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A Conscious Creation? Political Economy, Globalisation and Cultural Representation in Terrestrial South Korean Miniseries 2002-2017

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A CONSCIOUS CREATION? POLITICAL ECONOMY, GLOBALISATION
AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN TERRESTRIAL SOUTH KOREAN
MINISERIES 2002-2017

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to determine the extent to which miniseries broadcast across three Korean terrestrial public and commercial networks - KBS, MBC, and SBS - between 2002 and 2017 suitably reflect Korean culture and society. It investigates the changes in common cultural themes and representations across this period, unravelling the complex relationship between business, culture, and the evolution of content within this media form.

The contribution to knowledge of this research rests on its methods: the employment of a dual-strand approach of critical political economy and cultural studies. The critical political economy component relies on twelve semi-structured interviews with professionals working across policy, production and distribution. By examining political and economic dynamics at play, the thesis dissects influences and catalysts that have driven changes in the industry and the attributes of decision-making across the life course of the television drama.

The cultural studies strand examines cultural representation through a critical discourse analysis of 57 dramas (KBS - 24, MBC - 16, SBS - 17), varying between one in 2002 to seven in 2015 (average 3.5 per year), to identify larger trends over a broad period. The data was gathered through a coding method derived from Hofstede's six cultural dimensions and connected to three cultural perspectives - nationalist, neoliberal capitalist, and postcolonial/translocal regionalist (Cho Hae Joang, 2005; Lee Kee Hyeung, 2006; Cho Young Han, 2011) - to assess cultural representation and identify its permutations and revisions.

My hypothesis postulates the Korean miniseries presents idealised versions of cultural conservatism and economic capitalism which have shifted towards cultural progression and capitalist critique over the period of study; a shift ascribed to processes of globalisation, cultural hybridisation, and the pursuit of international audiences. However, my findings conclude that observed changes are likely not a premeditated shift towards progressivism, but rather an outcome of neoliberalism and cultural exchange. In particular, as per political economy insights, difficulty in securing funding compels both production houses and networks to stick to time-proven narratives and characterisations, whilst the competition for revenue and airtime perpetuates the tension of prioritising profit over promoting national culture, ultimately determining the direction of content development.

This research enhances our understanding of the intricate connections between business, cultural identity, and content in the Korean miniseries format. It provides valuable insights into cultural identity, themes, representation, and economic forces that have shaped the evolution of this popular media format, shedding light on the broader societal and economic implications within the Korean context.

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Thank you to my family - Mum, Dad, Sophie, Ted and Rufus - who have unconditionally supported me, all while listening to me complain, cry and curse. I love you.

This thesis is in loving memory of my dear Nanny and dedicated to her everlasting presence.

Declaration

The work included in this thesis is the author's own. It has not been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institution of learning.

List of Abbreviations

ARKO - Arts Council of Korea

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

EBS - Education Broadcasting System

FBC - Foundation of Broadcast Culture

FCC - Federal Communication Commission

GVC - Global Value Chain

IP - Intellectual Property

KBC - Korean Broadcasting Commission

KBS - Korea Broadcasting System

KCC - Korea Communications Commission

KCSC - Korean Communication Standards Commission

KFCC - Korea Federation of Content Creators

KOCCA - Korea Creative Content Agency

KOCIS - Korean Culture and Information Service

KOFICE - Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange

MBC - Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation

MCST - Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism

MCT – Ministry of Culture

OTT - Over-the-top (media service)

PPL - Product Placement

SBS - Seoul Broadcasting System

TBC - Tongyang Broadcasting Company

VOD - Video on Demand

Notes for Reference

For consistency, individuals with surnames of East Asian origin will be referred to by their surname first, even if they primarily work outside that region. For ease of reference, any citation of authors who share a surname will be referred to by their full name.

This thesis primarily applies the Revised Romanisation of Korean, but where appropriate, uses other Romanisation methods in instances of established use.

Estimated US dollar values are provided alongside Korean won, based on an approximate conversion rate of 1 KRW = 0.00077 USD.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Discovering the Wave

In 2009, shortly after graduating high school, I spontaneously decided to learn another language. Having attended my final years of high school in New Malden, a suburb of London said to be one of the most densely populated areas of Koreans outside of South Korea, I chose the language purely because of my access to it. I did not then realise the impact that decision would have almost fifteen years later.

Back then, the success of Psy's *Gangnam Style* (2012) or Netflix series *Squid Game* (2021) was inconceivable. When people found out that I was learning Korean, I regularly heard how 'strange' or 'unusual' it was. Often, it was only upon declaring that Korean is spoken more widely as a first language than French (Ethnologue, 2023), and its GDP is above Spain (International Monetary Fund, 2023), two commonly taught foreign languages in the UK, that these individuals saw the extent to which Eurocentric narratives had shaped their worldview.

By 2023, BTS had become one of the most successful music groups in the world, *Squid Game* became the most successful Netflix series of all time, and *Parasite* became the first foreign language film ever to win Best Picture at the Academy Awards. The country's cultural exports are now so well-known and popular, that few people have not consumed them in some form.

I watched my first Korean miniseries – a standalone series of roughly sixteen to twenty-four episodes – in 2009, the same year I started learning Korean. *Boys Over Flowers* (2009, KBS2) tells the story of poor high-schooler Geum Jan Di, who attains a

scholarship to an elite school and catches the attention of four attractive and wealthy classmates. The show captivated me and, though extravagant, its depiction of high school life seemed more relatable than the gratuitous sex and violence in British or American teen dramas of the same era.

Unknown to me then was the widespread use of this Cinderella narrative across East Asian media forms. The tale of a hardworking but poor girl who falls into a life of luxury appealed to a young generation increasingly affected by the imbalance of opportunity in a society that favours wealth.

It felt as though Korean dramas aged along with me as I shared with them the experiences of university (*Sungkyunkwan Scandal*, 2010, KBS2), entering the workforce (*Pinocchio*, 2015, SBS) and struggling with little money or good contacts behind me (*Fight for My Way*, 2017, KBS2). The attitudes and behaviour of characters changed over time, much like my own, and yet I had lived in an entirely different country and culture.

I also witnessed first-hand a change in these dramas over time, as damsels-in-distress transformed into weightlifters (*Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok Joo*, 2016, MBC) or superheroes (*Strong Girl Bong Soon*, 2017, JTBC).

It was my observation of these changes which sparked my desire to commence this project, as throughout the years of my undergraduate and master's degrees, my interest shifted from a hobby to an academic pursuit. At the time, academic publications available in English were limited, so I saw this as an opportunity to contribute to a

rapidly developing field of research.

1.2 Framing My Research Questions and Objectives

Based on my aforementioned experience with Korean dramas, I hypothesised they

presented an idealised version of cultural conservatism and economic capitalism, which

has trended more culturally progressive and capitalist-critical over time. This was a

trend I believe occurred, in large part, through processes of globalisation and cultural

hybridisation, fuelled by the opportunity of increasing international audiences and

profit.

The historical media and cultural imperialism imposed by the USA globally, and

exacerbated by their military presence, instigated a shift to what I consider to be an

'American' standard – a product most culturally palatable to a global audience. Yet it

was conservative slow-burn romances, a contrast to American equivalents, that

enchanted me and had already exported successfully to several regions around the world

(Elaskary, 2018; Han, 2019).

I initially conjectured three possible factors that contributed to this shift. First was the

influence of Western culture through imperialism and hybridisation. Korea's exposure

to Western culture was rapid in the post-war period as the American military became a

permanent fixture, and later amplified significantly through access to the Internet.

Secondly, I assumed that creators and legislators made conscious decisions to make the

industry more export-oriented over time. The widespread consumption of American

popular culture products ensured an almost global understanding of this culture, and

audiences would be more likely to accept content already aligned with this style.

Thirdly, any changes could have occurred through natural development, independent of

foreign influence or variables, such as natural societal and cultural shifts over time and across generations.

The title of this project, 'A Conscious Creation?' arises from Bourdieu's 'charismatic ideology of creation', in which he argued that in order to understand a piece of art, we must not only look at the art, but also look at the conditions of its production and reception (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 167).

My use of the term 'conscious creation' stems from my hypothesis of actively manufacturing a version of Korean culture that is intended to appear as 'real'. The representation of reality is a complicated process, even in non-fictional works such as news, documentaries, or PhD theses. In a fictional television series, we must recognise that the goal may not be to depict reality at all. This research aims to understand what controls or influences these depictions of 'reality'.

From this, the initial question I formed was: To what extent is the representation of Korean culture and society in the miniseries accurate? There are, of course, immediate issues with such a question. Culture is an immeasurable quantity, which when examined alone fails to make provision for the two most critical variables: mainstream Korean society and the miniseries. Both have indisputably changed over time, but the intention of this research is not to determine a causation, or suggest which occurred first, but to understand the correlation or syncing between these events.

Instead, I developed three main questions:

1. What are the common themes of the miniseries, and how have these changed over time?

2. To what extent can we claim that the miniseries is culturally, economically, and socially accurate?
3. Who decides what is Korean identity in the miniseries and why?

The first two questions more suitably cover the two variables of Korean society and the miniseries and can link their correlation. Question three, though broad, is designed as elementary, to lead on to the combination of the two strands of this research project: political economy and cultural studies.

1.2.1 Political Economy

Asserting that a drama series is both a consumable product and a cultural item, I firstly seek to answer: how do business and the culture industry influence production and content of the miniseries? The Korean Wave can be viewed as a business venture emboldened by government support to increase exports and promote economic investment. The result is a commodification of culture, as the profitability of entertainment products are placed over cultural value, and the success of the Korean Wave is directly tied to other national industries such as tourism, beauty and fashion.

As a result, production costs have significantly increased as the industry rapidly developed. Following multiple failures to increase the licence for public service broadcaster KBS since the early 2000s, and an industry-wide decrease in traditional advertising revenue, new forms of revenue had to be found. Product placement, sponsorships, and foreign investment became the most significant new forms of income. In addition, foreign investment became both prominent and controversial. as creators faced the challenge of balancing cultural content with the potentially contrasting views of foreign investors.

Furthermore, new forms of consumption, from cable networks to video-on-demand (VOD) services and web dramas, challenged terrestrial networks' historically strong audience share. Creative freedom and fewer restrictions on these new forms permitted more restricted content, including marginalised groups or taboo topics, leading to further loss of influence for terrestrial networks.

Secondly, I seek to answer: how do political and economic factors, such as neoliberalism or globalisation, impact the overall identity of the miniseries?

The political economy encompasses several groups with sometimes conflicting goals. The government, for example, seeks to assert the country as a dominant political and economic power, both domestically and internationally. Domestically, a strong economy and quality of life for its citizens will put the active administration in good elective standing. Internationally, a solid economy will bolster international trade and relations. A government can implement policies that promote market growth or restrict dissenting voices. Historically, Korea has seen both, which is why it is such an exciting topic of study, as the lingering effects of government control over terrestrial networks and production coincide with promoting the Korean Wave as a national business.

Historically, only domestic audiences' preferences were contemplated, despite K-dramas being exported beyond the East Asian region since the early 2000s. As technologies assisted in the global consumption of Korean dramas, the preferences of new foreign audiences became increasingly influential.

I aim to answer these questions through industry interviews with those with first-hand experience across the lifespan of the culture industry, beginning with policy through to consumption. Data was collected and analysed through interviews with twelve participants working in the Korea media industry, whose roles spanned across policymaking, production and distribution. As a result, the various components involved, such as broadcasting networks and production companies, can be individually analysed regarding their contribution to the miniseries format. The goal of these interviews is to identify the political, economic and social factors that have made a direct impact on the production of the miniseries format and its content.

1.2.2 Cultural Studies

In the same way I asked about the influence and impact of political and economic factors, this strand seeks to identify broader cultural changes and their impact on changes in miniseries content. In particular, this section seeks to answer: how do cultural ideologies or perspectives shape miniseries content?

Cultural values and identity are fundamental to our daily lives, and audiences expect to see them depicted on-screen. They can exist, develop, and progress, either alongside or independently of the institutions involved in the political economy, which is why multiple lines of research enquiry must take place.

The notion of defining culture is both challenging and controversial. Culture and cultural identities undergo a constant transformation (Hall, 1990, p. 225), which then must be identified within each research aspect. Identifying culture within a television series becomes additionally complicated when considering the external factors and variables that have driven any scene, episode, or series to be produced in its final

broadcast form.

Multiple academics have discussed discourse of early Korean Wave products (from around the late 1990s to the early 2000s) under three perspectives: nationalist, neoliberal capitalist, and postcolonial/translocal regionalist (Cho Hae Joang, 2005; Lee Kee Hyeung, 2006; Cho Young Han, 2011).

Due to its colonial past, Korean nationalism historically hinges on the advancement and protection of culture from foreign influence. The global success of the Korean Wave is a source of national pride, and so drama series make great effort to promote a Korean identity through various means. Character changes made in dramas using non-Korean source material, such as adaptations and remakes of Japanese manga, or American dramas, evidence an intentional effort to create a uniquely recognisable Korean identity. Military service and sacrifice for the nation promotes a distinctly Korean sense of collectivism (Robertson, 2018). Ethnic Koreans living abroad are pulled back 'home' by their cultural identity, whilst foreigners in Korea struggle in their confrontation between their foreignness and sense of boundaries society (Kristeva, 1991; Kang Kyoung Lae, 2018).

Neoliberal society emphasises one's ability to achieve but within a self-imposed restriction of behaviours. Simplified social mobility and a significant middle class are presented in contrast to the realities of the ultra-competitive culture. However, content critiquing the ultra-capitalist state has appeared over time, particularly intersecting with feminist progressions in characterisation.

Korea's post-colonial development from a country recovering from significant loss to a major exporter of cultural goods, provides the opportunity to promote its history and culture. This creates an opportunity educate audiences on the history of the peninsula and its culture, exempt from foreign voices and perspectives that have often dominated this narrative.

I aim to answer this research question through a critical discourse analysis of 57 dramas across three networks (KBS - 24, MBC - 16, SBS - 17) to identify cultural themes and their changes over the period of 2002 and 2017. These three perspectives (nationalist, neoliberal capitalist, and postcolonial/translocal regionalist) form the structure under which the data is gathered. This analysis is used alongside interviews to bring together the strands of research and understand the relationship between media industry structures and cultural identity.

When the analysis of industry interviews and miniseries content are brought together, these two strands of political economy and cultural studies contribute to a significant discussion of the political, economic, cultural and social influences on the drama production industry and the miniseries content.

1.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Considering the aforementioned research goals and questions, and factoring in existing work in this field, I believe this thesis has three significant contributions to knowledge in this subject.

Firstly, this work seeks to find and highlight the influential attributes in decision-making, production and distribution processes across the life course of drama

production and consumption, whilst placing Asian and Korean academic works and theories at the forefront of my methodological design. Much of the work on Korean popular culture industries I reviewed prior to commencing this study focused singularly on the role of the political economy or the state's role in the development of the culture industries (Nam, 2013; Howard Keith, 2016; Kim Tae Young, 2021b), or applied existing cultural theories, such as cultural proximity, to discussion of the expansion and success of the Korean Wave (Shim, 2006; Yoo et al., 2014). The distinction of my work arises through my decision to incorporate these elements alongside a significant analysis of the content being produced under this structure.

This leads on to the second aspect of originality in this work, which is its scale. Many papers seemed to focus on one or two case studies, often shows of significant success, such as *Winter Sonata* or *Jewel in the Palace* (Han & Lee, 2008), or more recently *Descendants of the Sun* (Jang, 2019; Mercier, 2020). Whilst a concentration on an individual series or a small sample can present significant characteristics or changes that may be representative of the miniseries format or the industry as a whole, a sample of this size is more beneficial in identifying and discussing larger trends and changes over a broader time period.

Finally, this work is original as I have elected to specifically focus on the terrestrial networks. Discourse centring on cable and streaming services, or papers making no distinction between distribution platforms or networks, is not uncommon. In particular much of the recent discourse includes references to Netflix and its works, despite only beginning its Korean service in 2015 and not releasing its first original drama until 2019 (Park Ji Hoon et al., 2023, p. 79). The streaming giant invested heavily in production

and distribution, by paying 110 per cent of the production budget in exchange for full intellectual property (IP) rights (Lee Ho Soo, 2020). Focusing solely on this 'Netflix' era fails to consider and recognise the influence of terrestrial networks and their historic role in the industry's development.

1.4 An Overview of the Thesis Structure

This thesis begins by examining existing theories in political economy and cultural studies spaces, the two main areas of analysis in this thesis. Chapter 2 starts by providing definitions and examining various schools of thought associated with critical political economy. In particular, this section delves into an examination of the mass communication industry and its function under capitalism. It explores how both public and private media services, and the mass culture industry, align their interests with their respective political and economic systems, and prioritise financial gain over cultural preservation. The section then advances to the discourse surrounding the nation-state and the imagined community, connecting to the theories of nation branding and soft power. These concepts hold significance to the thesis as they intersect the endeavours of the Korean political landscape with the development of cultural identity.

Next, the chapter moves to the theoretical foundations within cultural studies, particularly influential theories connected to cultural flows and cultural identity, such as media imperialism, orientalism, and cultural proximity. This section importantly deliberates the de-centring of Western-dominant theories of culture and cultural flows, which is imperative in efforts to decolonise the discussion of non-Western media, including in Western markets.

Finally, this chapter closes out by examining values, ethic and culture-bound

syndromes, which are the theoretical foundations to the cultural dimensions approach that becomes an essential element of coding in my miniseries and interview analysis. By bringing together political economy and cultural studies, this chapter emphasises their complementarity. Consolidating the broader structural politico-economic context with cultural aspects is essential to highlight correlation and synchronicity between the country's modern development and its sociocultural changes in this thesis. By doing so, we can then see the full image of the relationship between policy, structures, television broadcasting and the Korean Wave.

Chapter 3 provides context and necessary background against which the empirical chapters are set, through presenting a brief history of Korea's cultural policies, broadcasting structure, and television and popular culture production from 1945 to the present day.

I begin with a detailed history of cultural policy from 1945, which provides an understanding of current policies and structures that dictate decision-making processes today. The contextualisation of cultural policy development is important for the thesis as it informs the reader of both the political and cultural conditions under which the industry has grown to operate. I then move on to explain the structures in operation at a terrestrial network and governmental level, as well as the legislative frameworks that are active today.

This is followed by an introduction to television broadcasting in Korea, a history of the three terrestrial networks (KBS, MBC and SBS) that are the focus of this thesis, as well as the revenue structures and legislative acts that are connected to media production and

organisation. The history of these networks is essential in understanding current ownership and regulatory practices and how this affects production.

I then progress to detail the development of the Korean Wave, beginning from the 1990s until today. This information is presented under the four commonly used 'generations' or 'periods' of the Wave, detailing the important developments and characteristics of each era. This is important as the thesis spans at least three of these periods, and so again provides much needed context to the material provided in the empirical chapters.

Finally, this chapter ends by focusing on the Korean miniseries – the medium of focus in this thesis. I look at its definition, history, and unique production style that have made it such an exciting area for research.

In Chapter 4, I return to this project's research goals and hypotheses and detail how my research was designed, describing my deliberative processes and methodological implementation. I review existing literature on various methods for analysis and interviews, including the different analytical approaches of structural, discourse, and thematic analysis. From this, I move to the theories that form the foundation of my coding and data analysis framework, particularly the work of Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2001 and 2010). I also discuss the work of the academics whose cultural perspectives of the Korean Wave form the structure of presenting my collected data.

Next, I move on to discuss the sampling, recruitment and analysis processes for my industry interviews. To start, I discuss the benefits and limitations of completing

interviews via video conference software, which was essential during my period of data collection due to the limitations caused by COVID-19. I consider the forms of structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews and explain why a semi-structured approach is most beneficial to this study. Finally, I introduce how the research questions were formed, how I kept these consistent for all participants, and the necessity and benefits of question variation.

The subsequent section discusses the actual data collection and analysis processes, describing how I developed my series sample and the coding parameters. Following this, I similarly explain my interview participant recruitment process, data collection ethics, and the implementation of video conferencing software. Lastly, I discuss why I chose NVivo as my analytical software of choice, and the method through which I imported and completed my analytical processes.

Collectively, this chapter is vital in detailing my overall research design, so that the reader may comprehend my methodological processes, and how I generated and analysed the data presented in the empirical chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 5 is the first empirical chapter, primarily focusing on political economy. It uses data gained through interview responses to discuss the elements of political economy that have contributed towards change in the industry. I begin by examining explicit policies implemented over the study period, such as regulating and promoting specific industries and restructuring various institutions to ensure financial security. This leads to a discussion of content interventionism, where examples uncovering the relationship between policy and produced content are first displayed.

Next, the financial aspects of production are examined. This begins with addressing the changes to traditional forms of revenue, such as licence fees and advertising, and considering how newer forms of income, such as product placement, have affected both production and content. This leads to the loss of terrestrial network influence, as the industry moved from an oligopoly to one of high competition caused by the materialisation of on-demand streaming services and satellite networks.

Finally, I talk about the globalisation of audiences and international distribution. With initial distribution limited to the East Asian region, this expanded to the Middle East and Southeast Asia in the early 2000s. This section considers how different audiences received the content of Korean dramas over the study period and touches upon the consideration of international audience attitudes during the production process.

Chapter 6 leans on the critical discourse analysis of the miniseries to detail the cultural studies aspects. I first look at nationalism and discuss how the minor changes to characterisation in drama remakes in the region produce a distinct Korean identity. Korean national pride is often presented through military service, so I discuss how the narratives of sacrifice for one's country are particularly prevalent in Korean miniseries. Following this, I examine how dramas set in international locales emphasise the strength of 'Koreanness' through the crucial return to the homeland.

Next, I look at neoliberal societal perspectives, particularly regarding social mobility. This section considers why the miniseries generally portrayed individuals from lower socioeconomic groups as financially wealthier and more socially mobile than others. It

also looks at the intersection between feminism and the growth in critiques of the harsh capitalist conditions of Korea.

Finally, the chapter moves on to discussions of postcolonialism and regionalism. This section first begins by recognising Korea's tragic history and how this influences the narratives of a unified Korean Peninsula, before discussing ways in which modern Korean dramas caricature the difference between urban and rural locales. Lastly, this section looks at period dramas and the importance of historical and cultural accuracy.

Chapter 7 closes out this thesis by solidifying the findings of the previous chapters to draw conclusions, answer the research questions, and review my hypotheses and objectives. It is concluded by a reflection on the research project and its potential areas for growth and future research development.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Foundations of the Political Economy and Cultural Studies

2.1 Introduction

The first imperative of this thesis is to refine my research aims and develop an analytical framework. My aim in this chapter is to discuss existing works in this academic field and deliberate the extent to which they can be incorporated into my research design.

This chapter is broadly arranged around my two strands of research enquiry: political economy and cultural studies. I begin with political economy, with a particular focus on the operations of (and relationship between) political economy and mass communications industries in a capitalist system. This is followed by looking at the efforts of the state through nation branding and soft power to promote the Korean Wave and the global image of the nation.

I then move on to the topic of cultural studies, including the issues of communicating cultural meaning across borders. Factoring in the impact of historic and modern forms of imperialism and colonisation, we must recognise how emerging media countries (such as Korea) take advantage of the 'global' culture to successfully export cultural products.

Finally, national values, Confucian ethics, and culture-bound syndromes or emotions are introduced as part of an initial comprehension of Korean culture from which analytical frameworks will be further detailed in chapter 4.

2.1.1 Defining Culture

Before delving further into theoretical concepts, it is necessary to define and understand some critical terminology. One of the foremost challenges is defining the word 'culture'. Understanding what culture is and how it is made is the first step in approaching the research questions.

Culture is a complex word in the English language, covering concepts in multiple disciplines across several distinct and incompatible systems of thought (Williams, 1984). Rather than a single fixed theory, culture exists in perpetual flux, adapting and changing according to various components. We cannot separate culture from political, institutional, and economic factors. Therefore, considering both the perspectives of political economy and cultural studies is essential to this project.

We can divide culture into two main strands. The first is material, the physical creations left behind or those that come to be recognised as originating from a particular group, civilisation, or region. Some elements may be determined as significant by governing powers. The Korean government has previously invested in and promoted areas of traditional culture such as food, traditional forms of painting and ceramics, and classical Korean music.

The government's perception of historical importance and interest in keeping these areas alive is relevant. More modern or 'low' forms of culture are often viewed or presented as inferior to 'traditional' culture and have only recently become 'regarded as a valuable vehicle for spreading Korean culture' (Joo, 2011, p. 497).

Regarding products of the Korean Wave, the government later shifted attitudes to what

is referred to as *gookppong* – an overwhelming patriotism or jingoism – often used as a criticism of the Korean media and government, who excessively use the Korean Wave as a demonstration of the excellence of Korean culture (Kim Tae Young, 2023, p. 162).

The second strand of culture is immaterial: behaviours, social norms, and values that direct our actions and attitudes. Culture, Raymond Williams wrote, is 'the signifying system through which…a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored' (1981, p. 13), and that we 'have to emphasise cultural practice as from the beginning social and material' (1989, p. 211).

Beyond this, there is also the lived experience of culture, ways of thinking and acting, and distinct achievements of human groups. The core of culture consists of traditional ideas and their attached values (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 86). Cultural values are shared beliefs and principles that guide attitudes or behaviours among individuals within a group. They are significant and deep-rooted and vary widely across cultures.

The miniseries exists as a commodified good created for profit. So, whilst culture is still inherently entwined into its being, its existence is also heavily pinned by the political economy through which it was formed.

2.2 Theorising the Political Economy

Etymologically, the term 'political economy' comes from the Greek *polis*, meaning 'city' or 'state' and *oikonomos*, referring to 'one who manages a household or estate' (Veseth & Balaam, 2023, para. 1).

The study of political economy is relatively young, not developing significantly until

the 16th to 18th centuries as opposition to mercantilism – the belief that a nation's power and wealth are increased through minimising imports and maximising exports. It was philosophers such as Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Hume (1711-1776) who approached the discussion of distributing wealth and power through social, political, and economic factors rather than by God's will. By the 19th century, wider perspectives were published, such as the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) or the communism of Karl Marx (1818-1883). Regardless of the perspective, the fundamentals of political economy and its combination of the disciplines of economy, sociology and political science further developed in the latter half of the 20th century, as international relations became increasingly complex.

More recently, Vincent Mosco indicated two definitions of the term. The first he defined as narrow and asserted that political economy is the study of social relations (particularly power relations) that 'mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources including communication resources' (Mosco, 2014, p. 2). His second definition was broader, indicating political economy is 'the study of control and survival in social life', with control referring to the internal organisation of individuals and groups and survival referring to the means through which they produce what is needed to reproduce themselves (Mosco, 2014, p. 3).

From Adam Smith through to Vincent Mosco, a common theme is the methods and processes through which production and distribution are controlled and regulated. Here develops the distinction between political economy and critical political economy. The former incorporates discussion around growth, distribution, and trade, and the policies, institutions, laws, and political behaviour that shape them. Whereas the latter challenges

underlying assumptions, power structures, and ideologies that shape political and economic systems. Critical political economy emphasises the impact of capitalism, neoliberalism, and other dominant paradigms on society, to uncover hidden inequalities and injustices. When combined with media studies, this includes examining how the above is linked with culture, audiences, and ownership.

2.2.1 The Political Economy of Communication

The political economy of communication is a line of scholarship within media studies that investigates how information is communicated via power relations from the mass media to the public. Smythe wrote that 'the central purpose of the study of the political economy of communication is to evaluate the effects of communication agencies in terms of policies by which they are organised and operated' and 'the structure and policies of these communication agencies in their social settings' (1960, p. 564).

At this stage, it is useful to introduce the Marx's 1859 base/superstructure model. Here, Marx postulated that society consists of an economic base, which signifies the means and relations of production, and which shapes and maintains the superstructure.

The superstructure ascribes everything not directly to do with production, including art, culture and media, and defends the operation of the base. Therefore, we can assert that the media plays an active role in upholding the economic system. The relationship between the base and superstructure is reciprocal, with the base determining the superstructure only in the last instance (Althusser, 1971, p. 136).

Subsequent academics have largely supported this structure, albeit with some revisions. Weber's writings on structural functionalism support reciprocal causality (Turner,

1977). Gramsci instead suggested a division of the superstructure into two elements: political society, the 'oppressive apparatus of the state', such as the military or police, and civil society, 'the private apparatus of hegemony', which includes all private organisations, including the media (Morera, 1990, pp. 27-28).

Conversely, Smythe later summarised eight core aspects of Marxist political economy of communication and asserted that media communication sits as part of the economic base of capitalism (Smythe, 1981; Fuchs, 2015). Other academics have aligned with this assertion, such as Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott who wrote that 'the contents of the media and the meanings carried by their messages are... primarily determined by the economic base of the organizations in which they are produced' (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982, p. 18). Similarly, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock wrote that 'the ways in which the mass media function as "ideological apparatuses" can only be adequately understood when they are systematically related to their position as large scale enterprises in a capitalist system, and if these relations are examined historically' (Golding & Murdock, 1979, pp. 204-205).

2.2.2 Commodification, Spatialisation and Structuration

Another two of Smythe's aspects, monopoly capitalism and audience commodification, also hold significant weight in connection to this study and return us to Vincent Mosco, who divided the political economy of communication into commodification, spatialisation, and structuration.

Commodification is 'the process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange' (Mosco, 2014, p. 128). There are three main parts of commodification: content commodification,

audience commodification (as per Smythe), and the commodification of media workers.

The development of computer communications allows companies to monitor and have greater control over all aspects of production and distribution, enabling them only to produce what they know will sell easily, reducing content to a profitable commodity. The worldwide expansion of commodification in the 1980s led to 'increased commercialization of media programming, the privatization of once public media and telecommunications institutions, and the liberalization of communication markets' (Mosco, 2014, p. 12).

Garnham asserted the political economy of communication should shift attention from the notion of mass media as ideological apparatuses in order to focus on their economic role in surplus value generation and advertising (Garnham, 1990, p. 30). Garnham's opinion supports the assertion that the focus on media products is their profitability. As art becomes known for its value rather than its substance, the worker and their labour similarly become commodified.

Meehan (1984 and 1993) similarly argued that audience ratings are commodified as they operate to set the value that networks can demand from advertisers for access to this commodity audience. The monitoring of audience patterns through quantitative viewership data and qualitative feedback through online forums, combined with Korea's last-minute production style, ensures that programmes are constantly developing to maximise profit. Yet not all viewers are in television's commodity audience, so some parts of the audience are considered to be more valuable, and so both the commodity audience and commodity ratings are entirely manufactured (Meehan, 1993, p. 389 and

2007, p. 164).

Jhally (1987) argued that when audiences watch a show, they are working for the media, producing both value and surplus value. Networks are therefore buying the watching power of the audience. The audience watching time is considered programme time, and advertising watching time is considered surplus time. The audience becomes the worker, with their wage being the programme.

Next is spatialisation, which was identified as:

> the process of over-coming the constraints of geographical space with, among other things, mass media and communication technologies…television overcomes distance by bringing images of events on the globe to every part of the world. Moreover, companies increasingly use computer communication to organize business on a worldwide basis, thereby allowing them greater access to consumers, workers, technology, and capital. It also provides them with the flexibility to move rapidly when the need arises, e.g. the availability of low-cost or better skilled labor elsewhere (Mosco, 2014, p. 2).

The global value chain (GVC) seeks to disperse the processes of production, distribution and markets in order to maximise cost-efficiency (Chalaby, 2016 and 2019). GVC-oriented policy includes the opening of borders to encourage competition, promoting international co-production and the leveraging of resources, ideas, and capital (Chalaby, 2023, p. 186). The use of technology minimises the distance between nations and eases access for nations who wish to partake in the international media sphere. Its recent implementation in Korean policy appears in contrast to previous protectionist measures, as detailed further in Chapter 3.

At the same time, spatialisation additionally encompasses the worldwide restructuring of industries and often results in concentrated ownership, representing Marx and

Smythe's aspect of monopoly capitalism.

Spatialisation occurs across two lines: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal integration occurs when 'a firm in one line of media buys a significant interest in another media operation not directly tied to the original business' whilst vertical integration is the 'amalgamation of firms within a line of business that extends a company's control over the process of production' and distribution (Mosco, 2014, p. 15).

In the case of Korea, vertical integration within spatialisation can most commonly be seen through the limited ownership across conglomerates known as *chaebols*. *Chaebols* are large companies, often run by a single family, who have received large amounts of funds, tax relief, and legal leniency from the Korean government since the 1960s. The protectionist policies and preferential treatment granted to these companies enabled them to exhibit monopolistic behaviour and showcase the monopoly capitalism indicated by Smythe.

Finally, structuration, which creates 'social relations, mainly those organized around social class, gender, and race', for example:

> political economy describes how access to the mass media and new communication technologies is influenced by social class inequalities that divide people according to income and wealth, enabling some to afford access and leaving out others (Mosco, 2014, p. 128)

This amounts to Marx's theory that people make history but not under the constraints of their own making (Marx, 1852). Social action takes place within the constraints of the structures. Thus, social change and 'making history' can only occur within the conditions that the existing social structures enable.

Two views take place here. The first is the relational view – that class is defined by the practices and processes that link social classes. The working class is not merely 'defined by its relative lack of access to the means of communication, but by its relationships of harmony, dependency, and conflict with the capitalist class' (McKercher & Mosco, 2007 in Mosco, 2014, p. 17).

The formational view is that the working class is 'the producer of its own identity in relation to capital' and aims to demonstrate how classes constitute themselves and how they make history (ibid).

2.3 Political Economy Structures under Capitalism

For the purposes of this study, it is important to understand how media and culture industries operate under capitalism if we are to fully engage in a critical discussion of the political economy. Critical political economy can help to explain the conditions of production, particularly within the context of its own society. However, these conditions only partly cover the theoretical foundation of production, as the means of distribution and modern global flows have an increasingly substantial function in the contemporary marketplace.

In a capitalist system, markets exist under indirect governance within institutional frameworks provided by the political authorities. Private actors are empowered to own and control property for private financial gain, whilst workers are free to work and earn wages. Capitalism is designed to use societal resources most productively to meet consumer needs. It promotes productivity and short-term goal achievements over equalising competitive resources over a given season (Scott, 2006, p. 9).

Fuchs asserted that media in capitalism functions as modes of reification, as described in Marxist philosophy as the conversion of a subject into an object, such as a worker into a commodity. Commercial media reduces humans to consumers, culture is connected to its commodity form, and capitalism must present itself as the best or only system in order to reproduce its existence and keep media messages hegemonic (Fuchs, 2015, p. 530).

This system relies on the political authority's establishment of rules and regulations to ensure accountability and societal benefits. To maintain the structure of capitalism, the government has two roles: administratively, through building and supporting institutions and regulations that underpin the capitalist system; and entrepreneurially, through mobilising efforts to build and modernise these institutions as needed (Scott, 2006, p. 4). Scott suggested there is a three-level system of capitalism, as illustrated below:

Figure 1: Capitalism as a three-level system (Scott, 2006, p. 9)

On the lowest level are economic markets, where companies compete to serve customers and generate profit. The markets assign resources, govern prices, and process

transactions. The second level – institutional foundations – refers to infrastructure, such as education, travel, and legal systems. This includes regulatory frameworks and enforcement over the economic markets. The third and highest level – political authority – is state agents who implement and enforce rules and regulations, including specialised regulations for certain industries.

The Korean economy operates under capitalism, with a degree of open-market private freedom, combined with centralised economic planning and some government intervention. The country, which developed from a developing and primarily agrarian to a major world economy within just a few decades is often referred to as the Miracle on the Han River. The key characteristics of its economy include export-oriented development, well-regulated financial markets and family-controlled conglomerates (*chaebol*) with diverse business interests across industries.

2.3.1 Public and Private Broadcasting Services

Media and communication institutions wield colossal power under capitalism as they are the 'first and foremost industrial and commercial organisations which produce and distribute commodities' (Murdock & Golding, 1973, pp. 205-206). These industries play a double role, functioning as an industry but also as a site of representation and arena of debate.

Government authorities and media organisations share a mutual benefit in supporting one another. The government supports media industries largely through the development of infrastructure and public funds, as well as supporting institutions of media regulation. In turn, media industries can support the government by sharing communications with the public, promoting the country and its economy, and

promoting the administration's work.

The relationship between the government and media industries can be tenuous. The government is not only acting as a controlling force of the media, but together they produce culture across shifting economic, ideological and political levels. Dictatorial or authoritarian regimes can enforce control over the media industries to ensure that all communications only promote the works of the regime.

Public service broadcasting aims to not be subject to political or commercial interference, serving public interest over profits and generally funded through public resources, such as licence fees. Public service broadcasters are typically less dependent on advertising in comparison to commercial broadcasters, allowing for the production of content that may otherwise not be commercially viable in the mass market.

The ownership and operation of the three networks of focus for this study – KBS, MBC, and SBS – are detailed further in Chapter 3. KBS is a public service broadcaster operating under a hybrid revenue of both licence fees and advertising (since 1980). MBC is also a public service broadcaster, operating solely on advertising, and SBS is a private commercial broadcaster, operating on advertising.

However, in many instances, public broadcasters can be synonymous with government-controlled broadcasters, causing conflicting interests. One example can be seen in the UK in 2022 when the government announced its intention to privatise the public network Channel 4. The government argued that this would allow the channel the freedom to make its own content, therefore diversifying its revenue stream. However,

the channel, which first began broadcasting in 1982, was founded to deliver content to underserved audiences, and it could be argued that operating for financial profit would essentially guarantee that such shows would no longer be made. The suggestion is that smaller, localised pockets of culture within a nation can be easily overlooked when a country's media industry solely operates for profit.

2.3.2 Media Production and the Mass-Culture Industry

Adorno spoke out against mass culture, asserting that the 'categorical imperative of the culture industry no longer has anything to do with freedom' and 'the culture industry is not the art of the consumer but rather the projection of the will of those in control onto their victims' (1991, pp. 104 and 185). Adorno's focus was on drama content as he sought to disclose the messages it conveyed to mass audiences, arguing these provided a distorted view of reality, 'reinforcing the false values, childishness and dependency of audiences in a manner characteristic of the culture industry generally' (Witkin, 2003, p. 141). His broad distrust in popular culture was in contrast with the postmodern celebration of pop culture, driven by his belief that 'contemporary capitalist culture manipulates consciousness to undermine the prospect of the mediating subject' (Sherman, 2007, p. 8). Adorno's perspective challenges my assertion at the beginning of this thesis, where I purported sociocultural changes both in reality and on-screen have developed in synchronicity, in correlation rather than through causation.

My sentiments therefore align more with Negus, who wrote that 'an industry produces culture and culture produces an industry' and stressed that production occurs in relation to broader cultural formations and practices rather than simply within a corporate environment (1999, pp. 14-20). Pierre Bourdieu similarly challenged that if we are to understand a piece of art, we must first understand the conditions of its production and

reception, which relate to wider fields of power and class relations.

Therefore, culture needs to be understood as more than a product created through institutionalised practices, but through both the meanings given to the product and the practices through which it is made. Bourdieu's 'charismatic ideology of creation' directs the gaze towards the apparent producer to prevent us from asking who created this 'creator' and the power of substantiation through which the 'creator' is endowed (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 167). This does not merely mean looking to the wider network of agents involved in cultural production nor reducing art to its social 'context' (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p. 212). Instead, we must look at the complex issues of cultural production in the fields of power and social space, with varying levels of autonomy between the economic and political. The weakening of government in combination with globalisation exposes the vulnerability of the state capitalist model, as all economies are subject to the pressure of market norms and behaviours (Curran & Park, 2000, p. 8).

The relationship between culture and production is complex and has varying levels of autonomy. In many instances, it fails to recognise the roles of consumers and the function of counterculture in the production of cultural goods. Certainly, the limited ownership and control of the mass media worldwide can directly impact a standardised production practice. This is particularly visible in Korea as spatialisation and the increasing *chaebol* ownership ultimately condenses a huge proportion of the country's economy (and by extension, political power) down to a small group.

Garnham summarised that media has become an ideological apparatus for capitalism, resulting in the industrialisation of culture (Garnham, 1979). At the same time, Theodor

Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1979) wrote of the culture industry, arguing that cultural items are produced analogously to other industries' manufacturing methods in creating high-quantity consumer goods. They suggested that the industrial manufacturing processes have been applied to the creative realm, previously seen as an independent space, and once assumed separate from business and commercial interests. The result is a standardisation by a unified industry, where the format and content of all cultural products have become similar, and therefore, all popular culture is assumed to manifest the same basic features and processes.

2.4 Nation Branding and Soft Power

Nation branding is 'the application of marketing concepts and techniques to countries, in the interest of enhancing their reputation in international relations' (Kerr & Wiseman, 2013, p. 354). It is a marketing exercise, with the product being the country itself. Thus, the process focuses on the nation as a single, distinct entity with its own specific culture, often disregarding any international involvement that played a historic role in the building of its culture.

For Korea, nation branding was significant in its early cultural policies as it rebuilt and promoted its traditional cultural heritage. When we discuss the Korean Wave, investment into popular culture industries supported their development and, later, into transnational trade. Yet as the Korean Wave extended beyond its own borders, it expanded the scale for new markets and investment opportunities. Although global markets increase revenue and sales opportunities, they may come with restrictions or requirements of content that do not align with the domestic. The government wants to support and develop the Korean Wave, but only if it positively presents the nation and economy and promotes transnational trade and tourism.

Korea and its Korean Wave is not the first example of a national strategy. The Cool Japan and Cool Britannia efforts most apparent between the 1980s and 2000s were defined by youth culture movements of the era. Export-oriented policy, in creating globalised audiences, generates particular presentations that may not be attractive or authentic to the domestic audience. Brunsden (2007, p. 115) refers to the wave of Cool Britannia films, such as *Notting Hill* (1991) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), which present areas known domestically as multicultural to be almost entirely white middle-class in their demography.

The emphasis on national values and identity and the promotion of the country's standing internationally can reinforce national pride. Much of the policy implemented in the post-war period was designed to promote a national culture while narratives were heavily government-controlled. This relates to the ideas of nationalism and imagined communities; how citizens or locals define their nation and identity, recognise values, behaviours, and morals as 'their own', and use these to differentiate themselves from others.

2.4.1 The Imagined Community and the Nation-State

Benedict Anderson first put forward the notion that the nation is an imagined political community which has been socially constructed by those who perceive themselves as part of that group. He argued that all nations are inherently limited and imagined. Though nations are limited within their finite boundaries, they are imagined as even those living in the smallest nations will never meet or know most of their fellow members. Yet, the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationalism' enforce the idea that they have all somehow lived a shared experience in being part of the same group. They are

imagined as a community because 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1983, pp. 49-50).

One of the issues of the imagined community argument is the totalising narrative of demotic nationalism, as it is unable to describe the lived experience of personal identity. As Anderson asserted the nation is limited, it must exist through a process of inclusion and exclusion (Willis, 2003, p. 81). The imagined community can, therefore, perpetuate nationalism positively and negatively. It can bring together the people of a nation through their shared experiences and perpetuate a sense of the difference between communities. Furthermore, nationalism in this context is entwined with the culture of modernity, reigniting Western-centrism.

Kelly and Kaplan challenged this Western-dominant perspective of Anderson's writing. They asserted that Anderson associates the 'nation-state' with European enlightenment or early modern European developments. Yet, as a lexical term, it did not come into use until well after World War II (Kelly & Kaplan, 2001, p. 420). Critics argue that his focus on the rise of European nationalism cannot capture the complexities of imagined communities outside the Western context. Anderson does not adequately address the role of colonisation and imperialism in constructing these imagined communities in non-Western societies.

Though amongst native English speakers, the terms 'state' and 'nation' are used interchangeably, this is not the case in Korea. Myers wrote of a distinction that South Koreans make, a distinction between nationalism and patriotism. The conversation of

Korean nationalism is most often in the form of patriotism, or state-aligned nationalism, which differs from ethnic nationalism, an ethnosupremacist political ideology (Myers, 2011, para. 3).

2.4.2 Nation Branding

The imagined community is directly associated with the nation's brand. If the imagined community is how people view their nation, then the nation brand is how they allow others to view them.

Governments often directly engage in improving their country's image and reputation. Korea's international standing has increased exponentially in recent decades, from a barely known country to one associated with some of the world's biggest companies. Reputation was initially built through companies such as Hyundai, Samsung, and LG, but consuming these companies' products does little to engage a person with the country itself. Instead, through the Korean Wave, a genuine interest in Korea as a country has been built; in 2016, Korea saw over 17 million foreign visitors, an increase of 30 per cent over the previous year (Korea Tourism Organization, 2017).

The development of nation branding, particularly within the Korean Wave, can be seen as recent. Williamson wrote that 'Korea's government has been trying to change the country's international image – or rather a lack of one – for years…because for the past 50 years, South Korea has been focused on building the country, not marketing it' (2012, para. 3-6). In 2005, cultural anthropologist Michiya Iwamoto of the University of Tokyo noted that 'Korean people need to change their concept of 'culture' and ways of viewing it if they want to market their culture well to the outside world' (Kim Ji Myung, 2012, para. 8).

