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**Hallyu and its Economic and Cultural Impact on South
Korea: BTS as an Example**

Hallyu a její ekonomický a kulturní dopad na Jižní Koreu: BTS jako
příklad

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ABSTRAKT

Název práce:	Hallyu a její ekonomický a kulturní dopad na Jižní Koreu: BTS jako příklad
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Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá Hallyu a jejím ekonomickým a kulturním dopadem na Jižní Koreu. Zaměří se nejdříve na samotné Hallyu a jeho význam, vznik a historii. Poté čtenáři přiblíží historii hudebního žánru K-Pop. Jako příklad dopadu Hallyu a K-Pop na Jižní Koreu se tato práce blíže podívá na skupinu *BTS*. Práce se pokusí dle různých akademických prací a článků v médiích vyměřit jaký dopad tato skupina má na Jižní Koreu a jak se vůbec tento dopad měří, či jestli se vůbec tento dopad dá kvantifikovat.

ABSTRACT

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The main topic of this bachelor thesis is Hallyu and its economic and cultural impact on South Korea. First, the thesis will cover Hallyu and its meaning, emergence, and history. After that, the thesis will explain the music genre K-Pop and its history. To calculate the impact of Hallyu on South Korea, this thesis will use the K-Pop group *BTS* as an example. While looking at different academic writings and news articles in media the main aim of this thesis is to calculate the impact the group has on South Korea and how this impact is calculated and how or whether it is possible to quantify said impact.

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TRANSCRIPTION

In this thesis, the names are written in the romanization commonly used in the media. Afterward in the brackets, the names are written in the Korean alphabet and then written using the “McCune – Reischauer“ transcription of the Korean alphabet. The order in which the names are written is as follows: first is the last name followed by the given name as is the order in the Korean language.

Vowels		Consonants	
Korean	Romanization	Korean	Romanization (initial/final)
ㅏ	a	ㄱ	k/g
ㅑ	ya	ㄴ	n
ㅓ	ǒ	ㄷ	d/t
ㅕ	yǒ	ㄹ	r/l
ㅗ	o	ㅁ	m
ㅛ	yo	ㅂ	b/p
ㅜ	u	ㅅ	s
ㅠ	yu	ㅇ	-/ng
ㅡ	ǔ	ㅈ	ch/j
ㅣ	i	ㅊ	ch'
ㅞ	ae	ㅋ	k'
ㅙ	yae	ㅌ	t'
ㅚ	e	ㅍ	p'
ㅜ이	ye	ㅎ	h
ㅟ	oe	ㄱ	kk
ㅟ이	wi	ㄷ	tt
ㅟ이	iü	ㅂ	pp
ㅟㅏ	wa	ㅅ	ss
ㅟㅑ	wae	ㅈ	tch
ㅟㅓ	wǒ		
ㅟㅕ	we		

Introduction

The Hallyu wave refers to the global popularity of South Korea's cultural economy exporting pop culture, entertainment, music, TV dramas and movies. Hallyu is a Chinese term which, when translated literally means "Korean Wave" (Kim, 2015: 154). These past few years the Hallyu wave got even more popularized. There is more than just one reason for this popularization. For sure Korean dramas and movies helped with popularization. Especially the Korean movie *Parasite*, which won several awards (BBC News, 2020), and the Korean drama *Squid Game* that became very popular during the pandemic (MacDonald, 2022). However, one of the biggest reasons for the popularization of Hallyu is without a doubt K-Pop and especially the boy group *BTS*, who found their place in the Western market and Western media in these past few years. Especially during the world Covid-19 pandemic, this group became more successful in breaking milestones and records no K-Pop group has ever broken before (Mamo, 2020).

The main aim of this thesis is to explore the economic and cultural impact the Hallyu wave has on South Korea with later setting the group *BTS* and their career as an example to explore the impact more deeply and see how the impact could be calculated.

