

South Korea's Public Diplomacy Through the Phenomenon of Korean Wave

Anggun Tamara and Prof. Dr. Tulus Warsito., MSi.

*Department of International Program of International
Relations
Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta*

ABSTRACT

Korean popular culture has spread contagiously throughout the world, such as in Asia, Europe, and America in the last decade. Korean popular culture also well-known as the Korean Wave. The examples of Korean Wave are popular music, television dramas, movies, dances, fashions, foods, tourisms, video games and language. Korean Wave also has assisted to improve South Korea's national image, its financial system and has been visible as a means for South Korea's public diplomacy towards other countries around the world. The main focus of this paper is to analyze the government of South Korea's strategies in conducting the Korean Wave as its public diplomacy. Moreover, this paper will examine how Korean Wave gives the impacts to the public opinion so that they can change their notion towards South Korea. In the end, the writer will make an interpretive conclusion towards South Korea's public diplomacy thorough the phenomenon of the Korean Wave.

Keywords: *Korean Wave, South Korea, public diplomacy, relations, new image*

Background

The current cultural globalization's development in the taste of media consumption within the regions, such as *Bollywood* in South Asia, *Telenovelas* in Latin America, and *Trendy Dramas* in East Asia. Contemporary *dramas* are originating from Japan, yet it could create nuts for Japanese commodities in the neighboring countries (Iwabuch, 2004). Same as Japan, South Korea has developed as the fortress for the regional exports, let us see from many kinds of Korean Wave such as, Korean dramas, movies, fashion, pop music, tourism, games, and food that already spread throughout the world.

According to the Korea Tourism Organization, it stated that the deployment of the Korean pop culture's popularity throughout Asia is called the Korean Wave. Starting in the late 1990 and partially reinforced by Korean pop songs, the Korean Wave had transformed into a phenomenon at the beginning of 2000, when dramas had a substantial impact in many countries in Asia (Rocha, 2012). This phenomenon affirms how popular culture helps amplify the country's economic competitiveness and improve the nation image in the global market.

One of the reasons why Korean Wave has emerged is that there was a fear that Korean culture would dissolve in modernization. Moreover, in the late 1980s, the flood of American product was almost wiped out the Korean culture, and this naturally stimulates the nationalism. Nevertheless, global capitalism and the Korean nationalism are very suitable, since the discourse on national identity emphasized the importance of selling Korean cultural products in the global market (Cho H. J., 1999).

In the beginning, Korean Wave is conducted by the South Korean government as the tool to reinforce the Korean industry to the global market so that it can boost the economic interest of South Korea. However, in 2007 after Lee Myung-Bak was elected as South Korea's president, he frequently used the term Korean Wave and its growing popularity as a method of improving the national image. Furthermore, in the 45th anniversary of National Broadcasting Day, Lee gave the speech focused on defining the role of Korean Wave in strengthening the nation prestige (Tae Young Kim, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the research question and analyze the case study of this research, thus the writer will use the public diplomacy theory.

1. Public Diplomacy

According to the Oxford dictionary, diplomacy can be defined as the ability of the country in managing relations with other countries (Bull, 2008). While, according to the diplomatic dictionary, it defined diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations and holding the relations inter-states, also the ability to managing affairs without arousing the hostility (state.gov). In other words, diplomacy is a method used to achieve the interests of an actor peacefully, so that it can suppress the creation of war because war is considered the last way to overcome conflict. There are various types of diplomacy, and one of them is public diplomacy proposed by Mark Leonard. He argued that public diplomacy is a way to build relationships by understanding the needs, culture, and society; communicate views; justify misperceptions that exist in the international community; look

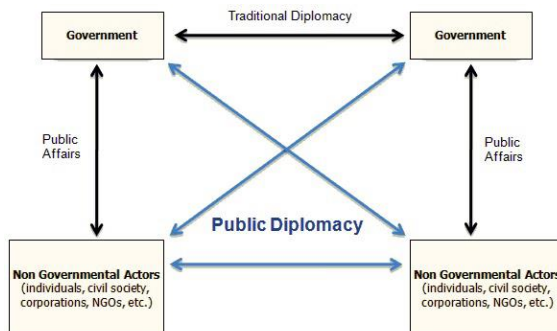
for areas where the government can find common ground (Leonard, 2002).