In 2009, Korea established The Presidential Council of Nation Branding (dissolved in 2013) to 'streamline Korea's overseas promotion activities and boost the country's image abroad on a comprehensive scale, including cultural programs and products' (Jung Yoo Soh, 2010, para. 7). The council focused on three areas to promote the national brand: improving the fundamentals of brand assets through product competitiveness, sovereign credit rating and global citizenship; establishing 'global standards' by setting a high value on systems and practices and through widening perspective and thinking, and focusing on the long term, by setting goals and analysing the outcomes (Suh Dae Won, 2009). Through significant gains made by the council, it was dismantled by the Park Geun Hye administration in 2013 after reaching a nation brand above the OECD average and higher than countries such as Spain, Finland, and Ireland.

Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) critiqued nation branding in the era of commercial nationalism. They asserted that nations in the neoliberal era rely on their own population to live and promote the national brand, which ultimately reforms national branding into a form of modern nationalism. For Korea, this can certainly be asserted as the case as the Korean Wave becomes appropriated as a shining metaphor for the country's development and global recognition.

Productions associated with the Korean Wave are all now determined to have a responsibility to present a nation that piques the interest of foreigners, both as tourists and consumers. This result, particularly in television, is a reductionist approach to representing the country and its culture.

2.4.3 Hallyu and Soft Power

Hard power refers to the military and economic forces a nation uses to coerce others to change their position, often obtaining results in a short period but potentially at the cost of positive international relations. Soft power can be considered the opposite of this, the indirect way of getting what you want. A country may obtain its desired outcomes because 'other countries admire its values, emulate its example, aspire to its level of prosperity and openness…soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others' (Nye, 2004, para. 7).

Soft power may not have an immediate effect, instead relying on a nation's positive outward projection to slowly change their opinions. More than influence, soft power can be seen as a means of attraction or persuasion. Nye and Kim argued that 'soft power is not the same as influence, though it is one source of it. Influence can also rest on the hard power of threats of payments' (2013, p. 31). Therefore, instead of viewing hard and soft power as polarising, they are both forms of power that can be used side by side and reinforce one another. Some resources produce both hard and soft power. One example is a strong economy, which creates 'hard' financial incentives and a 'soft' model of success that attracts others.

Nye and Kim continued, 'the soft power of any country rests primarily on three resources: (1) the attractiveness of its culture, (2) its political values when it lives up to them at home and abroad and (3) its foreign policies, when they are seen as legitimate and have moral authority' (2013, p. 32).

In Korea's case, Walsh stated that the Korean Wave 'persuaded Asian countries at the

societal level that Korea is a part of the developed, western world. This had a considerable impact on the soft power that can be deployed overseas in further promoting national interests in diplomacy, investment, education, and trade' (2014, p. 14). The state's approach to the cultural domain is driven by a logic of increasing exports and profit, expecting political and economic benefits, and aligning with other publications which acknowledge the government's influence in the exportation of Korean popular culture products as a means of increasing soft power (Lee Sook Jong & Melissen, 2011; Choi Jung Bong, 2015, Kim Tae Young, 2021b).

Soft power can be considered the rational and necessary response to Korea's history. It is a logical response to Korea's self-image as a nation regularly invaded by foreign forces against whom they had little military power to defend themselves, so 'soft power has become a means for Korea to compete effectively in international relations' (Walsh, 2014, p. 21). Choi Jung Bong furthered this and argued that the Korean Wave is utilised as a campaign and policy initiative, as it is 'neither just cultural in its valence nor determined solely by international fans' (2015, p. 44).

The Korean Wave is 'not an organic manifestation of rational market exchange in a cultural economy'; instead, it is a 'bureaucratic program operated from the stage of preproduction through the stage of marketing.' Because of its exponential growth, the government steered a good portion of it. It is more than an export industry; it is the apex of symbolic capital (Choi Jung Bong, 2015, p. 44). Choi, therefore, suggested that the governmental involvement with the Korean Wave is twofold. The first is from an economic standpoint; the rapid growth in popularity and increasing revenue in exports is unquestionably beneficial to the country's economy. Secondly, the export success of

creative content has elevated Korea's reputation on the international stage.

Popular culture is increasingly used as a core component in expanding economic competitiveness and influence, and Korea's soft power is an extension of its economic authority (Lee Sook Jong & Melissen, J., 2011; Nye & Kim, 2013). What is clear from both the Korean government's historical and current engagement with cultural production is that there is an active interest in how this can be used for political and economic gain.

2.5 Theorising Cultural Flows and Alternatives to Eurocentric Approaches

The political economy and concepts of nation branding and soft power go some way in understanding the business behaviours and international diplomacy involved in a global media industry. However, these concepts do not adequately cover the cultural connection between the stages of production, consumption, and identity.

2.5.1 The Circuit of Culture

In reference back to the political economy, it was discussed how the government and media industries are largely working together. This can be connected to Foucault's assertion that all societies control and distribute the production of discourse (1971, p. 53). There is an ideological component here, with the goal being to sustain the status quo and its social consequences. But I challenge the assertion of audiences as mere commodities, instead noting how the audience are not merely passive observers as humans are essential in creating meaning (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, pp. 6 and 8)

Critical discourse analysis, my chosen methodological approach, which is detailed further in Chapter 4, places a stronger emphasis on sociocultural and political factors

that shape discourse and societal perceptions.

The Circuit of Culture, generated by Hall, du Gay et al., visualises the connection between all stages of regulation, production, distribution, and consumption, which is imperative to this research project.
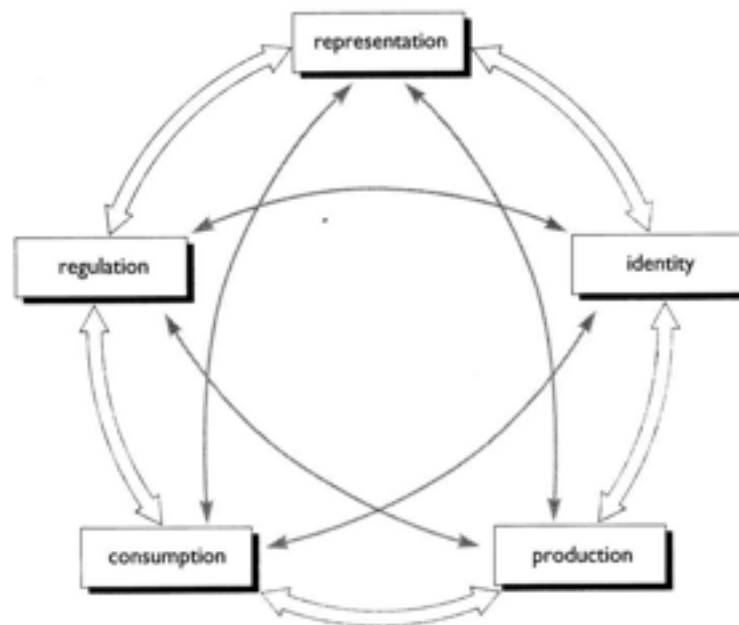
Figure 2: Circuit of Culture, Hall, Du Gay et al. (1997, p. 3)

The circuit demonstrates the network of the industry, between culture, the audience, and the representative practices of cultural identity. It provides an image through which we can understand the connectedness of the elements of this research project. Regulation and production are cultural production, representation and identity relate to cultural practices, and consumption equates to distribution and audience enjoyment.

This circuit is fundamental to this research project's aims, as the purpose of its dual-strand approach is to find and highlight the influential attributes in decision-making, production and distribution processes across the life course of drama production and

consumption, whilst factoring in both the political and cultural conditions under which the industry has grown to operate.

In cultural representation, there is great diversity in interpreting and representing. As Stuart Hall wrote, participants in a culture give meaning to things (Hall, 2000, p. 2). Audience members are active in decoding messages on television, and that meaning may be decoded differently based on assorted variables, including cultural background, economic standing, and personal experience (Hall, 1980).

In the case of encoding/decoding cultural meaning in the Korean miniseries, the encoders (such as producers and directors) are likely to consciously or subconsciously expect the audience to understand the message as they have encoded it. However, the decoders (audience members) now represent a far more comprehensive range of individuals with a broader and more varying knowledge of Korea and its culture and, as a result, also have a much more diverse ability to decode and understand the message.

Hall argued that the traditional sender/message/receiver model is too linear and fails to consider the complex structure of relations involved in creating, transmitting, and receiving messages. As detailed in the table below, the successful discourse transmission process is affected by several elements both on the side of the encoder and decoder.
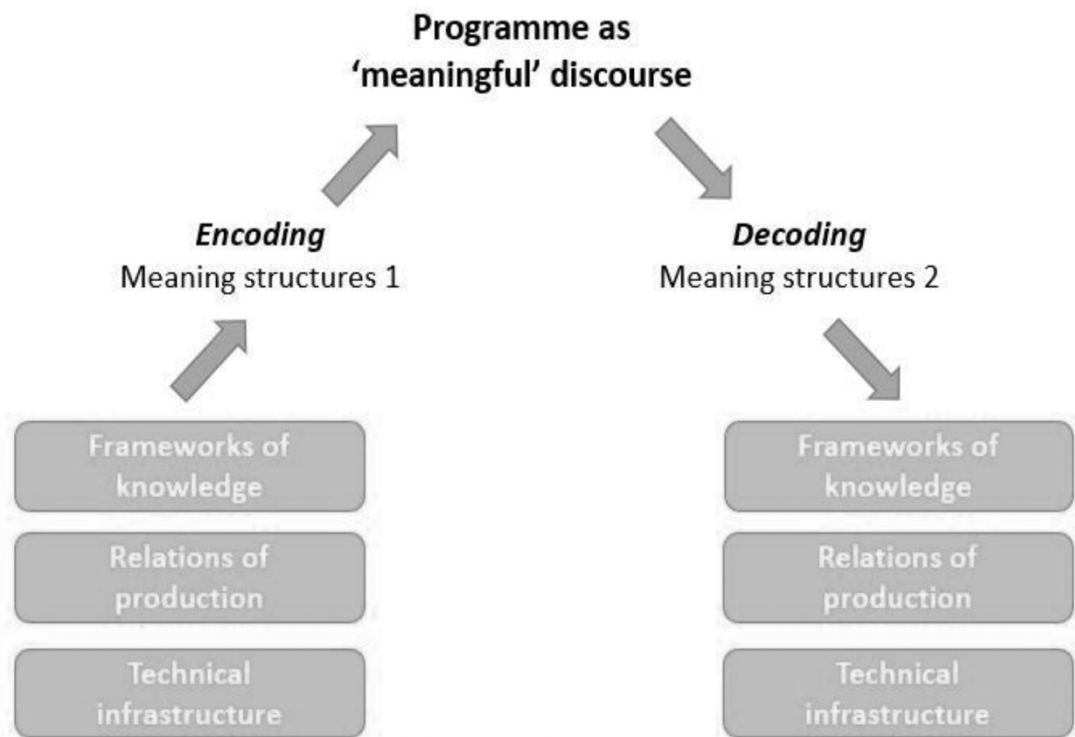
Figure 3: Programme as 'Meaningful' Discourse, Hall (1980, p. 120)

Hall argued four stages: production, circulation, use (distribution or consumption), and reproduction. Production refers to the construction of the message and it is not without its 'discursive' aspect, as it is 'framed throughout by meanings and ideas', including professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, and assumptions about the audience (Hall, 1980, p. 92).

Media practices and organisational structure are the means through which circulation occurs. Consumption refers to the discourse again being translated by audiences. He wrote that production and reception are not identical but 'are differentiated moments within the totality formed by the social relations of the communicative process as a whole' (Hall, 1980, p. 93).

Reproduction is also related directly to production as a process after consumption

through which the audience takes meaning and transforms it back into social practices. Through this, we can understand how exports to other countries in the East Asian region in the 90s and early 2000s became successful, as audiences could decode the product's cultural meaning through their cultural understanding.

Yet, shifts to production and consumption practices because of access to production and distribution directly impact the entire circuit of culture. In a recent survey conducted across 26 countries, 66.1 per cent of respondents stated that K-dramas are very popular or moderately popular in their country (Statista, 2023). This point connects to this thesis, as we consider the efforts involved in attempting to create content that can be culturally well-received by such a culturally broad audience.

This work highlights the challenges in understanding how messages and meaning are inserted into any television production. As the table above identifies, the successful transmission of a message is based on the mutual understanding of a message by both the encoder and decoder. One of the flaws of Hall's encoding/decoding theory is that it fails to identify that the framework of knowledge by which the encoders and decoders are processing the message may be fictional. There may be an element of 'culture' that has been so perpetually produced and reproduced within television that it is accepted as a genuine part of Korean culture. However, the original may be less true or not exist at all – which brings us to the concept of simulacra.

2.5.2 Simulacra and Simulation

Simulacra are representations or copies so accurate that they are mistaken for an original. Jean Baudrillard, who introduced the concept, proposed that reality has been replaced by a system of signs that have re-coded the real and asserted that mass media is

an agent of representation rather than communication. The media has created a new culture of signs without reference, and society has become so consumed by these empty signs that we can no longer distinguish between reality and simulation.

Simulation is the active process of replacing the real; where dissimulation or pretending 'leaves the principle of reality intact…simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false', the 'real' and the 'imaginary'' (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 3). The simulation, therefore, is a representational image that deceives, a copy without an original.

Many phenomena have played a part in disconnecting reality from the simulacrum: media culture, economics – exchange-value, multi-national capitalism and urbanisation, and language and ideology. He also introduced the hyperreal – a world of simulacra where nothing is unmediated. If we briefly refer back to Hall, he wrote that 'certain codes may, of course, be so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and be learned at so early an age, that they appear not to be constructed – the effect of an articulation between sign and referent – but to be 'naturally' given' (1980, p. 95).

Here, we can briefly return to a statement made in my introduction and concerning my thesis title. I wrote that my use of term 'conscious creation' stems from my hypothesis of actively manufacturing a version of Korean culture that is intended to appear as 'real'. I also acknowledged the complexity of representing reality and addressed the possibility that the goal is not to depict reality at all. This is supported by Fiske and Hartley, who wrote:

The more 'realistic' a programme is thought to be, the more trusted, enjoyable – and therefore the more popular – it becomes. Yet realism too is an artificial construct. Its 'naturalness' arises not from nature itself but from the fact that realism is the mode in which our particular culture prefers its ritual condensations to be cast (Fiske & Hartley, 2003, p. 128).

Within the Korean miniseries, Chae Young Sun argued that *Winter Sonata*'s capacity is to create a world of simulacra that has no reality to begin with. It is irrelevant whether its portrayals of young people or society are credible. It is the simulated world of *Winter Sonata*, its traditional values of chastity, filial piety, family and friendships, that appeal to a certain demographic. The depictions of masculinity are an idealised version that appeals to the fans, so the reality is immaterial (Chae Young Sun, 2014, p. 203). Audiences are, therefore, interested and complicit in forming unrealistic representations of masculinity, femininity, and societal values.

This factor must be considered when discussing the reality of cultural representation. Chae Young Sun's assertion underlines the importance in this thesis of adequately differentiating between reality, representation, and the simulacra.

The development of digital technologies, the Internet, and social media has shifted the audiences of Korean popular culture products. Globalisation diminishes an audience's ability to select and interpret cultural products and messages. Instead, there is a rise in ethnic nationalism as these audiences search for identity within cultural consumption.

It is this globalisation that introduces a new discussion of television flows and impact (Straubhaar, 1997, p. 285). Those involved in Korean television drama production were only initially concerned with response and audience ratings domestically. However, the shift towards a more international and multicultural audience base has animated content

creators to be more engaged and aware of the reception of their products on the global stage. By creating a product that can be successful across many countries and cultures, creators are exponentially increasing their potential profit and contributing to the good standing of Korea internationally. The downside is that domestic cultural elements are often diluted to be culturally palatable to a broader audience.

This notion is not unique to Korea; it is prevalent in the production of most creative industries in any country where the focus of success is on exportation and global reach. The sense of otherness is an essential substance of identity with the notion of identity transforming 'all relations of identity into relations of difference' introducing the arguments of both cultural proximity and self-orientalism in the considerations of Korean culture industries (Grossberg, 2011, p. 92; Fung, 2014, p. 55).

Both financial profit and a positive global reputation are equally valid incentives for creating content that will be well-received internationally. However, in a world with such a broad spectrum of traditional beliefs, cultures, and values, a problem is introduced to remain recognisable as 'Korean' to domestic audiences whilst having recognisable cultural elements across as many international regions as possible. This returns to my statement in the introduction of this thesis, where I hypothesised that miniseries are increasingly moving towards an 'American' standard, in an effort to create a cultural product that is globally recognised – a lasting effect of Western cultural imperialism.

2.5.3 Cultural and Media Imperialism

In 1976, Herbert Schiller published 'Communication and Cultural Domination', discussing how media companies and multi-national corporations from dominant

cultures (predominantly in the Western world) spread their values to other societies. In doing so, he laid the foundation for later analysis and debate on cultural imperialism.

Cultural imperialism is the process of powerful and more dominant countries imposing their culture on less dominant nations. Historically, this can occur in many forms, such as formal policy, military action, or general attitudes, although now more commonly referred to in the context of the exportation of cultural goods.

Before media technologies facilitated the spread of cultural imperialism, examples include boarding schools in the United States and Canada in the 19th and 20th centuries run by Christian missionaries that sought to assimilate Native children to Euro-American standards by banning native languages, adopting European-American names, cutting hair, and forcing them to abandon their Native identities and cultures (PBS, 2006; Bear, 2008).

Korean citizens living under Japanese rule between 1910 and 1945 were also subject to similar acts. *Hangeul* – the Korean writing system – was banned, many Koreans were forced to adopt Japanese names, and Japanese was taught as a first language in schools. Since Japan's surrender in 1945, there has been a consistent and visible American military presence in Korea, which introduced American music, fashion, and culture. As the Korean economy struggled in its post-war years, Western culture became emblematic of wealth, and American corporations were able to cash in on this, rapidly becoming multi-national. The global occupancy of the American military, along with its strong economy, resulted in a largely one-way flow of media and culture from America to the rest of the world.

With the development of television and mass media, cultural imperialism shifted to media imperialism. Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2015) wrote of at least three relationships implicated in the subject of media imperialism. Firstly, the processes of imperialism which are 'executed, promoted, transformed, or undermined and resisted by and through media'. Secondly, the media themselves and the meanings they produce and disseminate, and the political-economic processes through which they are sustained. Finally, media behaviours without reference to more encompassing frameworks, both international, such as unequal news exchange relationships imposed by Western agencies, and national, such as news and entertainment media that exercise significant commercial and political influence (Boyd-Barrett, 2015, p. 1).

Tanner Mirrlees's defined four dimensions of US-based media imperialism extending upon this final point, showcasing the operation of both international and national media behaviours:

1. A structural alliance and symbiotic relationship between the nation-state and its cultural industries
2. The nation-state's geopolitical support for the transnational economic dominance of US-based media and cultural industries
3. The media and cultural industries' support for the nation-state's international propaganda, soft power, and public diplomacy campaigns
4. Media and cultural products that intentionally or inadvertently function to glorify or legitimise the empire (Mirrlees, 2016)

The United States and a few other Western nations dominated the world's media, using it to their advantage and causing imbalanced cultural flows. These imbalanced flows have resulted in many countries implementing quotas and restrictions for foreign media.

In 1993, France required radio stations to play at least 40 per cent French music, and Spain imposed restrictions on the dubbing and projection of American movies (Cohen, 1993). Twenty years later, restrictive quotas continue to affect Hollywood's share. For example, the Hollywood market share is 80-90 per cent in Latin American countries but dips below 50 per cent in France (Hopewell, 2013).

Korea introduced similar laws restricting the hours of foreign content both in television and cinema. As a result, the balance shifted from almost complete dependence to asymmetrical interdependence (Galtung, 1971). While Korea still relies on foreign media content, notably in cinema, they have become a dominating force in content exportation. Due to concerns that imported Korean products were threatening domestic programming both culturally and economically, countries including China, Thailand, Japan and Vietnam imposed foreign TV quotas and limited total airtime for Korean dramas and K-pop content (Kim Youna, 2017, p. 419). In 2015, China limited imported TV dramas to 25 per cent of daily broadcasting hours and prohibited foreign investment in national internet service companies (Cho Jin Young, 2015).

These restrictions highlight some of the key criticisms of the cultural imperialism debate – the mistake that economic power is directly equated with culture, the lack of attention to the counter-power, and the underestimation of resistance. This model views audiences as passive with no active role (Golding & Harris, 1997; Sparks, 2007).

The globalisation of cultural flows means we can no longer view cultural imperialism as one state dominating the culture of another. Global media companies are no longer distinguishable from their American-owned counterparts, causing the emergence of a

world where 'alongside the American output of cultural product are the practically identical items marketed by competing national and transnational groups' (Schiller, 1991, p. 249). Nationality no longer matters in market-oriented media, and previous state and nation-centrism gave way to consumer interest and transnational markets (Thussu, 2016, p. 123). Schiller and Thussu's theories are pertinent to my hypothesis, as culturally identical products caused by global cultural flows justify my assertion that narratives have progressed away from traditional beliefs towards liberal, market-oriented content.

However, it can also be asserted that this change in content is not merely through globalised cultural flows. Lerner characterised the mass media as a 'mobility multiplier', arguing that the media helped process the transition from a 'traditional' to a 'modernised' state. He correlated the growth of media consumption and political democratisation, as individuals could experience events in far-off places, which forced them to reassess their way of life (Lerner, 1958, pp. 46-47).

Conversely, more media does not equal more democracy, as countries may have high media saturation but no correlation with socioeconomic or political development (Ekecrantz, 2011, p. 488). We cannot assume that anyone who comes across foreign media wishes to adapt to it. Some countries and cultures publicly reject historically imperialist flows of culture to this day. One example can be seen across the Indian film industry, which has successfully promoted Indian languages, fashion and culture, and challenged dominant Western cultures and narratives.

The dynamics of cultural influence are complex, and the interplay of global cultural

flows and local expressions of culture are hybridising to form their own individual culture.

2.5.4 Orientalism and Self-Orientalism

It is important to note that implementing foreign cultural elements only sometimes equates to cultural imperialism. In a cross-cultural context, Appadurai asserted that global-national-local interactions produce heterogeneous disjunctures rather than globally homogenised cultures (Appadurai, 1990; Thussu, 2016). Disjunctures are shaped by various historical, political, and cultural factors, manifesting through economic inequalities, cultural clashes, or power imbalances. They disrupt existing social structures and hierarchies and lead to new forms of cultural relations. Thus, heterogenous disjunctures directly highlight the non-linear and uneven processes of globalisation.

In its most basic form, the notion of cultural hybridity argues that when two cultures coexist, they create a new form of culture. Bhabha asserted that 'cultures come to be represented by virtue of the processes of iteration and translation', which 'erases any essentialist claims for inherent authenticity or purity of cultures', and they 'frequently become political arguments for the hierarchy and ascendancy of powerful cultures' (1994, pp. 83-84). Cultural hybridity, therefore, does not necessarily imply voluntary hybridisation. He continued that hybridity is a sign of the productivity of colonial power, a 'revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 159). Cultural hybridity is not only a mixing of cultural elements, but cultural identities formed through colonial relations and post-colonial migration. Therefore, hybridity is implicated in the 'destabilisation of identities in encounters between coloniser and colonised' (Frello, 2013, pp. 1-2).

In several ways, cultural imperialism and hybridity are linked, but the context of their existence differs. The cultural imperialism debate implies the forced implementation of cultural change, and cultural hybridity allows the colonised groups to assert their own identity by shifting the focus of cultural domination. Between these two, Korea leans toward the latter. Although some credit Japanese colonial forces with the early industrialisation and modernisation of Korea, modern Korea has instead found a balance between its history and traditional culture with external cultural influences from the United States, Japan, and other countries. Implementing traditional and external cultural influences can be considered a factor in the reception of Korean cultural products. Similarly, the exoticisation and essentialisation of Korean culture can create an allure for Western audiences.

Edward Said acknowledged the two geographical sectors of the 'Orient' and the 'Occident' to be entirely human-made – the relationship between them 'is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony' (Said, 1978, p. 13). Orientalism is ultimately recognised as exaggerating the difference between the East and the West as a presumption of Western superiority.

The 'Orient', ranging from the Middle to the Far East, is not a cultural, religious, or linguistic monolith. Its unity is fabricated through its exclusion and objectification by the West (Sakai, 1988, p. 499). Regardless of whichever term it is referred by – the Orient, the East, the Other – it can only exist as long as the West exists. Therefore:

> However impeccably the content of the 'Other' can be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its location as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytic terms, it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination and is the most

serious indictment of the institutional powers of critical theory (Bhabha, 1994, p. 31).

As technologies lessened the distance between countries and improved the ability to communicate globally, countries once dominated by Western representation have been able to present their own culture and identity. This displacement of centred discourses of the West puts into question 'the universalist character and its transcendental claims to speak for everyone, while itself being everywhere and nowhere' (Hall, 1996, p. 446).

Whilst Orientalism was built on the mysterious exoticism by the West, self-orientalism exploits this gaze, a 'strategy of inclusion through exclusion, and exclusion through inclusion' (Iwabuchi, 1994, pp. 53-54). Self-orientalism can be employed to create an ideological construction of cultural and national identity by establishing itself as the 'Other'.

Japan, a country often considered more West than East, uses its cultural ideals to promote its otherness. Its 'oriental calmness' and 'impersonality' are created through 'incessant identification between the subject and object, and outside "other"' (Yoshioka, 1995, p. 101). Ancient folk rituals are reinvented against a backdrop of cultural homogenisation to make them more appealing to the masses (Kim-Hogarth, 2001, p. 281).

Korea likewise uses self-orientalism to its benefit, incorporating historical and traditional culture against the backdrop of Westernised modernity to show its uniqueness. The familiarity of Western capitalism layered with 'exotic' foreignness becomes the core characteristic of Korean dramas. However, it can be argued that

instead of empowering themselves as the 'Other' by highlighting their exoticism and otherness, they are furthering the foreigner's privilege and authority. The process of folkorisation and reauthorising culture to suit the needs of the contemporary and the utilisation of exoticism further empowers the privileged West to advance their vision of Korean culture and identity (Dunkel, 2016, p. 2).

Whilst Orientalism and self-Orientalism are a tool in critically analysing content production, it is integral that we place this analysis within a larger social and cultural context. Korean dramas have subverted Western narratives successfully and have effectively given rise to a more nuanced understanding of Korean culture that would not have been possible under historic cultural flows.

2.5.5 Cultural Proximity and Hegemonic Mimicry

The term 'cultural proximity' is often used when discussing the consumption of popular Korean cultural products overseas. Straubhaar defined cultural proximity as 'the tendency to prefer media products from one's own culture or the most similar possible culture' (2003, p. 85). The cultural proximity argument suggests that countries and groups that share cultural elements will import and export cultural goods more efficiently, as their audiences will be more likely to recognise and accept the culture presented on television.

Korea's advantage is the cultural similarities that go beyond language, including non-verbal communication, religion, music, and food. Shared traditional values and Confucian ethics, such as family, community and strong morality, attract the East Asian cultural consumer (Lee Sang Joon, 2015, p. 7). This explains the strength of Korean products in countries such as Japan, China, and Taiwan, which share an entwined and

similar history and culture.

Historically, Korean popular culture has been modelled after the Japanese pop culture industry and shaped by Western pop culture (Hong Suk Kyung & Jin Dal Yong, 2021, p. 4). Koreans accessed European cultural fads by looking at Japan. European stars and fashion made their way to Japan first. Despite the ban on Japanese cultural products, Korea relied on pre-existing colonial flows of information, scholarship, and popular culture (Kim Kyung Hyun, 2021, p. 24). However, the cultural proximity model fails to consider how Korean products have succeeded globally. It risks presenting culture ahistorically, assuming cultural commonalities exist above diverse historical contexts and internal influences (Iwabuchi, 2002, pp. 131-132).

Attitudes in the early Korean Wave asserted that Confucianism was critical in early exports to East and Southeast Asia. This immediately implies a continued Orientalist view of East Asian culture, reducing it to the region's stereotypical representation and disregarding cultural and economic modernity in these countries. It also implies that Confucian traditions are viewed as a metaphor for the Korean Wave. Whilst the first argument indicates a general orientalist view towards culture in East Asia as a whole, this statement draws a direct relationship between a Western-built stereotype of Korea and its popular culture products. If such a metaphor exists, one could indeed watch an episode of a drama and fully understand the nuance of the Confucian tradition, which is unlikely to be the case. Given that the Korean Wave spread beyond East and Southeast Asia, the argument that a Confucian cultural background is crucial in its development is disproven (Suh Chung Sok, Cho Young Ju & Kwon Seung Ho, 2006, p. 42).

Cultural proximity has also been 'told as the triumph of domestically produced media over the alien foreign media privileged in models of cultural imperialism and one-way flows' (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008, p. 488). However, it can be conversely asserted that through the international exchange of cultural products, cultural characteristics that have weaker power or influence will be assimilated into those with stronger power or influence. As a result, the cultural characteristics of the recipient become assimilated to the foreign culture, cultural assimilation arises through globalisation and is accelerated through technological development (Suh Chung Sok, Cho Young Ju & Kwon Seung Ho, 2006, pp. 43-44).

Audiences have assimilated to cultural characteristics because of ongoing cultural and media imperialism but the oligopoly of the culture industry market creates an imbalance, as the supplier dominates the international interaction of cultural products, thereby strengthening cultural proximities. This has been compounded in Korea by the simultaneity of compressed modernity, a rapid economic and technological change making those who have grown up in a postmodern era less likely to distinguish 'traditional' cultural characteristics from those which have been assimilated through the long-term one-way flow of American cultural products.

Like American brands, which immediately conjure images of their 'home' nation, any product will have a cultural association with its country of production. However, the one-way cultural flow from America to the rest of the world created a 'ubiquitous Western modernity', making the original commodity irrelevant. Its origin becomes subsumed by local appropriation through hybridisation or indigenisation. Thus, many aspects of American culture are viewed as 'ours'; the proliferation of McDonald's

worldwide means it no longer represents an American way of life to global consumers (Iwabuchi, 1998, pp. 166-178).

The West often portrays Japan through its otherness, yet 'the dialogue between Japan and the West is frequently described in terms of Japan's absorption of the West. The pattern of imitation, absorption and finally reinterpretation of Western ideas is explicit' (Holborn, 1991, p. 18). We can go so far as to argue that the reinterpretation of Western style has become distinctly Japanese. Car models such as the Nissan Figaro, Mitusoka Galue and Toyota Classic are all based on older American and European car designs. The design of newer Western models no longer has the same aesthetic that made them initially appealing to Japanese consumers. So the original iteration and its 'Westernness' were taken and extensively imitated to the extent that it became a new product immediately recognised as a Japanese item.

Similar cases also exist within Korean cultural life. One example is fried chicken – popularity soared for this dish after the first Korean KFC opened in 1984. The recipe for fried chicken has since developed in Korea, resulting in successful chains opening stores worldwide (Lee Hyo Sik, 2013; Ock, 2016).

Both examples here can be considered forms of hegemonic mimicry. They have imitated and adapted the dominant group's cultural products or practices, ultimately subverting the underlying power dynamics of cultural flows. Korean cultural products have since become 'ambivalently hegemonic through their creative praxis of mimicry'. Their 'opaque underscoring of traditional cultural identity' does not differ from 'other Neo-American cosmopolitan aesthetics and styles' seen worldwide (Kim Kyung Hyun,

2021, p. xi). The difference between the Korean and Japanese cases is subtle. Japan historically viewed America as an ideal modern society model and aimed to be considered equal to the image of Western modernity. However, Korea slowly absorbed and developed elements of American culture through the military presence after the war instead of a discerned effort to incorporate it into Korean cultural life.

Therefore, conversations of cultural flows equating East versus West to be synonymous with Korea versus America fail to address the history of East Asian cultural flows and the cultural sphere that exists today. Certainly:

> Koreans have nourished a system of popular culture that has rendered its own ethnic and nationalist flavors opaque in order for its survival in the face of global competition against American cultural content and media industries. (Kim Kyung Hyun, 2021, p. 15).

Cultural collaboration is familiar in the region as several countries have paid attention to popular culture as it relates to the critical political economy, advancing regional integration through sharing national cultures and financial resources. Using co-productions as just one example of cultural cooperation, they have advanced pan-East Asian cultural products (Jin, 2021a, p. 52).

The perceived threat of Japanese cultural encroachment during the 1960s emboldened a defensive discourse against the visual nature of Japanese culture, affecting cinematic nationalism and giving rise to new genres such as gangster films (An, 2018, pp. 35-36).

Hybridisation and indigenisation of foreign commodities arguably exist as a natural part of the constant flux of culture. However, when discussing a nation's culture, the authenticity or original locale of anything can be questioned. If we ignore any cultural element originating overseas, what is left for us to consider? Confucian traditions and

belief systems are arguably the foundation of Korean behaviour. However, like the two major religions of Korea, Buddhism and Christianity, all originate from overseas. Must we, therefore, disregard any behaviours or values that stem from these as not authentically 'Korean'?

This is the criticism of understanding cultural hybridity as merely a mixing of global (mainly Western) culture with local culture. It depoliticises the formation of cultures, neglecting the local context of cultural production. When this occurs, the culture can be wrongly celebrated for its 'Americanisation'. Kim Tae Young (2021a & 2023) argued that earlier Korean cultural products were dependent on ethnocentric heritage, traditional values, and virtues in their reproduction, but later products are universal, transnational, and have hybrid characteristics that can appeal to domestic and international audiences. Most significantly, he asserted the appropriation of global popularity as a means of defining the new 'K' in Korean popular culture, and, therefore, anything successful in the market can be Korean. This implies that it is now the global success of a Korean product which makes it Korean, with its values and cultural characteristics no longer its fundamental determinants.

Therefore, the hybridisation and indigenisation of foreign commodities return us to our previous theories. What was once foreign is now local, and what was once local is now global. Undoubtedly, this introduces a new angle to the questions this project answers – in the era of the glocal, how can we effectively define a national culture?

2.5.6 De-centring Western-dominant Theories and Flows

All of the theories thus far are Western-centric. Cultural imperialism recognises the lasting effects of colonialism and historical one-way media flows from the West.

Cultural hybridity broadly implies the same whilst acknowledging a level of voluntary absorption of Western elements. Orientalism requires an understanding of the Western view of the Orient; self-Orientalism, too, is the nation recognising how it is viewed by the Occident and acting up to this. Cultural proximity generalises regions and assumes a shared historical culture that is often stereotyped and under-detailed.

In modern academic practice, we must focus on new kinds of global media flows that operate alongside existing media production centres without being mapped directly against them. In the digital age, global media flows are profoundly transformed beyond earlier discussions of transnationalism and translocalism. The transnational media order remaps media spaces and engages in new flows, such that international reach is no longer limited to Western conglomerates (Chalaby, 2005, p. 30). Processes of deterritorialisation link to diasporic communities, the ethno-scapes of mobility of people and, subsequently, cultures and identities give way to alternative and parallel modernities (Appadurai, 1991; Larkin 2001).

Parallel modernities discuss the coexistence of multiple economic, religious and cultural flows subsumed within modernity (Larkin, 2001, p. 407). Countries and cultures develop separately but may have shared characteristics, such as types of political structure (for instance, democratic, progressive, conservative) or economy (communist, socialist, capitalist, neoliberal). They seek to move beyond debates of coloniser versus colonised or East versus West as we revise our conceptions of global cultural flows that historically centre the West and disregard peripheries engaged in cultural production.

Larkin's parallel modernities give credence to what I hypothesised as the third possible

reason for a shift in drama content. To review, I asserted that content progression over time could be a result of natural societal shift and development, independent of foreign intervention or international relations. It is important to recognise that significant cultural shifts, such as from dictatorship to democracy, from conservative to progressive (or vice versa), do not solely come about by exchanges with the West.

Significantly, and not adequately addressed in existing literature, is the success of Korean dramas across non-Western markets since the early 2000s. Only now that these shows are available and accepted in Western markets are they considered 'successful'. This 'success' emphasises the Eurocentric view of global media, as it fails to validate the success and reception in other regions for decades.

Even domestically, where the Korean Wave was once viewed as the epitome of the embodiment of the West's penetration, perception has changed to view it as a successful operation in healing the colonial past.

2.5.7 Conclusion

Many of the discussed theories are often used together to explain the global success of Korean drama. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the limitations of these theories often come to disprove themselves in this context. Cultural proximity, as one example, is both accurate and untrue. It has historically been used as a basis for early exports and a reason for regional success. However, the global success of exported products suggests a shared or mutually understandable aspect of culture.

Cultural imperialism and hybridity oversimplify a history of cultural development over time and fail to recognise that transcultural exchange (whether forced or voluntary) still

generates new culture that is in no way less valid. Each of these theories can be used to discuss the remarkable growth and economic expansion of the Korean popular culture industry.

Suppose we accept the current society and culture for what it is, taking all foreign influence, inspiration, and imperialism. In that case, we must still acknowledge that real society and the society represented in popular culture products are not necessarily the same. The portrayal of cultural features is often stereotyped as positively associated with the culture of origin.

Khoo wrote, 'the cultural odour of a product – its specific national mark – is sometimes erased so that the commodity will have a better chance of selling overseas' (2007, p. 61). This is the argument I have defended in response to my hypothesis of this research project. The challenge is identifying the difference between changes in cultural representation as a natural development versus changes as an active choice. Much of this is concerned with self-perception, and the answer cannot be distinctly binary.

2.6 Cultural Dimensions and Values

As I approach this study from the perspective of a cultural outsider and an individual from a dominating global culture, it is of utmost importance that the process by which I later analyse these products is academically grounded. As just discussed, I consider it imperative to progress discourse in modern global cultural flows away from Western-dominant narratives and theories. Therefore, it is now fitting to introduce some important facets of Korea-specific cultural studies.

The opinion between Koreans and international audiences about what constitutes

Korean cultural values in television will differ and connects back to Hall's work on the encoding and decoding of meaning. There will be a universal awareness from creators that some of the culture-limited emotions and syndromes, such as *han* or *hwabyeong*, will not be fully understood by international audiences. The purpose is instead to represent these in a way that can at least be adequately interpreted.

I first seek to establish the meanings of cultural values, ethics and emotions, which ensure a theoretical underpinning for the project's coding process introduced in the following chapter.

2.6.1 Cultural Dimensions and Values

In my initial research around national branding and imagined communities, I first came across the work of Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Between 1967 and 1973, he completed a survey of IBM employers across forty countries, using a factor analysis approach to quantify and compare their national cultures.

Before detailing each of his dimensions, Hofstede first asserted culture is acquired as a slow process of growing into society through learning values (dominant beliefs and attitudes), partaking in rituals (collective activities), modelling against heroes (role models), and understanding symbols (myths, legends, dress, jargon, lingo) (Jones, 2007, p. 3).

Hofstede's original theory initially proposed four dimensions by which cultural values could be analysed:

- Power Distance – The extent to which less powerful members of a society expect and accept power to be distributed unequally.

- Individualism versus Collectivism – The extent to which individuals prioritise their own needs and interests over those of the group.
- Masculinity versus Femininity – The extent to which the society values traditionally masculine traits (achievement, assertiveness, competition) over feminine traits (care, cooperation, and quality of life)
- Uncertainty Avoidance – The extent individuals feel threatened by change, uncertainty, and ambiguity.

However, Hofstede's work is not without criticism. McSweeney's (2002) critique argued that the methodology is fundamentally flawed, questioning whether culture can systematically cause differences in behaviour. Jones (2007) argued that a survey is not an appropriate method to accurately determine cultural disparity, especially in cases where the variable measured is culturally sensitive or subject. Hofstede's study assumes that the domestic population functions as a homogeneous whole, resulting in an analysis constrained by the individual's character, creating a risk of arbitrary responses whilst ignoring the importance of community and variations in community influence. In reference back to the work of Benedict Anderson (1983), nations are not an appropriate unit of measurement in the analysis of culture as a culture is not necessarily bounded by borders, geographical or imagined.

The Chinese Value Survey (CVS), developed by Michael Harris Bond in Hong Kong, was composed of a values inventory suggested by Eastern minds, which 'only partly covered themes judged important in the West…the long-/short-term orientation dimension appears to be based on items reminiscent of the teachings of Confucius' (Hofstede, 2001, p. 351). The original IBM survey has been criticised as having an unintentional cultural bias as it is written by Western members. Given the ongoing Cold War in Europe, participants' memories of World War II and communist insurgency in

Asia, Africa, and parts of Europe, the timing of the original survey is argued to have been directly or indirectly affected by political influence. It failed to consider some of the unique facets of non-Western societies that substantially affect cultural behaviour.

Following this research, Hofstede added the fifth dimension, long-term versus short-term orientation. This is the extent to which a society prefers long-term planning, perseverance, and respect for traditions over immediate gratification and adapting to changing circumstances.

A sixth dimension was added in the 2000s, following research by Michael Minkov and the World Values Survey (WVS). This introduced indulgence versus restraint – the extent to which society indulges in the gratification of impulse and desire, preferring personal happiness and leisure over self-discipline and adherence to social norms.

Certainly, the approach of utilising surveys from only one company and using this to determine an entire country's cultural system can be questioned. However, Hofstede has argued that his approach was not designed to be an absolute measure but is merely gauging differences in culture. In addition, using only one company removes any possibility of effect by the employer or management, leaving only national culture to explain any cultural difference.

Two other significant projects have also been developed with similar goals and frameworks to Hofstede: Trompenaar's Model of National Culture Differences (1997) and Simon Fraser University's Global Leadership and Organisation Behaviour Effectiveness Project (GLOBE). Both utilised methods like Hofstede and presented

seven and nine dimensions, respectively, focusing on orientations such as inter-human communication, time, environment, and external factors. Across all studies, many dimensions have a level of conceptual overlap. Triandis wrote that collectivism includes power distance (1990, p. 57), a fair argument if we consider that greater power distance is embedded in the more collective nature of a society, where priority is placed in respect towards elders and the consensus amongst the people (Cho Bong Jin et al., 1999, p. 61).

Whilst culture and values are closely interconnected, groups with a shared culture, nationality or ethnicity may not necessarily share the same values, and vice versa. Hofstede distinguishes between the two, that 'values are held by individuals as well as by collectivities; culture presupposes a collectivity', whilst a value is the 'broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others' (2001, p. 5). Brennan supposed that the 'conceiving of national values means recognising these basic dilemmas as conflicting in internal and external relations of interconnectedness' (2012, pp. 26-27).

Koreans are often considered bound by an ethnic identity. There is an argument that ethnicism supersedes nationalism. However, this argument is contrasted with that of Margalit:

> We cannot choose between different ways of life that we consider valuable … we can only perform an existential act of choice that expresses our freedom to live this way rather than some other way, where both … are valuable to us. But more often than we choose a way of life, we are born into one. National belonging is the outstanding example of this truth (1997, p. 80).

Brennan noted that 'from these perspectives, we can assume greater incompatibility than consensus within national values, particularly given discrepancies between political and "lived" notions of what constitutes national values' (2012, p. 27).

Korean cultural values cannot be viewed as a single, defined idea, but rather a fusion of diverse, sometimes conflicting, values that vary between local societal groups, social classes, and generations. Rokeach also wrote that 'to say a person "has a value" is to say that he [sic] has an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence' (1973, p. 5).

Many of the social themes present in modern Korean society and its television stem from Confucianism, such as the family-centred social order, the contemporary gender hierarchy, the division of labour between man and woman, and the value and attitudes towards learning and status (Kim Youna, 2017, pp. 6-9). Whilst modern attitudes, technologies and events can coexist with and sometimes further promote these Confucian ideologies, the mindset and sentiments of younger generations often conflict with those of the older generation, who still hold the memories of oppression and a pre-modern era.

As with all societies, there is often a 'generation gap'. This is a perceived gap or difference of opinion in beliefs, politics, and values. Korea has a noticeable generation gap because of its compressed modernity. In this condition, economic, political and socio-cultural changes occur very quickly, causing a mutually disparate historical and cultural coexistence, leading to the reconstruction of a highly complex social system (Chang, 2017, p. 33).

Current children and young adults were born and raised in a modern and economically

successful country. Yet, their parents and grandparents grew up in a country of poverty, war, and military rule. The older generation who lived during the Japanese occupation is described as having a stronger will to live by traditional Korean values, which were taken away from them during their youth. Instead, the younger generation has lived in a more culturally hybridised society, where traditional cultural legacy has blended with other cultural systems and ethical values, resulting in a new contemporary social morality.

Korean miniseries tend to be associated with younger audiences instead of long-form drama series targeting homemakers and the older generation. As a result, miniseries are more likely to highlight the struggle or discord between the younger and older characters from the younger generation's perspective. Common themes of discord resulting from contemporary social morality can include sex or pregnancy before marriage or lack of deference in speech or body language towards elders.

Many Koreans connect Christianity to a Western way of thinking that will lead to a loss of national identity and its traditional ethical values. They are concerned that modern-day values, morality and ethics, lag behind the country's material progress (Oh Byung Sun, 1998).

New Confucian ethics value family relations and education, stressing self-cultivation and psychological self-discipline. It stresses a harmonious relationship with others, cooperation and social solidarity (Oh Byung Sun, 1998). This is challenged by Kim Yong Hak, who wrote that 'there were government-driven campaigns and propagandas to build up a national culture that emphasised distorted Confucianism, placing loyalty to

the nation on top of the moral credo' in the 70s and 80s (2007, p. 160). This is not so much the case in modern dramas, but Confucian moral values are still widely considered at the forefront of most Korean dramas.

The Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS) directly referenced family-based Confucian values in modern dramas, writing that their inclusion 'strikes a chord with Asian viewers who share a cultural affinity and makes them reliable entertainment in other parts of the world'. The themes of friendship, family values, and love are universal feelings that appeal to a wide audience. The unique 'Korean spirit', a blending of Confucian traditional values, Western materialism, and individualism, registers with the modern audience, whilst older audience members relate to the traditional values (KOCIS, 2011, pp. 42-43).

The Confucian influence on culture and values remains a major factor in national culture today. Many of the aforementioned traditional values, such as family ties, collectivism before individualism, and respect for education and authority, are broadly agreed upon by different cultures and communities worldwide.

2.6.2 Culture-Bound Syndromes and Emotions

The broad spread of Confucianism and its associated values and ethics can be attributed to the earlier concepts of cultural proximity and cultural odour. However, extensive work details feelings, emotions, and syndromes unique to the Korean people.

Huer (2009) referred to *han* as 'lodged in the deepest recesses of the Korean psyche that shapes, justifies and explains all that is considered the "Korean mind"'. Glionna called it an 'all-encompassing sense of bitterness, a mixture of angst, endurance and a yearning

for revenge that tests a person's soul, a condition marked by deep sorrow and a sense of incompleteness that can have fatal consequences…*han* has been described as a sense of hope, an ability to silently endure hardship and suffering' (2011, para. 6-7).

This concept has supposedly developed from Korea's history, which is filled with invasions and mistreatment. However, definitions and inclusions of *han* in pre-modern Korean literature are rarely found. In fact, it has been described as a modern experience, and a postcolonial translation of a Japanese colonial construct (Kim Sandra So Hee Chi 2017; Kang Minsoo, 2020).

In reference to why this emotion is considered so vital in the success of Korean dramas, KOCIS wrote that *han* is a 'collective sentiment of sorrow, regret, resentment, and, often, yearning for vengeance', which may be difficult for non-Koreans to understand. It is a strong emotion fuelled by fatalism and accompanied by a sense of passivity. Therefore outbursts of *han* draw sympathy and hope for overcoming adversity amongst both Korean and foreign audiences (KOCIS, 2011, pp. 46-48). *Han* is inherently tied to Korean melodrama, as the concept of suffering is a fundamental component.

Similarly, *hwabyeong*, a Korean somatisation disorder and culture-bound syndrome, is a clinical mental illness that arises when individuals cannot confront their anger in situations which they perceive to be unfair. Previous studies found that up to 4.1 per cent of the general population in rural areas are reported as having *hwabyeong*, with frequently higher in women of lower social class (Min Sung Kil et al., 1990). Symptoms include feelings of *han*, feelings of hatred and guilt, depression, and anxiety. *Hwabyeong's* cultural relatedness to *han* is associated with various life events,

including failed romantic relationships, life hardship, lower family class, low education level, betrayal, and injury often being the foundations of drama narratives (Min Sung Kil, 2009, pp. 14-15). Min later asserted that *han* and *hwabyeong* have a place in modern Korean culture, referencing the collectiveness of Korean football supporters at the World Cup as a kind of *puri*, or healing process (Min Sung Kil, 2009, p. 18).

Kim Bok Rae wrote of three kinds of Korean energy and tied them to different generations of the Korean Wave. *Ki,* a universal energy, *Jeong* is care and affection; and *Heung* is a collective sensitivity, a feeling of reconciliation and unity driven by dynamical convergence and synergism. *Jeong* is directly attributed to Korean Wave 1.0 and *Heung* to 2.0 (2015, p. 158). Thus, it is asserted that these feelings are not mere constructs but distinct cultural elements that are bound to creative products.

2.6.3 Conclusion

As I approach this research as a cultural outsider, under the expectation that those who read this thesis will likely be in the same position, these values and emotions are important to introduce. The introduction to Hofstede's work and the framework of cultural dimensions are particularly significant to the development of this project's methodological approach, detailed further in Chapter 4.

When discussing cultural values and culture-bound syndrome, certainly, it would be ideal to unequivocally identify a case for an act guided by Confucian ethics by having an equally strong case for the character to act by their own reasoning, devoid of Confucian influence. The objective is not to prove whether or not the aforementioned values, ethics, or syndromes exist, but merely to acknowledge their presence within the broader collective consciousness of the Korean public.

2.7 Conclusion

There are various aspects involved when considering how and why a particular representation of culture is embedded in popular culture products. Adorno contemplated how the industry of popular culture causes mass-produced and standardised products. The famous works of Stuart Hall (1980) and Jean Baudrillard (1994) raise interesting questions regarding how representation can be different for both the producer and the consumer and how we must consider the 'reality' from which television depictions of society have been based. As Hall stated:

> Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics – as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – 'the giving and taking of meaning' – between members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and express themselves, their thoughts, and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. (1997, p. 2)

Transnational media networks influence and impact local culture in various ways, including changes to cultural preferences, new cultural practices and the reconfiguration of identities (Chalaby, 2004).

Throughout the late 20th century, Korea's regimes used the rebuilding of a strong national cultural identity to control and oppress freedom in the media industries. However, Korea's rapid industrialisation and economic growth brought a compressed modernity, an entangled intersection of traditional Confucian-based attitudes with modern Western thought. The balance of cultures, mixing, indigenising and hybridising, created the global popular culture industry today.

Each of the theories and concepts examined in this chapter has its significance within the framework of this study. A comprehension of the theoretical foundations of the

critical political economy, such as industry commodification and the conditions of production of mass culture, is essential to understanding the roles involved in the regulation, production, and distribution processes.

The role of the nation-state and soft power initiatives connect our entertainment to structures of power. The success of the Korean Wave became attributed to nation branding efforts. The country's unique history and culture have formed culturally identifiable values, ethics and syndromes, which are imperative to understand if we are to adequately dissect the cultural content.

Prior theories on cultural flows highlight the lasting effects of Western media and cultural imperialism, but also showcase the development of non-Western cultural products and new global flows.

This chapter has detailed the theory that lays the foundation for developing this thesis, but we must next understand the history of how modern Korean society and its media industry were formed and developed.

Chapter 3 – Culture and Content in Korea: A Brief Introduction

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the evolution of the miniseries within the framework of the Korean State's soft power policies, the broader political and economic landscape of the Korean broadcasting industry, and the cultural development of formats such as the miniseries as part of the broader development of the Korean Wave.

Korea is one of the longest continuously existing countries, with legend dating the first Korean kingdom of *Gojoseon* as far back as 2333 BCE, though the first written account dates to the early 7th century BCE. The Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE-668 CE) adopted Buddhism as the state religion and was increasingly influenced by Confucianism. King Sejong invented *Hangeul*, the Korean alphabet, during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897), and Confucian ideals were further implemented into society.

Japanese forces occupying the Korean Peninsula between 1910 and 1945 attempted to eradicate many traditional cultural elements that had developed over the prior periods. By 1943, they established administrative policies with the goal of cultural assimilation; they banned the speaking of Korean and pressured many into adopting Japanese names (Caprio, 2009; Pak & Hwang, 2011). Others were forced to attend state Shinto devotions to weaken the influences of traditional Korean religions such as Shamanism (Nakajima, 2010). The subsequent Korean War (1950-1953) destroyed much of Korea's remaining physical cultural heritage.

Until the 1980s, Korea was a developing nation, but the growth of the industrial sector

was the leading catalyst to its economic development. In 2023, they are the twelfth largest economy in the world, with real GDP expanding on average by over 8 per cent a year, from 2.8 billion USD in 1962 to 1.8 trillion USD in 2021 (World Bank, 2023).

This chapter first looks at how post-occupation and post-war policy sought to reverse the efforts of Japanese colonialism and rebuild Korea. Amid political instability, early cultural policy took a protectionist approach to shield Korean assets before democratisation opened markets. Over the same period, broadcasting technologies also developed, and several television networks began broadcasting.

The combination of these two factors laid the foundation for the development of the Korean Wave, which is now amongst the most significant exports for the country. The Korean Wave spans over twenty years, incorporating the period which this thesis focuses upon, and has several eras, each with unique characteristics. We must look at each era individually to summarise goals and achievements.

As the miniseries is a crucial element of the Korean Wave, this chapter closes by familiarising the reader with its history and defining features. As the principal medium of this thesis, the miniseries' distinctiveness and its characteristic production must be made evident before continuing further into the research.

3.2 A History of Modern Korean Cultural Policy, 1945-Present

The Japanese Empire announced its surrender on 15 August 1945. The Korean peninsula, already of interest to both American and Soviet forces, was eventually divided amongst the 38th parallel in what was understood as a temporary arrangement until the Koreans were deemed ready for self-rule.

The United States Army Military Government in Korea had no clear cultural policy after its establishment. It paid little attention to Korean cultural matters, unlike the US occupation of Germany, where there was more significant control of media apparatuses as they attempted to reorient Germans from Nazism. Only following concerns of communist subversion in 1946 did US military personnel begin a sophisticated use of propaganda in film.

In 1951, Yale ethnologist Cornelius Osgood published *The Koreans and their Culture*, describing Korean culture as 'essentially shamanistic'. By the end of the decade, Korean scholars began discussing what constitutes the essence of Korean culture amidst stirrings of cultural nationalism (Kim Yersu, 1976, p. 16). Though none could make a definition, they voiced concern over traditional arts at the brink of extinction. So, colleges and universities began offering courses in traditional Korean subjects, including thought, architecture, and music.

After the Korean War, the government was preoccupied with economic development, national security, and political stability. Thus, cultural policy in Korea was only first introduced during the administration of Park Chung Hee (1961-1979). Seizing power through a coup, he understood the role of broadcasting and its power to spread his political and economic ideologies. He launched the television network Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), as television offered a new medium through which the authoritarian military government could legitimise the regime's ideologies and support broader political and economic objectives. During this time, the government encouraged music, films, and television programmes that advocated values of hard work for

economic development, personal sacrifice, and loyalty to the nation (Boyer & Ahn, 1991).

Park's administration published the first Five-Year Cultural and Economic Development Plan in 1962. Five-year plans, a method of economic planning over limited periods, were first used in the Soviet Union before spreading to other socialist states, including China, in the 1950s. The document introduced several measures that brought about an atmosphere of self-censorship in the media industries. These included the 1970 Declaration of the State of National Emergency and Martial Law Decree, which ultimately eliminated unbiased news coverage by banning broadcasts related to assemblies and demonstrations for political activities, and the 1972 Yushin Constitution, which restricted freedom of speech.

The official definition of culture in Korean policy and law dates to the provisions of the 'Act of Promoting Culture and Arts', published in 1972. In this document, 'culture and the arts' refer to 'literature, fine arts (including the applied arts), music, dance, drama, cinema, artistic entertainment, traditional music, photography, architecture, language and publishing.' Beyond this, Korean cultural policy acknowledged the 'spiritual and intangible aspect of human activity' (Hong Kiwon, 2013, p. 9).

The essential rationale for Korea's cultural policy was to construct a cultural identity (Kim Yersu, 1976). The foremost priority was traditional culture; 70 per cent of public expenditure in the cultural sector between 1974 and 1978 was spent on folk culture and traditional arts (Ministry of Culture and Information, 1979, p. 228). The focus on traditional and folk culture stemmed from these administrations' attempts to regulate the

cultural industries' activities and the creative freedom of artists, forcefully attempting to repress any individual or business that did not support the government's economic objectives (Kang Nae Hui, 2012). It was during this period that the Korean government recognised the potential of soft power, and thus it aimed to differentiate itself from other developing nations by showcasing its cultural heritage. Furthermore, the promotion of traditional culture also had further economic implications, as traditional performances and cultural events attracted international visitors and diplomats, improving cultural exchange and diplomatic relationships.

The priority of establishing cultural identity as part of the nation's rebuilding effort continued through Park's subsequent plans. He viewed culture and the arts as a generating force behind the drive for modernisation and mobilised them to secure political legitimacy (Yim Haksoon, 2002, p. 43). His government differentiated between 'sound' and 'unsound' culture, a 'sound' culture 'conducive to anti-communism, nationalism, traditional morality and state-led economic development strategy' (ibid).

Until Chun Doo Hwan became president in 1980, the three major terrestrial broadcasting networks – KBS1, TBC (now KBS2) and MBC – functioned under strict government control and were considered speakers for the regime. Chun permitted greater freedom in the media over his predecessors, but this was still limited due to clauses that made the press liable for damages if they violated someone's reputation, social ethics, or morals (Howard Ian, 2009, p. 65).

In 1981, Chun added the following to the South Korean constitution: 'The state should strive for the preservation and development of traditional culture and the advancement

of national culture' (Park So Young, 2010). He extended public subsidy from cultural heritage and traditional arts to include contemporary arts, and the fifth Five-Year Plan for Cultural and Economic Development involved a significant shift in the overall economic policy; from one of deep government intervention to one that promotes greater private initiative and working of the market mechanism' (Il, 1987, p. vi). However, successive governments did not seek to develop the cultural industries. Instead, they promoted industries such as electronics and heavy machinery for economic development (Kwon Seung Ho & Kim Joseph, 2014, p. 424).

Cultural policy can be separated into two forms, cultural policy 'proper' and cultural policy as display, under which Williams (1984) identified five state/culture relations:

Cultural Policy As Display
1. National aggrandisement
2. Economic reductionism

Cultural Policy Proper
3. Public patronage of the arts
4. Media regulation
5. Negotiated construction of cultural identity (McGuigan, 2004, p. 64)

Cultural policy 'proper' concerns itself with social democratisation 'in terms of support for art and media regulation', designed to counter 'penetrating market forces' that marginalise 'unprofitable cultural forms and the expressions of minority groups'. This form of cultural policy is often displayed at a national event to achieve national aggrandisement (Iwabuchi, 2015, p. 39).

Cultural policy as display 'takes the form of an "economic reductionism of culture" that

promotes economic growth' (Iwabuchi, 2015, p. 40). While cultural policy can no longer be developed effectively without considering the role of commercialised cultures in the public sphere, cultural policy as display has been well integrated, as the state claims it is regulating power by collaborating with private corporations (ibid).

Seoul hosting the 1988 Olympic Games is a particular point of reference for hybridising these two forms of cultural policy. Protectionist approaches conflicted with the goals of economic growth. After the success of the Games, succeeding governments began to acknowledge the importance of international cultural exchange. The global scale of this mega-event was one of the first opportunities for Korea to promote its modernity, economic development, and international market opportunities. Consequently, some of the earliest policy changes in the early 1990s sought to align cultural policy with neoliberal globalisation. Understanding that policymakers of national economics and defenders of national cultures can no longer afford to denounce transnational capital, the government launched an official *segyehwa* (globalisation) policy in active response to the external pressures imposed by the United States and to survive in the new world of global competition (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1992, pp. 125-6; Kim Samuel, 2000, pp. 2-3).

Nationally renowned writer Rhee Uh Ryung was appointed as the first minister of the newly formed Ministry of Culture in the 1990s, and the Ministry focused on the logistics of culture and its industries without being subordinate to politics or bureaucracy. They identified primary cultural policy objectives as 'establishing cultural identity, promoting the excellence of the arts, improving cultural welfare, promoting regional culture, and expanding cultural exchange with other countries' (Yim Haksoon,

2002, pp. 40-41).

The establishment of the first democratic government in 1993 shifted cultural policy from regulatory upholding of domestic political incumbency to autonomy in an internationally focused pro-competitive market. Under Kim Young Sam's administration (1993-1998), the Ministry adjusted government policy from regulation to 'laying the institutional foundation for the promotion of the cultural industry' by establishing the Cultural Industry Division in 1994 (Kwon Seung Ho & Kim Joseph, 2014, p. 429).

It was only following the IMF financial crisis of 1997, which resulted in a seven per cent loss in GDP, that the government redirected cultural policy towards market orientation. A restructuring of the television industry then increased competition among television channels. The government no longer viewed the cultural industries as an ideological tool for preserving Korea's national identity but instead saw the commercial and economic value in line with the broader shift towards neoliberalism globally (Yim Haksoon, 2002; Otmazgin, 2011).

Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003) issued the Presidential Proclamation on Culture, established the Korea Creative Content Agency, and prioritised the creative industries in the government budget (Kuwahara, 2014, p. 2). Government ministries provided various incentives, including low-interest loans, preferential taxes, and public infrastructure provisions at the cost of other sectors of the economy, which proved highly successful (Haggard, 1990). The Ministry of Culture received a budget of 102.1 billion won (roughly 78 million USD) during the Kim Dae Jung administration, the first time the

budget for the Ministry exceeded 1 per cent of the total government budget, and a sharp

increase from the 9.3 billion won (roughly 6.9 million USD) received under the Roh

Tae Woo administration (Kwon Seung Ho & Kim Joseph, 2014, pp. 430-431).

Kim Dae Jung additionally opened the previously restrictive quotas of international

productions, His focus was primarily on a bilateral investment treaty between Korea and

the United States, in the hope of increasing the credibility of Korea's economy, and

therefore boosting further foreign investment.

Whilst eventually successful, this initially caused a significant threat to the Korean

creative industries. Under economic pressure, cinemas were almost entirely dependent

on foreign cinema, as import costs were almost always lower than domestic film

production.

Furthermore, the government developed telecommunication schemes, providing over

one billion dollars to facilities service providers to supply the nation with broadband

between 1999 and 2005. The introduction of cable and satellite transmission systems in

1995 furthered the opportunity for new television networks, although poor content and

government regulation delayed a substantial growth in subscribers until after 2002.

Cable subscription numbers were less than 6 million in 2001, or around 12.6 per cent of

the population (Kim Su Jung & Webster, 2012). However, they rose to approximately

fifteen million cable subscribers with a penetration rate of nearly 80 per cent in 2010

(Kim Dae Young, 2011, p. 4).

To summarise, the cultural policy of Korea has developed significantly over the past

sixty years. First implemented as a means to negate the damage caused by Japanese occupation and the Korean War, the media was fundamentally utilised as a propaganda tool. Following democratisation in the late 1980s, policy shifted course from cultural protection to neoliberal globalisation. The investment and growth in technologies and market liberalisation in the 1990s then allowed the possibility for the Korean creative industries to become the global powerhouse they are today.

3.2.1 The Structures of Cultural Policy

Various ministries, councils, commissions, and companies have a voice in broadcast content. The structure, organisation, and responsibilities of these have all changed over time. Whilst all have individual responsibilities and work together, to manage and promote cultural industries, some are more significant to this study than others. In this section, I will briefly introduce those that are most relevant to this study.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) was formed in 2008 as the central government agency responsible for tourism, culture, art, religion and sports. It is the seventh iteration of the ministry since its foundation in 1968. The below figure, taken from Kwon and Kim (2014) and sourced from MCT (2007) and MCST (2012, 2013), details the changes in the organisational structure for governing the cultural industry in the Ministry of Culture over roughly twenty years, with boldened boxes indicating newly formed divisions, and shaded boxes indicating newly formed departments:

1994
- Organisation
  1 div. (director general)
  & 5 dept. (director)
- Content industry budget
  5.4 billion KRW

Cultural Industry Division

| Cultural Industry Planning | Video and Music Records | Publishing Promotion | Film Promotion | Copyright |

1999
- Organisation
  1 div. (director general)
  & 5 dept. (director)
- Content industry budget
  100.0 billion KRW

Cultural Industry Division

| Cultural Industry Co-ordination | Film & Video Promotion | Publishing and Newspaper | Game and Music Records | Cultural Commodity |

2004
- Organisation
  2 div. (director general)
  & 7 dept. (director)
- Content industry budget
  172.5 billion KRW

Cultural Industry Division / **Cultural Media Division**

| Cultural Industry Policy | Film & Video Industry Promo. | Cultural Media Industry Promo. | Broadcasting &Advertisement. |
| Contents Promotion | Game and Music Records Industries | Publishing Industry | |

2007
- Organisation
  1 centre (assistant deputy minister, 2 div. (director general) & 10 team (director)
- Content industry budget
  197.7 billion KRW

Cultural Industry Division → **Cultural Industry Centre** ← Cultural Media Promotion Division

| Cultural Industry Policy | Contents Promotion | Copyright Industry | Media Policy | Broadcasting & Advertisement |
| Film & Video Industry | Game Industry | Technology Workforce | New Media | Publishing Industry |

2012
- Organisation
  1 office (assistant deputy minister, 2 div. (director general) & 8 dept (director)
- Content industry budget
  249.1 billion KRW

Cultural Policy General → **Cultural Contents Industry Office** ← Copyright Policy General

| Cultural Industry Policy | Film & Video Content Industry | Game Content Industry | Copyright Policy | Copyright Industry |
| Popular Culture Industry | Cultural Product Trade | | Copyright Protection | |

Figure 4: Changes in the Organisational Structure for Governing Cultural Industry in the Ministry of Culture (Kwon Seung Ho & Kim Joseph, 2014)

The MCST now has over ten subfields in areas including religious affairs, cultural contents industry, cultural policy, arts policy, tourism policy, library and museum, public communication affairs, sports policy, and media policy (Hong Kiwon, 2013, p. 13). Sixteen organisations and 43 public and non-governmental organisations are directly controlled by dispatched MCST public officials.

The Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS) was founded in 1971 and is one of the significant organisations affiliated with the MCST. Its goal is to enhance Korea's national brand, domestically and internationally, by promoting cultural heritage,

principally by establishing global Korean cultural centres.

The Korean government established the Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE) in 2003 to orchestrate all governmental and private endeavours in the making of the Korean Wave (Lee Sang Joon, 2015, p. 9). Its main purpose is to 'serve as a facilitator for cultural exchange between Korea and foreign countries with a particular focus on popular culture and Asian cultural industries', and its main business 'consists of conducting overseas market research and surveys and giving policy recommendations for Korean Wave promotion' (Fuhr, 2015, p. 27).

The Arts Council of Korea (ARKO) was set up in 2005 to convey the voices of those who worked in the field, resulting in a system whereby both governmental (MCST) and non-governmental (ARKO) public bodies work together to support arts and culture. The ARKO website describes itself as drawing 'policies of culture and arts through the agreement by 11 council members that are composed of field cultural artists', with 'a synchronic structure for private sectors to participate in decision making in the public areas'. They aim to help 'cultural artists who have been unilateral beneficiaries of the policies…to innovate the customary cultural administration system and respond actively to the rapidly changing environment of culture and arts' (ARKO, 2023, para. 2-3)

The Korea Communications Commission (KCC) is the media regulation agency formed in 2008 by a merger of the Korea Broadcasting Commission and the Ministry of Information and Communication. The commission functions as a media regulatory agency, modelled after the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) of the United States of America. However, unlike the FCC, the KCC is not an independent agency but

a subordinate organisation of the President of Korea's executive office. Whilst it proclaims freedom of speech and press, the government continues to influence content on the grounds of strengthening the nation's unity and stability: 'All stations, in conjunction with a government-established committee, must review programme content both before and after transmission' (Kim Ju Young, 2007, pp. 107-8).

Primary functions of the KCC include:

> the formulation and implementation of policies pertaining to terrestrial broadcasting, general service and news-only program providers; the investigation and imposition of sanctions against violations conducted by broadcasting or communications business operators; the development and implementation of wide-ranging measures aimed at protecting users and their personal information; preventing the circulation of illegal or harmful information; the arrangement of broadcasting commercials; the formulation and enforcement of policies on programming and evaluation; and the development of policies for media diversification (KCC, 2023, para. 2).

The Korean Communications Standard Commission (KCSC) was formed in 2008, replacing the earlier Information and Communication Ethics Committee. The KCSC is a government institution regulating communications, including implementing and enforcing program age ratings and censorship. The commission has been heavily criticised for requiring Korean citizens to enter government-issued ID numbers before posting comments online between 2004 and 2013 and showing heavy political bias, particularly during the Lee Myung Bak administration (2008-2013).

The Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) is responsible for governing cultural content and overseeing Korean creative content advancement domestically and overseas. Established in 2009 by the MCST, the agency is viewed as a direct administrative intervention to support the advancement of the cultural industries.

3.2.2 Conclusion

Post-war cultural policies are marked by a strong emphasis on preserving and promoting traditional culture and later embracing global influences and modernisation. The swift shift towards neoliberal globalisation in the 1990s prompted a market-driven approach to economic development, whilst others have contended that the core character of the Korean government is essentially a developmental state with strong intervention and support for industries (Kwon Seung Ho & Kim Joseph 2014, p. 424).

Korean cultural policy can be summarised into three key areas:

1. Cultural preservation – Prioritising the preservation of traditional culture and heritage. Restrictions of foreign content and foreign investment into cultural industries are key examples of the protectionist approach to culture.
2. Cultural promotion – Cultural diplomacy was key to improving Korea's international standing. Policies became more liberal as the government shifted its approach, encouraging artistic freedom and promoting emerging fields of culture towards the end of the 20th century.
3. Infrastructure and digital technology – The government made significant early investments into internet and cable technologies, as well as new media forms, such as video games and animation.

The many organisations and structures involved in Korean cultural policy-making highlight the significance the government has now placed on protecting and promoting all areas of traditional and modern forms of tangible and intangible culture. These ministries and organisations collaborate to preserve cultural heritage, support the arts, and facilitate the growth of creative and cultural industries.

Given the plethora of organisations and structures involved in cultural policy-making and implementation, there are instances of conflicts and fragmentation. These largely

fall into two categories, fiscal and ideological. Fiscally, issues largely centre around funding allocation, with competition for limited resources hindering the development or execution of comprehensive cultural policies, or export orientation conflicting with domestic priorities. Ideologically, conflict centres on differing goals, such as between cultural heritage preservation and modernisation, or the preferred strategies in promoting soft power.

Furthermore, the numerous organisations involved lead to both overlap and gaps in responsibilities. Given there are different agencies created for different aspects of culture, there are likely issues in the communication of plans or initiatives which results in inefficiencies in policy development.

3.3 Television Broadcasting in Korea

Korea has four national networks – KBS, MBC, SBS, and EBS. Each network has a history and relationship with legislative powers that affect content production and public opinion. Lee Joon Ho and Youn Sug Min (1995, pp. 59–60) distinguish five periods of Korean television broadcasting, which are:

Period	Characteristics
December 1961 - December 1964	Government network (KBS) monopoly
December 1961 - August 1969	Duopolistic competition between government network (KBS) and commercial network (TBC)
August 1969 - December 1980	Oligopolistic competition among the three networks (KBS, TBS and MBC); oligopolistic equilibrium among networks
December 1980 - November 1987	Authoritative government control of broadcasting, virtually a KBS monopoly
November 1987 - Present	The liberalisation of broadcasting and rapid diffusion of new competitive media; competition between three networks (KBS, MBC and SBS), [cable channels (particularly general-service cable channels) and online channels]

Figure 5: The Five Periods of Korean Television Broadcasting (Lee Joon Ho & Youn Sug Min, 1995)

This table summarises the history of the networks, their relationship with the government, and various monopolies and oligopolies that have existed over the post-war broadcasting period.

The history of the Korea Broadcasting System (KBS) began in 1927 as Kyung Sung Broadcasting Corporation, a radio station operated under the occupying Japanese government. KBS currently has three terrestrial channels: KBS1, KBS2 and KBS UHD. KBS1 provides 'diverse programs dealing with news, current affairs, sports and education that target all viewers', whilst KBS2 mainly broadcasts TV dramas and variety shows (KBS, 2017b). KBS UHD broadcasts reruns of popular programs in high definition. The broadcaster also runs six satellite channels and six radio stations. The network has its own global English-language network KBS World, which is available for live streaming on YouTube with over 50 partners in 34 countries.

KBS moved to television in 1961 and changed its status from a government to a public broadcasting station in 1973 under Park Chung Hee, though the government held 100 per cent of the shares. Although managed independently, the constitution states that the President of South Korea chooses the President of KBS after a recommendation is made by the board of directors. The board are often selected by members of political parties, a system which effectively allows political control over KBS's management. It has continued to receive strong criticism from those who argue there are unfair recruitment practices and a lack of independence from government control.

Between 1964 and 1980, another commercial station, Tongyang Broadcasting Company (TBC), was in operation. Following the military insurrection of 1979, TBC was forced

to consolidate with KBS as part of the Policy for Merger and Abolition of the Press, a policy implemented to limit press freedom.

Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) began as a private conglomeration of regional commercial radio stations, established in 1961 and began television broadcasting in 1969. In 1980, Chun Doo Hwan forced several public broadcasters to merge with KBS after they had shown stories criticising him. At the time, MBC was a loosely affiliated network of 20 members, each privately owned but sharing much of their programming. The consolidation forced affiliates to surrender most of their shares to MBC Seoul, which was subsequently forced to relinquish most of its shares to KBS.

After democratic reform allowed the separation of MBC from KBS in 1987, the Foundation of Broadcast Culture (FBC) was established by the National Assembly in 1988 to protect MBC from political influence. The corporation now functions as a public broadcaster as its major shareholder, the FBC, is a public company. However, MBC is not free of political interference. The FBC board comprises nine members, three of which belong to the opposition party, but all are directly or indirectly appointed at the recommendation of the National Assembly. Former FBC board chairman Kim Woo Ryong was forced to step down after indicating the executive office pressured the then-MBC president to 'sweep away "leftist officials"', replacing 80 per cent of officials who harboured supposed liberal sympathies (Cho Jae Hyon, 2010; Carpenter, 2021).

The corporation currently runs one terrestrial network, three radio stations, five cable channels, five satellite channels and four DMB channels. MBC has the most extensive

production facilities in Korea, with digital production centres in Yongin and Ilsan and over 60 partners in 30 countries.

The Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) launched in 1991, becoming the second commercial broadcaster in Korea after MBC. Originally only broadcasting in Seoul before its national roll-out in 1995, it now has one terrestrial channel, two radio stations, and seven cable and satellite channels. As of 2022, SBS's largest shareholder is TY Holdings, followed by the National Pension Service of Korea. Thus, despite operating as a private company, there is still an indirect tie to government operations.

SBS's parent company, SBS Media Holdings, also runs several other companies which function alongside the SBS network. These include SBS Contents Hub, which distributes media online and SBS Culture Foundation, supporting broadcasting and cultural innovation. The Story Works is also a registered company under SBS Media Holdings, which provides in-house drama production for the network.

The Educational Broadcasting System (EBS) has been broadcasting nationwide since 1990. It is a public service broadcaster with most of its income received through advertising and sales, and three per cent of the licence fees collected for KBS are granted to EBS. Its content is primarily for children's education, although on cable/satellite channels, content is available for a more comprehensive audience range. One channel focuses on the high school curriculum, and another is dedicated to lifelong learning. EBS runs two terrestrial channels, three cable and satellite channels, one DMB channel and one radio station.

Each network's history is significant in understanding its relationship (both past and present) with the politics, economy, and culture of Korea. Their relationship with governing powers highlights their lack of independence and emphasises their role as key powers in the political economy of communication. Their attempt to regulate and censor certain content also accents their position as moderators of culture.

3.3.1 The Broadcasting Act and Regulations

The first broadcasting act was enacted in 1963 to create commercial broadcasters. From 1963 to 1980, the act intended to enforce government control over the broadcasting sector. After the shift to democracy in the late 1980s, the public demanded a new broadcasting act that guaranteed the independence of broadcasting from the government's influence and participation in broadcasting policy-making. The Broadcasting Act of 1988 emphasised freedom of the press and focused on decreasing governmental intervention in broadcasting (Park Ki Sung, 2007, pp. 110-111). Revisions were made in the 1990s, but it was eventually decided that an entirely new broadcasting act would need to be written because of new digital media forms and digital media convergence.

As the broadcasting structure became a mixture of public and commercial broadcasters, academics and those involved in policy-making referred to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), arguing it served as a model for public service broadcasting and would promote the Korean system's democratisation. Hjorth and Khoo (2016) stated that the New Broadcasting Act of 2000, which incorporated the Korean Broadcasting System Act, included specific clauses regarding KBS's role as a public service broadcaster and its responsibilities. Specifically, KBS 'should develop and broadcast programs that advance national culture and promote national cohesion' (Hjorth & Khoo,

2016, p. 346).

The Broadcasting Act is one of the essential documents regarding television, acting as a point of reference in determining suitability and liability for broadcast content. The most current Broadcasting Act, incorporating any relevant revisions, has several articles referencing national culture. The Act aims to protect viewers' rights and interests in informing democratic public opinion and improving national culture. Broadcasts are expected to contribute to the balanced development of local communities, promote national culture, and disseminate useful living information that improves the people's cultural life. Furthermore, the system should develop and broadcast programs that promote national culture and ensure the nation's homogeneity (Korea Communications Commission, 2008).

Throughout the 1970s, the government's censorship rules 'imposed a strict moral code on what was permissible in popular dramas and banned plots that focused on relationships outside of marriage, on divorce or on the lives of high-income families' (Kwon Seung Ho & Kim Joseph, 2013, p. 520). In the late 1980s, these rules were relaxed as demand rose for dramas to handle contemporary political and social issues. Now, The Broadcasting Act remains open to interpretation, allowing creators some creative licence and freedom regarding their work. However, the ambiguity of these clauses often permits action with little reasoning, certainly if a piece of work has caused controversy in some way. One example is KBS banning the song 'Uh-ee' by Crayon Pop for containing a single Japanese word, despite no remaining regulations banning Japanese culture (Gale, 2014).

Whilst the Broadcasting Act of the KCC regulates the industry, censorship has been regulated by the Korean Communication Standards Commission (KCSC) since 2008 and the Korean Broadcasting Commission (KBC) from 1987 to 2007. Before this, there was no specific commission in place, and instead, the government enforced deliberate censorship and regulations.

3.4 A History of the Korean Wave

The term Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*, was first introduced in China in the late 1990s and referred to the global popularity of Korean popular culture products, most specifically, television, film, and pop music (Shim, 2006; Jung Soo Keung & Li Hangmen, 2014; Kuwahara, 2014, p. 1). The expression was first seen in a November 1999 edition of *Beijing Youth Daily* (King, 2018, p. 511).

The usage of the phrase differs inside and outside of Korea. Outside of Korea, *Hallyu* refers to any Korean drama generally; however, in Korea, it is only used to refer to dramas that are successful overseas or feature actors that are recognisable or famous internationally (Kim Jeong Mee, 2014, p. 241).

The Korean Wave has historically been compared to the global success of Japanese popular culture products such as manga and anime. However, Kuwahara (2014) noted several differences between the two. Firstly, the Korean government promoted the Korean Wave to revive the country's economy. Therefore the products are tailored to appeal to the broadest possible audience. In contrast, Japanese popular culture and the notion of 'Japanese Cool' have always been produced for a domestic audience and spread more naturally across the world rather than through an intentional attempt to promote overseas. Japanese TV producers primarily created content for a domestic

audience, with global consumption a fortunate, unintended consequence (Brasor, 2020).

Secondly, Kuwahara argued that the success of Korean popular culture overseas is owed predominantly to 'the coming of the digital age' through which 'products are presented, distributed, and consumed through the Internet and social media by both entertainment agencies and enthusiastic fans' (2014, p. 1). In recent years, because of both increased investment by streaming services into Korean content and the export-oriented mindset of the industry, much Korean popular content is available online. In contrast, many Japanese companies have limited access to content internationally, with a clear preference to continue promoting physical products (such as CDs and DVDs), reducing the speed and ease through which international fans can engage with the products.

Kim Bok Rae argued that discourse on the Korean Wave is 'distorted by commercialism' and that its long-term success depends on partnerships with other governments and businesses in the free market (Kim Bok Rae, 2015, p. 159).

The Korean Wave is often referenced by stage, generation, or wave, with each one having unique attributes. For example, Jin Dal Yong asserted that periods 1.0 and 3.0 were subject to 'hands-on' policies, whilst 2.0 was largely 'hands-off' (2021b, p. 4155). This next section looks at all four generations of the Wave, to provide a substantial introduction to this industry.

3.4.1 Korean Wave 1.0 (Late 1990s to Mid-2000s)
The start of the Korean Wave can be linked to the first airing of *What Is Love All About* on Chinese state broadcaster in 1997 (Ju Hyejung, 2014, p. 35). Two years later, popularity spread to Taiwan with the success of *Stars in My Heart*. By 2003, the Wave

had reached Japan with *Winter Sonata* (Jin, 2016, p. 48). *Winter Sonata* and the 2003 historical drama *Jewel in the Palace* are two dramas responsible for creating a frenzy of interest in Korean popular culture products in East and Southeast Asia. A year after its first broadcast, the Korean Tourism Organisation purchased the main outdoor sets built by MBC and opened the official *Jewel in the Palace* theme park the same year (iMBC, 2004). *Jewel in the Palace* has since been sold to over sixty countries.

The Korean Wave's first generation was not limited to television, as music and film played an important role. However, the domestic film industry was unsuccessful in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as cinemas were almost entirely filled with imports. Music piracy with cassettes and CDs was rife, and companies lost substantial profit as a result.

Viewers are known to prefer culturally recognisable shows and conform to their cultural norms and values. Importing countries must decide if they should be exposed to foreign programming, whilst markets tend to favour domestic suppliers (Kim Young Duk, 2005). Lower production costs meant it would often be safer for countries to produce local content with a more in-depth understanding of their audience and preferences than risk investing in broadcasting a foreign drama. Television was one of the few entertainment forms that could have a controlled exportation profit, mostly due to the need for subtitles. K-pop's current international success proves that music does not necessarily have to be subtitled or translated.

There was little to no opportunity for dramas to be broadcast online, so international success was limited to foreign networks buying the rights for distribution, or via VHS or DVD. The production of VHS and DVDs, particularly outside of East Asia, was

minimal due to their high production cost and no guarantee of good sales. Furthermore, there was no evidence from foreign broadcasters that their domestic audience would enjoy an import from Korea. Marketing these products would again have been complicated and not cost-effective.

The rise of Internet distribution, cable and satellite television providers, and lower production costs became both an advantage and a challenge for the early Korean Wave. At this point, Korean dramas saw reasonable success in East and Southeast Asia; however, these technological developments increased competition from other international distributors and domestic broadcasters and producers.

The number of exported dramas decreased by 16.3 per cent in 2006, with the average unit price also reduced (Parc & Moon, 2013, p. 127). This was partly due to reducing the screen quota as part of Korea's Free Trade Agreement with the USA (Jin, 2012).

We can consider this the original era, many of its dramas have since become cult classics, from which even modern dramas' narrative tropes are associated. This generation was limited by the technologies of its time but was already beginning to envision further international expansion.

3.4.2 Korean Wave 2.0 (Mid-2000s to Mid-2010s)
Korean Wave 2.0, from about 2006 onwards, focused on the emergence of creative content and digital technologies. This period can be categorised by more intensive popularity and extensive dissemination and is equated with the penetration of Korean pop music into Western markets (Song Jung Eun & Jang Wonho, 2013; Jin Dal Yong & Yoon Kyong, 2016).

We should not take Korean Wave 2.0 to begin on 1 January 2006 and everything before that to be the previous era. The transition between 1.0 and 2.0 has been particularly blurred over several years, given changes to video streaming, video on demand (VOD), and social networking proliferation. This era is distinguished from its predecessor by its global reach and is characterised by the development of social media and its role in production and consumption (Oh Jingyu & Park Gil Sung, 2012; Jung Sun & Shim Doo Bo, 2013; Hong-Mercier, 2013).

The development of Internet technologies allowed networks to promote these dramas to a broader global audience at a low cost. Examples include the now-defunct website DramaFever, founded in 2009, which helped to increase Korean dramas' availability to audiences who previously relied on watching illegally uploaded content and pirating. Similarly, Viki, now a subsidiary of Japanese company Rakuten, was founded in 2007 and streams premium licensed content using a community of volunteers to subtitle works into dozens of languages. The improvement of the Internet and broadcasting/streaming sites, combined with this fan community-driven style to make these dramas accessible to more people, has allowed the Korean miniseries to reach a global audience.

Indeed, the internet and social media played their part in increasing global interest in Korean popular culture products. Online video sites, whether generic sites such as YouTube, or VOD services such as Netflix or Viki, have facilitated the speed at which dramas are now exported and the variety and number of those available. In the first stages of the Korean Wave, international fans were limited to channels that had bought

the rights to broadcast specific programs. In many countries, these shows were broadcast years after their original broadcast in Korea.

However, Kim Young Duk's comments concerning the earlier stages of the wave were no longer relevant. Producers and networks no longer relied on international broadcast networks to import their works; the importer's knowledge of what would be most well-received locally was no longer relevant or viable. Fans could access subtitled dramas online within 24 hours of the original broadcast in Korea or immediately watch an upload from their favourite artist on YouTube. International fans were closer to an equal platform with domestic fans. As a global fan base is larger and therefore potentially more profitable than a solely domestic one, content creators and artists began listening to international consumers' opinions and attitudes.

Despite this, many still considered this new era of the Korean Wave a passing phase. Psy's *Gangnam Style* of 2012 certainly introduced K-pop to the world on an unprecedented level, being the first YouTube video to reach a billion views and continuing as the most-viewed video ever until July 2017. However, to those unfamiliar with the Korean creative industries, it was seen as a parody. This led to questioning whether there was any legitimacy of true creativity across the industry and how Psy's success could be maintained across countries considered to be producing much more 'quality' content.

Whilst technological advancements eased the logistical and financial strain of selling popular culture overseas, Korea faced a new challenge of competing in a globalised market. Foreign audiences could just as quickly watch a show from Europe or India.

The Korean entertainment industry needed to ensure that it continued to grow and that its increasingly globalised audience was enjoying its content. The 2.0 era of the Korean Wave would be considered by most to be a huge success – Korea transformed from a largely unknown country to an entertainment world power.

This era can easily be seen as miles apart from its preceding generation. Whereas 1.0 focused merely on its diaspora and a few nearby countries, 2.0 sought to distribute to most of the world's population. Similarly, whereas 1.0 relied on overseas Koreans to help distribute their product, which was still very much in a physical format in its early stages, 2.0 utilised internet technologies to spread much more quickly to a much wider audience.

3.4.3 Korean Wave 3.0 (Mid-2010s to Present)

The Korean Wave 3.0 saw the merging of Korean popular culture with the global. The idea of the 'foreign' was increasingly disregarded, and Western consumers began to view many Korean actors and artists at the same or higher level than established Western artists.

Similarly, many stars of the Korean Wave are now known by people who are not actively engaged in Korean popular culture. BTS and Blackpink became the first Korean artists to perform at the American Music Awards and headline Coachella, respectively. Most Korean artists are now available for streaming on Spotify, and countless artists have worldwide tours. Korean dramas and films are readily available on Netflix, and the streaming giant now produces K-dramas.

The focus has shifted to whether global audiences will ever accept Korean popular

culture products into the mainstream. Generally, it tends to be directed at Western, English-speaking countries, which already have so much content in their local language. Therefore, the challenge is to convince these audiences to overcome what *Parasite* director Bong Joon Ho referred to in his Golden Globe award speech as 'the 1-inch-tall barrier of subtitles' (Bicker, 2020).

3.4.4 Korean Wave 4.0 (The Foreseeable Future)
Some sources suggest moving to the fourth stage around 2016, but it is also asserted that 3.0 started in roughly 2016, and the transition to 4.0 is now in process in the early 2020s (Jozsa, 2021, pp. 5-6). To summarise all generations, it is best to compare the earliest generation of the Korean Wave to the present iteration. Where the content and diffusion area of Wave 1.0 was limited to videos and CDs to East Asia and the Korean diaspora, 4.0 envisions largely Korean cultural elements becoming consumed globally as part of the mainstream lifestyle.

4.0 is therefore associating itself with K-style, an extension of earlier waves, and implies that representatives of cultural industries have quantifiable goals for their global consumers. They expect non-Koreans to eat Korean food and watch Korean dramas at least once a month, increasing revenue derived from *Hallyu* products by 50 per cent (Jun, 2017; Boman, 2022, p. 422).

Boman continued that dramas of this era reflect a changing socio-cultural landscape cumulatively signified by feminist themes merged with more traditional Korean and East Asian cultural elements.

Kim Bok Rae stated that for Wave 4.0 to see sustainable growth, it must enact laws to

protect publicity rights (2015, p. 158). This indicates a change in the perception of the stars of the Wave, whose existence has been commodified and publicised as a result of *Hallyu*'s expansion.

3.5 Defining the Miniseries

The miniseries is one of the most dominant production forms of fictional programming in Korea and has become a staple of the Korean Wave's success overseas alongside popular music. Television dramas started broadcasting back in the 1960s, but it was not until the early 1990s that the miniseries materialised, through long-form historical series transforming into what is now recognised as *fusion sageuks*.

A Korean miniseries is structured into approximately sixteen to twenty-four episodes, each lasting between 45 and 70 minutes. They are distinguished from ongoing television series, which do not have a set number of episodes or broadcast completion date. Multi-season miniseries are not unheard of, the most relevant being the *School* series that has aired since 1999. However, these examples often feature entirely different casts and locales between seasons, so having seen previous seasons is optional. With that being said, Korean dramas are increasingly being commissioned for further seasons, but most of these cases fall out of the period of study for this project and so are not further detailed.