The bachelor thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter is explaining what the Hallyu wave means and what it consists of as well the history of this phenomenon. For a better understanding of this phenomenon, the thesis shortly explains South Korean history leading to the Hallyu wave. It also describes different types of the Hallyu wave and the presidential views and opinions on Hallyu. At the end of the first chapter, the thesis focuses on Hallyu in recent years and what researchers think we might expect in the near future.

The second chapter is focused on K-Pop itself. It shortly explains what type of music genre K-Pop is. Then for a better understanding of this music genre it explains the history of popular music in South Korea before K-Pop. It also describes the history of K-Pop itself. At the end of the second chapter, the thesis explains how a K-Pop group is formed and how it works. It also shortly focuses on the dark, not so often talked about, side of K-Pop.

The third and last chapter is focused only on the group *BTS*. First, the thesis describes their history, how the group came to be, their career, and their success. Then the thesis tries to explain what academic writers and the media think the reason is for the group's enormous success could be. After that, the thesis explains how the group's impact on South Korea is calculated in both academic writing and in the media. The last part of this chapter is looking at the group's latest news and how they are shown in the media and what the media and fans think about those matters and how those matters could possibly affect South Korea.

1 The Hallyu Wave

Hallyu (“Korean Wave”) is a term that is rather well-known worldwide. It refers to the cultural phenomenon of South Korean popular culture getting more and more known because Korea exports dramas, referred to as “K-Dramas”, Korean movies, food, beauty, fashion, and Korean music, nowadays widely known as K-Pop (Kim, 2015: 154).

The Hallyu Wave has been officially recognized as a form of soft power. It is an important economic asset to South Korea, producing income through both tourism and export (Bond, 2022).

1.1 Origin of the word Hallyu Wave

Hallyu is also written as Hanryu in some types of literature. The origin of this word comes from *han* 韓, which means Korean, and *ryu* 流, which translates as “wave” (Kim, 2015: 155).

1.2 History of the Hallyu Wave

1.2.1 National History Leading to Hallyu Wave

In the 1970s and 1980s, South Korea was ruled by military dictators. Those dictatorships took a great deal in preserving South Korea’s cultural heritage and tradition. This might have been due to the history of Imperial Japan’s colonization and its pursuit to erase the Korean language and culture. However, it is mostly believed to be used to promote the culture abroad to increase the relationships with other nations and their cooperation (Lux, 2021: 88–93).

The first attempt to construct a national cultural policy is recognized as “The first five-year cultural development plan” from the year 1974 made by the Ministry of Culture and Public Information. When it comes to the cultural policy during the Fifth Republic, which was established in the year 1981, it was almost the same as the previous policy, which regarded culture as a part of the national arts. Starting with President Chun Doo-Hwan (Chōntuhwan), who ruled from 1980 to 1988, cultural promotion was first stated as a national duty (Kim & Jin, 2016: 5520–5521).

1.3 Beginning of the Hallyu Wave

The term was first used in the late 1990s by the Chinese press describing the popularity of Korean pop culture in China and other East Asian countries. This was due to the unparalleled success of Korean dramas like *What is Love* and *Winter Sonata*. The popularity of these dramas was most evident in China and Japan. However, it slowly spread further, to major parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe (Ganghariya & Kanozia, 2020: 177–178).

Next to Korean dramas, Korean movies also found popularity in other parts of the world. One of the earliest examples of this fact could be the action movie *Shiri* (쉬리, Shwiri) from the year 1999. It became the most-watched movie in South Korea, breaking the record set by the movie *Titanic* a few years prior (Jung, 2022: 10). Additionally, it also became successful outside of South Korea which helped to persuade the government to provide more opportunities to filmmakers. It also helped with changing the rules of filmmaking into less severe ones (Ganghariya & Kanozia, 2020: 177–178).

Another export gaining popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s is K-Pop. Specifically, the year 1996 can be considered as the beginning of K-pop music since this is the year a boy group called *H.O.T* (에이치티, Eich'it'i) debuted. This group became very successful in South Korea and overseas, especially in China, with their debut album *We Hate all Kinds of Violence*. This fact set them apart from other Korean singers and groups, who had succeeded only in South Korea. They also were the first group to hold a concert in China. Many call this the beginning of the international popularity of K-pop music overseas since up until this day entertainment companies are using H.O.T's success as a blueprint for how to turn their groups into popular ones (Jung, 2022: 11–12).