Fundamentally, public diplomacy is related to communication management among diplomatic actors, whether states and non-state actors, that have specific motivation goals to reach the foreign public through various communication channels to promote national interests. Above all, in contemporary public diplomacy, the focus has shifted from conventional diplomatic ways and objectives to promotion to cultivating relations with primary foreign publics (Guy j. golan, 2015). Kevin Mulcahy and Harv Feigenbaum are the researchers in cultural diplomacy had described the connection among actors involved in public diplomacy. Traditionally, public diplomacy as perceived includes:

- a. Governmental support of the programs in the cultural, educational moreover, informational domains
- b. Exchanges of citizens;
- c. Programs oriented towards informing and influencing foreign audiences (Elena, 2000)

Kevin Mulcahy also provided a figure that shows us the difference between actors in traditional diplomacy and actors in public diplomacy. Please look at the figure below.

Figure 1. Traditional Diplomacy vs Public Diplomacy



Source: after a figure realized by Kevin Mulcahy

The relationships that are established through public diplomacy are expected to create a good environment for international societies to work together and increase transactions among them. Mark Leonard assessed that four objectives could be achieved by public diplomacy, among other things:

- a. Increasing people's familiarity with one's country (making them think about it, updating their images, turning around unfavorable opinions)
- b. Increasing people's appreciation of one's country (creating positive perceptions, getting others to see issues of global importance from the same perspective)
- c. Engaging people with one's country (strengthening ties – from education reform to scientific co-operation; encouraging people to see us as an attractive destination for tourism, study, distance learning; getting them to buy our products; getting to understand and subscribe to our values)
- d. Influencing people (investors, public to back our positions or politicians to turn to us as a favored partner) (Leonard, 2002).

Recalling at the objectives stated by Mark, we can see that public diplomacy requires two-way communication to create good communication. Thus, the values and messages given can be received without misunderstanding. This also shows that public diplomacy is different from propaganda. Propaganda is often considered to have the same meaning as public diplomacy because propaganda also serves to influence others to have the same thoughts as we want. While in public diplomacy, it is emphasized that in the process, we must also listen to the opinions of others and not be compelling.

In conducting the Korean Wave as the public diplomacy, the South Korean government had cooperations with several

non-governmental actors, such as, individuals, group of people, professionals, and management companies. We can take some examples, one of the most famous music magazines in the world, Billboard, has announced the K-pop Hot 100 Chart in 2011. Furthermore, when several groups singers of South Korea such as Big Bang, 2NE1 and Girls' Generation held concerts, their concerts also sold out all over the world including in the US and UK. In order to connect with international fans, they mix other foreign languages into their songs, like Mandarin, English, and Japanese deliberately. It has seen that the South Korean government did collaborations with some group of people to conduct Korean Wave as its public diplomacy.

South Korea uses public diplomacy as a means to build cooperative relations with other countries around the world. The action of the South Korean government which supports Korean Wave is one part of its diplomatic effort which aims to build a good image of South Korea. The writer used this theory because the South Korean government utilizes Korean Wave as the nation branding of South Korea with the other countries around the world. The public diplomacy aims to influence the opinions and interests of the international societies so that it can facilitate South Korea and other countries in creating a form of cooperation that benefits each party.

Research Methodology

This research was done using a qualitative research method by collecting information from credible sources such as a book, journals, and articles that are analyzed using the theoretical framework mentioned in the previous part. The internet-based source also has a vital role in order to provide data such as charts, pictures, articles, and reports in order to obtain the update information.

Result and Discussion

In order to conduct the Korean Wave as public diplomacy, the government do several actions, including create some policies and do cooperation with several non-governmental actors, such as the film and drama makers, internet, entertainment companies, individual, business companies, and media.

A. Government Creates the Policy

In helping the growth of the Korean Wave, the government has played an immense role. The reason is that in the 1980s under Chun's administration, in order to shift the public's concern from politics. The government made the societies concerned watching movies and television dramas, through airing as many as possible the television dramas. The government believed that, if the societies were too focused on watching television dramas and movies, thus the societies will not have time to demonstrate. According to Park Seung-Hyun in his journal, he argued that the government was actively promoting the Korean film industry itself and making all television networks owned by the Korean television government (Seung-hyun, 2002).