Most drama series can be primarily attributed to melodrama or *makjang* styles. Korean melodrama historically draws on folk tales and *pansori* (traditional musical storytelling) and is tied to the concept of suffering and focuses on the concept of the self in relation to the family. Between 50 to 70 per cent of Korean films are categorised as melodrama.

Makjang is typically translated as 'going too far' or 'reaching the extreme' and is a stylistic choice of playing up to outrageous storylines, often elements such as revenge plots, murder, or switched identities. *Makjang* dramas have a basis in reality but are not intended to be viewed as realistic. Nevertheless, *makjang*-adjacent tropes, such as the rich male lead or hidden family secrets, are so fundamentally tied to the Korean miniseries that within the context of this study, there is no separation between the two.

3.5.1 The History of the Miniseries

The first television content aired on KBS, *Backstreet of Seoul* (1962), is described as 'more of a lecture on the problems of urban life than a meaningful attempt at family entertainment' (KOCIS, 2011, p. 63). Similarly, other shows on KBS, such as the children's program *Yeong-I's Diary* (KBS1, 1962-1963 and 1976-1979) and the two-decade-long drama *Real Theatre* (1964-1985), more closely resembled public campaign announcements and anti-communist propaganda than that of entertainment. KBS's commercial competitor, TBC, had a much more aggressive stance, broadcasting entertainment-based programming and more controversial dramas covering themes such as infidelity.

By the 1970s, the three broadcasters, TBC, KBS, and MBC, were broadcasting around 15 dramas daily before the government began imposing stricter controls over content and allocating more broadcasting hours to news and educational programming (KOCIS, 2011, p. 60). However, the dramas shown during this period began to move away from political agendas and were more inspired by everyday life and the people's difficulties. Poverty and the crimes committed in association with it were common themes, such as in MBC's *Susa Banjang* (1971-1989).

The introduction of colour television in the 1980s brought a richer assortment of storylines and themes. Nationalism remained strong, and period dramas such as *Foundation of the Kingdom* (KBS1, 1983) and *500 Years of the Joseon Kingdom* (MBC, 1983-1990) were based on a liberal interpretation of historical facts. Other shows also aimed to evoke nostalgia amongst audience members who witnessed the nation's rapid urbanisation.

Between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, drama popularity grew once again when broadcasters began to tailor their shows to the younger audience, taking influence from programmes shown in Japan. The expansion of cable and satellite options in the 1990s and the licensing of new broadcaster SBS gave another boost by expanding the market for entertainment content and increasing competition among viewers. Dramas acquired much higher production budgets. MBC drama *Eyes of Dawn* (1991) cost 200 million won per episode, cast over 270 actors and 21,000 extras, reached a peak viewership rating of 58.4 per cent, and became the ninth highest-rated Korean drama ever.

The SBS series *Sandglass* (1995) has been referred to as the drama that singlehandedly rewrote the history of Korean television entertainment, captivating viewers with a bold depiction of political oppression. It featured two episodes that recreated the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, a protest that grew after local university students demonstrating against the authoritative government and martial law were beaten, raped, and killed by troops, resulting in an estimated 2000 casualties. Depictions of this were largely avoided as authorities defined the incident as a rebellion incited by Communist sympathisers well into the late 1980s (Chosun Ilbo, 2009; KOCIS, 2011). Further relaxation of government regulations and censorship then introduced the new era of

dramas from which this study period begins.

3.5.2 The Korean Miniseries' Production Style

The single-season style of Korean dramas is utilised as a unique selling point. As such,

the production team faces the strain of fulfilling the audience's need for a rounded-off

narrative, with adequate airtime dedicated to character development. The Korean

Culture and Information Service noted that the single-season format:

> goes some way in explaining why Korean plots are often more emotionally
> charged than in the dramas of the West, relying more on dramatizing evolving
> relationships or conflicts between sensitive individuals than on simply creating
> and connecting incidents…The detailed, often intense depiction of emotional ebb
> and flow gives Korean dramas an edginess that is not attributable to
> sensationalism (KOCIS, 2011, pp. 45-46)

Another unique element of the South Korean miniseries is its last-minute production

style. Commonly referred to as the live shoot, hasty script, or *jjokdaebon* system, it is

known for notoriously harsh conditions and gruelling shooting schedules that have

become accepted practice. Very short script sections arrive on set, meaning actors do

not read whole episode scripts and often only film one-page sections at a time. Scenes

are often shot only a few days before the scheduled broadcast date, and there are even

cases of scenes being shot on the day of broadcast. It is reported that this shooting

schedule is designed for greater flexibility. Listening to the audience's feedback after

the first few episodes allows writers and directors to introduce new characters, increase

dialogue for popular characters, or change the tone of scenes, potentially resulting in

better profits for the show (Doo, 2015).

The live-shoot system remains the primary production method for three key reasons:

uncertainty over channels, an emphasis on raising viewer ratings, and the cutting of

production costs (Oh You Jeong, 2015, pp. 134-136). To compare this model with the

American television production model, Korean miniseries production more closely resembles US soap operas, which are designed to show multiple episodes a week for years. This is in contrast with US dramas, which are designed to produce at least 100 episodes over around five seasons in order to succeed in the syndication market.

The economic conditions of each country have influenced these designs. In Korea, with over one thousand independent production firms and only three major terrestrial networks, producers cannot produce more than three or four drama episodes without a network's backing. The process to have a project accepted by a network is long and drawn out; production firms circulate proposals to the networks, who then develop a shortlist and often only select their candidate a few months before the broadcasting date. Networks' dependence on advertising for revenue emphasises audience ratings and feedback. Entirely pre-produced dramas cannot gauge the viewers' reaction in advance.

For most terrestrial primetime miniseries, most money is spent on well-known actors, scriptwriters, and directors as the revenue impact of commercially successful stars is strongly upward biased (Hofmann et al., 2017). The remainder of the budget then must be used strategically to cover everything from supporting actors to costumes, equipment, effects, and location shooting. As crews and supporting roles are paid per day, fewer filming days will allow for a smaller budget to be spent on them.

This information showcases the distinctiveness of the Korean miniseries. Its industry's relationship with past governmental administrations and its current expansion goals emphasise how the aforementioned reasons clearly have a deep impact on negotiations and production, which returns to the questions and objectives that this project aims to

investigate.

3.6 Conclusion

As has been detailed, cultural policy in Korea has transformed significantly in the past fifty years. Authoritarian governments in Korea oversaw the growth of private sectors and industries, such as engineering and telecommunications, through financial authority.

First introduced to rectify the damage caused and the cultural history lost through the Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953), cultural policy now plays a significant role in shaping the creative industries. This evidences a history of interventionism in the field of culture, which has been largely accepted by all concerned, including the public.

In the early 1990s, government approaches were increasingly influenced by neoliberalism, and there was a rise in marketised and compressed individualisation following the IMF Crisis of 1997, as the economy was increasingly shaped by expanding market-centred commercialism (Lee Dong Hoo, 2021, p. 35).

The history of Korea's television systems is inextricably linked with its political history and the shaping of cultural policy. Even today, debates continue about the role the government and its associated bodies are undertaking in supporting the economic growth of the Korean creative industries. The role of legislative bodies and networks have become an area of further critique as the Korean Wave developed into a global phenomenon. Protecting industries from international influence whilst ensuring future funding has become a significant consideration. As K-dramas and other popular culture

exports become synonymous with Korea, these groups now have the task of promoting an entire nation and its culture.

Though Korea is not the only country whose government has implemented policies to develop cultural industries, it is primarily asserted that the Korean Wave grew through the support of the Korean government (Jin, 2021b, p. 4151). Sequential five-year plans, the initiation of growth of the cultural industries from the 1990s, and neoliberal policies focusing on deregulation, privatisation, and liberalisation, are all recognisable as influential in the country's development of the Korean Wave.

From the early 2000s, technological advancements and the proliferation of internet access altered global consumption patterns and market behaviours. The rise of mobile media formats and VOD content meant terrestrial networks could no longer guarantee high audience share. Dramas have equally developed from propagandistic moral education to icons of modern history and culture. Yet their distinct production style highlights the noticeable centralisation of economic gain, often at the cost of the health and well-being of its key players.

This chapter commenced discussion on critical political economy and its ties with the creative industries, and considered the fundamentals of how cultural production is approached in a globalised era. Following a robust introduction to the theoretical aspects of this study and detailing the political economy and culture industry of Korea, the next chapter introduces the research design and methodology for this project.

Chapter 4 – Research Methods and Design

4.1 Introduction

At the beginning of this thesis, I first introduced the thoughts that led me to undertake this research. To review, I supposed that Korean dramas present a pseudo-utopian version of cultural conservatism and economic capitalism. Over time, these presentations have shifted towards a more 'American' standard, thus trending toward progressive principles. The aim of this chapter is to solidify my research questions and hypothesis, define how this hypothesis can be tested, and identify the techniques to produce the required evidence.

Within the framework of this project, the term culture is used in its more immaterial understanding. This project discusses the broader term of culture in the sense of how we identify the culture of a nation or group of people by their interpretation of their values and identity. To truly understand Korean cultural identity formation in the miniseries, we need to understand who is responsible, why it is being represented this way, and how the industry continues these representations. We also need to acknowledge the period of this study and why this is relevant.

To develop and define a suitable methodological approach, I must introduce and further define the questions I intend to answer. In the introduction, I asked the fundamental question: To what extent is the representation of Korean culture and society in the miniseries accurate? I asserted that political economy and culture are two themes that should be equally considered. However, this question must be defined, as it would be difficult to identify accuracy in this context.

As we have learnt from previous chapters, Korea has developed rapidly as a nation and as a popular content creator. We must acknowledge the massive shift in audiences and production value and accept the inevitable change arising from globalisation. For this reason, it is important to consider the shift across all eras of the Korean Wave. The goal, therefore, is not merely to map and highlight changes across the period of study but to attempt to map these changes alongside larger developments in the industry and society to conclude how these are connected.

In order to drive the research and data collection processes, building on the main question, I first developed a series of broad questions:

1. What are the common themes of the miniseries, and how have these changed over time?
2. To what extent can we claim that the miniseries is culturally, economically, and socially accurate?
3. Who decides what is Korean identity in the miniseries and why?

There were further questions then built upon these, connected to the individual strands of research:

1. How do business and the culture industry influence the production and content of the miniseries?
2. How do political and economic factors, such as neoliberalism or globalisation, impact the overall identity of the miniseries?
3. How do cultural ideologies or perspectives shape miniseries content?

The two strands of focus are the critical political economy and perspectives relating to cultural studies. Considering the critical political economy, I have hypothesised that cultural representation became more progressive ahead of domestic audience attitudes. Layers of the critical political economy include explicit policy implementation, the level

of involvement by the government in developing and controlling relevant industries and companies, distribution, international relations, and profit, to name a few. The political economy framework is used to analyse the data gathered from interviews with regulators, policymakers, and producers, concerning the political and economic influences on regulation, production and distribution of the miniseries, presented in Chapter 5.

Industry interviews primarily seek to provide a greater critical understanding of the political economy. By engaging with participants who work across various stages, including cultural policy through production and distribution, I can highlight discontinuity issues at the singular series level and more extensive changes that have occurred slowly throughout the study.

The second strand involves studying the drama through the perspective of cultural studies. This can include the more immaterial aspects, such as identity and cultural foundations, but also the more general aspects of cultural production and its industries. Importantly, this considers how Korea and Koreans view and present themselves. Therefore, this research path primarily relies on critical discourse analysis, which aims to engage with the miniseries itself and consider how cultural studies-related issues have altered content. The critical discourse analysis framework is used in analysing data gained from both interviews and content analysis, to understand the cultural influences on the production of the miniseries, later presented in Chapter 6.

Some secondary data has been incorporated to provide supporting information, such as critical commentary (press), general audience response (forums) and audience ratings

data, to understand the public reaction to a particular series during its release.

This chapter discusses the theories and analytical frameworks considered before discussing the decided methods. I further expand on the details of the data collection and analysis mechanisms to provide a detailed insight into my thought process and this project's journey. Finally, I introduce secondary data methods that have also been incorporated into the empirical chapters of this thesis.

4.2 The Methods and Literature

Before detailing my decided approach to data collection and analysis, it is important to discuss all the possible methods that could have been utilised. By doing so, I can further justify how I decided upon my line of action and why I believe it is the best way to achieve my research goals.

4.2.1 Initial Analytical Approaches

Given that the research questions focus on themes within television miniseries, a study and review of these seem a natural part of the project. However, as an independent project, there is a limitation on how much can be studied and at what depth. My interest in the social and textual dimensions of cultural products within greater society and its related power structures initially drew me to structural analysis. This approach stood out as it focuses on the relationship between cultural and legislative frameworks, content, and audiences. Structural analysis shares a strong relationship with Hall's theory of encoding/decoding, in which he referred directly to this process as production practices and structures in television being encoded into a message. This refers back once again to the Circuit of Culture and its detailing of the interconnectedness of political economy

and cultural studies in production.

Both government and creators are linked, reliant upon each other to create and distribute content, yet they have their set values to achieve. The government is primarily concerned with national and cultural values and creators with more personal or private values. Although the creators may have a stake in national and cultural values, this is generally mediated through the government structure and vice-versa with the government's values.

The audience remains separate from the government and creators as they are not directly responsible for creating content. Generally, they are only concerned with a product's entertainment value. Despite a lack of licensed distribution in the earlier years of this project, pirated methods ensured that global audiences could find and watch Korean content. Creators are also responsible for this entertainment value, as they cannot contribute to their private value if the product does not sell.

In addition, critics of the structural analysis model, including Negus (1999), have suggested it focuses too much on the commodity rather than the culture. However, they fail to recognise that the two are not necessarily separate entities, as culture itself is a commodity within capitalism.

The structural analysis approach can analyse the structures through which texts are produced, distributed, and received. However, it fails to consider continuity and change within the texts themselves and changes and developments within an industry or society.

I then considered thematic analysis which, at its most basic level, is the analytical construction of codes, themes in qualitative verbal expressions, and patterns of recurrence, evaluation, and associations (Herzog, Handke & Hitters, 2019, p. 385). It includes multiple approaches, including coding reliability, codebook, and reflexive approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In thematic analysis, themes are actively crafted by the researcher and should stand alone as a meaningful statement (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 740; Connelly & Peltzer, 2016, p. 55).

Recurring themes across miniseries can be attributed to the permanence of a thematic, whilst cultural and social norms can be attributed to the presence of knowledge, practice or belief and the interrogating premise on which unity is based. Deviation or change over time tie to concepts that differ in structure and rules governing their use. Finally, systems of dispersion can be attributed to the political and structural limitations of the industry itself.

A general concern and disadvantage of the thematic analysis approach is that its flexibility leads to inconsistency in developing themes (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). Thematic analysis's self-directed basis in coding permits a framework to explore patterns and trends within data but cannot not necessarily examine the larger framework of power structures, relations, audiences and ideologies that naturally occur in text and speech. Therefore, whilst thematic analysis would have been a suitable approach if I were only analysing content, I did not deem it suitable for the analysis of my interviews.

4.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is not void of using themes as part of the analysis, but these can be

found as part of the text (in this case, interviews and content). Discourse analysis tries to identify themes in what people say. In each conversation, the researcher can determine if a particular theme can be abstracted. Discourse analysis is a framework that can examine language and representation, power relations, ideologies, audiences, and discursive strategies in television content. It can study works over an extended period whilst considering the changes in miniseries content as relevant structures pushed for a more international demographic.

The primary objective of most media discourse analysis is to account for the presence of 'bias or ideology in language, or the problematising of power relations in society' (Cotter, 2015, p. 797). As in all societies, the production of discourse is controlled, selected and distributed through procedures that seek to ward off dangers, master over chance events, and evade formidable materiality (Foucault, 1971, p. 53). As a social practice, discourse implies a relationship between the discursive event and the situations and structures through which it is framed.

Thus, discourse is both socially constitutive and socially conditioned. It is socially constitutive as it sustains and reproduces the status quo and is socially consequential as it gives rise to issues of power. It can have significant ideological effects, producing and reproducing unequal power relations or through inequitable representations of ethnic and cultural minorities (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 6).

Whilst discourse analysis is a broad subject of language use in communication, critical discourse analysis is a specific approach, emphasising the examination of power relationships, social inequalities and ideologies present in language use. The 'critical'

implies that social phenomena can be altered based on the understanding that societies are inherently changeable. As humans create meaning, the subject is not a passive observer but views society with a sceptical eye (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 8).

Critical discourse analysis places a stronger emphasis on sociocultural and political factors that shape discourse and societal perceptions, and so I deemed this to be the most appropriate approach, given its ability to connect both the miniseries content with points raised by interview participants regarding topics including beliefs, structures, and rules. I could still use themes as an initial coding approach but also develop and incorporate more topics as they arose naturally throughout the data collection and analysis process.

The weakness of critical discourse analysis is the highlighting of the analyst's position between social research and political activism, the cherry-picking of texts, and the difference in interpretation between the analyst and the reader (Wodak & Myer, 2016, p. 22). In addition, interviews bring forth issues of discontinuity and continuity, as reflecting on the flow of history means recognising that some things 'are no longer perceived, described, expressed, characterised, classified, and known in the same way' (Foucault, 1994, p. 217). Some discourse continues over time as knowledge and society establish what constitutes the current truth. However, as a transition over time, breaks and discontinuities occur as society reconfigures its discourse.

4.2.3 Initial Coding Method – Cultural Dimensions

To successfully develop a framework through which I could obtain and analyse data, It was essential to determine the elements of content I was going to use. Initially, when research began, I intended to focus on specific elements or areas of culture that I felt

were of value to this project. These mainly were broad topics such as politics, socio-economic classes, or gender norms. The first and foremost issue with such an approach was my lack of theoretical foundation as to why I had chosen some topics over others. This would inevitably raise concerns over the excessive subjectivity and potential inaccuracy of any results, as my debate would be solely focusing on areas that I 'felt' were relevant. Herzog, Handke, and Hitter argued that using 'basic social functions (e.g. social conflict) or structural components (e.g. economics, politics) as themes is 'an indication that themes have not been fully developed' (2019, p. 394), which made it clear I required a much firmer theoretical foundation for my method.

The critical challenge was ensuring that my coding scheme could generate the necessary information to answer my research questions. We have determined that culture is broadly interpreted, particularly its attitudes and behaviours. Individuals within a societal group or community may have different perspectives based on their own class, gender, life experiences, or countless other variables. Therefore, it seemed opportune to engage with Hofstede's cultural dimensions as an initial method to operationalise concepts of culture into themes and variables.

As a reminder, his dimensions of culture consisted of the following:

- Power Distance – The extent to which less powerful members of a society expect and accept power to be distributed unequally.
- Individualism versus Collectivism – The extent to which individuals prioritise their own needs and interests over those of the group.
- Masculinity versus Femininity – The extent to which the society values traditionally masculine traits (achievement, assertiveness, competition) over feminine traits (care, cooperation, and quality of life)
- Uncertainty Avoidance – The extent individuals feel threatened by change,

uncertainty, and ambiguity.

- Long-term versus Short-term Orientation – The extent to which a society prefers long-term planning, perseverance, and respect for traditions over immediate gratification.
- Indulgence versus Restraint – The extent to which society indulges in the gratification of impulse and desire, preferring personal happiness and leisure over self-discipline and adherence to social norms.

If these dimensions were to be used as starting codes, then the quantitative results of these cultural dimensions could be cross-referenced against representations to determine their accuracy, thus removing some concerns about the subjectivity of my readings of the texts.

Back in Chapter 2, I acknowledged other frameworks that have been developed following Hofstede's initial surveys, notably Trompenaar's Model of National Culture Differences (1997) and Simon Fraser University's Global Leadership and Organisation Behaviour Effectiveness Project (GLOBE). However, I continued to use Hofstede's dimensions as a basis for the initial coding for several reasons. Firstly, Hofstede's results were also confirmed through six further cross-national studies between the years 1990 and 2002. As such, his work can be seen as more substantiated and conclusive than the other frameworks.

Secondly, as these were only preliminary codes, I determined it best to use the fewest dimensions possible to expand upon these with more direct relevance to my data rather than beginning with a greater number of more specific, and sometimes binary, dimensions. As these codes would be applied to both the miniseries analysis and interview transcripts to determine a connection between the critical political economy

and cultural studies strands, it again seemed beneficial to rely on fewer dimensions that could be expanded later.

Following an initial review of the data using these six codes, I re-evaluated and introduced subcodes. Subcoding is the process of assigning a secondary tag after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry (Saldaña, 2013, p. 69). This method is particularly beneficial for more extensive indexing. Although subcoding is more prevalent in forms of content analysis, it was beneficial in helping to recognise themes or concepts that were connected to my assertions and theories. These subcodes were generated naturally as part of the coding process, and are detailed below:

Code	Title	Subcode
IvC	Individualism versus Collectivism	IvC-Foreign IvC-Korean IvC-Regionalism
IvR	Indulgence versus Restraint	IvR-Luxury IvR-Moral Discipline
LTO	Long Term Orientation	LTO-Future Planning LTO-Religion LTO-Tradition
MvF	Masculinity versus Femininity	MvF-Beauty MvF-Behaviour MvF-Education MvF-Sexuality MvF-Success
PDI	Power Distance Index	PDI-Authority PDI-Education PDI-Employment PDI-Wealth
UAI	Uncertainty Avoidance Index	UAI-Disability UAI-Ethnicity UAI-LGBT UAI-Mental Health

Figure 7: Description of analysis codes and subcodes

As can be seen, there is some thematic overlap between subcodes. One such example is the inclusion of education under both MvF and PDI. However, it is important to note

that these are not always mutually coded, as there is a difference in underlying cultural aspects. Here, the MvF portrayal of education can be related to a masculine interpretation, the emphasis on attaining good scores to attend a good university and acquire and well-paying, secure job, even if you may not like it. The PDI representation of education, however, connects more to social class, and the better opportunities and outcomes available to those with a particular type or standard of education.

Not all of the codes or the subcodes appeared with equal frequency. Evidence to showcase long-term orientation and planning, for example, appears with dramatically less frequency than examples of power distance, given most dramas are set within education or workplace settings, where hierarchy is clearly presented.

Using these codes made clear several potential problems in presenting these findings in their current format. Firstly, to present the findings from all of these codes would cause an imbalance between both the weighting of the critical political economy and cultural studies sections, and discussion of each of the codes within the cultural studies chapter. Secondly, as already detailed, Hofstede's approach has been critiqued for its Western bias. Given the significance of the Korean Wave as a challenge to Western global flows. I felt that relying exclusively on the work of Hofstede would counteract my efforts to place Korean academics and perspectives at the forefront of the conversation. Finally, I became concerned about how I could best use theory to correlate my findings with larger perspectives of cultural studies.

4.2.4 Demonstrating Culture – Cultural Perspectives

Factoring in these concerns, I attempted to find an alternative way to present the information found using these codes while connecting them to broader discussions of

culture. In addition, I aimed to find a way to incorporate the culture within the dramas to the culture outside, beyond the political economy. This would aid in connecting back to my theoretical foundations, including orientalism, nation branding, simulacra, and the circuit of culture.

To speak on the cultural discourse of drama content, I looked towards several of the works of Korean scholars who have attempted to differentiate the discourse of the Korean Wave from various perspectives. In 2005, Cho Hae Joang argued for three views: culturally nationalist, neoliberal and postcolonial. The following year, Lee Kee Hyeung advocated for neoliberal, cultural nationalist and cultural perspectives. In 2009, Kim Sujeong categorised research under capitalist and cultural approaches, and finally, in 2011, Cho Young Han wrote under three approaches: cultural nationalist, neoliberal capitalist, and translocal regionalist.

Using these perspectives in combination with Hofstede benefits the study by utilising immeasurable and measurable frameworks of culture. This combination permits more critical analysis than a straightforward adoption of Hofstede's schema, whilst also aiding in uniting the two strands of my research.

Cultural nationalism situates the Korean Wave as a 'symbol of Korean cultural excellence', emphasises Confucian values such as family bonds and patriarchal relations, and promotes traditional moral values (Cho Young Han, 2011, p. 385). The success of the Korean Wave became an emphasis of pride for Korean culture. The negative aspect of this approach is cultural essentialism, the assertion that Korean culture stems almost exclusively from a 'Confucian sensibility assumes a common

"Asian culture"' (Cho Hae Joang, 2005, p. 154).

Discussing drama production through this perspective can improve understanding of how Korea and East Asia are conceptualised within a global product. Within my study, I applied this through presentations of cultural nationalism: concepts of a unified Korean identity, the idea of a Korean homeland, patriotism and other idealised 'Korean' behaviours. Cho Young Han referenced Shin Yoon Hwan (2006), who argued that this perspective exemplifies the argument that the Korean Wave should embrace more of the world's national cultures to become a Global Wave. Therefore, I also elected to consider the concept of the international: how foreigners and foreign cultures are represented internally and externally. The dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and individualism versus collectivism are of immediate relevance here, as they consider attitudes towards immigration and the value of the group or country over the self.

Cho Young Han wrote that the neoliberal capitalist perspective emphasises profit, and the approach highlights the government's promotion of the Korean Wave as a national economic strategy (2011, p. 386). In the context of my own study, the neoliberal market strategy is already subsumed mainly under the banner of critical political economy. So instead, I elected to focus on representations in a neoliberal capitalist society. The application of neoliberal policies is responsible for substantial growth in social inequalities (Navarro, 2007), which can be clearly tied to the dimension of power distance, as those in lower socioeconomic groups accept hierarchical power structures.

Postcolonial and translocal regionalist perspectives have some level of overlap. Cho Hae Joang asserted postcolonial positions as viewing the Korean Wave as a result of

centuries of modernisation, capitalist expansion and homogenisation of global culture (2005, p. 163). Translocalism is critical of the imperial and Euro-American nature of the capitalist discourse of the Korean Wave, emphasising a need to expand the Wave as a counter to historic colonial cultural flows. Cho Han Hyejung (2003) argued that the Korean Wave contributes towards deterritorialising national boundaries and sharing nomadic identities. Within the context of this study, these perspectives can be best seen through efforts to re-establish Korean cultural identity through the forms of North-South relations, urban-rural identities, and historical fiction. These are significant as these discourses have been affected by colonialism, and modern conversations (particularly as they pertain to international relations) are frequently dominated by Western military-led discourse. Postcolonialism can be tied to long-term versus short-term orientation, given the preference to look towards past traditions and the value of perseverance.

4.2.5 Interviews

Although discourse analysis of the miniseries can provide insight into themes, values, and other aspects of cultural identity present, such analysis cannot answer how or why this is the case. The miniseries analysis itself cannot be subjective nor objective; any level of subjectivity or objectivity is applied through the unintentional bias of the researcher. Industry interviews are an essential data collection method to fill this gap to develop an understanding of the steps between cultural policy, broadcasting law and the final broadcast project. We cannot assume that the final product broadcast precisely as planned nor that all involved in the production and distribution processes agreed with the content or the creative process.

Creators offer a perspective of what it is to insert their subjectivity into representation,

and interviews are valuable in identifying the space between subjective and structural

forces involved in the miniseries creation (Brennan, 2012, p. 114). Examples of this

could include creators being forced to make edits by censorship agencies, unexpected

responses by audiences, or simply the practicalities or circumstances of filming.

Inevitable challenges and limitations are associated with completing any research

involving a human subject. Participants' responses are often dictated by what they

consider to be the expected or 'correct' answer. Giving a straight answer is regarded as

a 'social virtue', and participants give answers they think the interviewer wants to hear

or what they wish were true. Therefore, all responses must be individually appraised

and considered with some misgivings (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 62). Although interviews

offer access to otherwise undocumented information and provide insight into underlying

and implicit production factors, the interview participant's subjectivity will reconstruct

the reality. Their insight can demonstrate the experience of the time and be a part of the

discourse. However, there will inevitably be contradictions because of different parties'

perspectives and between the theory and practice (Dhoest, 2004, p. 396).

In addition, the qualitative nature of interviews brings the potential for power

imbalances. Power relationships in an interview context are culturally constructed, so

participants and their responses are subject to influence. Having the status of an outsider

has both advantages and disadvantages. Evidence suggests fuller explanations are

provided to the outsider over the insider, who is assumed to already 'know'. However,

some participants are expected to not cooperate because of the social status of the

researcher and the sentiment that the researcher was totally different from them

(Merriam et al., 2000). Therefore, the interview process can never be objective, as both

interviewer and interviewee are always implicated in the interview situation. Even though insider positionality often benefits access to information, it can also lead to power imbalance. In an interview setting, the researcher's status is far more dependent on their ability to establish rapport and ask meaningful questions to elicit usable data. In practice, my rapport with participants was furthered by using my contacts to approach potential interviewees. This mutual introduction helped gain initial trust before the interview began.

The original plan was for most of these interviews to take place in person. However, as most data collection occurred from 2020 to 2021, COVID-19 limited travel and restricted how interviews could be completed. I had to adjust and complete all interviews via video conferencing software. As it became clear that interviews would have to take place virtually, I noted several benefits of video conferencing interviews – the quality of face-to-face and online interviews has been proven to be the same, participants have a preference for video interviews due to reduced chance of public encounters with the interviewer, and the possibility of rapport being created quicker than in some face-to-face interviews (Gray et al., 2020; Cabaroglu et al., 2010; Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Mabragaña et al., 2013). Though the insider-outsider aspect will remain apparent, micro-behaviours are less likely to affect the overall atmosphere of the interview.

For some interview participants, the restrictions of working from home meant they could not commit to a video interview. In these cases, a series of questions were sent to them by email for completion. Though generally not considered an 'interview', email still has its benefits. It removes natural conversation, but it allows the participant to take

their time in answering their questions as they can think of specific examples, in contrast to sometimes nervous and quickened answers given when interviews are completed in person. I tried to keep email interactions limited to initial communications and as a follow-up after the interview, thanking participants for their contribution and allowing them to add points or clarify any previous answers if they wished.

For those who elected to complete questions via email, concerns over things such as body language or tone of voice are removed entirely, as this approach essentially removed the interviewer-participant dynamics. Questions needed to be prepared in advance, with no opportunity for an interviewer to guide the discussion. This highlighted the importance of creating a series of questions for each participant to elicit well-rounded, straightforward answers focusing on their areas of expertise or knowledge. One unintended benefit of the email approach was the additional time and freedom it afforded participants in putting together their answers, as opposed to the time restrictions of a video call and the pressure to answer immediately. It also allowed for the interview participant to review their answers for clarity before responding. At the same time, this would also increase the risk of self-editing on behalf of the participant, who may decide to change their instinctive answer for another.

I referred to Kvale's work on qualitative research interviews to develop questions, question formats, and preliminary analysis codes for the interviews (1996 and 2007). I first researched the different types of interviews, structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews are more associated with quantitative analysis, with a collection of questions prepared in advance with identical wording and question order. The closed question type and the standardised format support generalisation whilst

removing potential sources of error or variability in interpretation. This format, however, would limit the detail I would be able to gain from participants. As I was hoping to recruit participants from a wide range of roles, this method would mean I could only ask very generic questions if I were to ensure everyone could answer them.

Both semi-structured and unstructured interviews are commonly associated with qualitative analysis. These immediately seemed a preferable option given the qualitative research already underway with the analysis of the miniseries. These questions tend to be more general, subjective, and open-ended, eliciting rich, detailed answers as the participants' viewpoint is more easily accessed.

I elected to follow a semi-structured approach, beginning with an interview guide and a series of questions similar for each participant. This flexible interview process allows room to pursue topics of particular interest to the participants, or for them to speak about the industry or processes of their work (Leidner, 1993, p. 238; Bryman, 2016, p. 471). This involves acting as a moderator, guiding the interview but permitting various aspects of the subject to arise or digressions to occur if they seem productive (Bertrand, 2005, p. 79).

All participants had similar introductory questions about their careers and work. These were then followed by some specific probing questions based on their area of work. In the case of the semi-structured interviews, a combination of prompts and indirect questions were additionally asked where it felt necessary to engage with a particular topic further. Questions varied depending on the interview participant's role and industry; for example, those involved in the policy and regulation process will have

questions that focus on this topic over more creative questions asked to those involved in active production. The questions were designed to be as similar as possible so that answers could highlight both sides of the production process.

Interview data is discursive, which can make it difficult to interpret. I therefore elected to analyse interview responses with both the initial codes of cultural dimensions, and then a reflexive critical discourse analysis approach, noting topics of significance or repetition that could then be used in referring back to the series sample.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

4.3.1 Series Database and Sample Development

To develop a study sample, I first built a database collating all miniseries broadcast on KBS1, KBS2, MBC and SBS from January 2007 until the end of 2016. When starting this project, I intended to focus on series beginning in 2007, roughly the year Korean dramas began exporting more broadly overseas, and ending by 2016, shortly before I began my PhD programme. However, as has already been discussed, the start of international success for the Korean drama series is often ascribed to *Winter Sonata's* success in Japan, which was first broadcast in 2002. As we have also seen from the phases of the Korean Wave, by 2007, the second generation was already underway, with audiences increasingly globalised. Furthermore, the period from 2015 to 2017 was also indicating a shift towards a new era of streaming and on-demand consumption. Thus, the potential sample of miniseries expanded to include those that met the criteria between 2002 and 2017, generating a total list of 386 dramas.

As a reminder, a miniseries here has been defined by the descriptions listed in Chapter 2 – that it only contains those that have between 16 and 24 episodes and are longer than

45 minutes per episode. From the outset of this project, the focus has always been on the national networks. As such, I deemed it unnecessary to detail miniseries broadcast on other networks.

When considering an approach to creating a sample, my initial plan was to select one series per network for each year of the study. From the outset, my chosen method of sampling has been non-random and slightly purposive. Research questions in content analysis often cannot be answered with a random sample, instead requiring the researcher to systematically include informative content, and exclude content that is not (Schweizer, 2019, p. 270). Bertrand and Hughes also wrote that 'purposive sampling is selecting a sample that will test the theory, that is perhaps deliberately extreme or deviant' (2005, p. 199). The sample is non-random, as I have specifically selected the miniseries of the above channels. Therefore, my results will not represent all miniseries broadcast in Korea, affecting the ability to form generalised conclusions. This study's general intent is to provide a broad understanding of the miniseries, analysing and discussing shows that cover a wide audience area in terms of both international and domestic success. As such, I chose to include dramas that have been either extraordinarily successful or unsuccessful or are known to be particularly conservative or shocking in some way.

In the earliest stages of undertaking this research, it became apparent that the approach of one series per network per year needed to be revised. Not only did I have no theoretical basis for these self-imposed rules, but it also meant that I could not discuss a particular series, even if it held a vital example or evidence if I had already spoken of a series from the same network in the same year. Other aspects also supported the

removal of this restriction – certain networks broadcast more dramas than others, and some interview participants' work was largely limited to a particular network too. Thus, removing this rule would allow me to incorporate more examples to support my arguments and more successfully incorporate the analysis with the responses from participants. As a result, the sample totalled 57 dramas across the study period, with 24 from KBS, 16 from MBC and 17 from SBS. The number of shows for each year averaged 3.5, varying from one in 2002 to seven in 2015. The full list of sampled dramas is available in Appendix A.

My next task was to determine how many episodes and by which method I would analyse each drama. Initially, I saw no issue with watching and analysing all episodes. However, if we assume there is an average of twenty episodes per series, with each episode an hour or longer, the total period watched would be well over 1000 hours. Once we also consider the process of writing, storing and coding notes for each episode, this would be a huge investment of time and storage, with little evidence to support a significant benefit over analysing fewer episodes. Manganello, Franzini and Jordan suggested a random sample of three to five episodes of program-based studies, up to a random sample of seven episodes for character-based analyses (2008, pp. 14-15). Had each episode of a series been self-contained, consisting of distinct, separate narratives and characters, it may have been necessary to watch all episodes. However, since this study aims to gain an overall understanding of the content over sixteen years, I determined it would not be necessary to watch and analyse each episode.

Therefore, for the 57 dramas in the sample, extensive notes were written for a minimum of seven episodes per series. These were supplemented with online episode summaries,

primarily obtained via the website DramaBeans, an English-language Korean drama

analysis site. The purpose of including these episode summaries was twofold. Firstly,

inclusion allowed for a larger review of the drama content without costing a significant

additional time investment. Secondly, I was able to compare these summaries to my

notes to ensure objectivity and not miss out on any noteworthy points of interest. When

combining both my own notes and supplementary summaries, the total number of

analysed episodes reached 502, more than the minimum requirement of 399 if only

seven episodes per series were analysed.

Although my Korean language ability allows me to follow without subtitles, I elected to

use English subtitles, as I determined it would be more consistent for all aspects of the

data collection and analysis and thesis composition to be completed in a single

language. Particularly regarding the miniseries analysis, I also determined it preferential

to rely on a standard 'published' subtitle, rather than my interpretation of the language.

For many series, these were easily available through legal streaming sites, whilst for

older series, I was required to find pirated and fan-subbed versions online.

4.3.2 Interview Recruitment and Participation Processes

As I created my initial database of miniseries, I simultaneously made notes of

producers, directors, writers, and production companies. Some research on these names

and companies provided me with contact information through which I could make

initial enquiries. At the same time, I used professional sites such as LinkedIn to find

potential participants by again using possibilities of companies or roles as initial search

information. I was also provided with further possible participants through connections

available to my supervisors. As interviews began to take place, I then relied on a

snowball method, with these participants providing me with contact information for

colleagues and friends who also worked within areas of my interest and would be happy to help. Appendix B of this thesis contains a list of interview participant profiles.

As part of the initial recruitment, I provided all participants with an information sheet, which further detailed the intention and aims of the research project, and a consent form, which is available in Appendix C. The consent form included details of myself, my supervisor, the project, and the ethical regulations. Participants were required to sign and return this form, which is kept on record until the completion of my PhD programme. They could also request a returned version which includes my signature and request a copy of this thesis upon its completion. As detailed in the consent form, participants were permitted to request a withdrawal at any time and without reason. Participant responses were ensured to be anonymous, meaning I do not reference specific individuals' names, or their works if it could lead them to be directly identifiable. However, companies or their created works may be named in instances where there is no concern for the participant's identity to be revealed.

A total number of 12 interviews were completed, varying in length from 25 to 54 minutes, with an average of 40 minutes. Participants' roles varied, from independent contractors and mid-level employees to high-ranking officers or producers with decades of experience. The size and influence of their companies also varied, from independent production studios up to large media conglomerates with over three thousand employees.

Prior to the commencement of the interview, when completed via video conferencing software, participants were made aware that they were being recorded and were

permitted to ask any questions relating to myself or the study at the beginning and end of the interview. They were given the option of declining to answer any question without reason.

All interviews took place exclusively in English. This was not, at the time, something I explicitly planned. To participants who did not speak English as a first language, I assured them at the start of the interview that they were welcome to answer any questions in Korean if they felt unable to answer adequately in English, and that I would later translate their responses. A potential participant's English language ability was never a determinant in their eligibility for involvement.

Ultimately, I recognised several benefits of completing interviews exclusively in English. Firstly, the participants' English level, as a whole, appeared higher than my Korean ability. All participants were fluent beyond minor grammar errors, which have been actioned in this text to ensure the clarity of their response whilst not affecting meaning. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, my role as interviewer was to direct the conversation to stimulate usable data. Had the interviews taken place in Korean, I risked missing nuance in their language, which would have affected my ability to adequately direct the interview in an appropriate direction.

Secondly, if only some interviews had taken place in Korean and others in English, this risked causing an imbalance, with potentially more usable data coming from the English-speaking participants. Finally, I believe the continuous use of a single language is of benefit to both the data analysis process and displaying my research. Much like the issue of nuance in that actual interview process, I would be concerned I could not pick

up on subtle indicators of cultural dimensions during the coding process. Or, more significantly, missing topics of significance raised in the interviews that I would want to use later to further analyse my series notes.

I used Zoom as the primary interview software because, unlike Skype, Zoom does not require users to have an account. During the period in which interviews took place (Spring/Summer 2021), Zoom also benefited from more widespread use, as Microsoft Teams was more limited to those who worked with office software. Zoom's security features were further beneficial to ensure participant confidentiality, as a password is required to join the meeting. The interview and transcript were automatically saved to Zoom's cloud storage before I moved them to my own secure virtual storage, individually password-protected. The automatically generated audio transcripts were checked against the recording and cleaned for accuracy before being imported into NVivo. For question responses received via email, these were imported straight away.

4.3.3 Coding and Data Analysis Processes

I determined NVivo as the most suitable software for qualitative analysis given its ability to organise and analyse large amounts of data. It is also possible to use discourse and thematic analysis methods and examine relationships in the data. Though NVivo can analyse automatically, I undertook a primarily manual approach, mainly due to the difficulty of developing a suitable matrix that would present accurate results. The reliance on automated analysis can risk encouraging the researcher to believe the results are reliable. Due to the subjective understanding of the significance and cultural context of this study, I determined that despite the increased cost of time, the results would be more useful if derived from manual methods.

My data was imported into NVivo in two batches, beginning with my miniseries notes, followed by the interview transcripts. To begin my coding process, I initially referred to Braun and Clarke's work on the six phases of thematic analysis:

Phase	Process	Result
Phase 1	Read data to become familiar with data and any patterns	Preliminary starting codes
Phase 2	Generate initial codes, making inferences of code meaning	Comprehensive codes
Phase 3	Combine codes into overarching themes, describing code meaning	List themes for further analysis
Phase 4	Research how themes support data and overarching theories	Recognition of how themes are patterned
Phase 5	Define themes and interesting points	Comprehensive analysis of how themes help understand the data
Phase 6	Refer back to sample to ensure description of themes is an accurate representation	Full description of results

Figure 6: Six Phases of Thematic Analysis, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 77-101)

Although I elected to undertake critical discourse analysis as my approach, I found this work beneficial as it defined a clear process. However, the thematic emphasis of this method would make it difficult for me to incorporate data and information about larger structural topics. Boman (2022) implemented a simplified, three-step process to analyse themes in the Korean Wave 4.0 discourse, based on the work of Clark and Braun (2014, p. 90) and Bryman (2016, p. 587):

Step 1: Initial reading of the tests

Step 2: Identification of themes and sub-themes (other significant elements) and relating them to earlier research and theoretical frameworks.

Step 3: Presentation of findings and insights related to the research questions and prior research in order to develop a coherent narrative pattern (Boman, 2022, p. 426)

As detailed in the previous section, the initial coding was based on all six of the cultural dimensions. The first wave of interview transcripts and series notes were analysed under

this method. I manually coded each instance of a dimension appearing, with further distinctions made of particular themes or behaviours within this dimension, listed in Figure 7.

Following this process, interview transcripts were also analysed under a separate process with some additional codes. This occurred where topics arose during interviews that were significant but did not inherently ascribe to a particular code. Instead, they spoke of specific considerations or processes that were implemented that resulted in these dimensions existing and developing.

These additional codes were 'Audience' and 'Changes (general)', with subcodes under 'Changes (general)' consisting of distribution, policy and production. This was necessary to triangulate connections or divergences between industry processes and particular recurring behaviours or actions.

These topics were then cross-referenced against existing codes to interpret potential overlapping and overarching themes. This was followed by a secondary review of the miniseries notes using these new findings to specify definitive examples of these themes in practice.

4.4 Audience Ratings and the Use of Secondary Data

Where it helps to support specific examples, I have elected to include data from secondary sources, such as audience ratings, online forums, or complaints. These ratings provide an additional source of information, especially when discussing specific case studies.

To briefly return to Meehan's comments detailed in Chapter 2, the audience is commodified for networks to value the programme and set advertising rates. However, given the Korean miniseries' unique last-minute production style, audience response data can provide us with quantitative data that may support a general theory about the development of a particular series throughout its broadcast period. These sources' anonymity means it is impossible to verify the objectivity or originality of the writer and their response, but they can provide an additional perspective or voice of those who stand between the miniseries' structural and subjective dimensions.

Two companies in Korea currently provide viewership ratings, AGB Nielsen Media Research and TNmS. Both companies use measuring devices attached to between 2000 and 2500 households across Korea. For AGB Nielsen, these are distributed across Seoul (550), Busan (250), Daegu (200), Gwangju (160), Daejeon (160), and other smaller cities (290) (Bark, 2011). The spread of households intends to show a fair representation of viewer habits across the nation. However, dispersal is not in scale to the distribution of population as the Greater Seoul Metropolitan Area has a population of over 25 million people, approximately half of the entire Korean population. Furthermore, it can be argued that such a small number of households compared to the country's total population cannot provide accurate data.

Ratings are usually published within a week of the broadcast air date but are often available before this. Higher viewership ratings allow networks to charge more for advertising and product placement. However, with the expansion of online streaming and VOD services, current methods must be updated as they can only calculate 'live' audiences. Besides, this method does not consider the level of engagement or activity

with those audiences in areas such as online discussion, social media engagement and purchasing related goods (including branded goods and placement products). Despite the change in television consumption habits, the ratings from AGB and TNmS are still the major determinant by networks for deciding advertising prices.

The relevance of audience rating and response to this study is twofold. Firstly, audience response can highlight what is 'right' or 'wrong' about a particular drama and if this had been recognised by those involved in a production. Perhaps, the issues raised about a particular element of a show were not rectified during its run but there has since been a noticeable reduction or absence of this element. Secondly, the audience ratings can highlight the differences between domestic and international audiences.