1.4 Types of the Hallyu Wave in History

As seen in the table number 1, Hallyu Wave can be divided into 3 different phases depending on its main product and the time of the said product.¹ Those phases are called *Hallyu 1.0*, *Hallyu 2.0*, and *Hallyu 3.0* respectively (Kim, 2015: 157).

¹ The overview of this chapter is based on Kim (2015): 154–159.

The Past, Present, and Future of Hallyu			
	Hallyu 1.0	Hallyu 2.0	Hallyu 3.0
Period	1995-2005	2006-Present	Foreseeable future
Area of Distribution	Asia	Asia, Europe, and North America	The whole world
Target	K-dramas and movies)	K-pop idols	Genre-diversification
Way of Distribution	TV broadcasting, CDs, Videos	Internet	Cross-media
Directivity	Asia noticing South Korea	Overseas expansion	Turning into mainstream

Table 1 - The Past, Present, and Future of Hallyu

Source: Simplified version by this author (M.N.) of a table created by Kim (2015: 158)

All these popular products between the 1990s and early 2000s mentioned above are nowadays seen as the first part of the Hallyu Wave otherwise called Hallyu 1.0. That was the beginning of the phenomenon we know about today. The main strength of Hallyu 1.0 was the gaining popularity of Korean dramas and movies mostly just in East Asian countries (Kim, 2015: 158).

The second Wave, called Hallyu 2.0, is more focused on K-pop idols and Korean actors. The Hallyu 2.0 started around the year 2006 and continues until today. One of the biggest differences from Hallyu 1.0 was the area, where products of this Wave saw popularity. It continued in East Asia but with this Wave, Hallyu Wave and its products started being popular both in North America and Europe. The biggest leader of Hallyu 2.0 was K-pop with its groups like Girl's Generation (소녀시대, Sonyöside), Kara (카라, K'ara), and Big Bang (빅뱅, Pik'paeng). Those were a few of the first groups that made it to the American market bringing the new music genre, K-pop, outside of Asia.

It is believed that the change from *Hallyu 2.0* to *Hallyu 3.0* is happening now or will happen in the near future. In this third phase of the Hallyu Wave, the focus is on moving from just music, movies, and dramas into more fields. Nowadays, more and more Korean idols are also actors (Kim, 2015: 159).

Korean idols are one of the biggest promoters of different Korean brands, who are slowly expanding outside of Korea. One of the reasons why this is possible is due to having Korean celebrities acting also as brand ambassadors. Loyal fans are willing to buy different products from beauty to cars just because their idols are advertising them (Kim, 2015: 158–159).

1.5 Presidential Views on the Hallyu Wave

As Hallyu Wave slowly became a bigger part of South Korea's economy, the presidential support to use its soft power to the fullest started to be there as well.² The first official president to ever mention the term Hallyu was President Kim Dae-Jung (1998–2003) in the year 2001 during his speech for the Third Conference of Tourism Promotion. During this speech, the message he delivered was about how Hallyu Wave should be developed in the future to be a lasting and beneficial part of South Korea's economy. For this to be possible he expanded the budget for the cultural sector.

President Roh Moo-Hyun (2003–2008) was following in the steps of his predecessor. However, he also included the viewpoint of possible mutual cultural exchange and cultural diversity. As an example, Roh's first mention of the term Hallyu Wave was during his visit to China, where he highlighted a possible cultural exchange between South Korea and China (Kim & Jin, 2016: 5522–5523).

Once the political power went from liberal to conservative at the end of 2007, the new president Lee Myung-Bak (2008–2013) demanded the industrialization of culture during his inaugural speech. With that, he also used the Hallyu Wave's growing popularity as a technique to improve the national image. Overall, it is possible to say that during his presidential term, his target was to develop Hallyu Wave as a tool to increase the national image and the national economy.