At that time, there were only two themes of Korean drama, namely love stories and historical dramas. It is because the drama and filmmakers were not allowed to make dramas that show the current situation of South Korea at that time. Although the South Korean government never told the drama makers clearly what themes they should make, however, the government censored political drama, and indirectly this made the drama makers should make other themes. It is evident that there is transparent cooperation between the Korean government and drama makers (ibid).

The use of music on television shows is another development that can be found in the 1980s besides the

development of television dramas. The government can also influence what people hear on radio and television. This was because two broadcast networks such as KBS and MBC have been declared as government property. Since at that time South Korea did not allow foreign popular culture to be imported into the country, so there was a big vacuum that had to be filled on television. Music shows are relatively inexpensive to make and entertain. In his journal, Dooboo Shim noted that in the 1980s South Korea did not have an independent music industry. He also stated that the government could decide what type of music would be played on radio and television (Shim, 2006).

President Chun turned over the leadership of his party to his friend Roh in 1987. In order to demand more democracy, new protests soon emerged in South Korea at that time. Roh's concern arose if he did not permit the elections, so his leadership will compete too much. To get much support from the societies, he promised more freedom. Apart from allowing elections, he also began allowing American popular culture to be imported into the Korean market. Thus, Hollywood films could be imported into South Korea directly in 1987. This means a sudden increase in Hollywood films in South Korea. The film industry in South Korea believes that their products will disappear if they do not start making better quality films. In the end, the cultural industry in South Korea can develop even slowly.

The Asian Financial crisis in 1997 hit many Asian countries. South Korea was one of the countries who got the impact. Inevitably, South Korea must borrow money from the IMF and the United States to help its country condition. However, the IMF strongly demanded that South Korea should continue to open its markets to other countries. Furthermore, South Korea must recover the country's economy. As a result of this shift, for the first time in history, Japanese popular

culture can be imported into South Korea. It made the cultural industry in South Korea experiencing more competition.

In doing so, the experiences made more innovation in the Korean film industry, so they began to emulate Hollywood by combining and adding their original characteristics and developing uniquely in innovative ways (Shim, 2006). In order to improve the quality of films produced by the film industry, the government began to establish a film quota system. Film quota required cinemas in Korea to play Korean films for at least 146 days a year. As a side effect of this, the number of Hollywood films imported and watched in South Korea was much reduced. (ibid).

Under Kim Dae Jung's leadership, in order to fix the South Korean economy in 1998, the government made the cultural sector as one of their primary targets for growth. The reason behind this was that Korean films and music are expected to generate many benefits for South Korea. The 5-year plan or often called as the 'broadcast video promotion plan' was made by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 1998. The purpose of this plan is to support the Korean Film Board while the function of this institution is to fund Korean films and promote its exports abroad.

In order to promote the Korean Wave, the Korean Broadcasting Commission went directly to some countries like Indonesia, Thailand, and India. The trip had a direct impact on Korean dramas export to those countries (Millim, 2011). We can see that after those countries got to know about the Korean Wave, then they will get more familiarity towards South Korea. It seems that the government had successful public diplomacy with other countries.

The Ministry of Tourism established an Advisory Committee to find how to maintain the Korean wave in culture and sports realms in 2012. In the promotion of the Korean Wave, even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trades also

participated (Chung-un, 2012). Together with the Korean Broadcasting Commission, they visited distant countries to promote Korean dramas such as countries in South America, the Middle East, and Africa. This has paid off that countries like Paraguay, Peru, Iran, and Eswatini have now broadcast Korean dramas. On Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website, they stated that besides their aim of promoting the Korean Wave to the international community, their aim was also to promote South Korea itself.

B. The Cooperations Between the Government and Non-Governmental Actors

As the writer has mentioned above that in conducting the Korean Wave as the public diplomacy, the South Korean government do the cooperations with some non-governmental actors. Both actors whether government and non-governmental actors played an immense role in conducting the Korean Wave as South Korea's public diplomacy towards other countries around the world.

