

Soft Power of Korean Popular Culture in Sri Lanka

Amalini Fernando¹

In recent years, there has been a surge in the international visibility of South Korean culture throughout the world. Korean popular culture, also known as the “Korean Wave” (Hallyu in Korean) ranges from Korean music (K-pop), dramas (K-drama), movies, video games, food, fashion, tourism, and language (Hangul). This cultural phenomenon has also resulted in multi-layered transnational movement of people, information and capital flows to and from South Korea. The main focus of this paper is to examine the essence of the Korean Wave and its impact in Sri Lankan society through the concept of soft power. In particular, this paper explores the origin and spread of the Korean Wave in Sri Lanka, the relationship between the spread of the Korean culture and social changes in the country, and the changes in the public perception towards South Korea. Hallyu fan communities in Sri Lanka are a testimony to how contemporary Korean culture is received outside the geographically and culturally proximate markets of East Asia and outside the major economic and consumer-driven markets of North America and Europe. Furthermore, images and information about South Korea are not familiar to Sri Lankan life as Sri Lankans do not share any significant historical or cultural relations with South Korea. In such a background, the introduction and spread of Korean culture in a short span of time is remarkable. This experience helps to understand Korea’s influence in South Asia which is heavily influenced by Indian and colonial cultures. More broadly, the paper attempts to examine how diffusion of popular culture in a small state such as Sri Lanka increases the soft power of the origin nation. The findings conclude that the constant consumption of Korean popular cultural products has indeed affected the image Sri Lankans have towards South Korea in a positive way, by improving their knowledge and perception of South Korea. It also has urged the consumers to travel to South Korea, learn the language and build social networks with the Koreans.

Keywords: *Korean Wave, Popular Culture, Soft Power, Sri Lanka, South Korea*

¹ Department of International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya.
amalinifernando@gmail.com