Once again, the successor after Lee Myung-Bak, Park Geun-Hye (2013–2018), mentioned Hallyu Wave during her inaugural speech. She decided cultural enrichment would be one of the four administrative priorities during the term of her presidency. She promised to expand the success of Korean culture with many different policies to help its growth (Kim & Jin, 2016: 5526–5527).

² The overview of this chapter is based on Kim, T. Y., & Jin, D. Y. (2016): 5522–5527.

1.6 Recent Years

The Hallyu Wave has been steadily growing since its starting point in the early 90s.³ From little kids to older people all around the world, the products that were at first only known in South Korea, are nowadays known to foreigners as well (Jung, 2016: 10–12).

In recent years the Hallyu Wave is slowly developing into something more complex. However, the old exports of Korean movies, dramas, and music have passed milestones never seen before. For example, movies such as *Parasite* (기생충, Kisaengch'ung), *Train to Busan* (부산행, Pusanhaeng), or *The Handmaiden* (아가씨, Agassi) have been nominated or have won some of the most prestigious film awards such as Oscars or Golden Globe. Already mentioned *Parasite* was the first non-English movie to ever win an Academy Award for Best Picture (BBC News, 2020). It also won a golden globe and BAFTA, which stands for British Academy of Film and Television Arts (IMBd, n.d.).

Similar to movies, Korean dramas have expanded as well and nowadays there are millions of people watching them. Some of the critically acclaimed K-dramas are *Squid Game* (오징어 게임, Ojingö Keim), *Vincenzo* (빈센조, Pinsenjo), *Descendants of the Sun* (태양의 후예, T'aeyangüi Huye) and *Sweet Home* (스위트홈, Süwit'hom).

As a matter of fact, *Squid Game* became the most-watched show on Netflix of all time. It pulled 1.65 billion hours in 28 days since its premiere on September 17th, which is corresponding to more than 182 000 years in total (Spangler 2021). Besides that, it was also nominated for over 60 different awards. Those awards include a BAFTA or Screen Actors Guilds Awards for example. In the end, it won over 25 of those nominations, making *Squid Game* one of the most awarded K-drama to date (MacDonald, 2022).

The last one of the well-known Korean products is K-pop. Nowadays K-pop has become a huge phenomenon all over the world. Idol groups such as *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (방탄소년단, Pangt'ansonyöndan), mostly abbreviated as *BTS*, *BLACKPINK* (블랙핑크, Püllaekp'ingk'ü), *TWICE* (트와이스, Tüwaisü) and *STRAY KIDS* (스트레이 키즈, Süt'ünei K'ichü) have assembled dedicated fanbases that helped them break long-standing music records, set mostly by non-Asian artists in the past. *BTS*, especially, has a formidable career that will be more explored later in the thesis (Jung, 2016: 10–12).

³ The overview of this chapter is based on Jung (2016): 10–12.

2 K-Pop

K-Pop is nowadays one of the most popular South Korean exports. According to Jin Dal-Yong “K-pop is mostly known by younger generation.” (Jin, 2016, p. 111). It is usually youth music accompanied by dynamic dance. It is a mix of Korean style performance influenced by Western countries. This means it is using the typical Korean performance with its visualization, dance moves, and fashion while combining Western sounds such as Hip-hop, R&B, Jazz, disco, etc (Suryani, 2020: 48). That gives K-pop attractiveness and uniqueness so there are people who enjoy it both in South Korea and worldwide. However, it is no longer seen as a mix of two cultures but as its own unique culture (Jin, 2016: 111).

Since the year 2018, K-pop saw remarkable revenue growth. It reached 17.9% in revenue growth and by 2020 the growth was as big as 44.8% making it the fastest-growing market of the year. According to the International Federation of Phonographic Industry’s *Global Music Report* of 2019, K-pop ranked 6th among the top ten music markets worldwide. It also stated that groups *BTS* and *BLACKPINK* were the artists that were leading this market growth (Nensee, 2022).