1. *Internet*

KOCIS stated that in the spread of the Korean Wave, one of the factors that accelerated its deployment was the internet. Internet really helps something to spread easily and quickly. Some social medias that contribute in the spreading of the Korean Wave, such as Youtube, Twitter, and Facebook. Therefore, in recent years, the majority of Korean Wave fans have also enjoyed K-pop or watching Korean dramas for the first time on the Internet, the Internet has become a very influential media throughout the world. They also saw that the dance had its selling value. Many K-pop fans around the world tried to dance like their idols and then upload it on the internet.

2. *Entertainment Companies*

We cannot forget the role of Korean entertainment companies in the development of the Korean Wave itself. One of the pioneers who played a significant role in the development of K-pop is Lee Soo Man. Lee Soo Man is the founder of SM Entertainment, one of the most famous record companies in South Korea today. Many idol groups created by this company, such as H.O.T., BoA, SHINee, Super Junior, SNSD, and many more. Lee Soo Man once dreamed of bringing J-pop style music to South Korea. Although J-pop was not that popular in South Korea, Lee Soo Man thought positively that this type of music could become popular in South Korea someday. Then he imitated the style of the favorite Japanese metal band X-Japan and created a band of its own.

Ironically, all of his band's concerts were canceled when Chun's administration ran in 1980. At that time, it turned out that music bands were also banned from filling out shows on television. After learning about this uncomfortable reality, Lee Soo Man decided to move to America to study computer engineering. In America, he even received a reference from MTV. MTV was one of the major TV channels at that time, a music station that broadcast many pop music videos with dances in the video. Lee admitted that it was possible to be able to replicate this success and bring it to South Korea.

When he returned to South Korea, in 1989, he began to form SM Entertainment. H.O.T, the first boy band in South Korea, in 1996 made its first debut. The members were chosen not because of their singing skills but because of their dancing skills. One member won the dance competition, and after that, he asked to join the group. Two other members were found when they danced on the street. Although the group broke up in 2001, the group has inspired many boys and girls to try and become K-pop stars as well. (Tuk).

As with Lee Soo Man, Yang Hyun Suk was another important actor in the development of the K-pop industry. In

1991, he became a dancer in the music group Seo Taiji and Boys. Seo Taiji and Boys was the first group to use rap and dance in Korean songs. After Seo Taiji and Boys broke up, in 1998, Yang Hyun Suk then formed YG Entertainment. YG Entertainment later became the second largest entertainment company in South Korea after SM Entertainment. YG Entertainment specializes in using hip hop as a basis for their songs. Several groups and singers who are contracted with YG Entertainment until today are Big Bang, Psy, 2NE1, and many more.

3. *Business Companies and Individual*

The government believes that the Korean Wave is a means used to get more profits. Their views are almost similar to those of commercial businesses. Research on the Korean Wave was carried out by various giant companies such as Samsung, Hyundai, and LG. These companies acknowledge that the Korean Wave makes it easier to sell products abroad. LG Electronics, for example, has awarded the benefits of the Korean wave.

The real evidence that can be seen is that after using actor Ahn Jae Wook from a Korean drama entitled *Stars in My Heart* in commercial advertising in Vietnam, sales in that country have increased (Tuk). In order to increase the popularity of the Korean wave, the LG company gave Korean dramas for free to TV stations in Vietnam and even paid for dubbing from the drama. The Samsung company does another case. They made advertisements for LCD TVs in China and also invited actor Ahn Jae Wook to promote the company's products. Samsung has taken over Phillips as a new LCD TV in China.

4. *Media*

Another actor who helps the government in conducting the Korean Wave as its public diplomacy is the media. Korean

news media began to write about the Korean Wave since 2001. Initially, when the news report came out, the general public was very surprised by this news and questioned the validity of the report. It also because the Korean media have not been able to provide a satisfying reason why Korean dramas can be top-rated in China and Japan at that time. Until when a Korean drama entitled *Winter Sonata* became very popular in Japan, photos of Bae Yong Joon arrived at the airport in Tokyo in 2003 and many Japanese women were waiting for him, making Koreans begin to believe that the Korean Wave was something serious to noticed (Toru Hanaki, 2007).