There are, of course, potential reliability concerns about using such large-scale audience ratings. A generalisation of programme popularity can be made by the absolute reliability of data and the conclusions that can be drawn from these ratings are limited (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005, p. 44). Concerning international audiences, it is not easy to attain accurate data on their consumption and response. Whilst networks and production companies often share details of the number of countries to which a drama has been exported and for what amount, data can be considered inaccurate once we consider audiences watching dramas online. Shows may not be licensed for streaming in certain countries, so users may resort to using virtual private networks (VPNs) to access these dramas, invalidating location-based data, or watching via illegal uploads, providing no usable data whatsoever.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the theoretical foundation and the practical application of data

collection and analysis for this project. By detailing my research questions and aims, I considered the best approaches for industry interviews and miniseries analysis.

Previous research projects measuring culture, particularly by Hofstede, provided initial codes by which I could begin the study of my series sample using a discourse approach. Critical discourse analysis was determined to be the most suitable method, as it can connect the structures, representation, and reception of content, thus being the most useful tool in combining the two strands of data collection. I also elected to incorporate the three perspectives of the discourse of the Korean Wave (nationalist, neoliberal, and postcolonial), through which I can combine the cultural studies and critical political economy elements, supporting my research questions to the best of my ability, and generating an original contribution to knowledge in this subject.

Interviews were kept semi-structured so participants could open up and share their stories and experiences. In doing so, I was enlightened as to new lines of enquiry that I had not previously considered, which were later reviewed in relation to the miniseries analysis. Participants were recruited through direct outreach, supervisor introduction, and a snowball approach. Most interviews took place via video conferencing software Zoom but a small number were also completed via email due to the restrictions at the time of data collection because of COVID-19.

After developing a non-random miniseries sample and analysing a minimum of seven episodes from each of the 57 series, I imported these notes into qualitative research software NVivo, alongside the transcript and email responses of all interview participants. Initial analysis of the miniseries notes and interview transcripts was

completed using a coding method derived from Hofstede's cultural dimensions. A secondary wave of analysis of the miniseries notes was then completed following an enquiry of further topics of interest as raised by interview participants.

By using this method, I was able to create a framework through which my research objectives could be addressed. The presence of themes and their changes over time can be studied, alongside aspects of the critical political economy and cultural studies that may have been contributors to a shift. Both lines of enquiry, critical political economy and cultural studies, stand alone as individual lines of research, but their relationship is also made clear. This then shows the connections between the fragments of the circuit of culture, and aids in determining the 'conscious creation' of culture, as first presented in the introduction chapter.

Chapter 5 – The Regulation, Production and Distribution of the Miniseries: Interview Data

5.1 Introduction

'Who gets to tell their stories? Who can enter the media industries, and whose voices are heard? (Redvall, 2021, p. 227). Here, as Redvall stresses, media content is always marked by certain ideologies. There is a complex interplay of extrinsic and intrinsic factors, agency, power, control, and the ideologies of structural inequality. Consequently, before the content can be dissected and understood, we must first fully dissect the systems of power that influence the creative industries. For this reason, I am first investigating the role of the critical political economy in Korean miniseries production.

The aim of this chapter is to present and analyse the interview data collected through my analytical framework developed across Chapters 2 and 4. By engaging with those involved in policy, terrestrial networks, production, and distribution, I can compare perspectives and experiences, thus, further understanding how policy decisions, revenue and consumption are understood by both the effecting (policymakers) and affected (content creators) parties.

As a reminder, the research questions that this specific chapter seeks to answer are:

1. How do business and culture influence the content of the miniseries?
2. How can we attribute political and economic identities, such as neoliberalism or globalisation, to the identity of the miniseries?

Authoritarian governments in Korea in previous decades oversaw the growth of private sectors and industries, such as engineering and telecommunications, through financial

authority, but by the mid-1980s, the development of these private sectors grew beyond the state's capacity of control. In the early stages of democracy in the 1990s, government approaches were becoming increasingly influenced by neoliberalism. Following the IMF Crisis in 1997, there was a rise in marketised or compressed individualisation, with the economy shaped by the expansion of market-entered commercialism (Lee Dong Hoo, 2021, p. 35). The short period between the democratisation of the state and the beginning of the Korean Wave can easily be overlooked. Still, the lingering effects of direct government control and its protectionist approach to cultural policy should not be neglected. Yet, it is not only political authority and institutions that are significant. From the early 2000s, technological advancements and the proliferation of internet access altered global consumption patterns and market behaviours. The rise of mobile media formats and VOD content meant terrestrial networks could no longer guarantee high audience share.

Explicit policy implementation has significantly affected the industry and its approach to content production. This includes both well-documented efforts, such as screen quotas and financial incentives but also reflects on the indirect and passive courses of action pertaining to content regulation and intervention. Streams and sources of revenue over the period of study are contrasted against the rise in production costs. The increasing reliance on foreign investment brings a new challenge to satisfying global investors and audiences while attempting to maintain a distinct cultural identity. Increasing competition between networks and new consumption methods generates new content and representation rarely seen on terrestrial series. Finally, the chapter examines the past, present and future of global distribution to reflect on the effects of transnational and transcultural representation and consumption.

5.2 Government Policies – Economic Prosperity and Financial Incentives

As the chief controlling force in the political economy, I determined it makes sense first to discuss the government and how it controls, regulates, or manipulates the popular culture industry and its productions. This is based on the three-level system of capitalism detailed in Chapter 3, where the highest level is political authority – the state agents who enforce rules and specialised regulations for certain industries (Scott, 2009, p. 6). The government supports the functioning of the private industry through regulation and promotion. These are important in reducing legal problems, business conflicts, and general social antagonism (Kim Shin Dong, 2022).

Based upon the modern history of Korea detailed in Chapter 3 it is reasonable to assert that the government has two distinct interests in implementing its cultural policy: economic prosperity and international influence. Cultural policy can also be categorised as implicit or explicit. Explicit policy produces and circulates narrowly defined fields of culture, whilst implicit policy indirectly governs culture as a way of life, symbolising the values and norms of a target population (Ahearne, 2009; Lee Hye Kyung & Zhang Xiyu, 2021, p. 522).

The Park (1963-1979) and Chun (1980-1988) administrations primarily sought to reproduce cultural identity and promote regional culture (Yim, 2002, p. 40). One of the major policies was the screen quota system which limited the number of foreign film productions available under the principle that protecting the film industry was the same as protecting Korea's cultural identity. Even after democratisation, the government did not implement alternative measures to protect or develop cultural identity other than maintaining the screen quota system. Though the government initialised the

revitalisation of the domestic film industry through legal and financial intervention, national culture was not a point of discussion in Korea's culture policy. As a result, domestic films have rapidly become a blockbuster style in their content and budget (Jin, 2006, p. 16). This approach largely continued into the realm of television drama production. Policy focused on opening the industry financially, with little consideration to the prior focus on national culture.

Cultural policy exists as the upper rung of government intervention, under which other elements exist. It is both provable in its existence and measurable in that we can note changes of significance after specific policy implementation.

Two interview participants (K and L) worked as high-level cultural officers across ministries and entertainment companies for many years. One further participant (Participant J) was employed as Broadcasting Regulation Advisor across multiple iterations of the MCST and the KCC. I opened with the same line of questioning for all of these participants, asking the broad question, 'In the period 2002 to 2017, what do you consider to be the most influential pieces of cultural policy?'

The purpose of this question was twofold. Firstly, it increased the likelihood that participants would give a specific response related to their area of expertise, thus opening the conversation for more discussion. Secondly, its impartiality allowed the participant to express their opinion or stance.

Participant K referenced a large number of policies across various media forms. Those of particular pertinence to this study included the expansion of the ratio of obligatory

outsourcing production; pan-government efforts to eradicate illegal content downloads; active protection of copyright, such as the establishment of an organisation to strengthen copyright; and the emergence of comprehensive programming [cable] channels such as TV Chosun and Channel A and JTBC.

However, other responses varied, from asserting that significance lay with an investment in the production of cultural contents (Participant L, High-Level Cultural Policy Officer, CJ ENM) to the opinion that there is no policy of influence or significance, as 'the Korean Wave is a naturally occurring phenomenon and that 'broadcasting policy was not a direct opportunity' (Participant J, Broadcasting Regulation Advisor, KCC).

I then proceeded to ask how these policies have affected drama production. Participant K responded:

> There is a compulsory programming system for dramas created by an outsourced production company. In Korea, much effort has been made to revitalise outsourcing production, as in the UK. As part of this, a terrestrial broadcasting company was required to program up to 40 per cent of the broadcast programs produced by external sources, according to the Broadcasting Act.

> The terrestrial broadcasting company continued to tackle this ratio of compulsory programming in order to make more self-production, but most of the dramas that were popular in Korea and abroad were produced by external producers. There may be various problems with the external production system, but it can be considered that the promotion of external production and the regulation of mandatory programming ratio have been a major role in the popularisation of Korean broadcast programs overseas as the Korean film industry has developed due to the 'screen quota system'…

> In 2002, overcoming the IMF financial crisis, domestic companies were reorganised, and terrestrial broadcasting companies also began to move drama production personnel in an atmosphere of restructuring and production reduction. They moved to an outsourced production company. At this time, as sound record producers, entertainment management companies, and movie producers entered into the production of dramas, the outsourcing production market for dramas reinforced not only in terms of capital, but also in casting, OST [original

soundtrack], etc., changing dramas into comprehensive content products (interviewed 20 July 2021).

The screen quota, abolished in 2006, benefitted cultural preservation, industry growth and audience exposure but created artificial demand for domestic films, leading to lower production quality led by the quota rather than genuine market demand. The minimum hourly quota of digitally produced programming was established to facilitate production growth in this field (MCT, 2002). Later, the '10pm Drama Protection Law', otherwise known as 'The Prime-Time Drama Protection Law', was implemented in 2012, supporting the domestic drama industry by regulating broadcasting schedules of primetime dramas on terrestrial networks. Terrestrial networks were made to allocate a minimum of 10 per cent of their primetime slots (9-11 pm) to domestically produced dramas. The policy's objective was to provide better opportunities for local production companies to have their work broadcast during hours when viewership is typically higher.

The Korean government, the MCST, and other indirect government agencies also helped companies distribute cultural products. 2002 was the first year in which Korea recorded a broadcasting trade surplus, with deficits consistently recorded prior to this. Over 60 investment companies financed the film industry between 1998 and 2003, rising to 511 by 2011 (MCST, 2011). Since 2003, the Ministry of Culture (now the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) has assisted the creative and cultural industries, deregulation, and the broadcasting industry's opening, allowing greater competition between production companies and broadcasting networks.

The Roh Moo Hyun administration (2003-2008) elected to follow its preceding

administration by applying an arm's length principle to cultural policy, but recognised

the economic potential of the cultural industries and supported significant investment

into its infrastructure:

> We have a tendency that the government will provide economic supports, give money [to develop the business]. That is going to happen. Funding is important, but I believe it should be distributed to businesses that can budget effectively with proper structures and resources in the market…What the government can do is only invest some seed money and trigger some trickle-down effects. It is the market's role to generate capital [to develop cultural industries] (Roh, 2003).

In 2003, the High Digital (HD) Production Centre was built, consisting of studios,

recording booths, editing and post-production facilities, and digital information archives

(MCT, 2004). His government also subsidised the construction of the Digital Magic

Space (DMS) in 2003, a large-scale production complex with the capacity to produce

2000 hours of digital television programming per year (MCT, 2007).

Following Lee Myung Bak's inauguration in 2008, he critiqued Noh's approach and

implemented measures to raise the competitiveness of cultural commodities in the

global market, providing policy packages targeting exportation and finding material

with potential for commercialisation (MCST, 2008; Kim Tae Young, 2021, p.94). In

2011, the MCST introduced the 'First Basic Plan of Promoting the Content Industry', a

framework for developing the cultural industries, as well as announcing an investment

of over 1 trillion won (approximately 800 million USD) to 'commodify original

storytelling sources' and to construct a 'production system of "Killer Content"' (Kim

Tae Young, 2021, p. 95).

Between the years 2010 and 2015, Korea's broadcasting contents exports rose by 15.1

per cent, and by 2018, *Hallyu* exports boosted the Korean economy by approximately

9.48 billion USD, of which broadcasting made up 410 million USD (Huh, 2017, pp. 1389-92; Park Jin Hai, 2019).

These interview responses and supporting data assert that the most significant government policy implementations concerned economic prosperity. Participant K's reference to post-IMF crisis restructuring is the first allusion to reactionary policy. However, substantial investment into the infrastructure of drama production, in combination with efforts to artificially grow the industry, does indicate a level of future planning. At this stage, there is some evidence that government efforts directly affected the production industry, but this cannot be directly connected to content or identity.

5.2.1 Explicit Policy – The Case of Special Purpose Companies

In conversation with Participant L, they continued to speak of the outsourcing of production and the subsidisation of production expenses:

> The second major impact was the subsidisation of program production expenses to broadcasting companies. Until now, the Korea Communications Commission has taken over the broadcasting business, and the Ministry of Culture and Sports has been in charge of outsourcing production, and each of these Ministries has provided subsidies for the production of programs in a competitive manner. (Participant L, interviewed 20 July 2021)

This is also in line with the response from Participant K, who asserted that many measures were implemented in the aftermath of the IMF crisis to help stabilise the industry. The most economically significant were financial assistance, such as loans and debt restructuring offered to help stabilise networks' operations, market liberalisation, and content support, such as funding programs and incentives to encourage production. The outsourcing of drama production was promoted by the government as a means to expand the market, promote international collaboration, and ensure cost efficiency.

This can be tied to one of the more academically discussed policies implemented, the introduction of Special Purpose Companies (SPC). An SPC is a company-type legal entity typically used to isolate firms from financial risk. To promote the outsourcing of content production, the Korean government implemented this new policy to permit SPCs in 2006. The SPC system permitted registration with the MCST for a period of one to three years, from pre-production to the end of post-production. The government offered tax benefits and intended to support independent production companies, and the policy encouraged the facilitation of easy funding and risk reduction through co-production, as well as transparency of spending and procedural efficiency (Ju Hye Yeon, 2017).

In some of the earliest SPC-produced dramas, actors already known overseas helped to generate initial investment from foreign (particularly Japanese) networks. The first drama to be SPC-produced was *Legend* (2007, MBC) which starred actor Bae Yong Joon, who was already immensely famous in Japan after the success of *Winter Sonata*.

SPC-produced dramas on KBS, MBC and SBS increased from four in 2007 to 21 dramas in 2011. By 2015, the number of registered SPCs reached 109, though only 15 of these were for TV drama productions (Ju Hye Yeon, 2017, p. 104). Nine dramas of the sample were produced via SPCs and were broadcast between 2010; their average audience rating ranged from 7.4 per cent (*School 2015*, 2015, KBS2 and *Hwarang*, 2016, KBS2) to 31.7 per cent (*Slave Hunter*, 2010, KBS2), with an average of 16.7 per cent.

The system reduced the burden on networks to finance dramas fully and networks

earned exclusive television advertising revenue during the show's first broadcast. However, independent production companies remained most at risk if the drama was not able to generate a large audience, as domestic advertising and re-broadcasting revenue was not distributed to the production companies (Ju Hye Yeon, 2017, p. 107). Therefore, it was possible that independent production companies only saw a small return in profits compared to the network for a successful co-production.

The imbalance of profit distribution from advertising revenue caused independent production companies to run with a continuous deficit. They primarily earned profit from foreign investment, licence and remake sales, and pre-broadcast sales to foreign television networks, consequently implicitly incentivising exports. To generate these sales, networks decided to reserve SPCs for historical or romantic dramas with popular actors or idols that generally are best received by transnational audiences but have higher production costs. As such, production companies would have a strong interest in gaining positive attention from foreign audiences.

As Ju surmises:

> The SPC production benefitted networks more than independent production companies, the opposite of the government's intention and expectation. There has not been a substantial change in Korean TV production systems with the SPC over the past several years; however, k-dramas have often created co-production systems between three networks and independent production companies when the drama seeks to infiltrate foreign TV markets (Ju Hye Yeon, 2017, p. 107).

This can prove that production companies aimed their content internationally as they were reliant on foreign revenue sources, but Ju's statement evidences this was not a necessarily conscious decision by the government. This cultural policy is an example of implementation for economic prosperity, as a means to financially bolster the industry

through the expansion of outsourced production.

5.2.2 Conclusion

To conclude, participants supported the conviction that, like the film industry, policy for television production was almost exclusively driven by economic gain rather than with any intention of supporting or developing cultural identity. This section sought to determine the extent to which the government, or structures involved in policymaking are directly generating change in miniseries production, based on the political authority and institutional foundation levels of the 3-level capitalist system (Scott, 2006) and regulation under the circuit of culture (du Gay et al., 1997).

Evidence shows that since the early 1990s, the government developed policies so the private sector could boost the cultural industries. In the early 2000s, market liberalisation, heavy investments and other financial incentives developed the drama industry and increased competition. Creating Special Purpose Companies is one example of policy intended to support independent producers that ultimately benefitted networks.

It can again be argued that policies were developed and implemented with the intention of expanding the television industry, but they still appear largely reactionary, aiming to stabilise costs in the aftermath of the financial crisis. It was mostly policies of conservative administrations that supported cultural industries through deregulation and pro-market neoliberalisation. These policies were not necessarily designed with the global expansion of the Korean Wave in mind, instead on the intention of international investment and co-productions. This came from a financial need rather than a drive to expand export markets but showcases the initial timeline by which programming

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became more internationally focused.

Given their measurability and explicitness, it is easy to understand why these are the policies that are viewed to be of most significance. However, the hands-off, implicit policies of liberal and progressive administrations, such as improving creators' rights and increasing funding eligibility, should not be understated.

5.3 The Economy of Culture and Content Regulation

The prior section identified policies that supported Korea's economic prosperity, but we must also look at policies related to international influence. By the late 2000s, dramas were successfully exported to multiple regions. As the Korean Wave became its own brand, the government then invested in cultural industries and developed suitable funding programmes.

The explicit use of popular culture products as part of Korea's soft power agenda asserts the state's substantial interest in the continued success of its culture industries. In his 2008 inauguration speech, the newly elected president Lee Myung Bak declared the Korean Wave as a national business:

> Korea is a nation of culture with an extensive history. The Korean Wave that is now well placed around the globe testifies to the advantage of skilful replications of such a long tradition. Modernization of traditional culture is useful for facilitating arts and culture and such attempts surely dignify the country's economic prosperity. Now, culture has become an industry. We must develop our competitiveness in our contents industry, thereby laying the foundation to become a nation strong in cultural activities.
>
> An increase in income will lead to a rise in cultural standards, which in turn heightens our quality of life. Through culture we are able to enjoy life, through culture we are able to communicate with each other and through culture, we will be able to advance together. The new Administration will do its best to bring the power of our culture into a full blossom in this globalized setting of the 21st century (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008)

This is the pinnacle of the objectification of the culture industry (Kim Tae Young & Jin Dal Yong, 2016, p. 236). Not only is the highest-ranking member of office declaring specific importance to the Korean Wave, but he links the success of the culture industries to the people's quality of life.

With the help of KOCCA and the KCC, the government actively promoted Korean cultural products overseas, and utilised the Korean Wave to increase consumption. For every 100 USD in cultural goods exported, they generate up to a 412 USD increase in exports of other goods such as food, clothes, and cosmetics. This supports the assertion that dramas cannot be culturally or nationally ambiguous.

Regardless of how the content is represented, it cannot remove itself from its Koreanness. As Kim Kyung Hyun wrote, the national origins of brands such as Zara, Uniqlo or Estée Lauder may be unknown, but BTS (or any other group) will never be cleansed of their national origin, no matter how commercialised or Westernised (2021, p. 29).

This section seeks to understand how implicit government participation and other external forces have affected the economy of cultural production as it pertains to critical political economy. It centres on the industry and the commodification of cultural production and how a commodification of culture leads to content control and regulation from different groups with often opposing objectives.

5.3.1 Content Interventionism and Government Blacklisting

After speaking with participants about the government's implementation of explicit

policies, I broached the subject of the content of the miniseries. I asked participants their perspectives on the relationship between cultural policy, political economy and content, asking to what extent they thought government intervention directly affected content.

Participant J, a broadcasting regulation advisor for the Korean Communication Commission noted that, despite heavy investment, it is difficult to find data evaluating the extent to which regulations and supporting programme production costs have impacted the overall production of dramas. Instead, the revitalisation of drama production and increase in exports may be due to an increase in overseas demand, increased production quality, or the regulation and support of the Korean government (interviewed 20 July 2021).

Asking Participant L the same question, they stated:

> The Government has consistently maintained the principle of 'support but not interfering' in the production of contents, such as dramas, and thus the influence of the Government is unlikely to be significant (interviewed 20 July 2021).

Other participants largely subscribed to the same mentality that there is no measurable relationship between the government's regulation of content production and overall industry development. However, whilst Participant L categorised the government input as support without interfering, others argued against this, alleging the government intervenes too much, and their intervention is insignificant and unconstructive, with no measurable impact on the success or exports of drama productions.

Otmazgin similarly interviewed media industry personnel in Korea who generally agreed government policy had not proven to be significant or constructive to the

industry, as the state lacked a deep familiarity with the industries and resources invested in promoting the sector have proven to be neither significant nor effective. Policy is too interventionist, and highly institutionalised arrangements are counterproductive by failing to accommodate the volatilities of cultural markets. He argued that the government should instead keep a free space where cultural innovations can interact naturally with the established industry (2020, pp. 44-45).

The conflicting views here occur due to a difference in the perception of what constitutes government intervention. Certainly, a lack of policy or intervention is also a stance in its own right. Though it is true that the government rarely interfered directly with specific drama content, there are cases of political decisions which have hurt the freedom of cultural industries and creative entertainment.

One major example is the blacklists created under the administration of former presidents Lee Myung Bak and Park Geun Hye (2013-2017). Lee demanded the suspension of funding to various productions, and in combination with the Park administration, generated nine blacklists between 2008 and 2015 of over 300 organisations and almost 9000 names, including top directors and actors (Chung, 2018). Names were added for a variety of reasons, including taking stances publicly about certain political decisions, voicing support for opposition parties, and criticising Park or her late dictator father Park Chung Hee (Steger, 2018; Noh, 2016). Individuals were said to be discriminated against 'secretly but persistently' and excluded from government arts subsidies (Choe, 2017). Through the controlled release of funding and other opportunities, the government limited whose stories are shared. There is a reasonable argument that those not included in the blacklist - likely political non-

engagers or supporters of the conservative administration – would be less likely to create progressive content.

No matter how ideologically divided cultural governance has been, the blacklisting enacted by the Lee and Park administrations proves government officials actively attempting to control content. However, this would contradict my hypothesis as it indicates a practice of promoting conservative content. That being said, it can be reasoned that they undertook such actions to restrict or challenge voices they personally viewed as threatening, either to their own cultural and moral perspectives, or political careers.

It can be argued that these actions are not representative of the attitudes of prior administrations as a whole. For that reason, it is difficult to wholly summarise the decisions of governments spanning over fifteen years as a single belief or approach at this stage.

5.3.2 Audience Content Regulation

In contrast to the responses from interview participants, audience behaviours indicate a conviction that the government and its related ministries can impact content production due to their relationship with the terrestrial networks.

Following the government's implementation of an online petition site, multiple petitions have been raised by citizens demanding cancellations of certain dramas, often following a misrepresentation of historical or cultural facts. In 2021, over 225,000 people signed a public petition demanding the cancellation of the cable drama *Snowdrop*. The drama, set during the 1987 pro-democracy movements, featured a North Korean spy as a

central character, despite no historical evidence to support North Korean involvement.

The executive office of the President of South Korea eventually released a statement rejecting the petition, where they expressed their respect for 'the self-correction efforts and autonomous choices made by the private sector, including creators, producers, and audiences, for content that goes against public sentiment.' They acknowledged the authoritative power of the Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC), by agreeing that 'broadcasts that undermine the public responsibility of broadcasting, such as excessive distortion of history, or violate regulations' are subject to KCSC deliberation (Kim Kyung Hee, 2021).

Political candidates leverage controversies, taking advantage of public discourse to promote their run by tying this directly to their patriotism. In this instance, presidential candidate Sim Sang Jung of the Justice Party used the controversy, stating that protagonists should be 'ordinary citizens who shed blood, sweat, and tears for the democracy of the Republic of Korea' and 'creative freedom should be humble in the face of the scars of our history' (Lee Ho Young, 2021). The active administration declared support for a free market and a clear separation between state and creators, but Sim's statement reflects an opinion of supporting the preservation of cultural accuracy and patriotism in drama production.

Participant B, a drama producer, referred to their works of historical fiction. They acknowledged that audiences demand a strong level of historical and cultural accuracy for this genre, and in order to avoid harsh criticisms, most historical dramas are genre-fused with fantasy or include fictional characters (interviewed 5 April 2021). Participant

K also referred to this from the perspective of production costs:

> Traditional historical dramas have been changed to fusion historical dramas on the grounds that it is difficult to make up for production costs compared to other genres and that they are more likely to be engrossed in controversy over history, but they are still being reduced (interviewed 20 April 2021)

This challenges the theory of simulacra, particularly as Chae Young Sun applied it to the case of *Winter Sonata*. The contention that drama does not need to be based in reality is disproven here. I would argue that Chae's declaration is perhaps inadvertently limited to 'modern' dramas, rather than those with a historical or political underpinning. Instead, I contend it is the people's feeling of *han,* and the assertion that they have yet to receive a reasonable apology for their endured hardships (particularly in the 20th century), is a culturally collective sentiment that overrides the entertainment value of a product.

This reinforces the perceived benefit of the *jjokdaebon* production method, as creators can quickly adjust and self-regulate content in response to immediate audience feedback. Participant K noted the benefits of this over the pre-production method:

> Pre-production [in Korea] was difficult because a large number of dramas had to be produced with limited resources, and this was an opportunity to create Korean dramas in a dynamic manner…In most cases of Korean dramas, the programming and production of Korean dramas are performed at the same time without any prior production system, so the reactions and trends of viewers may be reflected…With the development of digital technology after the year 2000, there have been cases where the opinions of the public or viewers can be immediately conveyed to the production crew, and viewers may have controlled the flow of dramas. In terms of production, there have been cases where broadcasting accidents have occurred because editing has not been completed by the airing time due to the imminent production schedule.
>
> It can be said that the production of dramas is also related to the dynamism of Koreans, and the production site of dramas has also contributed to the growth of Korean dramas. It is not an exaggeration to assume that the staff members live 24 hours a day at the production site during the production period, as it is not an exaggeration to make it possible to repeatedly film the scene until the desired scene is made with virtually no time limit, unlike in the case of foreign countries,

such as the United States or Japan.

There is no denying that this has become the basis for the growth of the Korean drama industry (interviewed 20 July 2021).

Participant K's response connects two key points. They highlight the perceived benefits of last-minute production and the benefits that modern technology has afforded in that public criticism can be immediately actioned. They then tie this method to the Korean working ethic and the produced commodity. Viewers' attitudes are connected to the dynamism of production and have contributed to the industry's growth. It is this relationship, participant K asserted, that distinguishes Korean productions from their American or Japanese counterparts.

Technological developments and the spread of social media use are important factors, as social media use was not widespread until the late 2000s. Back then, it would have been more difficult earlier to react and adapt within a short period. Changes were likely slow across series and years, rather than more recently where public response can be viewed and actioned within a couple of episodes.

Discussion with participants highlights the assertion that audiences are a key driving force in content change, which we can argue has been amplified over time because of technological developments. The connection with cultural accuracy (particularly in period dramas) connects to nationalist and patriotic attitudes. It is then possible to argue that the aforementioned actions by various politicians were driven by populism. This gives audiences a voice but continues a level of commodification, as it is not so much their opinions that are valued, but the possibility of taking general preferences and using them, whether for fiscal profit, or political gain.

5.3.3 The Neoliberal Commodification of Idols

To refer back to Mosco, commodification transforms things 'valued for their use into products valued for what they can bring in exchange' (Mosco, 2014, p. 128). This applies to the above-mentioned illustration of using audiences for gain, but also can be discussed in the context of the commodified players of the industry – idols.

The expansion of the Korean Wave into foreign markets often began with the penetration of popular music. In the early 2000s, Chinese teenagers pursued the Korean Wave as it filled a culturally empty space left by the changes of the early 1990s. The Korean government sought to increase the culture industry's budget to promote expansion to China and other East Asian countries but quickly became aware of the potential backlash from partner governments if they were seen as being too visible as promoters of the Korean Wave (Cho Hae Joang, 2005, p. 160).

Cultural relations between Korea and China (and East Asia as a whole) were formed through the logic of capital and so the Korean Wave became 'nothing other than a game of pop stars produced by capital' (Baek, 2001, p. 6). Participant D, a senior Manager for Global Distribution at MBC stated:

> Media companies such as CJ ENM…in the casting stage, there is a big meeting with the head of PR, an executive of the production team, and the head of the distribution team, and they put their opinion as to who is popular globally. Who is good if they focus on targeting their major markets? The Japanese market – who is good? Who is popular in Japan? (interviewed 20 April 2021)

To promote expansion and generate content across multiple forms of media, a common technique was to cast 'idol' members of popular music groups into dramas, ensuring audience viewership increased through their own established fanbase. Participant K

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(High-Level Cultural Policy Officer, CJ ENM) also confirmed:

> I tried to develop both pop and K-drama at the same time by Idol celebrities [appearing in the dramas]. Even though the main actors were not equipped with acting ability, they could have been given priority in casting (20 July 2021)

In the earlier years of the study, idol actors remained unproven in acting, so their costs remained low. In my sample, the earliest case of major idol casting was singer Rain in *Full House* (2004, KBS2). Series including *Boys Over Flowers* (2009, KBS2) and *IRIS* (2009, KBS2) reached peak audience ratings of 32.9 per cent and 39.9 per cent, respectively, proving this method could be successful. Not only were idol fans increasing viewership, but idol and actor fame increased exponentially as it coincided with Korean Wave 2.0. Entertainment companies took note and began training their stars in acting, pushing for more idols to appear in dramas. The costs of casting top idols then skyrocketed and no longer guaranteed the previous level of success.

Of the 57 dramas in the sample, 31 (54 per cent) featured an idol, 62 per cent for KBS2, and 50 per cent for MBC and SBS. Idol appearance was rare in the early 2000s but increased significantly, with 76 per cent of dramas in the sample between 2009 and 2013 featuring at least one idol as a significant character. The normalisation of idol casting diluted its power. As Participant D continued, to distribute well now, especially internationally, productions must include a major idol. Newer K-pop groups, or 'rookies', are no longer sufficient, and the agencies of major stars tend to prioritise large productions, such as those on Netflix (Participant D, 20 April 2021).

Some shows have relied on idols to generate buzz and viewership, but it is not a guarantee of success. Five of the six main stars of *Dream High* (2011, KBS2) were active idols, and the show featured multiple cameos from other popular actors and stars.

Achieving an average viewership of 15.7 per cent, its success was attributed to its meta-commentary on top of a fleshed-out story, using those moments to enhance its sense of humour (JavaBeans, 2013, p. 318). Yet its second season, *Dream High 2* (2012, KBS2) failed to make an impact, with an average viewership of 7.7 per cent, despite featuring another four idols in lead roles. Similarly, *To the Beautiful You* (2012, SBS), produced by major entertainment company SM Entertainment, had three well-known idol stars in major and supporting roles and cameo appearances from other popular idol groups throughout the series. Despite this, it only managed to achieve an average viewership rating of 5.1 per cent.

Evidence supports that idol dramas exist under a neoliberal strategy of promoting the market over content integrity. The data showing the sudden increase in idol appearances from the start of the Korean Wave 2.0 establishes the focus on overseas expansion through K-pop idols - emphasising the relationship between international distribution and content. Whilst idol casting generates international interest and potential funding, it also can cause a level of content regulation. Idols are subject to heavy influence by their entertainment company, which can often extend to the types of characters they play. I assert that the idol strategy exists primarily as a financial incentive, as more controversial characters and storylines can still be distributed to non-idol actors.

5.3.4 Conclusion

Those involved in content production favour minimal government intervention and champion audiences bearing responsibility for determining 'suitable' content. Kim Ok Young, a judge for the television category for the Baeksang Arts Award, stated that rather than a 'top-down government-led advisory body' or 'association of experts', it is more desirable to broadcast content out to the world and leave them open for public

evaluation (Kim Hae Yeon, 2021). Scandals such as the Park blacklisting are significant when discussing the cultural accuracy of Korean dramas. The act of restricting certain industry players and the link between the government and particular networks does evidence an influence on content.

Idols lured funders and audiences during the initial push of the Korean Wave overseas. The requirement that idols portrayed characters presented as superior and pure, coupled with inadequate acting ability, affected content to some extent. In the later stages of the study, the saturation of idols and drama opportunities across terrestrial and cable networks meant that featuring an idol no longer guaranteed the same pull of audience numbers. To have the same effect, dramas would now need to be casting the most successful idol stars. This casting would come at an incredible cost, but it remains one of the most secure means of guaranteeing international funding and overseas broadcasting potential.

There is still little change to the production methods because of funding issues and a preference for audience feedback. A wholly pre-produced drama remains rare, it was not until the success of *Descendants of the Sun* (2016, KBS2) that the number of pre-produced dramas began to increase. For much of the study, most dramas were developed under the live-shoot method, further supporting the points detailed thus far that the audience remains the most critical factor in content development.

Based on the information obtained up until now, there are three predominant groups involved: the regulator (the government and related ministries/groups), the creator (both production studios and networks), and the consumer (audiences). These three groups

also align with the regulation, production, and consumption aspects of the Circuit of Culture. The remaining two, representation and identity, are more largely incorporated in critical discourse analysis. Although Du Gay, Hall, et al. (1997) emphasise the interconnectedness of all five structures, the data I have obtained currently indicates a perception that these three groups each have a direction of intent. I constructed the diagram below, which displays the direction of intent for creators, audiences, the government, and related regulatory bodies.
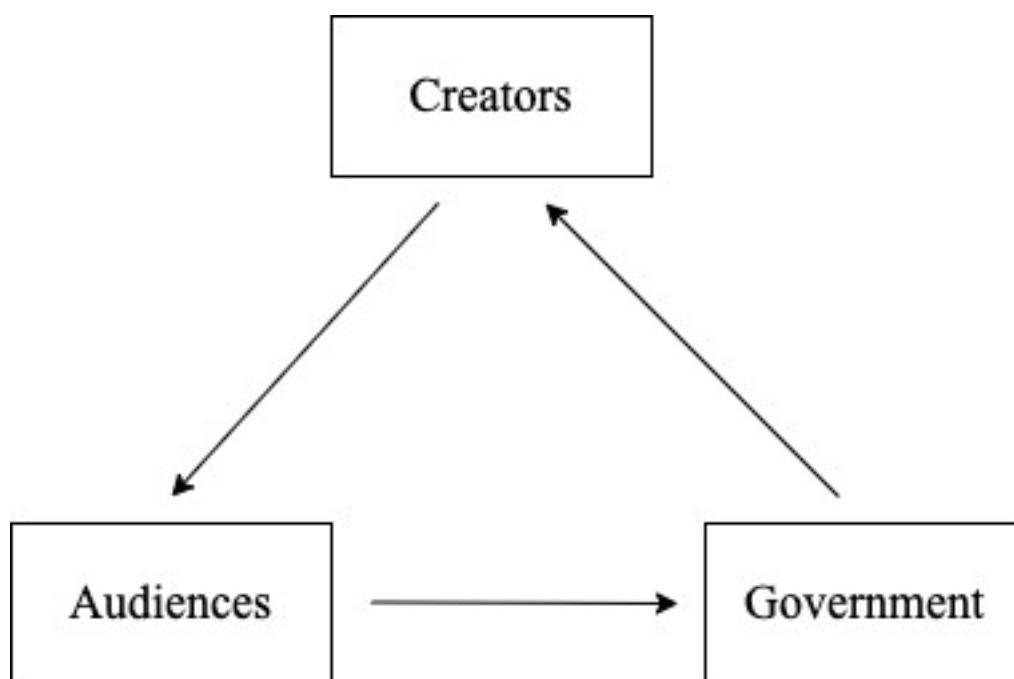
Figure 8: Direction of Intent

For creators, their attention is primarily directed at audiences. Audience ratings determine success and funding security, and response to episodes ultimately affects content. As Participant B asserted, creators are regularly considering and changing content to avoid audience criticism.

At first sight, this observation seems to suggest that audiences can influence creators.

However, that is not the case, as audiences primarily direct their attention to the government and related regulatory bodies. Though feedback can, to some extent, be directed at creators through forums or messaging, it can usually only be pointed towards one particular individual or team. The vast number of companies and individuals working on a single show makes this form of communication unlikely to generate significant change. Therefore, audiences engage in boycotting, online hate, or public petitions to raise awareness. However, for major attention or significant change to be brought to the industry, audiences rely on the government's capacity for regulatory or policy change.

Finally, the government and regulatory bodies direct their attention towards the creators. Unable to manipulate audience behaviour, they can control their preferred narrative (such as content and cultural representation) by directing their attention to and asserting control over the labourers in the creative market.

This diagram surmises the content of this section. I assert that the government does not directly control nor influence the content, but its direction of intent is always towards creators. This involvement is rarely explicit or publicised but actions over the period of study significantly demonstrate attempts to manipulate the industry beyond mere financial incentives to expand the Korean Wave.

5.4 Revenue, Investment, and the Cost of Production

Participants' responses up to this point have frequently referenced the financial aspects of policy and company organisation. Early cultural policies, such as screen quotas and the outsourcing of drama production, developed the industry by creating more

companies and thus more competition. Financial flows are a significant factor in the production process and are heightened under the capitalist system and the commodification of culture.

After the IMF financial crisis of 1997, many networks reorganised and reduced departments to save on costs. Key forms of revenue are licence fees and advertising but over time, the means of income have changed. Traditional advertising revenue has decreased, and there is an increasing reliance on product placement, international investment, and other sponsorship forms.

Important considerations must be made to the source of production costs and to whom these funds belong. This section therefore aims to investigate the power that money has on content, particularly as the proportion of foreign revenue increases. To what extent can we assert that profit-seeking is prioritised over the authenticity of a product?

5.4.1 Licence Fees and Traditional Advertising Revenue

The three terrestrial networks rely on differing means of income yet remain remarkably similar in their revenue trends. KBS relies on a licence fee that has been in place since January 1963, but began accepting advertising in the 1980s to meet rising production and operation costs as an alternative source of revenue when a large proportion of the audience refused to pay the licence fee in protest (Kwak, 2012, p. 93). In 1980, KBS generated zero revenue from advertisements, but since the early 1990s, advertisements have accounted for around 60 per cent of revenue (Hanawa, 2005, p. 93)

The current licence fee costs 2,500 won (approximately 1.90 USD) a month which is paid alongside viewers' electricity bill and has remained the same since the 1980s.

Since 2003, there have been at least four failed attempts to increase the licence fee. The KBS board's rationale to increase it has been to reduce the annual deficit of 100 billion won (approximately 76.8 million USD). Public opposition largely comes from a demand for political fairness, whilst supporters argue that reduced dependence on advertising ensures production is not focused exclusively on audience rating (Kim Jae Heun, 2015; Yang Seung Hee, 2021). KBS justifies that licence fee revenue is used for KBS1 programming, and advertising revenue is used for KBS2, leading critics to argue that KBS2 should be privatised. KBS2's dependence on advertising revenue decreased socio-cultural and educational content, resulting in a greater focus on viewership as a determinant for programming. The network's focus on raising programme ratings and increasing advertising revenue domestically has resulted in the Korean audience viewing public television more positively than commercial networks (Kim Ju Oak, 2016, pp. 110-116).

MBC insists it is a public broadcaster, and advertising was forced by a merger with several private broadcasters decreed by Chun Doo Hwan's military government after they showed news that opposed his administration. This merger also affected affiliate stations of MBC around Korea, which were forced to give up many of their shares to MBC Seoul, which in turn was forced to give most of its shares to KBS. However, some assert that the merger was justified as it would allow for 'the provision of better-quality programming for the general public' (Kwak, 2012, p. 19). Although MBC's ownership structure is that of a public broadcasting station, it operates as a hybridised public/private broadcast, as its economic resources come exclusively from advertising funds. It relies on commercial funds and maximises profit and audience share (Park In Kyu, 2005, p. 125).

It is only SBS whose ownership and financial structure have remained independent. As the only private commercial broadcaster, it has consistently relied on advertising as its source of revenue.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, advertising revenue initially dropped but recovered swiftly. As the below table details, 2011 to 2012 had the highest revenue from advertising, but numbers since declined as viewers migrated from television to other mediums (Kim Thae Rae, 2016, p. 12):

Terrestrial Channel Advertising Revenue (Unit: 100 million KRW)

	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
KBS	4974	5637	5774	6048	5627	5074
MBC	3956	4628	5387	4423	4368	4099
SBS	3952	4827	5010	4724	4414	4094

Figure 9: 2015 Broadcast Market Competition Status Evaluation Report (Korea Communications Commission, 2015)

Over a similar period, the average cost of production per episode for a drama has increased from 36.5 million won (approximately 27,700 USD) in 2001 to over 700 million won (approximately 530,000 USD) by the late 2010s (Conran, 2021).

Some series from my sample are amongst the most expensive dramas produced during their time. Both *IRIS* (2009, KBS2) and its sequel *IRIS 2* (2013, KBS2) cost approximately 20 billion won for twenty episodes, a cost of 1 billion won (approximately 758,000 USD) per episode. Broadcasters make an estimated 300 to 400 million won (approximately 226,000 to 302,000 USD) per episode if all advertisements are sold (Kim Yang Hee, 2013). This likely applies to only the most successful of

dramas, suggesting that a miniseries could recoup around 50 per cent of its production costs from traditional advertising.

5.4.2 Production Costs, Pre-Production, and Financial Risk

Higher production costs do not necessarily guarantee good viewership ratings. Though *IRIS* reached an average viewership of almost 32 per cent, *Moon Lovers Scarlet Heart Ryeo* (SBS, 2016) reached an average viewership of only 7.6 per cent, despite costing around 500 million won (approximately 379,000 USD) per episode.

The number of productions increased (through new cable networks and other media forms) in line with a decrease in audience market share. This then increased demand for top actors, who could charge more for their appearance. This altered the division of cost, and a significant amount now often goes to the casting of top stars in order to obtain funding and broadcasting slots. As a result, there has not been significant investment into sustaining cultural production by improving the production environment (Ahn, 2018)

Higher production quality, overseas filming, and overseas marketing (including subtitling, dubbing, and advertising) also all effectuated higher overheads. The expansion of the Korean Wave has arguably worsened the working environment, as most continue to work under poor conditions and pay, with only a few major stars and workers seeing any significant benefit (Kim Tae Young, 2021, p. 160).

Production cost increases add significant risk, particularly to smaller production companies, as cast and crew are usually paid after the last episode is aired. The cast and crew of *Faith* (2012, SBS) had not been paid over six months after filming wrapped, at

a cost of over 1.7 billion won (1.29 million USD), which resulted in the bankruptcy of the production company (Kim Yang Hee, 2013).

Networks cover, on average, only 50 per cent of production costs, placing an additional financial burden on the production companies. When considered in parallel with SPC policy, this demonstrates how networks have developed and maintained a structure that allows them to seek the most profit whilst simultaneously lowering their responsibility to meet costs. At the same time, despite their refusal to share their burden of financial risk, they ultimately still hold creative power over the production companies.

Production companies usually need to secure airing slots with a TV network before being able to secure any funding. Given the time taken to negotiate and acquire these funds, production companies are left with little time to film ahead of schedule, justifying the continuation of last-minute filming. Networks and production companies often agree to lessen their losses and shorten series if they do not achieve high audience numbers. Similarly, incredibly successful dramas can easily have additional episodes written in. Looking specifically at my own sample, pre-produced dramas are low in number, with only 6 (10.5 per cent) fully or partly pre-produced. Most examples of wholly or partly pre-produced dramas already have widespread interest, high budgets, famous actors, and international filming locations. These include *IRIS* (2009, KBS2) and its spinoff, *Athena: Goddess of War* (2010, KBS2). It was only in 2016, with the success of *Descendants of the Sun* (2016, KBS2), that attitudes shifted more positively towards a pre-production method.

Greater control of domestic and foreign investment, international distribution, and

developing merchandise tie-ins mitigate financial risk. This trend also suits the Chinese market, where all dramas must pass censorship by the Chinese government before being broadcast. Subtitles and dubbing tracks can also be prepared in advance, allowing for a simultaneous global release.

The decrease in network revenue, whether through licence fees or traditional advertising, means networks cannot grant as much initial funding to productions. In order to meet the rising costs of production, both networks and production companies, therefore, rely on alternative forms of funding, primarily product placement and foreign investment.

5.4.3 Sponsorship, Product Placement, and Foreign Investment

Product placement (PPL) has become a major source of funding since a reduction of profits generated by traditional commercial advertising. PPL originated with the intention to promote independent production companies, increase diversity of programming, and strengthen the broadcasting industry's competitive power (Chae Myung Jin & Sun Hye Jin, 2013, p. 57). Previous regulations demanded that advertisements and broadcast programmes were clearly distinguishable, effectively banning PPL. Regulations introduced in 2007 allowed PPL in cases of unintended one-time exposure of a product, or unavoidable exposure, in such a way that would be natural and not disturb the context or flow of the show.