2.1 Popular Music Before K-Pop

The evolution of Korean popular music can be divided into three parts. The first part is from the 1920s to the 1950s. This means the biggest influence during the beginning of Korean popular music comes from Japanese music during the colonial era and then from American music during the liberation era (Kim, 2012: 14).

The second phase starts from the 1960s to the early 1990s. During those times Korea went through modernization and industrialization by military dictatorships. The biggest influence during this time was politics. Culture overall was seen as a support for the authority and a way how to manipulate the population to ignore some problematic actions of the authority.

The last part starts in the 1990s after South Korea freed itself from the military rules of the past and entered an era of civilian government. The K-pop we know today is believed to have emerged during this time (Kim, 2012: 14).

2.1.1 Popular Music from the Japanese Colonial Era to the 1950s

As stated before, the first part of the evolution of Korean popular music started around the 1920s during the time of Japanese colonization. Under the rule of the Japanese Empire, modern media began to emerge. Newspapers and magazines started to get published and radio broadcasting started during these years as well. In politics, modern culture was used as an influence to promote Japanese culture, which also was used as an obstacle to traditional Korean culture. During those times recordings were inspected by the *Japanese Government-General of Korea* and made to be recorded again if deemed unfit to be released, which made it hard for Korean popular music to develop to its full potential at that time (Haggard et al., 1997).

In 1926 a song called *Glorification of Death* sung by soprano singer Yun Sim-Deok (윤심덕, Yunsimdök) is believed to be the birth of popular music as a full-fledged industry. The popularity of this song and its singer are the reasons why overseas record labels thought about Korea as a possible new market. In 1927 and 1928 very well known record labels *Columbia Records* and *Victor Records* respectively opened their offices in Seoul. In 1933 *Okeh Records* was the first record label established by a Korean. During those times *Kyongsong Broadcasting Corporation*, today known as *Korean Broadcasting System* or simply *KBS*, launched a radio service. However, due to the little number of available receivers, the impact is believed to be almost non-existent. In the 1930s phonographs became widely available, which made it possible for the market of popular music to expand dramatically (Kim, 2012: 14–20).

Four music genres and their influence shaped the earliest form of Korean popular music. At first, there were two music genres. Popular folk music known as *Tongsok minyo* and folk vocal music sung by professional singers known as *Japga*. The mix of those two genres became so popular that it became a new genre, a second genre that shaped early Korean music. This new genre is called *Sinminyo*, which are new folk songs. The third genre was influenced by Western music, specifically by Western classics, jazz, and folk music. The fourth genre was simply Japanese music.

All of those combined settled as a new popular genre in the 1930s, which later became known as *trot*. This genre is known for its sorrowful *shinpa*-mood lyrics and the pleasure-seeking rhythm with simple and hedonistic qualities. *Shinpa* was at that time a new theatre genre from Japan, where the main feature was a tragic story full of grief (Kim, 2012: 14–20).

2.1.2 Liberation and Korean War

As Korea was independent of the Japanese colonial period in 1945 and few years later the country got divided into two different ones, Korean popular music also went through different changes. *Trot* music was still one of the most popular music genres. However, American songs also became a big influence during those times. Shortly after the Liberation new record labels were established. This time completely Korean without the Japanese overlooking its work (Lie, 2012: 342–343).

Trot is known for its sorrowful lyrics. During the Japanese colonial period the lyrics were mostly about the feeling of despair this period brought to the population. However, during the Liberation period and Korean War, the main topic in the lyrics changed to the despair people felt due to the separation of the country.

The dance craze was a new genre that began in the 1950s. American songs with dance rhythms were the main influence. It is believed this genre got developed as an escape for the population from the horrors of the Korean War. The United States was by some seen almost as a utopian country full of dreams (Kim, 2012: 21–24).

