewers.

### ***The South Korean government's response to the Korean Wave***

The phenomenal success of South Korean pop culture began to hit the headlines in the South Korean media in the late 1990s. The South Korean government realised that the export-oriented economy had found a new overseas market in the midst of the national plight of the IMF-directed economic restructuring (Shim, Doobo 2008,

28). Impressed by the sensational economic performance of South Korean cultural commodities abroad, the South Korean government established 'cultural technology' (i.e. the technology that produces television dramas, films, pop music, computer games, animation, etc.) as one of the six key technologies alongside IT (information technology) and BT (biotechnology) and pledged a huge amount of financial investment and administrative support to domestic cultural industries (ibid.).

Significantly, in 2001 for this very cause the South Korean government founded the Korea Culture and Content Agency with an annual budget of US\$90 million (Lee 2011, 89). It later merged with other institutes to become the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA). The official KOCCA leaflet reveals the following spheres of activity: (a) support for content production and promotion of creativity, encompassing the broadcasting and visual content industry, game industry, cartoon industry, character industry, animation industry, and music industry; (b) support for exports and international exchange; (c) development and promotion of cultural technology (CT) and future convergence content; (d) building infrastructure for the content industry; (e) policy development, survey, and research.<sup>1</sup>

The South Korean government also launched in 2001 Broadcast Worldwide (BCWW), an annual broadcasting content tradeshow for developers, distributors, buyers, sellers, producers and investors. It is considered Asia's largest trade fair in the broadcasting and visual industry (Alessi 2011, 16). For instance, according to data presented by Shim Doobo, the 2005 BCWW was attended by approximately 3,500 buyers, investors and other media professionals. South Korean producers were reported to have earned US\$15 million during this four-day event. Specifically, South Korean television dramas, including *Lovers in Prague* (2005) and *My Name Is Kim Sam-soon* (2005), accounted for about US\$9 million in sales (Shim, Doobo 2008, 28).

Naturally, as soon as the Korean Wave started, anti-*hallyu* sentiments began to emerge sporadically. Any overtly enthusiastic attempt on the part of the South Korean government to promote South Korean cultural commodities is bound to be confronted with hostility. Luckily, these have not been numerous. For instance, Shim discerns but a few of them, such as the Korean Embassy's sponsored road shows of South Korean films or the Korean Overseas Information Service's (which is subordinate to the Government Information Agency) provision of television dramas to broadcasting networks in Egypt and Mongolia free of charge (ibid., 28–9).

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<sup>1</sup> The official leaflet is available online from <[http://eucck.org/storage/contents\\_files/500\\_599/579/kocca.pdf](http://eucck.org/storage/contents_files/500_599/579/kocca.pdf)>.

## Conclusions

The overall data gathered while conducting research leads to the conclusion that the phenomenon of *hallyu* was never a calculated attempt on the part of the South Korean government to better its international prestige and might, at least in the initial stages of the phenomenon in question.

Rather, the rise and spread of the Korean Wave happened due to what may only be referred to as felicitous timing and favourable circumstances, both on the domestic and international plane. Significantly, while the South Korean government always played a supportive and considerate role, its underlying ends were basically economic rather than political. Indeed, the very fact that cultural industries can prove to be highly profitable was as surprising to South Korean political decision makers as the overall international success of the Korean Wave was. More aggressive marketing and sporadic attempts to take advantage of the outstanding performance of South Korean creative goods abroad were pursued by the South Korean government only after the phenomenon in question was in full swing.

The Korean Wave has been significant within the East Asia region because of the following reasons: (a) the Korean Wave has provided its overseas fans with personal satisfaction; (b) the Korean Wave has bettered the diplomatic relations among the East Asia countries; (c) the Korean Wave has set considerably high quality standards for any similar prospective regional movements, thus contributing to the overall future quality of cultural produce in East Asia; (d) the Korean Wave has fostered healthy nationalism, self-esteem, and inter-cultural tolerance in the countries of East Asia.

Even though all elements of the Korean Wave have enjoyed astounding success within East Asia, South Korean TV dramas have made the strongest influence on the dynamics of the East Asia region, surpassing even that of South Korean films and pop music.

So far the manifestations of the cinematic aspect of South Korean popular culture and the Korean Wave in general in Lithuania have been relatively meagre and therefore insignificant. Among Lithuanian audiences the most popular South Korean movie director is Kim Kiduk and the most popular South Korean movie is Kim Kiduk's *Hwal* (2005). Kino Pavasaris, an international film festival in Vilnius, has screened two or more South Korean movies each year since 2004, the *status quo* implying that South Korean cinema has secured itself a modest Lithuanian fan base, which is luckily gradually increasing. No official appearances of South Korean television dramas have however been witnessed in the Lithuanian media market so far.

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