The Korea Broadcasting Commission attempted to enforce these regulations strictly, with an average number of 30 cases of sanctions over the period 2006 to 2009 (Chae & Sun, 2013, p. 60). However, with increasing numbers of PPL cases due to broadcasting companies and outsourced production companies attempting to recoup costs, many

voiced the opinion that the actions of the Korea Broadcasting Commission were ineffective.

The establishment of the Korea Communications Committee in 2008 spearheaded the examination into improving broadcasting revenue amidst calls for an overhaul of the broadcast advertising system, as revenues on terrestrial broadcasting were declining. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture and The Korea International Trade Association asserted that PPL regulations not only support the production of *Hallyu* products but have a significant positive effect on the export of Korean products and improve the national brand image.

The Broadcasting Act was revised in 2010 to limit PPL to entertainment and variety programmes, but regulations remained loose and difficult to enforce. Regulations required that PPL should not persuade audiences to purchase the product, the brand or product cannot be directly said, and the appearance of the product cannot exceed 5 per cent of the broadcast's run time nor exceed more than one-quarter of the screen (Chae & Sun, 2013, p. 68).

The rise of PPL comes from the intention to promote independent production companies, to increase the diversity and competitive power of the broadcasting industry. Therefore, the inundation of PPL comes from the approval of broadcasts produced from outsourced production, which allows for the identification of sponsorship (Chae & Sun, 2013, p. 57). In 2011, the annual expenditure of PPL on terrestrial TV increased by 449 per cent, and the number of programs containing PPL increased by 134 per cent (KOBACO, 2022).

The commodification of dramas begins at its earliest stages of production. The workplace of a main character in a show can be sold for as much as 500,000 to 1 million USD. Sources also suggest product exposure on popular shows starts at 100 million won (approximately 76,000 USD).

However, there are benefits to PPL and other forms of sponsorship. Production companies usually get to keep 100 per cent of sponsorship revenue and split PPL revenue 50/50 with the network. PPL-related tourism has occurred in cases such as for the towns used for filming in the aforementioned *IRIS* (2009, KBS2) and *Descendants of the Sun* (2016, KBS2). Tourism increase generated from drama series in both directions has a notable relation to positive international relations and soft power.

Dramas produced post-2010 heavily feature product placement that pushes the permissions of the amendment, in turn, becoming a recognisable feature of more recent dramas. Although I did not specifically ask about PPL or forms of advertising, this was still commonly referenced by multiple participants, highlighting its prevalence. In discussion with Participant C, a Freelance Korean Entertainment Content Creator, they mentioned the pervasiveness of brands such as Subway or Samsung in the miniseries stresses the gravity and the influence of PPL rule changes (interviewed 16 April 2021).

The over-commercialisation of scenes is a general complaint of audiences, as it makes them harder to believe. Viewers complained online about *Descendants of the Sun* (2016, KBS2) after characters set their Hyundai car into autopilot so they could kiss, arguing the scene is dangerous, in addition to complaining of the excessive product placement

prevalent throughout the entire series, which generated over 2.6 million USD.

Successful dramas will receive more PPL offers as the series continues, allowing the producers to insert this into filming and make more money. This once again emphasises the current system of last-minute drama production, as producers are driven entirely by audience ratings as a means of ensuring continuing income. The need for audience ratings and subsequent funds overshadows creative freedom. Many companies will only advertise for pre-produced dramas with some guarantee of audiences, usually stemming from the casting of a high-profile actor.

With networks unable to provide up-front costs, many productions require initial investment via alternative means. Foreign companies, particularly from China and Japan, were among the initial investors in Korean dramas. The increase of foreign interest and investment into productions also brought and an influx of foreign characteristics and styles, with the goal of attracting global audiences. This incentivises a culturally global or transnational approach to the creation of content.

Even now, despite refusing to broadcast Korean shows, Chinese companies are investing heavily. This brings about significant concerns as their financial contribution allows them to assert influence over the content, in some cases resulting in backlash from domestic audiences, and affecting diplomatic relations (participant E, interviewed 22 April 2021). Significant Chinese investment has been mentioned as a problem as it has been known to prioritise the aesthetic of particular actors above their acting ability. The pre-production method is often preferred by Chinese investors as they are able to fully screen and censor episodes before broadcast, meaning that creators are unable to

adapt content based on audience feedback.

Joseon Exorcist (2021, SBS) was mentioned by participants B and E, both producers, as an example of the negative implications of international funding and PPL. Participant E referenced this example, noting the blurring of its historical accuracy and the use of Chinese food and props that had been included as part of a PPL deal. The level of backlash from audiences resulted in the series being cancelled after only two episodes.

Ultimately, this emphasises two key controllers of content, the source of investment, and audiences. Whether the funding comes from foreign or domestic companies, audience disapproval usually only stems from overt displays of promotion. However, it does appear that there is a conflict with foreign investors, whose product placement directly contradicts Korean culture, and whose preference for pre-production is in contradiction with the industry-established norm.

5.4.4 Conclusion

Despite operating as public service broadcasters, KBS and MBC's dependence on advertising as a main source of income makes content production too revenue-focused. PPL and other sponsorships support independent production companies as an alternative source of income. However, it is known to distract audiences and has led to complaints over cultural accuracy.

The increase of foreign investment, particularly from China, can be associated with a change in content, due to the casting of preferred actors and a preference for pre-production to meet censorship requirements. In extreme cases, this leads to significant cultural and historical inaccuracy.

Significant Chinese investment would counter my hypothesis of progressive content. However, this must be interpreted with some caution. Domestic multi-national conglomerates are still amongst the largest sponsors, with Samsung sponsoring around two-thirds of all domestically produced soap operas. These companies more accurately operate under neoliberalism, as they favour private enterprise and profit maximising. Therefore, they will likely continue to back most content as long as it does not promote any anti-Korea rhetoric and is achieving consistent audience numbers.

Poor audience response or low ratings for any drama will lead to advertisements (both traditional and PPL) being withdrawn by companies. As such, it can be understood that all forms of advertisement play a role in the maintenance of a neoliberal market. Yet, as this market expands globally and the potential profit margin increases simultaneously, profit-seeking is ultimately prioritised over content.

5.5 Terrestrial Networks and their Competition

This chapter has so far demonstrated the extent to which policy and financial flows have affected content. With regard to the government, we have discussed the extent to which they can influence content. However, when considering networks' relationships with the government, we must consider the ways in which there is implicit and explicit coercion in both directions. Now it is necessary to discuss the role of the networks, their reach, and how their power influences and orchestrates change.

In the 1990s, the emergence of SBS broke the duopoly of KBS and MBC. SBS invested early into drama production, particularly *Sandglass* (1995), a 24-part drama which re-enacted the Gwangju Uprising, which cost 186,000 USD per episode and reached a

peak audience share of 60 per cent. KBS elected to follow this programming strategy and schedule more drama and entertainment programmes rather than developing its own distinct programming strategy (Park In Kyu, 2005, p. 147).

I previously noted that the government has two interests when developing cultural policy: economic benefit and international influence. However, television policy, in particular, lacked the intention to develop cultural identity. The above statement again draws attention to this; KBS and MBC, two networks operating under a public system, have rarely challenged the status quo, following SBS's successes in advancing content amongst commercial broadcasters.

KBS is often criticised for their consistent but invisible pressures in program production; its relationship and dependence on the government have created an authority that makes it difficult for those within the company to present the government with a critical eye (Kim Ju Oak, 2016, p. 112). In 2013, KBS refused to give a slot to *City Conquest,* leading to its cancellation before broadcast, despite broadcasting rights already being pre-sold to Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Their interest was mostly due to the starring of Kim Hyun Joong, an internationally successful actor who had already featured in *Boys Over Flowers* (2009, KBS2) and *Playful Kiss* (2010, MBC). KBS argued the drama was excessively violent and unfit for broadcast, whilst producers asserted the reasoning was political, as it was during a new turnover in government.

To reintroduce the networks, KBS2, as KBS's primary channel for drama broadcasting, operates for gain, and therefore its 'decisions regarding programming production are

commercial based on potential profit and supposedly deviate from KBS's philosophical

foundation' (Kim Ju Oak, 2016, p. 115). MBC was founded as a public network until it

transitioned to a private network owned by a few large stockholders. However, 70 per

cent of its ownership is held by the Government of Korea through The Foundation of

Broadcast Culture, which was established to insulate MBC from political influence and

KBS. SBS remains the only independent, privately operating, national terrestrial

network.

I spoke with each of the participants about the three networks, asking them to what

extent they thought their funding structure had an effect on drama production.

Participant L, a high-level cultural policy officer, stated:

> SBS, which entered relatively late, was a completely private broadcasting
> company, acting as a disruptive competitor. Even though KBS is a public
> broadcasting service that charges a license fee, it has been criticised a lot for being
> attracted to the competition for ratings with other broadcasters. Since MBC is a
> public broadcasting system structurally and a private broadcasting system as a
> financial resource, it is located at the midpoint between the KBS and the
> SBS…Overall, there is no significant difference (in drama productions for each
> broadcaster). Only about the extent that KBS is a fully public broadcaster may
> show a cautious position. This is because there have been many public criticisms
> from viewers (interviewed 20 July 2021)

This participant here refers back to my statement in section 5.3, where I asserted that the

fundamental concern of creators is negative public attention. Participant B, a drama

producer, discussed how creators now have greater options for production and

distribution beyond the big three terrestrial broadcasters:

> We currently have KBS, MBC, and SBS, which had great power [but] lost their
> leadership in the production and broadcasting of the drama. Nowadays, I feel that
> the vertical integration centred on network broadcasters has been dismantled, and
> the power goes to small independent out-sourcing producers or writers, which has
> been strengthened nowadays…In the past, when we produced a certain drama, we
> [had] to follow the preference of a particular platform. It seems that now that it
> has changed…we do not have to follow someone. There are various platforms or
> various channels, so we don't have to change our stories; we only have to choose

a specific platform. There's a big difference; we can pass them now (Interviewed 5 April 2021).

Participant B's comments return us to the spatialisation of the political economy detailed in Chapter 2, particularly the processes of vertical integration, which is the 'amalgamation of firms within a line of business that extends a company's control over the process of production' (Mosco, 2014, p. 15).

Prior to the start of the Korean Wave and during its earliest stages, many networks created works made almost entirely through 'in-house' means. Many were 'loyal' to a network, either by choice, or contractually or financially obliged. The proliferation of satellite and cable networks, and alternative forms of consumption such as VOD, have increased opportunities for creators and given more creative freedom as satellite and cable networks are not subject to the same content regulations as terrestrial channels. Deregulation and privatisation created a market of small independent creators, and those within the industry have welcomed the expansion of cable networks and OTT services, giving them more opportunities to create content with fewer restrictions and allowing them to keep their artistic vision.

These shows may appeal to audiences for a variety of reasons. Firstly, for those who are historical receivers of Western-dominant media flows, they would appear familiar as they tend to have more common in American shows. There is greater lenience with the use of obscene language and portrayals of violence or sex. Secondly, even for those unfamiliar with more obscene content, there may be a novel or exciting factor to watching these shows. Finally, it permits shows to cover a greater range of topics, and more accurately depict day-to-day life.

Terrestrial broadcasters are unable to compete with this content fully, and struggle to balance content that is moderately progressive and well-received by a diverse and global audience, without overstepping authoritative boundaries or facing stricter public backlash.

Terrestrial broadcasting in Korea has historically perpetuated concentrated power and wealth amongst a small number of groups. As a result, the diversity of content needs to be improved. In 2012, 75 per cent of all dramas were outsourced to independent companies. Yet out of 156 registered firms, only 34 produced dramas that aired that year (Kim Yang Hee, 2013). With so much content and profit generated by a small group, these corporations can impose their own power over other elements. These companies have the power to influence policy in their favour, but concentrated ownership restricts creative freedom and the variety of content available.

Despite a potentially beneficial relationship between the terrestrial networks and government agencies, the increasingly deregulated free market has increased the number of competitors and as a result, the fight for audience share. Though my research questions are phrased to ask who orchestrates changes and why, it is necessary to view the full picture and recognise implicit conditions and external factors that have affected drama production. This is not direct, implemented changes, but larger developments across the media industries as a whole which have impacted terrestrial operations.

5.5.1 Industry Oligopoly, Cable Networks and New Competitors

To return back to my first question, I asked participants what they viewed as significant policies implemented during the study period. Participant K, a high-level cultural policy

officer for CJ ENM (a major entertainment and media company) responded:

> The emergence of comprehensive programming channels such as *TV Chosun* and
> *Channel A* and *JTBC* (2011) and giving preference for programming channel
> numbers by the Government (interviewed 21 July 2021).

Between 2002 and 2017, at least 35 cable networks were launched in Korea. This

includes tvN and JTBC, launched in 2006 and 2011, respectively, which have since

become fierce competitors to the terrestrial broadcasters in drama viewership ratings

and success. New networks have the financial benefit of being free 'from government

regulations on the number and the length of direct and indirect commercials they air,

which means they are free to have commercial breaks during a program' (Shin Hae In,

2011).

However, at least 15 of these are owned, at least in part, by one of the big three

networks. Most of the others are owned by existing conglomerates, such as CJ ENM or

Viacom, or one of the four networks (TV Chosun, JTBC, Channel A and MBN) owned

by large conservative newspaper groups following deregulation to allow newspaper-

broadcasting cross-ownership. This once again returns us to the spatialisation of

political economy, but this time more particularly horizontal integration, where a firm in

'one line of media buys a significant interest in another media operation not directly tied

to the original business' (Mosco, 2014, p. 15).

Major organisations hold parent ownership over most production companies via

acquisition over the period of study. Just five companies cover over 52 per cent of all

productions in the sample. CJ ENM, established only in 2010 following a merger of

seven CJ Group companies, highlights the speed at which smaller production companies

have been acquired and absorbed by larger conglomerates. They own not only tvN and

OCN, two major cable channels that are direct competitors to the terrestrial networks for audience share, but also hold shares in several major production houses, including Hwa&Dam Pictures (productions include *Secret Garden*, *A Gentleman's Dignity* and *The Heirs*) and JS Pictures (productions include *Love Story in Harvard* and *Heartstrings*).

The free market developed an industry that, despite a growth in production and distribution companies, still has small core ownership predominantly operated by *chaebol* corporations. This is significant in the level of influence broadcasters have on the government and policy. For example, the CJ-affiliated media companies, function under the same family as the number one health and beauty chain, the largest cinema chain, and the largest delivery firm, operated by the family who also founded Samsung. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to emphasise the influence that these media companies have on the industry, as their power exerts over the entirety of the country's economy.

When I asked relevant participants what they thought about the influence of terrestrial broadcasters on the industry, the general opinion was that of declining influence. Participant K answered:

> State broadcasters have a great influence on broadcasting law and cultural policies in Korea. Nowadays, the number of pay-per-view broadcasts, such as cable TV, IPTV, OTT, etc., has increased a lot, and the influence of the state broadcasters (KBS, SBS, and MBC) has decreased as much as the viewership rate of the state broadcasters has decreased.

In 2021, KOCCA and MCST announced a budget of 14.66 billion won (approximately 11.13 million USD) for the local video content industry, with 4.5 billion won (approximately 3.4 million USD) designated for the conventional broadcast sector.

However, a new sector was made to specifically fund content suitable for distribution via streaming services such as Netflix or other IPTV services, with dramas made for streaming platforms eligible to receive funding of up to 300 million won (approximately 228,000 USD). The stipulation was that creators could only apply after forming a consortium with a streaming service provider (Lim Jang Won, 2021). At the same time, it was also reported that KOCCA plans to moderate the establishment of reasonable copyright distribution between content creators and distributing platforms. KOCCA's position as an intermediary between distributing platforms puts them in a position of power in negotiating international distribution deals. This new funding eligibility is not dissimilar to the SPC funding method of the 2000s. It stresses the emphasis on newer and more globalised consumption methods.

A 2006 report found that only 4.8 per cent of independent production companies fully owned the content copyright for broadcast content (Choi Se Kyoung, 2010). Creators are now stuck between choosing to pitch towards more traditional networks, at the risk of receiving less money and potentially altering their vision or attracting the attention of a player such as Netflix, who will pay for total production costs but lose their ownership rights to their intellectual property.

5.5.2 Web Dramas and their Alternative Content

Another alternative to conventional broadcasting methods is web dramas, which have increased dramatically since 2014. Web dramas are shorter than their broadcast counterparts, usually between 10 and 25 minutes long. An episode of a web drama costs an average of 35,000 USD, substantially less than the 229,000 USD of standard television dramas. Sponsorship costs less, and web dramas are also free from the stringent regulation of television dramas for product placement and other advertising

techniques (Kang Jennifer, 2021, p. 999).

They have received praise for challenging the traditional structures of broadcast television. Traditional media institutions are highly regulated, and only certain players can participate. Web dramas are not restricted to the same regulations and can experiment more easily as cultural norms are not firmly established (Kang Jennifer, 2017, p. 763). Therefore, they can exist outside the dominant power structures and the related content expectations. As such, topics and characters not frequently seen on Korean television can be present. Berber Hagedoorn wrote that television is a 'post-network, post-public service media system.' Audiences have become increasingly fragmented, so they are no longer bound to specific programming (2012, pp. 57 and 63).

I asked participants what things they thought have or might catalyse change for terrestrial productions, and several mentioned web dramas. Participant A, a creative content consultant, indicated:

> The demand for gay love, for instance, is certainly on the rise and Korean drama writers are starting to listen. Of course, most of these dramas are made as short web series, but they continue to be popular, which makes one wonder just how long it will be before they hit the mainstream markets. (interviewed 23 February 2021).

Participant E, an executive producer, agreed:

> Now you also have YouTube people creating their own web stories. They're creating their own content, so if you're not seeing it on TV, where people wouldn't necessarily get these things, just go to the internet…so people who aren't seeing themselves represented, they're making their own content, and people are taking notes (interviewed 22 April 2021).

Content consumption is increasingly privatised through streaming and smartphones, with no small help from the Korean government, which invested so heavily into internet

infrastructure. Web series fall outside the scope of this study, but their recurring reference from participants is significant. It is important to recognise that certain groups or topics have been so inadequately depicted that an entirely new format has gained traction by working on inclusion.

5.5.3 Conclusion

To return to my hypothesis, I argued that networks historically presented an idealised cultural conservatism and economic capitalism. KBS's close connection with the government is an often-cited reason behind its attempts to control content. However, given the relationship that all have with the government and the political economy as a whole, it is not unreasonable to assert that all three have undertaken efforts to restrict content deemed by themselves to be unsuitable.

The point here is their attempt to choose the content based on content rather than profit maximising. If it was solely an issue of maximising income, the content towards the end of the study would more closely resemble cable networks' dramas as these were the most successful. Unfortunately, proving their intentions and actions goes beyond the scope of this study. As seen in the case of *City Conquest*, networks are unlikely to be forthcoming about rejecting shows they deem to be against their best interests. Networks will continue to produce and broadcast content that aligns with the government's conservative approach. Only SBS is considered a disruptor for terrestrial networks but is still limited due to broadcasting regulations.

With increasing cable networks and web dramas, creators have more freedom to create what they want, but still, even these outlets are ultimately under the ownership of just a handful of the richest and most powerful. Non-traditional broadcasting methods are

considered a place for the less represented groups of society, with the hope that this will eventually filter down to cable networks and then terrestrial broadcasters.

The challenge for terrestrial networks is that they are no longer solely competing against each other but against a constantly increasing number of cable and satellite networks, as well as OTT services that are heavily investing in original content with the support of the Korean government. Further examination of this topic is required as it is outside the purview of this research. However, it is reasonable to suggest that future changes will occur due to the market transformation.

5.6 Globalisation, Distribution and The Growth of International Audiences

In the literature review, I introduced some of the common theories that are attributed to Korean dramas' global success, but many of the theories of cultural proximity and cultural odour have been debunked. The relationship between Korea and other countries in the East Asian region is complex, and transnational cultural flows have become largely one-directional as Korea becomes the region's leading exporter of popular culture products. Data derived from products distributed well overseas is used to drive future productions.

As has already been established, creators are deeply aware of avoiding negative audience backlash. That said, the audience that they considered was almost entirely domestic. As Participant B noted:

> In the early days of the 2000s, when the Korean Wave first came, honestly, little attention was paid to foreign audiences. But then, after 2008 or [20]10, the value of Korean actors increased according to their popularity among the world, so their guarantees have been increasing. So since then, foreign series of Korean shows have become an important source of production costs, so after that, we began to care about viewers. (Interviewed 5 April 2021).

Viewers from diverse cultures and countries have been devoted to these shows since the mid-2000s, but the distribution focus is now global rather than on small regions or the Korean diaspora. The focus was primarily on the cast rather than the content, commodifying stars (Participant B, interviewed 5 April 2021); as Participant J asserted, 'if it does not include a star writer, a star producer, or a star actor…it cannot be programmed' (Participant J, Broadcasting Regulation Advisor, interviewed 20 July 2021).

This once again returns to Chapter 3 and two of the three forms of commodification of the political economy: content commodification and audience commodification (Mosco, 2014), under which I asserted that media products are seen as little more than profit-generating goods rather than artistic or creative pieces, and audiences are only valued for their data and ability to generate income.

In the theory chapter, I also noted that the proliferation of legal streaming services means that the process of international distribution can now also be controlled by media companies, further commodifying the international distribution and consumption processes. International distribution should be distinguished into two forms of distribution: the sale of programmes to TV stations in international markets, and the distribution to the home, direct to the consumer. Participant D, a senior manager for global distribution at MBC for over ten years, spoke about how the attitude towards global distribution teams has changed:

> Ten years ago, when the market was really small and domestic and only in Asia, the production team didn't consider distribution at all. They didn't even talk with the distribution team or the PR team during the stage of development. But now things have changed…they realise that [global] distribution is a great source of budget (interviewed 20 April 2021)

Their comment highlights that audiences (particularly international) are viewed merely as numbers. They are not necessarily seen as individuals with experiences and opinions but as a source of income and a measure of success.

The business of international distribution also becomes more complex as technological developments give consumers the freedom to consume their media at any time, anywhere, either legally or illegally. Thus, international distributors must consider territoriality – the licencing of content – which is a crucial form of revenue, and windowing, particularly the shortening of periods between releases in regions to minimise piracy and ensure revenue streams (Steemers, 2016, pp. 738-739).

Both Participants B and D confirmed that the consideration and attitudes towards international audiences and global distribution have changed as foreign viewership increases. Now that K-dramas and the Korean Wave are seen as the pride of Korea, creators must consider the culture they present. At the same time, we must also look at the international audience, how this has changed over time, and how their perspective, based on their own region and cultural experience, affects their interpretation and acceptance of the content.

Returning back my theoretical foundations, Ksiazek and Webster wrote that cultural proximity is 'the intuitively appealing notion that people will gravitate toward media from their own culture' (2008, p. 485). However, this sense of proximity is no longer merely cultural. There are other types of proximity, such as body language, dress, humour, and religion, that all define a level of cultural similarity (La Pastina &

Straubhaar, 2005, p. 274).

I recruited several participants who could help to provide an overview of the complete cycle of global distribution and consumption: producers who must consider audiences from different regions and cultural groups; global distributors who sell these dramas to foreign networks; and media professionals from different regions and cultures who can discuss how Korean content is received and accepted globally.

5.6.1 Global Audiences and the Case for Cultural Conservatism

Beyond East Asia, Middle Eastern and other majority Muslim countries were among the first to embrace early Korean dramas. In Egypt, *Autumn in My Heart* (2000, KBS2) was aired in 2004. *Winter Sonata* (2002, KBS2) was broadcast in Iraq and Jordan in 2005 and 2007, respectively. 2006 saw the first airings of *Jewel in the Palace* (2003, MBC) in Türkiye and Iran and *My Lovely Sam Soon* (2005, MBC) in Israel. The success of Korean dramas across these countries is largely attributed to conservative depictions of romance, strong family ties, and a closer cultural understanding of Korean dramas than dramas of the West (Mozafari, 2013; Elaskary, 2018).

In Türkiye, *Jewel in the Palace* was originally broadcast during the day as it was cheaper than generating original programming but only reached a viewership rating of 1.2 per cent. Since then, K-dramas have seen substantial success, and there have been remakes of many series, including *Boys Over Flowers*, *Autumn in My Heart*, *The Heirs*, and *She Was Pretty*. Turkish audiences' acceptance of Korean dramas centres upon three major motifs – conservative romanticism, close family ties and friendships, and social class differences being a focus of conflict and negotiation (Kaptan & Tutucu, 2021, p. 197).

In Iran, the first airing of *Jewel in the Palace* reached an audience of over 90 per cent in Tehran, and *Jumong* (2006, MBC) reached over 80 per cent. Iranian audiences welcomed the thematic elements of belief, values, philosophical teachings, and cultural aspects whilst Iranian broadcasting agencies preferred clean K-dramas over immoral or decadent Western products (Mozafari, 2019, p. 25; Kaptan & Tutucu, 2022, p. 199). K-dramas are seen to enforce Confucian traditional values that Iranians find more closely aligned with Islamic culture (Ying, 2008).

More recently, countries across Africa are now increasing their broadcasting of Korean dramas. I interviewed three writers who are based in Africa, and we spoke at length about the accessibility of Korean dramas to international audiences. They cited 'timeless and universally relatable themes' and 'authentic storytelling' as part of the general global appeal. Some of the aspects of Korea and Korean culture that are specifically appealing to African audiences are:

> Filial relationships (the Asian equivalent of 'black tax', bloodlines), community, perceived chastity, virtue, moral guidance through life lessons and storytelling, and relationship building around meals and hospitality.

When asked about changes over the period of study, they believed that while the Korean drama has become 'less conservative' with 'wider representation' and 'more risk-taking,' they have stayed the same by including 'virtue signalling' with a value on 'filial relationships' (Participants F, G, and H, interviewed 22 May 2021).

In Latin America, a predominantly Catholic region that also suffered at the hands of Western colonialism, the expansion began in the early 2000s as part of the *segyehwa* initiative. Richard Millet, the vice-president of business development for KBS in

America, asserted it is the twists and conflicts of the Korean drama storyline that appeal to Latin American audiences as it is very similar to the telenovela's form of storytelling (Han, 2019, p. 42). Korean dramas have become a fierce competitor to the Brazilian telenovela. Whilst in operation, 30 per cent of DramaFever's viewers were from the region (Han, 2019, p. 39).

Korean dramas resonate with Latin Americans who struggle for middle-class identities under the forces of globalisation in the development of Latin American modernity:

> The search for an alternative utopian vision of modernity not rooted in the European model is what makes K-dramas appealing to the Latin American audience, as South Korea, as a non-Western and postcolonial nation, has achieved what seems to be a fluid transition to modernity under economic recession, neoliberalism, and globalisation (Han, 2019, p. 43).

The resentment towards coercive Western ideals and colonial power 'extends the space for critical reflexivity in geographically distant, globalised communities.' The appeal of Korean dramas has been enabled by voluntary fans who take on the roles of cultural experts and educators, promoting Korean society to their home country and enhancing their own self-image that has been stigmatised by Western Orientalism (Kim Youna, 2022, pp. 25-26).

Based on the existing literature and discussion with interview participants, the key cultural elements that appeal to these audiences are family ties, conservative representations of romance, and philosophical teachings. These themes are often less commonly represented across American dramas and more closely align with the religious values of many of these countries. Given that these cultural elements have been referred to by audiences across East Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, all of which have vastly different cultures, this reasoning once again discredits the cultural

proximity argument for Korean dramas' success. Outside of East Asia, it is reasonable to determine that these dramas were well accepted because of their contrast to the Western products that emphasise Western images of superiority and Orientalism that have been so widely distributed and consumed until now.

5.6.2 Issues of Diversity and Transcultural Representation

International audiences are the key to developing and maintaining the Korean Wave, but they are solely viewed as financial consumers in many ways. As noted in my correspondence with participants and referenced by other academics (Kim Youna, 2022), drama producers have historically paid little attention to international audiences. As a result, creators and networks have failed to diversify their production teams, which has resulted in poor representation of some communities.

One example is *Man Who Dies to Live* (2017, MBC), which featured Muslims drinking alcohol and wearing bikinis, and a character placing his foot close to the Quran. After audience backlash, MBC apologised and removed the scenes from VOD platforms. The series reached good audience ratings domestically of 10.3 per cent. Other dramas, such as *Penthouse 3* (2020, SBS) and *Racket Boys* (2021, SBS), received similar negative attention for culturally insensitive comments and racial and cultural stereotyping (Kim Hae Yeon, 2021).

This initially counters the hypothesis of this project, as it highlights a domestic focus and lack of research into, or consideration of, international cultures and audiences. However, I believe international audiences are often equated with white and Western audiences. This drives my opinion that the goal of the Korean Wave is to reach 'mainstream' success by achieving validation and acceptance in Western markets. This

would support my hypothesis of an international move to progressivism as it seeks to integrate itself into these markets. However, this is at the cost of respectful and educated depictions of non-white or non-Western cultures.

The Act of the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity was enacted in 2014, seeking to 'protect and promote cultural diversity' and to 'encourage, protect and cultivate culture and arts activities based on cultural diversity'(Korea Legislation Research Institute, 2014). Measures include implementing and expanding cultural outlets like Arirang TV and King Sejong Institutes. Importantly, the UNESCO report also assigns the government's ceiling of audience share and compulsory broadcast programming by independent producers under this banner (UNESCO, 2018). However, there is no indication of specific targets or plans. Unfortunately, the act primarily focuses on expanding the reach of knowledge of Korean culture, another example of unilateral cultural flow.

5.6.3 Conclusion

Korean television strives to reflect the needs of foreign stakeholders. However, television producers will not make products which prioritise global audiences as 'successful products are always the ones that stick to the basics' (Kim Tae Young, 2023, p. 156).

The conservative cultural elements of Korean dramas have been referred to as a key factor in their success in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Even for American and Western European audiences, elements such as the slow-burn romance were a compelling change from American productions. Nevertheless, despite increasing international audiences and opportunities to film overseas, producers and

networks have failed to complete reasonable research into these countries and cultures.

5.7 Conclusion

To reiterate the research questions that apply to this section, I sought to identify what aspects of political economy have contributed to changes in the miniseries over the study period, and who decides the Korean identity in the miniseries and why. As we look back to the circuit of culture introduced in Chapter 2, three units are of most significance: regulation, consumption, and production.

I first looked at the processes of regulation, through explicit policy implementation and the financial interests of the involved players. After dissecting implemented policies and confirming with responses from interview participants, I present the idea that cultural policy is largely unconcerned by content but instead heavily focused on profit and global expansion. Early policies, such as screen quotas, perpetuated a nationalistic approach. These were intended to develop domestic production industries. Much policy has been reactive and failed to have reasonable foresight, most clearly demonstrated in the aftermath of the financial crises of 1997 and 2008. Neoliberal reforms, such as deregulation and privatisation, caused the oligopolisation of various areas of the industry.

It is too early to suggest neoliberal globalisation is the new cultural imperialism as it allows local cultures to promote their distinctive cultural characteristics (Throsby, 2010). Despite US media conglomerates still being major players in the global market, they are by no means operating alone as there are regional players with a strong presence in local markets (Kim Tae Young, 2021, p. 58).

Domestic policy has largely concerned itself with financial security, particularly for networks. Whilst financial incentives may have made some impact, the system operates in favour of the networks. Much of the financial burden and responsibility is put on production companies, often resulting in bankruptcy, as production costs increase with no secured funding. We can declare that the ultra-competitive free market is fighting for any audience share, as the free market offers few government protections. The financial strain on production companies is brutal, at the cost of smaller production groups being unable to sustain themselves.

The consensus is that government ministries and those directly involved in cultural policy or industry regulation could not keep up with the new pace of expansion. The shift towards global markets to attract foreign investors has had both positive and negative cases. Overall, the government lacked the interest to consciously create a cultural narrative beyond directives that combined the Korean Wave with tourism and economic prosperity.

Looking at production, this pertains to the areas of revenue, production costs, networks and production companies. Power and ownership remain amongst only an elite few, hindering opportunities for new or marginalised voices to share their content. The restriction of voices caused by the oligopolisation of networks and production companies is only more limited when we consider how various government administrations have attempted to limit artistic freedom and dissenting voices.

As the Korean Wave has become more and more successful, its top stars have been able to charge more for their appearance. Coupled with the increase in production costs in

general, this puts huge pressure on both networks and production companies. When considered in parallel to loss of influence and increase in competition, perpetuated by the proliferation of cable networks, VOD, and web series, production decisions can be seriously impacted.

For consumption, there are two major points of interest: international audiences, and audience response. From the late 2000s onwards, global audiences increased at an explosive rate, but the content has been, and still largely remains, domestically focused. The expectation is that international audiences will either watch and enjoy or not; there is no indication that much consideration is made specifically towards them. This disregard is even more exemplified when we look at representations of non-white and non-Western cultures.

Audiences, especially international, are largely commodified. However, the power that audiences have when operating as a group should not be overlooked. They have successfully cancelled entire seasons and made shows lose their sponsorships. That being said, I assert that this influence still largely stems from profit maximising, or at least loss minimising. There is no evidence to suggest that producers, directors, networks, or any other relevant group are truly taking the feelings and preferences of audiences into account. These preferences appear mediated, with the networks (and to some extent the government) having the final say, attempting to placate audiences by largely sticking to the status quo.

Therefore, to answer who decides the Korean identity in the miniseries, I propose that the two most powerful groups are the government and the terrestrial networks. The

government is concerned with expansion, not protection, as evidenced by their reactionary policy implementations. This, in turn, forces networks to rely excessively on advertising and foreign sponsorship to acquire funds. This initially suggests that all three networks operate like privatised networks, choosing content exclusively for its profitability. Writers, producers and other creators involved in developing a series are held hostage by both parties, unable to access certain funding opportunities, share certain stories, and operate free from their control.

Over the period of study, the most significant change is the increase of competition and reduced influence of terrestrial networks. Cable networks, OTT services, and web dramas all have unique characteristics that help draw an increasing audience share. They can present more progressive and rarely seen representations.

To conclude, it is difficult to argue strongly for the case that content has moved towards progressivism in this chapter. More surprisingly, my research indicates that for many non-Western markets, it is not cultural conservatism that has been the main selling point but a non-Orientalist view of non-Western modernity.

Instead, I assert that rather than an intentional move towards progressivism to promote the Korean Wave overseas, changes have occurred as an unintentional consequence of market neoliberalisation. Policies and business decisions were made to expand the market, first domestically and then overseas. New channels and other media forms began generating content covering topics and groups not previously adequately represented on terrestrial networks. Terrestrial networks then had to compete for audience share and potentially lost revenue as the same advertising regulations did not

bind cable networks. Creators then also had the option to pass terrestrial networks completely, viewing the creative freedom and increased funding availability as a significant benefit, despite the potential loss of intellectual property rights.

Chapter 6 – The Content and Production of the Miniseries: Interviews and Content Analysis

6.1 Introduction

Thus far, my obtained research has led me to assert that, content regulation and alteration are merely a by-product of developing a successful national business and an attempt to satisfy very oversimplified audience partialities by using 'universal' content. Profit margins are regarded above the content of the miniseries and its cultural value.

However, this chapter centres around cultural studies, with the focus far more on the content itself. The points of contention here circle the self-awareness of dramas and their grounding in reality. The circuit of culture distinguishes between identity and representation for good reason; there is a difference between the way someone views themselves and the way they are perceived. Moreover, once we factor in the theory of simulacra and simulation, it is important to consider to what extent representations are based in reality. In the context of this study, the reproduction of things that do not have an original can include creative interpretations that are reliant on nostalgia and an idealistic outlook. This chapter therefore moves on to consider what is the more powerful factor in representation – identity or reality – by focusing on and answering the following research questions:

1. What are the common themes of the miniseries, and how have these changed over time?
2. To what extent can we claim that the miniseries is culturally, economically, and socially accurate?
3. How do cultural ideologies or perspectives shape miniseries content?

In this chapter, I am primarily using critical discourse analysis to break down the content of my miniseries sample. Discourse is also connected with the interview

responses and any points they raised that were relevant to cultural analysis. The coding and analysis approach was based on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions discussed in Chapter 4, which as a reminder, are: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long- versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. Given the quantitative results provided by Hofstede's study, it is possible to some extent to compare the accuracy of representations. I also incorporate further data from interview participants and secondary sources to challenge these results and provide alternative suggestions on how the representation of these themes has been created and changed over time.

As I detailed in my research methods chapter, to best connect these dimensions with larger discussions around cultural studies, the findings are attributed to three cultural perspectives: nationalist, neoliberal, and postcolonial (Cho Hae Joang, 2005; Lee Kee Hyeung, 2006; and Cho Young Han, 2011).

From the perspective of nationalism, positive representation of the country, the promotion of Korea as a business and tourist hotspot, and Korean pride all affect the encoding and decoding of cultural heritage. The neoliberal perspective discusses social mobility within a neoliberal capitalist structure and how class, gender, and educational and financial achievement have become key socio-cultural markers. Finally, the postcolonial and translocal perspectives consider how Korea's colonial history and the possible goal of a pan-Asian cultural bloc affect its cultural presentation.

6.2 Hallyu, the Pride of Korea: Nationalism, Patriotism, and Ethnic Identity

Culturally nationalistic perspectives of the early 2000s emphasised pride in Korean culture under the belief that Korea could now compete with more 'advanced' nations on

the global stage. Such perspectives often placed Korean popular culture, and by default, Korean culture more generally, in dichotomy with American and Japanese equivalents. Where Japan and America supposedly focused on violence and sensationalism, Korea's Confucian ethos and cultural essentialism created products with a focus on 'authentic' culture. This ties back to the conversations and data of the previous chapter, which evidenced the success of Korean drama products across various markets. As I have already argued in Chapter 5, it is not necessarily the Confucian or Korean characteristics that appeal to foreign viewers but a distinct alternative to the Orientalist and Western-dominant depictions presented in Euro-American products.

Prior to even the earliest stages of the Korean Wave, state and cultural business were invested in the nation's cultural production, developing nationalist and anti-communist products that aligned with the government's cultural agenda, particularly during the republics between 1961 and 1987. A focus on ethnocentricity, traditional heritage and values became the basis of institutional support, whilst the administration of Park Chung Hee (1961-1979) announced in their first Five-Year Economic Development Plan in 1961 to focus on shifting the economy to becoming more export-oriented. Media products largely promoted a nationalist and strongly anti-communist rhetoric, a remnant of government propaganda from the decades prior.

Myers (2011) wrote that South Koreans make a distinction between nationalism and patriotism. Patriotism should be viewed as support for the state, whilst nationalism should be viewed as support for the nation. Nationalism is then split further, with the first context a support of Korean cultural identity and history, and the second is a form of ethnic or romantic nationalism (Myers, 2011; Yin, 2013; Han & Lim, 2023).

The second Korean Wave, beginning around 2004, had less ideological media discourse, though the nationalist undercurrent remained strong. Hong Kiwon referred to this as a period of retrogression, as after an administration change in 2008, conservatives and liberals clashed ideologically over cultural policy. Conservatives argued that many cultural practices did not match their orientation, accused creators of pro-socialism and communism, and insisted that cultural policy was more susceptible to political influence than ever (2013, pp. 7-8). Over the same period, proposals were made to delink the Korean Wave from nationalistic fervour, alongside developing strategies for larger-scale production and regulation of content quality (Cho Hae Joang, 2005, p. 160).

However, Cho Young Han identifies the cultural nationalist approach differently. They assert it 'constitutes East Asia as a unilateral entity', which situates the Korean Wave as a 'symbol of Korean cultural excellence' and praises Korean popular culture for 'nicely representing traditional moral values in modern, urban settings' (Cho Young Han, 2011, p. 385). The Korean Wave then seeks to inspire pride whilst still serving the mechanisms of commercialism and globalisation (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011) and *Hallyu* becomes appropriated as a part of the country's achievement over the past fifty years.

Whether globalisation leads to homogenised global cultures or hybrid cultural identities, national cultures and identities are viewed to be in decline (Flew, Iosifidis & Steemers, 2016, p. 2). Cultural nationalism, 'the distinctiveness of the cultural community as the essence of the nation' has been implemented to regenerate the national community

when a 'people's cultural identity is felt to be lacking' (Yoshino, 1992, p. 1; and 1999, p. 1). Cultural nationalism in Japan is often gate-kept, asserting that Japanese cultural identity is restricted to only those who practise the culture, speak the language, have inherited Japanese 'blood' from their ancestors, and have always lived on the Japanese archipelago (Befu, 2001, p. 71). In contrast, Korea has utilised increasing ethnic diversity to reconstruct ideas of a homogenous national identity, portraying foreigners (usually Caucasians) based in Korea as 'para-Koreans', thus consolidating societal norms to position the Korean Self as analogous to Western modernity (Eydam, 2020).

The idea that East Asia exists as a single cultural entity returns to the theories of self-orientalism and cultural proximity, which are controversial when placing Korean drama in the global market. In becoming a unilateral entity, these products can be easily distributed across the East Asian region but also risk becoming indistinguishable from their regional counterparts. The task is then to make content that can be simultaneously recognised and embraced whilst individually recognisable as Korean content to ensure consumers continue to watch.

6.2.1 The East Asian Remake and the Korean Difference

By the mid-2000s, Korean dramas had become a major export to East Asian countries, particularly China and Japan. Companies from these countries also began investing vast amounts into Korean drama production. In 2014, Korea's television exports to Japan, China and Hong Kong comprised 25 per cent, 18 per cent, and 17 per cent, respectively (Huh, 2017, p. 1391).

A quantitative analysis of Chinese audience comments found that cultural proximity failed to predict enjoyment but succeeded in explaining involvement with Korean

dramas. The cultural similarities between China and Korea allowed Chinese viewers to get involved with the characters through cultural proximity rather than relying on narrative (Lu Jia, Liu Xichuan & Cheng Yao Yao, 2019).

Although my research thus far has largely asserted the inaccuracies of the cultural proximity theory, it was still regularly applied during the early stages of the Korean Wave. Adaptations and remakes amongst East Asian countries were especially prevalent in the mid to late 2000s. In more recent years, countries from further afield, including Türkiye and India, have bought the rights to some of the most popular dramas to make their own versions.

To determine the prevalence of East Asian remakes and their significance in advancing the Korean Wave, I did some background research on my own sample. Only four dramas (7 per cent) used non-Korean source material, all of which were either Japanese manga or anime. Yet 18 dramas (31.5 per cent) from the sample have been remade in other countries.

Boys Over Flowers (KBS2, 2009) is one of the four dramas to be made from foreign source content. It was based on the manga *Hana Yori Dango*, which was adapted into a drama series in Japan in 2005, as well as in Taiwan (*Meteor Garden*, 2001) and China (both entitled *Meteor Garden*, in 2009 and 2018).

Between all these series, there are minor changes that indicate social and cultural differences from the Japanese original. The Korean version follows Geum Jan Di, a student at a prestigious high school ruled by four extremely wealthy students known as

F4. Anyone who goes against F4 receives a 'red card', giving other students free rein to bully that student until they drop out. Jan Di is the daughter of a dry cleaner, and a swimmer who cannot afford to go to a school with a swimming pool. She is offered a place at the esteemed school after saving a harassed student from committing suicide.

This contrasts with the Japanese version, where Makino Tsukushi already attends the elite school. Though her family is humble, she enters the expensive school because of her parent's vanity. KOCIS wrote that the Korean version added the swimming component to present the heroine overcoming harsh reality. They continue:

> More dramatic flavour to the original content, which empowered the character with personal undauntedness. In this version, the emphasis was placed on her self-fulfilment as she pursues her own destiny through talent and effort. Along with other entertaining elements, this was another factor in the drama's enthusiastic reception in other Asian countries (KOCIS, 2011, pp. 72-73).

KOCIS's assertion is perhaps most clear as an illustration of *han*, a decided effort to incorporate Koreans' efforts of besting adversity. This statement also suggests an active decision to give the female protagonist her own interest and goal, which bestows the character with more personality beyond her interactions with the male characters, something emphasised less in the Japanese version.

Even more significant difference can be seen in the case of *City Hunter* (2011, SBS). In the original manga, protagonist Saeba Ryo is a 'ladies' man', a borderline bankrupt private detective who only takes jobs from attractive women. Yet in contrast, the Korean Lee Yoon Sung works as an IT specialist in the Presidential Office, and the plot centres on his search for revenge after high-ranking officials shot his father following a secret North Korean operation. The manga is considered comical and lewd, whilst the Korean series is dramatic and uses a prevalent trope of noble sacrifice to bring

wrongdoers to justice.

The evidence here suggests a dichotomy. *Boys Over Flowers* exemplifies the nationalistic approach through its creation of a defining feature which separates the Korean product from its regional counterparts, whilst *City Hunter* loosely takes source material and transforms it into a story of Korean patriotic justice. However, the prevalence of Korean dramas remade overseas implies replicability. Unexpectedly, none of the historical dramas from the sample have been remade because we can assume all meaning would be lost when changing the cultural and historical context. This then argues that non-historical dramas are, to refer back to Iwabuchi (2002), culturally odourless. Instead, the global flows of Korean cultural products are bolstered by generalised depictions of modernity that are more easily emulated and reproduced.