That inspired all new writings about the Korean Wave abroad. Since then, many news about Korean singers, artists and actors have been written from a very nationalistic perspective. In fact, in Korean newspapers, professors and politicians were interviewed to give their opinions on the phenomenon of the Korean Wave (Jeongsuk, 2011). Their argument remains in the writing of Korean journalists. Everyone is proud that the Korean Wave is liked by all circles in the world, including politicians, journalists, and ordinary people

Conclusion

South Korea is one of the countries in East Asia whose culture has become a phenomenon in the early 2000s. The world's attention began to point to South Korea when South Korea succeeded in the film and music industry. As a result of this, a term called the Korean Wave emerged. The Korean wave represents people's madness towards South Korean popular culture. Many countries in the world are affected by the Korean Wave, for the example is Taiwan. Korean wave has contributed to improving the national image of South Korea. The Asian news framework explicitly emphasizes the nation's sense of branding against the Korean wave.

Although historical factors have been able to stretch South Korea's relations with its neighboring countries, however, thanks to the phenomenon of the Korean Wave, the stretching relationship can be closed again. Korean popular culture is expected to increase the interest of the international community towards South Korea. The main impact that South Korea can feel from the Korean Wave phenomenon is in the economic field — exporting various types of Korean popular culture products not only promoting South Korean photos abroad but also adding to South Korea's economic benefits.

In conducting the Korean Wave as the public diplomacy, the South Korean government played an important role even though the government also collaborated with non-government actors, including the film and drama makers, the Chaebols (Samsung, Lg, and Hyundai), the entertainment companies (SM entertainment and YG entertainment), individuals, and media. For South Korea itself, they feel proud if the entertainment products they release are not only to fill local needs but can be an alternative entertainment for the world community.

Actors who work with the government as if they are connected. The government as the actor has the right to issue policies on what products to produce, filmmakers and dramas who are trying to make beautiful quality films and dramas, Chaebols who can fund these dramas, and artists who have represented South Korea in various overseas events. We also cannot forget the role of media and the internet. Korean media always present news that is smelly and internet and also a means to help the phenomenon of the Korean Wave spread easily and quickly to all corners of the world. Since the beginning of a national phenomenon, the Korean government plays an active role by helping the Korean media in publicizing Korean popular culture throughout the world. This global expansion penetrated various communication media throughout the world. Therefore, the success of the Korean

wave can be attributed to that published in media throughout the world.

In the end, South Korea is utilizing the phenomenon of Korean Wave to gain its national interest, namely public diplomacy with other countries in the world. Thus, the world community will be more familiar with South Korea, know more about South Korea, and want to visit South Korea and even invest in South Korea because these things can improve the welfare of the Korean people themselves.

References

- Bull, V. (2008). *Oxford: Learner's Pocket Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cho, H. J. (1999). Constructing and Deconstructing "Korean-ness" in 1990s South Korea. *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, 65-102.
- Chung-un, C. (2012, April 3). *Ministry launches a panel to get advice on hallyu*. Retrieved January 7, 2019, from The Korea Herald: <http://nwww.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20120403001013>
- Guy j. Golan, s.-u. y. (2015). *International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc
- Iwabuch, K. (2004). *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Jeongsuk, J. (2011). Transnationalization of Korean Popular and the Rise of "Pop Nationalism". *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 489-504.
- Leonard, M. (2002). *Public Diplomacy*. London: Foreign Policy Centre.
- Millim, K. (2011). The Role of the government in the cultural industry. Some observations from Korea's Experience. *Keio Communication Review*, 163-182

- Rocha, N. L. (2012). Hallyu y su Impacto en la Sociedad Mexicana. *Estudios Hispánicos*, 579-598.
- Seung-hyun, P. (2002). Film censorship and political legitimization in South Korea. *Cinema Journal*, pp. 120-138.
- Shim, D. (2006). Hybridity and the rise of Korean popular culture in Asia. *Media, Culture & Society*, 25-44.
- State.gov. (t.thn.). *Diplomatic Dictionary*. Retrieved May 8, 2018, from Discover Diplomacy: <https://diplomacy.state.gov/discoverdiplomacy/references/169792.htm>
- Toru Hanaki, A. S. (2007). Hanryu Sweeps East Asia How Winter Sonata is Gripping Japan. *International Communication Gazette*, 281-294.
- Tuk, W. (n.d.). Who are behind the success of Korean popular culture? *Master's Thesis*, 57