6.2.2 *Dulce et Decorum Est* – Military Service and National Pride
Much like how historical fiction is culturally unique and non-replicable, depictions of a country's military are also inimitable. In Korea, military service is seen as a rite of passage for men, encouraging 'social connection, conformity, hierarchy and a shared sense of national pride', which are essential 'to understand and survive South Korea's work and corporate culture' (Robertson, 2018, para. 7).

Military service has existed in Korea in some form since the early Koryo period (918-1392 AD) as a hereditary position. It is now one of 26 countries with compulsory national service, with most men between 18 to 35 required to serve about two years, making it third in the world by total military per capita (The Military Balance, 2017). However, there are many cases of celebrities and citizens illegally avoiding conscription by falsifying illnesses or changing their citizenship shortly before

drafting. The mass media's exposure of military service evasion and irregularities among the wealthy throughout the late 1990s and 2000s' was 'instrumental in undermining popular acceptance of military service as men's duty' (Moon, 2006, p. 16).

Despite its prevalence in society, the military experience is largely unrepresented on-screen. There are a multitude of possible reasons for this. Firstly, lack of representation may be a conscious decision to avoid dependence on the military and the sacrifice of soldiers as a narrative aid, through fear that the sacrifice of men to serve may be misinterpreted as viewed as a capitalisation for commercial gain. Secondly, overt depictions of nationalism and patriotism through the emphasis of military power risk disrupting the delicate balance of inter-Asian relations. Thirdly, audiences tend to watch shows to escape day-to-day stressors, or find some comfort in watching those who 'have it all' struggle with their own issues. Therefore, it would be deemed unlikely that people would enjoy watching military dramas, especially men, who often view their conscription negatively. Finally, as Salmon (2014) noted, given the increasing unpopularity of military service among the young male populace, there is a concern that its depictions whitewash the experience, where bullying, physical, and sexual abuse have all been frequently reported.

Rather than mandatory conscription, which is a point of contention in society, more dramas featured voluntarily enlisted characters to promote serving one's country and further emphasise the sacrificial nature of collectivist culture. This also allows for easier inclusion of female characters and the opportunity to embed a love story into the plot.

Two of Hofstede's cultural dimensions are commonly identified here: individualism

versus collectivism and power distance. Patriotism and serving your country are defined values in collectivist societies, and high-power distance societies legitimise hierarchical power structures.

From my sample, 9 series (15.7 per cent) are based around military or law enforcement or feature a main character working in one of these occupations. Out of these nine series, *Descendants of the Sun* (2016, KBS2) is regularly referred to as a shining example of a Korean drama generating soft power and military propaganda (Jang Kyung Jae, 2019, p. 25). Its success was profound and widespread, reaching an average domestic viewership of 28.6 per cent (AGB Nielsen) and being sold to over thirty countries. Even the prime minister of Thailand called for his citizens to watch it as it conveyed the values of 'patriotism, sacrifice, obeying orders and being a dutiful citizen' (Bahk, 2016, para. 3).

It follows the relationship between elite Special Forces Unit captain Yoo Si Jin and Doctor Kang Mo Yeon as they negotiate conflicting philosophical values whilst on a peacekeeping mission in the fictional country of Uruk. Its charm fosters the glamorisation of patriotism, which boosts citizen loyalty to the country, 'which could be transferred to that for the ruling party, hence legitimising state control of the polity.' (Leung, 2021, p. 189). As such, it can be understood why military dramas would be of interest to the ruling powers. The Ministry of National Defence is listed as a supporter of the production. They assisted by providing military equipment and permitted the use of Camp Greaves as a shooting location, emphasising government support.

The profitability of this series was initially questioned over two concerns. Firstly, that

audiences would not be interested in a drama which focused on soldiers and war; and secondly, that a male soldier as the lead character would significantly reduce profits earned from sponsorship, as a significant amount of PPL now comes from cosmetic products. These concerns, combined with the costs incurred by shooting overseas led to SBS passing on the drama and being broadcast by KBS2 instead (Lee Jung Yeon, 2016). This strongly implies a fundamental concern of SBS's privatised nature of profitability over content, whereas KBS2 appeared willing to risk funds for a distinctly pro-military drama.

Writer Kim Eun Sook stated she did not deliberately write the drama as patriotic as the narrative was supposed to focus on the moral conflicts of Kang Mo Yeon. Yet, throughout the series, there are examples of patriotic and propagandist imagery, including the two protagonists stopping their conversation to salute the flag when the national anthem begins playing:

This image is unavailable due to copyright restrictions
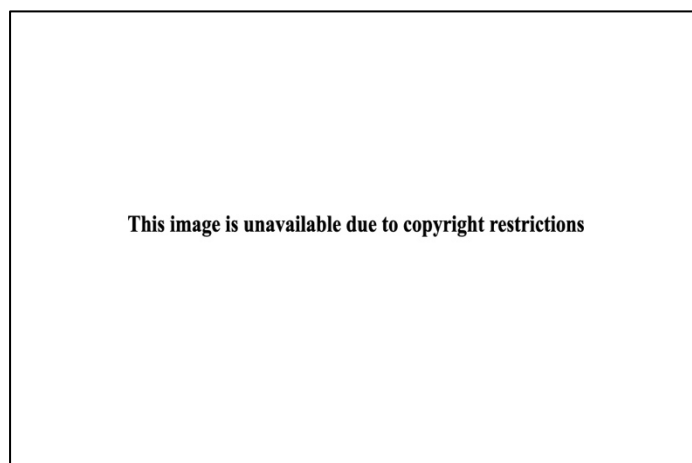
a) *Descendants of the Sun,* episode 3

Other shows, such as *The King 2 Hearts* (2012, MBC), use serving in the armed forces as a means of character development. Lee Jae Ha, the crown prince of an alternate South Korea with a constitutional monarchy, is introduced as arrogant and irresponsible. He is tricked into participating in a joint military collaboration with North Korea and

forced into an arranged marriage with North Korean Special Forces Officer Kim Hang Ah. Over the series, he fights a terrorist group seeking to eliminate the royal family after peace talks are established over the 38th parallel. By the end of the series, he has transformed into a leader willing to work hard and make sacrifices for his country and the people he loves.

Similarly, Han Gil Ro, in *7th Grade Civil Servant* (2013, MBC), is obsessed with James Bond films and becoming an international man of mystery. He appears immature and entitled because of his wealthy upbringing. After joining the National Intelligence Service to become a spy, he willingly investigates his father, putting national security and love for his country before his own family. This epitomises the cultural value of collectivism through the lens of nationalism, as national collectivism (or patriotism) is placed over familial collectivism and filial piety.

In all three cases, the characters' personalities and behaviours change as the series develops, usually in unison with the show's conflict. This infers they only become their complete and best selves after serving the country. This presents a nationalist position by promoting military service and directly tying it to ideals of collectivism and masculinity.

The portrayal of military service promotes the non-hegemonic 'pan-Asian soft masculinity'; male characters who 'physically groom themselves, form tight friendships with women, remain single, and are sexually passive to the point of never pursuing physical intimacy' that are written and shared by women (Coles, 2008, p. 241; Louie, 2012; Lee Min Joo, 2021, p. 29). This idealised male can also be utilised nationally to

subvert the increasing discontent of mandatory conscription amongst domestic males.

Moreover, the presentation of military service in dramas combines soft and hard power and links it to national pride and Korean identity. These series promote the military force of Korea non-aggressive manner. Most overseas activity is exclusively restricted to peacekeeping missions, a far more respected portrayal of the military over colonialist and invading forces of Western nations. Contents and their patriotic code were aimed both for domestic consumption – anti-communist rhetoric has been a long-standing component of military dramas in Korea – but also made for international export to generate soft power.

6.2.3 The Pull of Cultural Origins

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a rapid increase in the cross-border movement of women from Northeast Asian countries to Western countries, as a lack of 'structural shifts' in local societies made it difficult for women to transform within the nation they were born (Kim Youna, 2010). Media images of the West encouraged women to view their homelands more critically. They triggered a desire to leave, presenting Western regions as more ideal and thus determining the direction of their movement (Kim Yaeri, 2011, p. 70).

Through an individual's placement in a different culture, we can see the cultural morals and values that this individual considers most important to their identity. We most commonly see this when a person moves abroad and faces the challenge of attempting to integrate with the local culture whilst maintaining their own sense of cultural self. This often results in people of a particular culture or region living in proximity to one another in many major cities. On-screen, the experience of culture shock, or the journey

of characters while they are away from home, is one way we see this idea of 'Koreanness'.

The relevance to the study is that their experience focuses on cultural difference. When they are overseas, the relationship between characters and their location is a relationship between the domestic and the foreign. Scenes are dedicated to focusing on the struggles of these characters as they negotiate cultural unfamiliarity. Ultimately, their culture and a deep-rooted sense of Koreanness prevent them from adapting to the feeling of Otherness. The experience of the Other is emphasised as a discovery of the true self, as Kang Kyoung Lae wrote:

> Their trip constitutes an encounter with the Other – the foreign land, the unfamiliar surroundings, and the warmly welcoming hosts. More importantly, these experiences are encounters with their own expectations of iconic sites, and thus every moment has the potential to make them aware of the archaic Other within them which is, as Kristeva (1991) puts it, a discovery of the self (2018, p. 69)

One of the standout examples of Kang's assertion is *The Heirs* (2013, SBS), which follows conglomerate heir Kim Tan, who is studying abroad in Los Angeles to hide the illegitimacy of his birth. He appears moderately adapted to the Californian lifestyle. However, flashbacks of his old life in Korea imply an unresolved trauma, and he eventually returns to Korea to bear the weight of his responsibilities as an heir.

In contrast, Cha Eun Sang travels to Los Angeles to visit her recently engaged sister, who she discovers is living in filthy conditions with an abusive boyfriend. The sister runs away with the money their mother has provided for the wedding. Following this, Eun Sang sheds her 'American Dream' and moves back to Korea with her mute mother, who has recently become the live-in maid for Kim Tan's household.

The series follows the relationship between Kim Tan and Cha Eun Sang, from their first meeting in Los Angeles to living under the same roof and attending the same high school whilst being from deeply disparate backgrounds. For Korean audiences, it also shows two Korean characters from vastly different upbringings struggling to find their place overseas before deciding that Korea is their home and returning, playing up to the concept of Koreanness and a Korean 'motherland'.

The narrative of 'returning home' appears with surprising frequency. One of the earliest examples is *Ireland* (2004, MBC), which tells the story of Lee Joong Ah, raised in Ireland as Georgia Shaw by adoptive parents. In the first episode, she is left devastated when the Irish Republican Army murders her family, she travels to Korea to find her biological family, stating 'from my homeland to my motherland.'

Hubinette noted that *Ireland* and multiple other dramas from the 1990s and 2000s developed narratives around adopted Koreans with traumatic pasts in their adoptive country who choose to return 'home' to Korea. International adoption is an 'expression of Western exploitation and oppression,' with adopted Koreans living unhappily under their adoptive parents. Meanwhile, the 'white populations in the recipient countries are constantly torturing them with racism and discrimination' (Hubinette, 2005, p. 223).

Ireland is not the only series that relies on the adoption narrative to uphold the Korean identity. Another example is *I'm Sorry I Love You* (2004, KBS2), in which protagonist Cha Moo Hyuk works on Australia's streets as a scam artist. Abandoned by his parents and mistreated by his foster parents, he is shot twice in the head during an assassination

attempt at his ex-girlfriend's wedding. With money gifted guiltily by his ex-girlfriend, he moves back to Korea to find his birth mother, discovering she is a popular actress. Subtle portrayals emit more favourable responses towards Korea. The 'Australian' Moo Hyuk is angry, poor and has no success in romance. However, 'Korean' Moo Hyuk finds his family, wealth and love; his personality changes from being self-centred to becoming altruistic.

Similarly, *Mr Goodbye* (2006, KBS2) tells of Hyeon Seo, who grew up in the United States. After his adopted parents' death, he returns to Korea and finds happiness by falling in love, learning he has a son and meeting his biological mother.

Hubinette quoted former First Lady Lee Hui Ho's speech at the 1st International Gathering of Adult Korean Adoptees in 1999:

> Now you must forget your difficult past and renew your relations with your native country in order to work together toward common goals based on the blood ties that cannot be severed even if we wanted to…Your mother country is developing day by day to become a first-rated nation in the 21st century…I hope you maintain your Korean identity and help enhance the pride of the Korean people doing your best wherever you are (Hubinette, 2005, p. 101).

Here we see how political influence and popular culture have a cyclical relationship. As Korean politicians implored Korean adoptees to identify with their Koreanness and be one with the Korean people, popular culture furthered this message across film and television. This, in turn, has furthered this general opinion across audiences that Korean adoptees will always be more Korean than any culture or country in which they have been raised. The reasoning for adoption perpetuates a false reality that biological parents are rarely complicit in giving up their children. This bolsters the conviction that the Korean collective identity overpowers any other cultural experience, identity, or

feeling of belonging.

Conversely, few series feature any foreign characters. This may be due to a lack of suitable actors capable of speaking fluent Korean, but the 2016 South Korean Census quotes around 2 million foreign nationals living in Korea. With a population of over 50 million, this represents around 2 per cent. In the limited examples of a foreign character's appearance, this is usually a white-presenting, attractive individual, who speaks fluent Korean, yet somehow has little to no understanding of Korean cultural norms and behaviour.

Where foreign characters are featured, a large part of their character development is structured around them 'shedding' the foreign to 'become' more Korean. In the latter episodes of *Playful Kiss* (2010, MBC), a half-Korean woman named Chris appears at the protagonist's family's noodle shop. The shop staff argue over who should attempt to speak English with her, despite nothing indicating that she speaks English, another indication that 'foreign' is still associated with the West, specifically the USA. They are shocked that she speaks fluent Korean before learning about her mixed ethnicity and journey to Korea to discover her heritage.

Her language ability indicates she either has a strong relationship with Korean family members through which she learnt the language or that she otherwise spent her time studying, both of which would suggest a certain level of interaction with other common elements of Korean culture. However, she cannot eat with chopsticks when she returns to the restaurant. Joon Gu, the cook, is so stunned that he teaches her how to use them, at which point she becomes infatuated. By the end of the series, she has decided not to

return home, instead remaining in Korea with Joon Gu to open another branch of the noodle shop.

Transnational mobility has been socially constructed as a form of cultural capital. used for individuals' social status and 'ideological process of subject formation' (Simpson, 2005; Kawashima, 2010; Yoon, 2014, pp. 1015-1016). Chris's encounter with Korea's hospitality helps her see and accept the Korean Otherness that has resided in her all along. Whereas in *The Heirs*, we see that despite the hospitality that Kim Tan received, he was unable to find himself comfortable in the United States, being drawn back to his cultural home of Korea. Where Chris is shown to have such a pull towards Korean culture that she is willing to forget her entire life in her home country, Kim Tan and Eun Sang are pushed towards their own sense of Korean identity and belonging.

The choice for Korean citizens to return to the country is not unusual. This is evidenced by a decrease in Korean students studying abroad (Kahng, 2015). Kahng asserted that employers consider overseas-educated Koreans as a liability, as they become individualistic and therefore have a more challenging time adapting to the hierarchical business culture.

This links to two of Hofstede's dimensions, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity versus femininity, but interestingly indicates opposing accuracy of the results. Korea scored highly on the uncertainty avoidance index with 85 out of 100. A strong score for uncertainty avoidance tends to lead to ethnic prejudice and xenophobia (Hofstede et al., 2011, p. 285). In masculine societies, immigrants are expected to assimilate (Hofstede et al., 2011, p. 232). Korea was initially indexed as scoring feminine, indicating

integration, but Buja (2016) asserted that Korea has moved more masculine in the decades since the initial results were released (2016, pp. 178-179).

Korea's homogeneity produces an expectation for foreigners to disregard their known customs and cultures to embrace the Korean way of life. Foreign characters on-screen are, at best, depicted as capable of speaking fluent Korean without any other knowledge of Korean culture or, at worst, used for light comic relief. The representation of foreigners on-screen appears accurate to Buja's assertion of masculinity, as their difference is highlighted, and assimilation is celebrated. Kang Kyoung Lae supports this by referencing the documentary series *Love in Asia*, where an episode features a young Filipino woman, a victim of abuse not permitted to parent her own child or open a bank account, whose suffering is presented as a transformation from a 'pathetic love story into a touching narrative of assimilation' (2018, p. 63).

Korea's implicit respect for the voices of Western Others, as opposed to Others from the Global South, highlights that many Koreans remain contemptuous of immigrants from Asian and African Countries (Kang Kyoung Lae, 2018). Foreign characters are usually white. Black characters are limited to being from the United States or Africa, and other non-white characters are rarely included. Europe, in this case, means white, and white means English.

This conclusively indicates a distinct nationalist undertone in cultural representation. Of course, foreigners are not a monolith, and nor should we assume that the entire population of Korea has the same perspectives on immigrants. However, the foreign experience is almost always portrayed negatively, and both Koreans and foreigners

alike are portrayed to have better outcomes once they return 'home'.

6.2.4 Conclusion

The prevalence of remakes between East Asian countries promotes Cho Young Han's assertion that the nationalist approach is centred around a unilateral East Asian identity (2011, p. 385). This was particularly true in the earlier stages of the Korean Wave, up until the early 2010s. However, the minor changes to character identity and behaviour highlight an intrinsic attempt at building a Korean identity distinct from its other regional counterparts.

Military dramas are one of the most conspicuous ways Korea has presented its power and influence directly through media, promoting patriotism and sacrifice for the nation. Despite increasing opposition to military conscription, its principle still assumes a necessary connection with masculinity and collectivism (Moon Seungsook, 2005, p. 65). This underlines the collective nature of Korean culture while simultaneously using the soft power of the Korean Wave to bolster the image of Korea's armed forces.

A united Korean identity is presented frequently, with the idea that 'Koreanness' will always override any other cultural experience. The focus was not necessarily on the international locale but on the validity of these characters as Koreans with a homeland they will feel naturally compelled to return to, as Korean characters long to return to their cultural homeland. This aligns with the theory that 'immigrating adults are unlikely to trade their home country values for those of the host country; at best they make small adaptations' (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 397). Yet we do not see the same rule applied to foreign characters, who almost immediately choose to wholly imbue Korean culture. The result is an imbalanced sense of cultural superiority, the Korean culture

overriding any other that may exist within a character, whether through their ethnicity or the country's culture of their upbringing.

Korean representation in overseas communities on-screen is important for those who live in countries where they are not adequately represented in the media. Focusing on these groups was a helpful approach in the earliest stages of the Korean Wave that focused on the diasporic audiences.

Overall, this confirms that there is a distinct nationalistic theme that runs throughout the Korean miniseries and has largely remained unchanged across the period of study. There is the capacity for greater questioning of changes to attitudes, as trends indicate a move from feminine to masculine, and from collectivist to individualist, as a result of rapid industrialisation and economic growth.

In regard to my first question – What are the common themes of the miniseries and have these changed over the study period? – the three perspectives of nationalism, neoliberalism, and postcolonialism, function well as umbrellas for the most significant of themes. The term 'K-drama' alone indicates Korean dramas' inherent tie with their Koreanness. There is an emphasis on a united ethnic identity, whether this is presented through experiences in the military, or overseas. Particular miniseries have evidenced a conscious decision to distinguish themselves from their East Asian counterparts and become more recognisably Korean.

As the Korean Wave is increasingly consumed globally, it is reasonable for it to become an industry of pride, and for an intentional effort to portray the country and its people in

the most positive light.

6.3 Social Mobility and the Neoliberal Economy of Experience

Neoliberalism as an ideology argues for an institutional arrangement of limited bureaucratic intervention, and that free-market principles will ultimately benefit all citizens. The lack of implemented measures, it is argued, removes discrimination in the market.

Cho Young Han wrote that the neoliberal capitalist approach 'champions the importance of profit and developing of political strategies' (2011, p. 386). In contrast, Lee Hye Kyung and Zhang Xiyu noted that neoliberal representations on television in Korea aim to show young people how to maintain themselves and possibly prosper in neoliberal creative economies. Whilst Western neoliberal subjectivity is freedom, autonomy and coolness, the Korean style emphasises the psychological qualities of post-industrial creative workers and productive ethics embedded with Confucian ideals of familial piety and collectivism (2021, p. 522).

The decentralised nature of implicit policy produces two narratives, from policy to commerce and production to fandom. The first is shared by youth and critics of neoliberalism and points to the usefulness of young Koreans as human capital, with a focus on university education in a competitive job market. The second narrative centres on overcoming hardships through endurance and self-development to become full members of society (Lee & Zhang, 2021, p. 525).

Kang Kyoung Lae (2018) referenced Ouellette (2004) and contended that shows, particularly talk shows that judge other people's behaviours and customs, 'tend to create

a certain sort of self-governance in a neoliberal society' (2018, p. 72). The eagerness to experience encounters with foreign Others through the screen has, in effect, reinforced 'existing normative orders in contemporary society, which are customarily male, bourgeois, and Eurocentric', and thus shows are simultaneously challenging and reasserting viewers' interpellation 'into the temporal flow of contemporary Korea' (2018, p. 72).

6.3.1 Traversing Social Class through Korean Modernity

Neoliberalism emphasises an individual's ability to act rationally but idealises certain qualities and characteristics. However, the modern self is formed by certain norms perpetuated through organisational settings like corporations and schools. Neoliberalism also stratifies societies, with implications for people's general social and economic status and standing (Holmqvist, 2021, p. 1355). As a political and economic ideology, proponents of neoliberalism also generally support meritocracy, believing that deregulation and the free market will naturally result in those with the highest skills rising to the top.

Korea ranks number 14 in the world by its number of millionaires (Credit Suisse, 2019). Companies like Samsung, LG, and Hyundai bolster their image of wealth and technologically advanced living. Yet, the inequality of opportunity in Korea is higher than in the United Kingdom, Belgium, and France (Jung Min Ho, 2017). Historically, the status system of Joseon meant one's class was a 'legally and morally sanctioned status system with clear and relatively impenetrable boundaries between the strata' (Kim Hyuk Rae & Song Bok, 2007, p. 39). The social character and nature of relationships in these classes differ significantly from other societies because of the interplay between economy, politics, and culture over Korea's historical evolution of

society (Kim Hyuk Rae & Song Bok, 2007, p. 46).

Meritocracy directly conflicts with Korea's historical social structure, which was strict in inequality of opportunity. However, it is aligned with the ideals of Korean perseverance. Thus, the inclusion of social mobility is intrinsically connected to Korean modernity.

As with many capitalist societies, members of high-earning social groups are likely to have access to a wider range of employment and education opportunities. Attending one of the three top universities – Seoul National University, Korea University, or Yonsei University, often called the SKY universities – is seen as a symbol of success and pride amongst families. At these three universities, 62 per cent of students come from the highest-earning 20 per cent of families. Returning to Bourdieu's works, he consistently argued that society's ruling and intellectual classes preserve privilege across generations, despite the myth of equal opportunity and high social mobility through formal education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986).

Hofstede (2010, p. 61) wrote that power distance is described as a value system of the less powerful members of society. Power distance focuses on how these less powerful members of a society accept or question the unequal distribution of power. Here we are considering how these individuals, generally of a lower socio-economic group, engage and interact with the social inequality surrounding them. With a score of 60, Korea is depicted as a hierarchical society, power is centralised, and those in lower positions of power accept that power is distributed unequally. Those in lower socioeconomic groups do not necessarily question the structure under which their inequality exists, and those

in higher groups will aim to increase the distance.

One of the physical representations of this is beautifying the living conditions for those in lower socioeconomic groups. To showcase the real standard of living for those struggling would risk a negative response from the public and hypothetically increase negative attitudes towards the active administration. This beautification presents a minimised social mobility gap, as the 'poor' characters live a lifestyle far more aligned with the middle class. The modern lifestyle is depicted through luxury items and accessibility to expensive places, associating participation in modernity with conspicuous consumption. Thus, the experience of modernity and consumption becomes significant in the formation of identities (Savage & Ward, 1993; Hollands, 2017; Kaptan & Tutucu, 2021, p. 205).

In conversation with participant B, they acknowledged the role that rapid modernisation has played in the issue of social class and mobility:

> Korea is a country that has achieved economic development very quickly…however, there is a problem where the gap between the rich and the poor grows. And the issue of economic and social fairness is very important in our society, so therefore in Korean dramas, rich people are often characterised as a villain or [an] antagonist (participant B, interviewed 5 April 2021).

Though Korea is indexed as having a high level of power distance, the upper classes are viewed with increasing negativity, which has been showcased on screen. Different social classes are portrayed as the 'other' and not sharing a culture. Many Koreans think negatively about chaebols because their wealth has been accumulated through excessive government subsidies rather than hard work or entrepreneurial skills (Kim Bok Rae & Song Bok, 2007, p. 48).

Princess Hours (2006, MBC), *City Hunter* (2011, SBS) and *School 2015* (2015, KBS2) are just a few examples from my sample that feature families that are less financially secure but share a very close and equal relationship, which are almost always contrasted against wealthier families who have a dysfunctional and unequal relationship. There is a resulting inference that modern ultra-capitalism is in direct contrast with Confucian values. Better family relationships in poorer households imply collectivism and filial piety, distinct Confucian values; thus, these families are inherently more 'Korean' in their attitudes and behaviours.

Class and social mobility representation can also be tied back to critical political economy. The image of wealth, success, and easy social mobility, particularly noting the transition from a developing nation to one with one of the highest GDPs in the world, promotes Korea's business acumen on the global stage. This can be supported by noting the lack of content surrounding the 2008 financial crash and the neglect to acknowledge the increase of poverty in its aftermath.

Therefore, the portrayals of social classes and social mobility are of deep significance, often used together to promote contrasting but contemporaneous qualities of Korean society and its culture. Conspicuous consumption and the lifestyles of the wealthy are used to promote the country's affluence and a refined modern image. The interpretation of an extensive middle class and the ease of mobility between classes encourages the Korean economic system, inferring meritocracy reigns over inequality of opportunity. Finally, working-class individuals are still promoted positively, personifying cultural values of femininity, collectivism, restraint, and long-term orientation.

6.3.2 Candy, Cinderella, and the New Feminist Heroine

Portrayals of working-class characters also emerge through the poor female protagonist, a trope commonly associated with East Asian dramas, and referenced by multiple interview participants (A, C, E, and I) as a defining element of Korean dramas. As Participant A, a Creative Content Consultant for Rakuten Viki stated:

> Dramas have progressed beautifully on an aesthetic level, but they've also progressed in substance as well. If you take time to go back and watch an older drama, the basic 'drama formula' becomes painfully clear: rich boy, poor girl, some obstacle that comes between them…while this basic formula is still there in today's dramas, we've seen a huge progression in character roles and development. Men are starting to become a bit less chauvinistic; women are allowed a little more freedom in the pursuit of their own goals and dreams (interviewed 23 February 2021)

This 'poor girl' representation can be traced back to the 1970s manga *Candy Candy*. Candy is a poor but cheerful orphan who works hard, becoming a lasting influence and idealised heroine in Korean popular culture. She is similar to Cinderella in that they both endure poverty and hardship, but Candy emphasises an industrious spirit and a plucky attitude. Her success feels earned by giving herself some agency over her own life (JavaBeans, 2013, pp. 621-22).

The poor female being thrust into a life of wealth is built around audiences wanting to escape from their own realities of life (Participant E, Executive Producer, interviewed 22 April 2021). However, the distinction between Candy and Cinderella separates the female struggle and details a change of representation over the period of study.

In *Princess Hours* (2006, MBC), Shin Chae Kyoung is a normal high school student made to live among traditional and conservative royals, after entering into an arranged marriage with the Crown Prince. She is a bold character with personal interests but must

push these characteristics aside to become a bride and live in the Royal Household. This can be contrasted with *Fight for My Way* (2017, KBS2), where the economic situation is presented as a critique of modern society, but the characters fight to grow in their particular fields despite the odds stacked against them. Choi Ae Ra dreams of becoming a television announcer but works as a department store employee, struggling to accomplish her goal without a prestigious education or influential acquaintances.

This type of female protagonist interconnects gender and neoliberal capitalism, as Candy is positioned in contrast with the rich male. He is cast as a bad personality, lacking social skills and who rudely disregards sincere confessions of love. He initially represents the increasingly villainised upper class, and it is only after experiencing first-hand the trials and tribulations of Candy that his personality softens. The 'Rich Man/Poor Woman' trope can be polemically interpreted as perpetuating gender inequality and stereotypes. The superlative conclusion to several of these series sees the woman marrying a rich man, most favourably when she still manages to maintain her working-class, plucky attitude at the end.

It can be asserted that strong female characters who fight against their own hardships and adversity serve two purposes. Firstly, this is another display of *han,* a collective sentiment of resentment and yearning for vengeance, and the exaltation of Korean perseverance. Secondly, this appeals to the majority female audience, who cannot see this in real life. In reality, the gender pay gap in Korea is the highest amongst OECD nations. 2017 figures indicate that women only earn 63 per cent compared to men, and workplace culture pressures women to leave permanent employment once they have children. Only 10.5 per cent of management positions are held by women, and the

nation ranks last for female representation on company boards of directors (OECD, 2017, pp. 1-2). In 2022, newly elected President Yoon Suk Yeol vowed to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, stating structural sexism is a 'thing of the past'. He scrapped government gender quotas and declared people would be hired on merit rather than sex, yet only recruited three female members to his 19-member cabinet (Mackenzie, 2022).

In summation, depictions of the female lead have markedly progressed over time. Though our ideal heroine has always been headstrong and persevered through hard work, her success now more frequently comes down to personal goals achieved independently from men.

6.3.3 Conclusion

The significant theme of this section has been power distance. I argue that its portrayals have changed over the period of study, as although rich people have rarely been presented positively, the world of the rich was usually seen as a dream that poorer groups were lucky to find themselves in. As time has gone on, the critique of the upper class feels less to be on these people as individuals, but on the circumstances of society that permit them to maintain their power and influence whilst others suffer.

As a whole, the representation of this theme over time has shifted its focus towards social class and how its formation can be attributed to issues of high-power distance. Young adults can now find more resonance in representations showcasing the inequity between social groups. The struggle for equal access to academic opportunity, for gender equality in the workplace, seems to be discussed more regularly on-screen and in reality.

The notion that Korean-style neoliberalism emphasises Confucian ideals of familial piety and collectivism is also accurate. The poor protagonist is defined by their values, in contrast to the wealthy characters who are solely defined by their capital. Thus the victory of the protagonist is directly attributed to these values, inferring that their Koreanness is a significant factor in their accomplishments.

6.4 Postcolonialism and Translocal Regionalism

The Korean Wave is a result of centuries of modernisation, capitalist expansion, and cultural homogenisation (Cho Hae Joang, 2005, p. 163), but critics such as Professor Paik Won Dam asserted the Korean Wave as 'the embodiment of the West having penetrated our bodies' (Cho Hae Joang, 2005, p. 171). She later continued that the Korean Wave is not something that can be continued by the state and through capitalism. Instead, the Korean Wave is 'something that we need to shake off,' releasing 'the burden of an unhappy history' to 'head towards more peaceful relations' (Paik, 2005, p. 288). Thus, the postcolonial perspective aggressively challenges the capitalist structure through which *Hallyu* was created, suggesting that stars of the Korean Wave are nothing more than players in a game produced by capital and that *Hallyu* merely shows the Western penetration of Korean culture through its modernisation.

Translocal regionalism is likewise deeply critical of all capitalist approaches. However, it emphasises 'reciprocal Asian cultural flows' and establishing a 'pan-Asian cultural infrastructure, including the invention of trans-local or transnational identities' (Cho Young Han, 2011, p. 386). This perspective is driven, in part, by the ways that countries, including China, Japan and America, have squashed Korean culture and history. In the way that American culture has 'forced' its way into global public

spheres, a cultural relativist position suggests Asia should create its own economic bloc in the same way as Europe.

Before the Korean Wave, the focus remained on ethnocentricity, heritage and traditional values and virtues, but Korean dramas can now be defined as having universal, transnational and hybrid characteristics that appeal to both domestic and international audiences. Investing in characters and stories exceeds national orientation (Chin & Morimoto, 2013). Transcultural fandom does not emphasise nationality but instead things such as age, gender, or sexuality. Transnational issues embedded within contemporary capitalist society may instead have become the key driver of audiences (Jin, 2021c).

This section seeks to understand how Korea's history as an occupied state intersects with its capitalist modernity to reinterpret and re-present its own identity through a postcolonial outlook.

6.4.1 Two Countries, One Nation

North and South Korea have been divided since Japan's surrender in 1945. The original division along the 38th parallel was neither discussed with nor agreed upon by Korean politicians but instead negotiated between the Soviet-occupied North and the US-occupied South. Following the Korean War's armistice in 1953, a new military demarcation line was implemented, which remains in place today. Despite the division between the two nations for the past sixty years, the peninsula's recorded history dates back to the 7th century BCE. Therefore, a substantial history and culture are shared between these two modern nations.

If we are to agree with Hofstede's defence of his own approach, both nations would likely continue to hold similar cultural behaviours and values because of such extensive shared history. Yet more explicit works on the cultural dimensions of North-South relations and the prospect of reunification indicate extensive differences in their values which would significantly hinder reunification efforts (Kihl, 1994; Chamberlin, 2004). This section does not specifically focus on an individual cultural dimension, but the general depiction of North-South cultural similarities, particularly as they pertain to larger conversations of the last effects of US-USSR intrusion in creating the partition, and the concept of a single ethnic identity.

The King 2 Hearts (2012, MBC) and *Doctor Stranger* (2014, SBS) are two series from my sample that feature North Koreans as protagonists and focus on inter-Korean relations. They show North Korean characters' difficulties adapting to life in the South, including scenes utilised to indicate how far behind the North is regarding its freedoms, economy, and technological developments. Again emphasising nationalist undertones, in both series, North Korean characters are shown to shed their North Koreanness to assimilate more effectively with the culture and ways of the South.

The main characters are shown to have a deep understanding of South Korean popular culture. In the first episode of *The King 2 Hearts*, Kim Hang Ah travels to Seoul for the first time to participate as part of a North-South military collaboration. Between shots of high-rise buildings, emphasising the South's modernity, she and her colleagues comment on celebrities they see on billboards from their bus windows. Hang Ah appears to immediately know the names of all the stars she sees, along with their military status.

This shares similarities to early scenes of *Doctor Stranger*, where protagonist Park Hoon illegally sells cassette tapes of South Korean singers to his classmates. He knows the dance routines and exclaims, 'You'll be called a spy in the South if you don't know this song. So, all spies sent to South Korea must learn this song'. The black market for popular culture products in the North is well-documented, and it stands to reason that both Park Hoon and Kim Hang Ah, who lived in relative esteem in the capital Pyongyang, could access these goods. Their inclusion insinuates that Korean popular culture is so prolific and desirable that it has even reached the realms of its reclusive neighbour.

Despite the intended humour of these scenes, implying a deep proliferation of South Korean popular culture in the North, both characters' journey to acceptance in the South is filled with struggle, as they are looked down upon for not understanding their way of life.

IRIS (2009, KBS2), *IRIS II* (2013, KBS2), and *Athena: Goddess of War* (2010, SBS) are a series of dramas all existing in the same narrative universe that centre around attempts to reunify the peninsula. In general, the portrayals suggest that the higher ranking the individual, the more nefarious their intentions, returning to the separate cultural issue of South Korea's acceptance of hierarchical powers and class divide. Lower-ranked individuals are seen as victims of circumstance who either acknowledge the superiority of South Korea or are blameless in their mentality of North Korean supremacy because of their upbringing.

This returns to the understanding of Korean ethnic identity, as a 2019 survey of North

Koreans who defected to South Korea found that 87.1 per cent of respondents supported

reunification, including when they lived in North Korea, with 41.4 per cent believing

that 'North and South Koreans are the same people' (Cho Sung Min, 2023). As Hang

Ah monologues in episode 15 of *The King 2 Hearts:*

> Have you ever been separated from your family? People with the same language,
> the same history, who lived together for thousands of years… in one moment,
> halved… have you ever been split like that? Losing parents, siblings, destroyed by
> a three-year war… have you ever had that happen to you? I don't know if
> something like this is just a game to you, but it has always been critical for us.

In contrast, South Korean support for reunification has fallen from 37.3 per cent in 2016

to just 22.3 per cent in 2020, with 71.4 per cent of those born after 1991 supporting

peaceful coexistence over reunification (Cho Sung Min, 2023).

This is significant as depictions of the North are not villainised, nor is their blame the

parties that brought about the division. From a postcolonial perspective, the North-

South relationship is largely presented as both victimless and blameless, existing mostly

through a cooperative relationship rather than any substantive suggestion of future

reunification.

6.4.2 Regionalism, Urban Superiority and Traditional Identity

The singular Korean identity has played a fundamental role in the representations of

foreigners and the interaction of Koreans amongst the Other. Despite the unwavering

sense of a definitive Koreanness, the miniseries simultaneously portrays an inconsistent

and unfair depiction of rural and urban lifestyles.

The drive to promote a postcolonial identity in combination with an East Asian

transnational identity culturally affects the content of the drama through the deletion of national characteristics, historical differences and socio-structural hierarchies, often resulting in the erasure of indigenised and traditional identities and sensibilities (Cho Young Han, 2011, p. 388). If the goal is to build a pan-Asian cultural bloc and to connect an entire region's products and market, the region as a whole becomes generalised. The image is one of an individual modernity, on par with, but separate from, the modernity of the West. However, in doing so, the modern and the urban take precedence over local rural groups, cultures, and identities. In promoting its country and culture, Korean dramas are often associated with cities and modernity. 'Cultural production and urban processes mutually constitute each other' as 'dramas are simultaneously shaped by and shape the material and spatial conditions of Korean cities' (Oh Youjeong, 2013, p. 37).

82.59 per cent of the Korean population lives in urban areas (Trading Economics, 2016). A similar percentage of dramas in my sample were set primarily in Seoul, so this is a relatively accurate statistical representation of the geographical population.

The negative representations of people from certain regions find their basis in long-existing regionalism in Korea, which has characterised contemporary Korean politics since the 1970s (Kwon Keedon, 2004, p. 547). All regions express a strong anti-Honam sentiment, referring to Gwangju, and North and South Jeolla regions. In the regions of Jeju and Yongnam, 50 per cent refuse to accept Honam people as business partners. Honam is centred in negative social distance, with no other region so uniformly cast out (Kim Yong Hak, 2007, pp. 19-20).

Despite efforts to modernise rural areas – a political initiative called *Saemaeul Undong* (New Village Movement) has been in place since the early 1970s – the country continues to see migration from villages to cities. While the initiative successfully improved infrastructure and living conditions and reduced poverty in rural areas, the government failed to address the larger migration problems and low-income levels in rural areas compared to urban areas. Therefore, the depiction of characters moving to the city to gain better education or career opportunities is not inaccurate. This can be seen in *Pinocchio* (2014, SBS), where the two leads grow up on the fictional island of Hyangri Island before moving to Seoul to become journalists.

Similarly, the rural is generalised as either somewhere to escape from, or as a place of punishment. This can be seen in *Poseidon* (2011, KBS2) when undercover police officer Seon Woo is demoted to a country maritime police office in Gunsan after an operation goes wrong.

The city is connected to academic and career success and rural characters who move to the city are often presented as becoming more mature, suave, and culturally and socially aware. The implication is that city life played a substantial role in their development, simultaneously insinuating that rural characters could not develop these more 'chic' attitudes and mannerisms if they remained in their villages. We can see this through the example of Song Sam Dong in *Dream High* (2011, KBS2) who is portrayed as kind-hearted but lacking style and social skills. He moved to Seoul to attend a famous performing arts school, before undergoing a drastic style change, eventually becoming a globally successful singer.
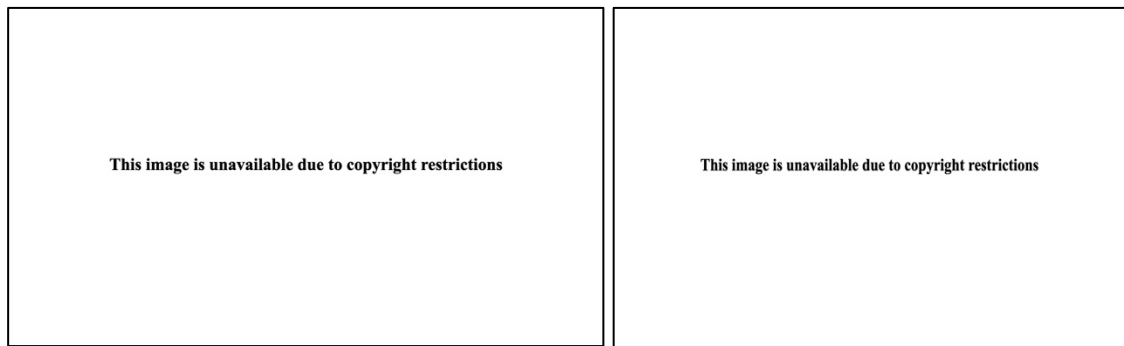
a) *Dream High,* episode 2; b) *Dream High,* episode 16

I asked producers and directors about their use of filming locations outside of Seoul versus the inclusion of non-Seoul locales in the drama. Participant E, an executive producer, responded:

> For other cities…Jeju is like its own world when it's represented on screen. It can either be super luxurious because of the beach and the ocean, but it can also be very local. So they'll definitely go into the markets, and they'll have somebody speaking in the Jeju dialect, which is really very different from the rest of the Korean language on the mainland.
>
> Also, a lot from Busan, they'll use it as a kind of trope, like a poor country person going to the city and making it big, and then maybe they'll shoot in the hometown of that person at some point for their history. But it's just never as glamorous as Seoul. They are always trying to hide their background. Regionalism is a huge thing in general in society.

Participants agreed that non-Seoul locales are often just incorporated as a trope or to showcase a disparity from the city, but I was unable to gain additional evidence to the reasonings for this prevalence. There is nothing to suggest that filming locations play a role, as many shows are filmed outside of Seoul to save on costs. There are many examples, including *Fight For My Way* (2017, KBS2), which was largely filmed in Hocheon Village in Busan, or *The Heirs* (2013, SBS), which filmed school scenes in Daejeon, but both are largely set in Seoul. Yet, there is often a strategic exposure of places to promote tourism, following the unexpected increase in foreign visitors to Chuncheon after the success of *Winter Sonata*, rising from 28,500 in 2002 to 295,673 in

2005 (Korea Tourism Organisation, 2006).

Outside of my sample, but what I consider an important reference to make, is the drama *Reply 1997* (2012, tvN). This series became a huge success for its matter-of-fact setting in Busan, further supported by all the actors actually hailing from that region and using both regional and time-specific slang, where it portrayed Seoul as a scary and cold place that represents Western characteristics over Korean values (Mazur, 2018). *Reply 1997*'s success was because it recognised the lives of people living outside of Seoul, with their own cultural history and their own local use of language.

To conclude, it is interesting that rural characters are often typified as being connected to traditional cultural values. When we compare rural and urban characters, we can see the masculine and individualistic traits present in Seoulites more clearly. Thus, it can be interpreted as Seoul being tied to Westernism and modern capitalism, but depending on the series, this relation can be inferred as either positive or negative. That being said, the city's modernity often overshadows but cannot replace the undercurrent of traditionalism that found its niche in quotidian aspects of urban life (Lu Hanchao, 2002, p. 126). These representations can be attributed to the Korean Wave, as a result of the modern and globally competitive image that Korea wishes to portray. Traditional culture and heritage are often relegated to historical series.

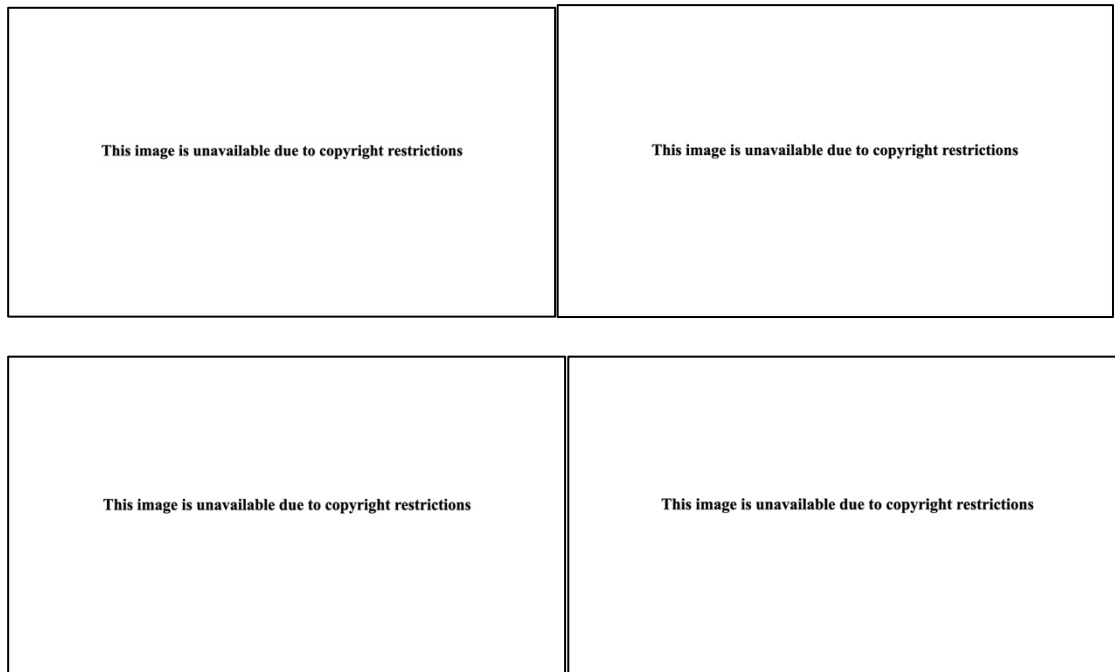### 6.4.3 Historical Accuracy and Heritage Recognition

Historical education is almost entirely mediated, whether through textbooks, stories or the screen. Our imagination of history has been embedded through images and texts we have received. In the period following colonisation and the Korean War, we have already noted the government's efforts to promote traditional culture.

From the postcolonial and translocal regional perspective, this promotion now extends from the domestic to the international. The quote 'history is written by the winners' can be re-evaluated here as Korea, once a victim of colonisation, whose history and culture were on the brink of annihilation, can now showcase that same heritage and tradition to the world. Representations of history can be connected to the dimension of long-term versus short-term orientation. Korea ranks as being long-term oriented, which can be attributed to its long history as a civilisation. However, I elected to include this section as a result of the frequent comments from interview participants concerning an explicit consideration in the interpretation and representation of history.

Representations of Korean society in the miniseries have already been identified as over-exaggerating its middle class and the ease of mobility to it, whilst simultaneously showcasing the country's economic achievement as a means to be viewed as on par with developed Western nations. This has a distinct similarity to Brennan's work on the Brazilian miniseries, where they noted that Brazilian miniseries endeavoured to visually represent 1920s São Paulo as a metropolis on par with New York City in that era, with the purpose is of enriching the visual culture of the nation (2012, p. 152).

History is often shaped by comforting nostalgia or shallow historical nominalism and misrepresented through beautifying and romanticising the era (Lee Kee Hyeung, 2005, p. 232). Instead of being faithful to an era's visual identity, representations of the past emphasise aesthetic beauty, much in the way *Titanic* (1997) represented lower classes as lively and full of dancing, neglecting the squalid conditions passengers were actually forced to endure on the ill-fated ship. Higher class and wealth in past contexts are

almost always designed to look luxurious, but poverty too is designed in cosmetic excess, ignoring the poor conditions that would be accurate.

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Clockwise from top-left: a) *Sungkyunkwan Scandal,* episode 2; b) *Moonlight Drawn by Clouds,* episode 3; c) *Scholar Who Walks the Night,* episode 12; d) *Hwarang,* episode 3.

The images above showcase the sets and costumes of *Sungkyunkwan Scandal,* filmed at the old campus of Sungkyunkwan University; *Moonlight Drawn by Clouds*, filmed at The Garden of Morning Calm, an arboretum in Seoul designed to showcase the 'Korean interpretation of beauty'; *Scholar Who Walks the Night*, primarily filmed at MBC's outdoor film set Yongin Daejanggeum Park*;* and *Hwarang,* largely filmed at Silla Millennium Park, a theme park designed to educate about the history and culture of the Silla period. Given the lack of remaining historical structures, especially those that could hold up to extensive shooting schedules, most shows are dependent on specially designed sets, which can deliberately enhance the aesthetic qualities of various eras.

From the selection of shows studied, five were set during the Joseon period (1392-1897): *Iljimae* (2008, SBS), *The Slave Hunters* (2010, KBS2), *Sungkyunkwan Scandal*

(2010, KBS2), *Scholar Who Walks the Night* (2015, MBC), and *Moonlight Drawn by Clouds* (2016, MBC), and one, *Hwarang* (2016, KBS2), was set during the Silla Kingdom (57 BCE – 935 CE).

In Korean period dramas (*sageuks*) and 20th-century dramas (*sidaegeuk*), historical accuracy is needed to preserve the history that conquering forces have attempted to overwrite. Characters are often real historical figures and are researched down to minute details. As detailed in the case of *Joseon Exorcist*, inconsistencies or anachronisms can bring in viewer complaints.

The *fusion sageuk* – an often fantasy-bound fictionalisation of historical individuals and events –a evokes the past through contemporary cultural indices (Hwang, 2004, p. 80). *Fusion sageuks* attempt to rewrite history by incorporating modern concepts or elements of fantasy, co-opting historical facts for historical value (DramaBeans, 2013). Their tone is designed to be entirely separate from regular *sageuks*, thus reducing the opportunity for audience complaints, but also diminishing the drive for historical truth.

The freedoms and rights of characters, particularly women, are often changed to be acceptable for modern audiences. The lack of access for women to education or career opportunities is presented light-heartedly through tales of crossdressing, such as in *Sungkyunkwan Scandal* or *Scholar Who Walks the Night,* a narrative trope that continues into modern dramas (*1st Shop of the Coffee Prince*, *You're Beautiful*, *To the Beautiful You*). This showcases not only a lack of access for women to certain opportunities but also the issue of LGBT representation; the male protagonist often questions his sexuality in a panic, before sighing in relief after finding out his love

interest is actually a woman. This then returns us to *Hwarang*, which was an actual elite male warrior group of the Silla period, whose same-sex relationships are historically detailed (Kim Young Gwan & Hahn Sook Ja, 2006). Yet in the series, homoeroticism remained undepicted and unreferenced, exemplifying instances where the assumption of audience preference displaces cultural history.

Networks play a role in building hegemony through their versions of history. More specifically, the engagement of fantasy elements to represent aspects of history results in a discourse shift of factuality, as the space between fact and fiction is opened, making it possible to interpret reality (Brennan, 2012, p. 249). This is the pinnacle of entertainment value and commodified culture being placed above cultural reality.

This was confirmed in conversation with participant B, who stated that the decision to intentionally use fictional characters and fantasy elements amongst 'real' history, or to present an almost alternative reality, is decided in early production meetings:

> If you are producing or directing [a] historical drama, we have to keep the time of birth and [the] best of our historical figure that's written in history books, and sometimes the official title is a historical figure…I think the Director or Producer or Writer for historical dramas have to fill the gap between the facts…If you want to touch the facts, you have to be very careful, and if you want to make an interpretation different from historical facts, then, in that case, you'd better create a fictional character (Interviewed 5 April 2021).

Series set during prior historical periods have many benefits from the perspective of practical production. Joseon was largely sealed off from the outside world, which made it a significant period of Korean cultural development. There is no need to consider filming overseas or including foreign characters. Several film sets featuring traditional architecture have been built, such as MBC's Yongin Daejanggeum Park, so these series

can be produced without exorbitant cost. Secondly, the further these series are set in the past, the more perceived freedom and creative license there is concerning historical events, as there are no living people to question them.

Modern history is often less accepted by audiences than older history. This can be seen in the British series *The Crown* (2016-2023, Netflix), which detailed the life of Queen Elizabeth II. In its first few seasons, it received widespread praise for its accuracy, which suddenly received negative media attention once the sixth series was confirmed to include the 1997 death of Princess Diana. As a beloved figure to much of the British public, who also harbour a negative recollection of the Queen and her response during that time, certain press outlets attempted to assert the inclusion of these events would be in bad taste.

This provides a possible reason for the lack of a series set during the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), as none appear in my sample. Given its relative proximity in history, many people are still alive who experienced and remember these events. For these reasons, fictional depictions of modern history are more often limited to moments of national pride, such as the 1980 Gwangju Uprising (the democratisation movement following the coup-installation of dictator Chun Doo Hwan), the 1998 Olympic Games, or the 2002 World Cup. This also helps to appeal to audiences' feelings of nostalgia and nationalism, as memories of the past are often attributed to positive emotions.

Period dramas are important in promoting historic and traditional culture, particularly to international audiences who likely have no prior experience or understanding of the

country's history. However, when history and culture are used for commercial gain, the aesthetics are likely to be placed above the integrity of accuracy. Additionally, and as supported by participant responses, audiences' reactions and creative self-regulation have normalised the process of placing real historical figures in fusion fantasy settings.

6.4.4 Conclusion

From the perspective of postcolonialism, the Korean Wave can be considered an opportunity to resolve past traumas, with the chance for the country to finally control its own narrative and return to its traditional cultural heritage. However, some issues arise as the industry is promoted overseas, alongside larger efforts of the country to be seen as globally competitive, and a difficult balance between promoting modernity and tradition.

The extensive history of the peninsula overpowers its more recent, divided history. North Koreans are rarely painted as an enemy, but as victims of unfortunate circumstances who one day may be reunited. Yet, the cultural influence of the South's products reaching even North Korea is regularly made, with an undertone that North Koreans recognise the superiority of the South. Representations of North-South relations as a whole can again be connected to the postcolonial aspect, an assertion of ethnic identity to counter the actions of the US and USSR acting out of their own interests.

The peninsula's extensive history brings emphasis to the dimension of long-term orientation, a society's preference for perseverance, long-term planning, and the ability to adapt. This adaptation can be seen as connected to Korea's experience of compressed modernity, and its ability to move into ultra-modernity with relative ease. This ultra-

modernity is often placed in conflict with traditional or rural aspects. Regionalism is rife both in reality and on-screen. There is a positive association between the modernity and Western characteristics of Seoul and the opportunities they provide; modernity is tied to education and hard work, respected Confucian behaviours, but at the cost of traditional culture, which remains in the countryside.

Traditional culture is instead often left to the confines of period dramas. Period dramas tend to aestheticise history, placing their entertainment value above accuracy. To avoid the risk of negative audience feedback commonly associated with inaccuracies, these series are commonly fused with fantasy elements. This then removes any perceived requirement for accuracy in cultural representation. By no longer requiring accuracy, these shows can instead exaggerate and romanticise the beauty of the era. This allows for the embellishment of aesthetic properties, whilst exaggerating the heroic properties of the home nation.

Overall, my research leads me to believe that the postcolonial perspective represented is the least culturally accurate. The desire for Korea to be viewed as globally competitive shifts the focus to urban modernity, reducing the celebration of all regions and cultures, and causing historical accuracy to be displaced by entertainment value.

6.5 Conclusion

There are several cultural points and themes that run across this chapter. The first is an emphasis on a united Korean identity and the essence of Koreanness. This identity overpowers the lived experience, with Koreans always returning home, and foreigners willing to disregard their foreignness to fully assimilate to the Korean ways of life. The combination of Korea's history and culture, with an emphasis on Koreanness being

embedded into the drama, can explain both the nationalistic and postcolonial aspects of representation in the miniseries, though to differing degrees of accuracy. The neoliberal production and representations of social mobility and society can be connected back to the effects of the critical political economy.

To recap, I sought to answer the following questions in this chapter:

1. What are the common themes of the miniseries, and how have these changed over time?
2. To what extent can we claim that the miniseries is culturally, economically, and socially accurate?
3. How can cultural ideologies be attributed to shaping miniseries content?

This chapter has covered all of Hofstede's dimensions as initial themes of interest, but I believe that certain themes are of distinct prominence. Firstly, the theme of collectivism. This can be seen in a multitude of ways, from a local level within rural communities, to a national level in military service, to an ethnic level with united North-South groups and the narrative of returning to a motherland.

It is reasonable to assert that these representations are, to some extent accurate. At least in the sense that data suggests the value that Korea places on collectivism. That being said, we can also agree upon some changes that have occurred in society that do not necessarily come across in representations. Data suggests that South Koreans do not necessarily envisage a future unified Korea, but North Koreans do, and the illegal smuggling of K-dramas into the North may be a reason to not adequately showcase actual attitudes towards the topic. It does not appear that the value of collectivism has changed significantly over the period of study.

The theme of power distance also makes a regular appearance, but with a lot of negativities attached. Though the differences between social classes have always been highlighted, more recent dramas seem more reflective of peoples' attitudes towards the system which contributes to class difference. As of yet unmentioned shows that promote workers' rights include *Chief Kim* (2017, KBS2) which follows a public accountant fighting for employees' rights, and *Assemblyman* (2015, KBS2), in which a labour rights spokesman becomes a member of the National Assembly.

As a whole, I argue that power distance remains accurate. Though there appears to be an increase in complaints or critiques of these power structures, there is little conversation about changing or dismantling said structures. There are complaints that it exists, but more with a general acceptance that this is the case and cannot be changed, which is a fundamental aspect of societies with a high-ranking power distance.

The conceptual overlap between collectivism and power distance was already established by Triandis in Chapter 4 (1990, p. 57). Thus, this discovery is not surprising, but one interest to me as a researcher was the prevalence of *han.* Despite not being a 'theme' that I actively tracked, depictions of Korean perseverance and its value appeared with surprising frequency.

In my opening chapter, I asserted my hypothesis that series represent idealised cultural conservativism and that has become more progressive over time. Now, at the end of this chapter, I must acknowledge that the data collected has led me to re-evaluate my position, at least partially.

It would be difficult for a society to move wholly progressive in all aspects in such a short period of time, especially when we factor in contrasting cultural forces. One clear example here is *Descendants of the Sun* (2016, KBS2). A substantial move towards progressivism would reject mandatory conscription and military action. Yet not only was this series a massive success domestically and internationally, but it is also one of the most recent dramas in the sample.

It is at this junction that the cultural perspectives come into play. Nationalist perspectives, alongside Korea's soft power and nation branding strategies, are likely to overpower significant critiques of national structures. Neoliberalism suppresses the inequality of opportunity, with the assertion of a meritocracy and that, at some point, working hard will eventually overcome all the gains the rich have received over you. Postcolonialism seeks to overcome intergenerational trauma and reinterpret Korea's position in the world's history.

To briefly return back to participant interviews, I asked participants how they think cultural studies can be attributed to thematic changes over time, and whether they think representation changes as a result of general societal change, or through active decisions made by content creators. Participant L, a high-level cultural policy officer for MCST suggested that 'as far as dramas contain the values, thoughts and interests of the times, the subject matter and the stories of dramas have changed accordingly' (interviewed 20 July 2021). In contrast, Participant A, a Creative Content Consultant for Rakuten Viki, argued that:

> General societal changes definitely help with representation…[but] if the drama producers don't sign off on it, there won't be change. The producers are going to have to want to include it. The TV company will have to sign off on it (interviewed 16 April 2021).

Similarly, in conversation with Participants F, G, and H, all freelance writers, they stated that 'representation changes as a result of general societal change. Going against what's socially acceptable can result in [ostracism]' (interviewed 22 May 2021).

It does seem that those involved in the creative process do not wish to push content beyond what is already established as a standard socio-cultural practice. This is particularly true for those who are not comfortably committed to a particular network or production studio and are therefore likely to be more reluctant to challenge established practices. Whilst, as a whole, this may be the case, I cannot fully agree with this, as we have already discussed the growth of LGBT themes in the web series as one example. Of course, the web series is a far different state of affairs to miniseries on national networks, but the fact they are in active production in a society which does not offer any anti-discrimination protections nor prohibit hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity showcases a progression of content in contrast to societal norms.

Overall, I argue that most cultural representations are in line with their dimension's indexation (as per Hofstede), which indicates accuracy. I argue that nationalist and neoliberal sentiments and perspectives are presented most accurately, largely due to their prevalence in society today.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

Having now presented my empirical data and analysis across Chapters 5 and 6, the aim of this chapter is to summarise my findings, conclusively answer my research questions, and reflect and review my methodological approach, as well as make suggestions of areas for further research and contribution to knowledge in this field.

Although this project focused on productions up to the end of 2017, I must summarise the past by observing the current climate and potential future developments. When I first began my PhD studies in 2017, Netflix had yet to release its first original K-drama. The international consumption of Korean dramas, particularly in the West, was still mainly limited to the Korean diaspora and others like me who were considered to have a 'niche' interest. This gives cadence to the significant growth the Korean television industry has seen in just a few years.

In my introduction, I spoke of my experience watching Korean dramas since high school until now, and the changes I personally perceived. This experience guided my hypothesis, that these dramas aim to present an idealised version of cultural conservatism and economic capitalism that have trended more progressive over time.

I considered three major causes behind this shift. First was the influence of Western culture through media imperialism and cultural hybridisation, whose effects have been amplified by Internet access. Secondly, I considered a conscious decision made by those in the creative process to design a more globally exportable product, shaped in part by the widespread consumption of US content. Finally, I supposed that these changes could be a natural process of evolving society, distinct from outside cultural intervention. The

title of this work, 'A Conscious Creation' was in homage to Bourdieu's charismatic ideology of creation. His understanding was that to understand a piece of art, we must consider the conditions of its production and reception. I sought to add the aspect of active production in art, the action of viewing reality and selecting or mediating aspects.

In this final chapter, I revisit my research questions and make my final arguments. I will evaluate the steps I took to collect my data and achieve my results, reflect upon my methods, and determine, in hindsight, what possible changes I would make now. Finally, I wish to look at the topics that this research could not adequately cover, questions and lines of research that the results of this project have raised, and further possible areas of research enquiry.

7.2 Answering the Research Questions

My initial question was, to what extent is the representation of Korean culture and society in the miniseries accurate? I immediately critiqued this for its immeasurability, as there is no reasonable method or metric that can be used to measure culture and its accuracy. Yet it seemed clear that both the miniseries and society had changed over time. So my initial research questions became:

1. What are the common themes of the miniseries, and have these changed over the study period?
2. To what extent can we claim that the miniseries is culturally, economically, and socially accurate?
3. Who decides what is Korean identity in the miniseries and why?

Much of the existing literature centres on cultural policy or they dissect select cultural themes across a limited number of case studies. However, to get a full picture of the developmental process, I believed it was necessary to broaden these topics and combine

both strands into a single research project. For this reason, this research was then designed to follow two components – critical political economy and cultural studies.

First was critical political economy as to refer to Bourdieu once again, we must understand the conditions of the creation before understanding the creation itself. I therefore sought to answer two major questions:

1. How do business and the culture industry influence production and content of the miniseries?
2. How do political and economic factors, such as neoliberalism or globalisation, impact the overall identity of the miniseries?

The second strand aimed to look at these themes and their relationship with cultural studies, answering how cultural ideologies or perspectives shape miniseries content.

7.2.1 Culture, Themes and Accuracy

I first wish to break down some of the general overall findings of this project, before separating this into the individual aspects of critical political economy and cultural studies. My main question to answer was: What are the common themes of the miniseries, and how have these changed over time?

To find an answer to this question, I developed a sample based upon all miniseries broadcast on KBS, MBC, and SBS, between the start of 2002 and the end of 2017, totalling 57 series. I wrote extensive notes on a minimum of seven episodes per series, and additionally incorporated episode recaps (predominantly from DramaBeans, a Korean drama analysis site). Including these recaps helped to guarantee that I did not miss points of significance, and ensured a level of objectivity to my work, as analysis would not be solely based on my subjective interpretation of events.

These notes were then transferred into the qualitative analysis software NVivo, where I coded them in reference to Hofstede's six cultural dimensions:

- Power Distance – The extent to which less powerful members of a society expect and accept power to be distributed unequally.
- Individualism versus Collectivism – The extent to which individuals prioritise their own needs and interests over those of the group.
- Masculinity versus Femininity – The extent to which the society values traditionally masculine traits (achievement, assertiveness, competition) over feminine traits (care, cooperation, and quality of life)
- Uncertainty Avoidance – The extent individuals feel threatened by change, uncertainty, and ambiguity.
- Long-term versus short-term orientation – The extent to which a society prefers long-term planning, perseverance, and respect for traditions over immediate gratification, and their ability to adapt to changing circumstances.
- Indulgence versus Restraint – The extent to which society indulges in the gratification of impulse and desire, preferring personal happiness and leisure over self-discipline and adherence to social norms.

Across Chapter 6, each of these dimensions made an appearance in some form, but the two themes that appeared with the most frequency were collectivism and power distance. I already spoke at length about these in the conclusion of the previous chapter, but I will briefly reassert them here.

Collectivism appears in a variety of forms. Familial relationships and filial piety are highly valued across Korean society and depict collectivism on a small scale. More largely, we see community collectivism in the workplace and in neighbourhoods. At the most sizeable end of the spectrum, we see national collectivism, the willingness to sacrifice oneself for their nation. This theme remains largely consistent over the period

of study.

Power distance is presented through a constant demonstration of socioeconomic differences, such as the conspicuous consumption of the wealthiest groups. Hierarchical social practices such as in the workplace, or the military, are also common. However, power distance is often shown to be less powerful than *han* and the belief that Korean perseverance can overpower the societal advantages given to the wealthy few.

Although higher classes have often been shown as villains, the portrayal of the working-class protagonists has transitioned to be more critical of the structures that perpetuate these inequalities. There is also a perceived increase in shows that centre on workers' rights.

The next is, to what extent are these themes culturally, economically, and socially accurate? It can be argued that society has become more vertically individualistic, a desire to be distinct and with special status, as opposed to horizontal individualism, where there is no desire for special status (Singelis et al., 1995). This can be connected to the increasingly competitive (and thus masculine) nature of education and career success. A number of factors can be attributed to this, from the Confucian value of education as a form of self-improvement, to the effects of free market capitalism and its trickle-down effect on the labour market and education.

This similarly connects to the accuracy of power distance. Whether it is the hierarchical nature of corporate culture, or inter-generational communication, the younger generation in particular appears to be more aware of, and vocal in, their displeasure with

these systems.

In both cases, although these thematic issues are highlighted and often complained about on-screen, it is rarely in combination with a genuine complaint of, or suggestion of an alternative to, the structures that created them. As was asserted by interview participants in the conclusion of the previous chapter, shows have changed over time along with larger social change, but those involved in the creative process are largely sticking to the status quo, not attempting to present any real alternative or promote change, unless society actions this first.

7.2.2 Political Economy: Manufacturing a Global Industry

Moving on to the particulars of the critical political economy and cultural studies, I sought to investigate that, asserting that a drama series is both a consumable product and a cultural item, how do business and the culture industry influence the production and content of the miniseries? How do political and economic factors, such as neoliberalism or globalisation, impact the overall identity of the miniseries?

To investigate the effects of the political economy in drama production, I primarily relied on interviews with those working across various stages of the industry, from policy writing to production and then to distribution and consumption. These participants were recruited via several methods. Initially through a combination of introduction and self-directed contact, and then more largely dependent on a snowball method.

Because of travel limitations at the time of data collection, caused by COVID-19, these interviews primarily took place via Zoom. A number of participants also completed

their questions in a written questionnaire format. For all participants, interviews took place in English. Although this was not a requirement, I ultimately recognised the benefit of using a singular language across all data collection and analysis, as it ensured I could better detect nuance and lead the direction of the interview.

All interview transcripts were then imported into NVivo and initially coded by the means detailed in Chapter 4, via the same method as the drama notes. Following this, I then evaluated the transcripts once more, noting other topics or themes of significance or prevalence, and used these in a further review of the miniseries.

Participants referred to policies from earlier administrations that sought to protect cultural heritage and largely agreed that more recent policies were driven by commercial gain. Financial crashes and economic instability were factors in deregulation, opening up market opportunities and competition. However, the free market caused small and independent production studios to fail. The decrease of independent studios, the oligopoly of media conglomerates, the restriction of funding, the relationship between the government and national networks, and the blacklisting of those speaking out against the administration all suggest the decisions are left in the hands of a conservative and wealthy few.

The government's promotion of cable television in the early 2010s brought further challenges to terrestrial networks, as programmes on these new networks were not bound by the same broadcasting regulations, often greater creative freedom, and less restrictive means of advertising.

A decrease in traditional advertising revenue and no increase in licensing fees were major contributors to the law change surrounding product placement. This brought about more foreign investment, causing friction between foreign investors and markets, and the domestic producers.

The effects of global expansion become even more significant as we consider the growth of foreign audiences. The conservatism present in these miniseries was a welcoming component in their early exports, and participants supported this by acknowledging a lack of consideration towards foreign viewers until the 2010s. However, understanding different ethnic groups and cultures has failed to progress alongside these increased exports. I argue this is because 'global' markets are merely seen as white and Western, which affects both the depiction of non-White and non-Western groups. This is a contributing factor to content shift, as the interpretation of global audiences and their presumed preferences do not accurately reflect the diversity of viewers.

Overall, it can be concluded that several political and economic factors drove change in the industry over the study period. I believe that most policy and government intervention was largely driven by the goal of economic prosperity and that historic aims of cultural heritage were largely forgotten.

Further institutional factors are involved, particularly the frequent changes to structures, including the creation of new ministries and departments. These can be attributed to reactive policy development and implementation, as aims and responsibilities could cause conflict.

The focus on neoliberalisation and free-market trade diminished the range of stories produced, whilst simultaneously causing financial strain on the industry due to the increase of competition and production costs.

To the government, and by extension, the networks, the Korean Wave was merely a profit-maximising opportunity – a means to attract more spending into cosmetics, electronics, and tourism, above any real consideration of content or the audience.

Creators, particularly smaller production houses, have been most affected. My interviews and analysis lead me to conclude that creative freedom on terrestrial networks has been stifled through a combination of funding limitations, government associations with these networks, and a level of self-regulation brought about by fear of negative audience backlash.

The proliferation of cable networks, web series, VOD providers, and other forms of new media consumption are of interest to the group of creators who want to create more progressive content. Though cultural representation on terrestrial networks has changed over time, this has largely only occurred after social change. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether these channels will remain in the status quo with domestic society or re-evaluate their position if their power and revenue are increasingly lost to these new forms.

7.2.3 Cultural Studies: Constructing a Culture

Much like the above, I similarly sought to answer: How can cultural ideologies or perspectives be attributed towards miniseries content and its thematic changes?

This line of research primarily relied on the analysis of drama content over the period of study using critical discourse analysis based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. I completed a secondary review of these notes following my interviews, taking into consideration topics and themes that were raised. These findings were then applied to the perspectives laid out by Hae Joang Cho (2005), Lee Kee Hyeung (2006) and Cho Young Han, 2011: nationalistic, neoliberal capitalist, and postcolonial, which I will now use to dissect my discoveries.

The nationalistic perspective emphasises pride in national culture. Nationalism and patriotism should be considered separately, as patriotism is largely support for the state whilst nationalism can be broken down into support for Korean cultural identity and history or ethnic nationalism, an ethnosupremacist political ideology. Overt ethnic nationalism rarely makes an explicit appearance and would not export well in an already precociously balanced Asian market.

This perspective as a whole has been amplified by the success of the Korean Wave. Nationalist products seek to differentiate themselves from their regional counterparts and make themselves distinctly Korean, but this can at times be in direct conflict with cultural accuracy.

The nationalist perspective then asserts that anything associated with the Korean Wave is inherently Korean. This is additionally relevant when we consider how representations of the country, and its culture, are often drivers of tourism and spending in other industries.

The neoliberal concentration is on social mobility and financial achievement, seeing competition as a defining characteristic of humanity. However, the notion of meritocracy – the idea that one's abilities alone are enough to ensure success – is often combined with *han* and the value of Korean perseverance.

The concept of social mobility conflicts with the Confucianist ideals of earlier historical periods which severely limited social movement but aligns with the modern image of opportunity. The depictions of neoliberalism within a now-neoliberal society seek to give praise to the system. It fosters the prevalence of a middle class, access to education and career opportunities.

The postcolonial perspective seeks to re-evaluate content through Korea's new global position, considering transnational and hybrid characteristics that appeal to domestic and international audiences, and investing in characters and stories that exceed national orientation.

As Korea's global image moves from one of poverty to power, the industry advances its efforts in showcasing its history and culture. Countries such as Japan and China, with whom Korea shares a tumultuous history, have previously attempted to either claim or eradicate aspects of traditional Korean culture. The postcolonial perspective attempts to reinstate the independence and uniqueness of Korean culture. However, the increasing dependence on foreign investment from these countries has caused friction in its depiction.

I argue that nationalist and neoliberal perspectives can be most attributed to accurate depictions of society, whilst postcolonial perspectives can be attributed to certain inaccuracies, which I ascribe this to the perceived value in the global market. Postcolonialism in some sense is a largely internal perspective, shaped by Korea's desire to move away from its colonised past. Nationalism and neoliberalism however appear more externally, how Korea showcases itself, and how its market operates globally.

If we are to align my opinions on the accuracy of these perspectives with my findings of the political economy strand, this does support my hypothesis to some extent. Prior to the start of the Korean Wave, there were already efforts to deregulate and privatise markets to help support global trade and the economy. Even before Korean popular culture became widely consumed overseas, there were efforts to showcase the country as advanced and globally competitive. Given the role of the Korean Wave in Korea's soft power initiative, it is understandable that these efforts would continue into popular culture products.

7.2.4 Conclusions

To summarise the final findings of this project, I first wish to answer, who decides what is Korean identity in the miniseries, and why? I assert that there are two main controllers of this.

Firstly, I consider audiences as potential consumers to have a significant role and that a distinction should be made between the domestic and international, who serve different roles. Domestic audiences have become, in effect, a regulatory authority over the Korean Wave. Their role has grown in sync with the development of social media and

the normalisation of sharing personal opinions online, and with the growth of international exposure. When dramas become one of the only ways in which the world sees your country, it is natural to want to see it portrayed fairly. But when it also becomes a significant way in which people interact with your country's economy, the success of the Korean Wave becomes inherently tied to your own life. I argue that the international audience plays a role in content development over time, but their role is significantly more submissive. They are not necessarily seen as having any direct impact on the content, instead merely seen as passive consumers and an opportunity to generate even more money.

Secondly, and somewhat controversially, I wish to rewrite my question, from *who* controls the identity, to *what* controls the identity. I believe that neoliberalism plays a fundamental role in both the industry's formation and culture contents, a concept that I had not originally considered.

I argue that dramas more accurately reflect neoliberalism, modernity and vernacular cosmopolitanism. In contrast to my hypothesis, I now instead assert that it was not so much a decisive change towards progressivism, but a natural move as transnationalism and transculturalism generate a new modernity, united through technology and increased critiques of power and wealth disparity.

I surmise that the intention of increasing profits was an initial catalyst in content change, but I do not consider this to be an intentional outcome. In fact, the difficulty in securing funds limited the number of operating production houses, which had to rely on tried and tested narratives and characterisations.

Initial export success was primarily driven by cheap costs for purchasing countries. As K-pop began to see commercial success in the mid to late '00s, the industry utilised idol stars to generate audiences and income. By the early 2010s, K-pop became a gateway for many international audiences into other aspects of Korean popular culture.

The consumption of film, television, electronics, and cosmetics showcased the soft power and influence of the country. Television, in particular, became a way to showcase Korea's modernity, generating tourism and further consumption. This, in turn, changed the shift from merely marketing a show to marketing an entire country and its culture. Thus, it can be argued that this was a turning point. Dramas moved from being primarily domestic products to international export.

My second question was, what does Korea want to portray as a Korean identity, domestically and internationally? Domestically, there is an increasing critique of Korea's neoliberal capitalist structure, but overall, Korea remains incredibly conservative and anti-communist, and these depictions are mirrored on-screen. In society, there is ongoing debate over women's equality and LGBT rights, but instead, the critique of capitalism feels limited to complaints of social class, without delving any deeper into intersectionality. This therefore feels like complaints are on a superficial level, an intentional decision to connect with the modern youth.

Internationally, representations seem centred around modernity and opportunity. This once again ties back to neoliberal ideologies, which emphasise globalisation. From the perspective of the government and networks, these representations seek to promote

investment. Production perspectives can still be tied to nationalism – a desire to promote the country and distinguish its uniqueness in the global market, and to postcolonialism – a desire to showcase the development of the country and its global competitiveness.

7.3 Reflections on Research Design and Methodology

From the start of this project, I acknowledged the possible problems that could arise by someone such as myself completing research on this topic. Whilst I believe that most are understanding of international academic exchange, I recognised the possibility of my own position and privilege affecting bias or subjectivity in my research process.

Wherever possible, I made a conscious effort to refrain from comparative approaches. I avoided speaking unnecessarily of American or British examples, lest it come across as indicating a 'standard' form and a deviation from it, leading to a perpetuation of the notion of the Other. Yet, I was not prepared for just how pervasive Western cultural supremacy is in existing literature. Even in cases such as discussing cultural imperialism, which I had initially seen as critical of Western cultural influence, I became understanding of its problems, of its assumption that Western culture has anything to do with cultural change elsewhere. It seemed that almost any theory discussing societal change or cultural development assumed a connection to the West. Even now as I write East and West, we need to recognise the inaccuracy of these terms and the connotations embedded within them.

It was therefore imperative that I placed Korean and Asian voices at the forefront of this study, and I did my best to use their works when speaking of their culture. I used

Korean perspectives to lead the cultural studies chapter and interviewed those within the industry to share a true experience.

At the start of this project, I could not have foreseen the outbreak of COVID-19 and what that meant for me. It entirely changed the working style for my full-time job, and deeply affected the ways by which I could complete data collection. I wish to briefly consider some of the shortcomings of my research design, and aspects I would re-evaluate if I had the opportunity to do this again.

7.3.1 Interviews

Because of COVID-19, I initially delayed my interview recruitment process. I had envisaged that I would be able to travel to Korea to complete at least some of these interviews in person. By 2021, there was still no end in sight of travel restrictions, so I had to reconsider my entire plan of field research and begin the recruitment and completion of my interviews online.

There were significant difficulties in acquiring participants, particularly those working in the government areas of policy. In conversation with another PhD student based in Canada who was following a similar line of research, they also expressed difficulty in participant recruitment in this area. As they are a native Korean fluent in the language, I could at least assume it was not a language barrier preventing individuals from participating.

Upon reflection, I would have benefitted from recruiting participants who formerly worked in various parts of the industry. This is not a concern over maintaining anonymity, as I believe participants responded truthfully, but given their current

position, their perspective may be limited. An individual who was once employed but is now an outsider may have displayed a different opinion or perspective.

Much of the first analysis stage was complete by the time I began interviewing participants. The benefit was that I was well-versed in the content and could engage in conversation, particularly with those involved in production. The responses from participants significantly changed the direction of the thesis and led to new lines of research and analysis.

Although I cited the benefits of completing interviews online in my methodology chapter, I admit that completing these amid COVID-19 proved to be particularly challenging and potentially detrimental to the overall data collected. Personally, I felt a lack of personal connection, which could have been better developed if these interviews had taken place in person. In addition, it limited the opportunities for further networking, both in regard to interview participants, but also at academic events.

7.3.2 Miniseries Analysis

In the earliest stages of this project, I was predominantly focused on the critical discourse analysis of the miniseries. I sought to find a critical and measurable way by which I could analyse these shows. The initial incorporation of Hofstede's dimensions appealed because they were clearly defined, and I could utilise existing results and scores to examine the accuracy and authenticity of the shows. However, the looseness of these dimensions meant my own knowledge or understanding of the theme limited the topics I ultimately discussed.

Given the large sample size, there are always examples of opposing sides of the

spectrum, limiting the ability to make genuinely assertive conclusions, but smaller samples on a particular subgenre, such as political or historical, would have underscored the likeness of productions rather than significant differences within the form itself.

As a whole, I support the final design of this project and believe it is an original contribution to knowledge in this field. That being said, I think critical political economy and cultural studies are both such vast topics individually that there was always going to be an issue in completely covering both subjects and doing so in a balanced way. Some certain issues or examples were not meaningful enough to warrant inclusion here but are of applicability to these subjects as a whole. For this reason, I am certain there are opportunities to develop this work further in the future.

In retrospect, I believe this line of research would have benefitted from magnitude coding as part of the analysis process. For example, power distance index could have been subcoded as PDI+ or PDI- to analyse examples of high or low power distance present. If the capacity for more quantitative analysis was available, there would be the option to use the numbers to compare a 'score' with Hofstede's findings, both as a total score and scores over time.

7.4 Contribution to Knowledge

I would like to take this opportunity to return to my introduction, where I detailed what I considered as contributions to knowledge and address how these have been achieved.

Firstly, I identified this work to be significant in the subject field through its discussion of both political economy and cultural studies within a single project, whilst placing Asian and Korean academic works and theories at the forefront of my methodological

design. By doing so, I aimed to find the influential attributes in decision-making, production and distribution processes across the life course of drama production and consumption. This was achieved through interviews with professionals across all stages of the regulation, production and consumption cycle, in combination with a well-constructed and methodological discourse analysis of a drama sample.

This leads on to the second aspect of originality in this work, which is the selection and implementation of this sample. Despite a hugely significant increase in the number of published papers on this topic since the start of my PhD, the scale and controls of my sample are exceptional. This is evidenced through my academic references, particularly those from utilised in Chapter 6, where papers often only deliberate one or two case studies. By utilising a sample of this scale, there is a greater opportunity to discuss larger changes over time.

Finally, I consider this work to be original and a contribution to the subject due to my decision to focus exclusively on terrestrial networks in a pre-2017 Netflix era. Certainly in the past couple of years, following the global success of shows such as *Squid Game*, there is what I consider to be a new discourse emerging in Korean television studies. Recent discourse often centres around shows emerging from cable or streaming services, making no distinction between the modes of production and distribution, both of which are highly significant in this industry. However, focusing solely on the streaming era fails to consider and recognise the influence and lasting impact of terrestrial networks, and their historic role in the industry's development.

7.5 Areas for Further Research

Since the beginning of this research project in 2017, there have been significant

developments and changes across the industry, both domestically and internationally. Netflix has become one of the largest investors in Korean dramas. As a private corporation, they seek to maximise profit. As they operate internationally, they are less bound by the local standards and expectations of drama format or content. In the case of K-dramas, this is most evidently presented through the increasing use of a multi-series format.

The Korean miniseries has largely been identified by its single-series format. Even in the case of hugely successful shows, a further season is rarely made. However, Netflix has begun to normalise multiple series with fewer episodes. Following this, cable and terrestrial networks also began to announce further series of successful dramas. The maintenance of the status quo is perhaps a reason as to why this change was not actioned before, but in the era of increasing battles for funding and audience share, there is a level of assurance when you extend an already successful series, rather than making an entirely new one. This change could bring around larger changes to content and cultural representation. With more episodes and airtime, there is more time to dedicate towards character development, narrative nuance, and cultural detail.

Given the extensive references made to web series, I believe their impact on more traditional broadcast series will be noticeable and will become a significant topic of future academic discussion. I believe this also connects to a larger conversation about other source material being used in drama series. In my sample alone, fifteen dramas (26 per cent) were adapted from existing content, such as manhwa and novels. Webtoon (online manhwa) adaptations also appear to be common in web series. It would be interesting to compare the depiction of some themes between original and adapted

works. There could be an indication that changes occurred earlier in manhwa or fiction formats, which then later were carried across into drama production.

7.6 Final Conclusions

My final point is an emphasis on the role I consider neoliberalisation to have played in the Korean Wave and its contents. There is a dichotomy in public service broadcasting in Korea. We can argue that licence fee-funded programming creates societal and public value, whilst commercially advertised content prioritises profit. The terrestrial television networks of discussion here are attempting to balance public interest against privatised commercial interest. As long as advertising revenue is the main form of income, content can never truly focus on promoting national culture, as it seeks to meet the needs of its investors over its consumers.

Increased competition between networks and media distribution options can allow for more dramas to be made with the potential for more original storylines. However, this free market also ensures a need for guaranteed sales, resulting in consistent elements that do not overtly push the status quo.

The interest in international audiences has largely been based on an interest in global trade, as the increase in drama consumption leads to higher spending in other industries. As many international audiences consume via VOD, the difference between terrestrial and cable is no longer distinct, and terrestrial networks may have to consider this going forward.

The influence of the drama series should not be diminished. Television showcases civilisations and societies around the world and can do so through multiple cultural

perspectives. Audiences are no longer bound by geographical limitations, as popular culture provides a connection between countries and their people, removed from politics and ideology.

Throughout the past seven years in which I have been working on this project, I have had the tremendous opportunity to watch the entire landscape of global television consumption change. It cannot be understated how hugely important this is. We are simultaneously fortunate now to access content showcasing the full breadth of culture, history, and ways of life from around the globe, whilst also experiencing a huge and arguably detrimental shift to all art as it is reduced purely to its sale value.

It has been my experience, as it has been the experience of many others – television is a gateway to culture.

Appendix A: Miniseries Sample (by Year)

Title	Network	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Winter Sonata	KBS2	x															
Summer Scent	KBS2		x														
All In	SBS		x														
Ireland	MBC			x													
I'm Sorry I Love You	KBS2			x													
Full House	KBS2			x													
Stairway to Heaven	SBS			x													
My Lovely Sam Soon	MBC				x												
Love Story in Harvard	SBS				x												
Resurrection	KBS2				x												
Mr Goodbye	KBS2					x											
Princess Hours	MBC					x											
The Devil	KBS2						x										
War of Money	SBS						x										
Prince Hours	MBC						x										
1st Shop of Coffee Prince	MBC						x										
Iljimae	SBS							x									
Beethoven Virus	MBC							x									
Boys Over Flowers	KBS2								x								
Iris	KBS2								x								
You're Beautiful	SBS								x								

Title	Network	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Secret Garden	SBS									x							
Playful Kiss	MBC									x							
Athena: Goddess of War	KBS2									x							
The Slave Hunters	KBS2									x							
Sungkyunkwan Scandal	KBS2									x							
Poseidon	KBS2										x						
City Hunter	SBS										x						
Dream High	KBS2										x						
Heartstrings	MBC										x						
My Princess	MBC										x						
A Gentleman's Dignity	SBS											x					
School 2013	KBS2											x					
The King 2 Hearts	MBC											x					
To The Beautiful You	SBS											x					
7th Grade Civil Servant	MBC												x				
Iris II	KBS2												x				
I Hear Your Voice	SBS												x				
The Heirs	SBS												x				
Doctor Stranger	SBS													x			
It's Okay, That's Love	SBS													x			
Birth of a Beauty	SBS													x			
Healer	KBS2													x			

Appendix B: Interview Profiles

Participant ID	Position	Company	Interview Date
A	Creative Content Consultant	Rakuten Viki	23rd February 2021
B	Producer/Director	Mongjakso	5th April 2021
C	Korean Entertainment Content Creator	Freelance	16th April 2021
D	Senior Manager, Global Distribution	MBC	20th April 2021
E	Executive Producer	Gwangju Foreign Language Network	22nd April 2021
F	Writer/Podcast Host	Freelance	22nd May 2021
G	Writer/Podcast Host	Freelance	22nd May 2021
H	Writer/Podcast Host	Freelance	22nd May 2021
I	Writer/Producer	Dramabeans	18th June 2021
J	Broadcasting Regulation Advisor	Korea Communication Commission/Korea Broadcasting Commission/Ministry of Science and ICT	20th July 2021
K	High Level Cultural Policy Officer	CJ ENM	20th July 2021
L	High Level Cultural Policy Officer	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism	20th July 2021

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

<u>CONSENT FORM</u>

Title of Study: Conscious Creation?: The Development of Korean Cultural Identity through Hallyu's Global Expansion

Researcher: Rebecca Lewis

I have been given the Participation Information Sheet and/or had its contents explained to me.	Yes	No
I have had an opportunity to ask any questions and I am satisfied with the answers given.	Yes	No
I understand I have a right to withdraw from the research at any time and I do not have to provide a reason.	Yes	No
I understand that if I withdraw from the research any data included in the results will be removed apart from anonymised data.	Yes	No
I would like to receive information relating to the results from this study.	Yes	No
I wish to receive a copy of this Consent form.	Yes	No
I confirm I am willing to be a participant in the above research study.	Yes	No
I note the data collected may be retained in an archive.	Yes	No
I note my data will be fully anonymised.	Yes	No

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

This consent form will be stored separately from any data you provide so that your responses remain anonymous.

I confirm I have provided a copy of the Participant Information Sheet approved by the Research Ethics Committee to the participant and fully explained its contents. I have given the participant an opportunity to ask questions, which have been answered.

Researcher's Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix D: Other Referenced Works (Alphabetical by English Title)

Autumn in My Heart (2000, KBS2)

Backstreet of Seoul (1962, KBS)

Bridget Jones's Diary (2001, dir.: Sharon Maguire)

Dream High 2 (2012, KBS2)

Eyes of Dawn (1991, MBC)

Hana Yori Dango (2005, TBS)

Jewel in the Palace (2003, MBC)

Joseon Exorcist (2021, SBS)

Jumong (2006, MBC)

Legend (2007, MBC)

Man Who Dies to Live (2017, MBC),

Meteor Garden (2001, CTS)

Meteor Garden (2009, Hunan TV)

Meteor Garden (2018, Hunan TV)

Moon Lovers Scarlet Heart Ryeo (2016, SBS)

Notting Hill (1999, dir.: Roger Michell)

Parasite (2020, dir.: Bong Joon Ho)

Penthouse 3 (2020, SBS)

Racket Boys (2021, SBS)

Real Theatre (1964-1985, KBS)

Reply 1997 (2012, tvN)

Sandglass (1995, SBS)

Snowdrop (2021, JTBC)

Squid Game (2021, Netflix)

Strong Girl Bong Soon (2017, JTBC)

Susa Banjang (1971-1989, MBC)

The Crown (2016-2023, Netflix)

Titanic (1997, dir.: James Cameron)

Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok Joo (2016, MBC)

Yeong-I's Diary (1962-1963 and 1976-1979, KBS1)

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