2.1.3 Popular Music in the 1960s and 1970s

During the 1960s, Korea's economic development was the main political topic, at least for the military government that influenced and censored the public discourse. As a propagation of the political ideology, mass media (especially TV broadcastings), were used, which greatly helped with the propagation of popular music. However, censorship of popular music was established in the year 1966 (Paik, 2001: 539–542)

American-style music, which began in the 1950s, found its place in mainstream music during the 1960s. It was mostly due to the American army stationed in Korea. The lyrics switched from sorrowful to typical life problems of the middle-class population. This can be because buying albums started to become popular mostly amongst the middle class. After all, it was them who were able to afford to buy albums. *Trot* kept its place in mainstream popular music. Its lyrics were describing the sorrowful feelings of the Korean population during those times of change (Kim & Saeji, 2021: 120–123).

The 1970s, just like the 1960s, were times when the military regime promoted rapid economic growth. However, during those times public uprisings broke out and social conflicts were heightening, especially among students (Paik, 2001: 539–542).

Young students rejecting the old culture and opinions of their parents were the main impulse of new Korean popular culture simply referred to as *Youth Culture*. This new phenomenon started in the United States in the 1960s, in South Korea it came a decade later. Youth culture was symbolized by long-hair, blue jeans, and folk songs sung accompanied by acoustic guitars. Those songs were inspired by Western folk songs. The main topic of those songs was the rejection of the old generation and the almost rebellious wish for a change.

Youth culture with its music was on the rise, especially during the first half of the 1970s. However, during the second half, the government and its *Yushin Constitution* started once again a censorship and rule over music. Due to the censorship *Youth Culture* and its music became once again unfavorable and were made to leave the mainstream market to mostly students' underground establishments.

Given the rising popularity of *Youth Culture*, the popularity of the *Trot* was decreasing. However, after 1975 *Trot* singers became part of the mainstream market once again. But still, it was music enjoyed mostly by older generations. The younger generation did not feel the nostalgia and sorrow from the Japanese Colonization, the Liberation, or the division of the country. That is the reason why *Trot* singers changed the genre a little bit while mixing the typical sound with rock, go-go, or disco sounds and tempo (Kim, 2012: 35–47).

2.1.4 Popular Music from the 1980s to the 1990s

The military regime in the 1980s was even more strict one than its predecessor. Cruel censorship rules and a reform of the newspapers and broadcasting systems were put in place. One of the biggest changes during this period was the newly emerging market consumers - teenagers. The change was due to the new type of music which was more focused on the performance and dance aspect of the music. This divided the music market into three parts. *Trot* was still the favorite music of the older generation, while new dance music got popular with the younger generation, especially teenagers. Ballads found a solid fanbase in both groups. Pop ballads had lyrics that appealed more to a younger audience (Kim, 2012: 50–53).

Starting in the 1970s there were protest singer clubs in different South Korean universities, mostly hidden in the underground market. They did not bring the popular music that was hyped by the mainstream media. For those who frequented these clubs, the mainstream songs were not about the real-life problems everyone was going through. In the 1980s those singer clubs became better known due to the increasing conflict between military and people's resistance, emerging as a symbol of the resistance and the fight for democracy (Kim, 2012: 60–63).

The 1990s are known mostly for the slow change and democratization of the country. It was also during those years that the phenomenon of K-Pop saw its beginnings. The first very distinguished group, believed by some to have been the beginning of K-Pop, with unique music that surprised the public, was *Seo Taiji and Boys* (서태지와 아이들, Söt'aejiwa Aitül) (Jung, 2022: 11–12). However, the more common view is that the group *H.O.T.* represents the beginning of K-Pop (Jung, 2022: 11–12).

2.2 History of K-pop

The slow change from music being just a physical market, where consumers had to buy the products to enjoy it, to online streaming platforms is one of the main reasons why K-Pop could become the genre we know today. It was not until the years 1999 and 2000 that the online-based music services *Soribada* and *Bugs Music* were established. With them, the music record market could completely switch to an online one and reach a far bigger audience. The producers also decided to switch their focus on the younger teenage fans as their main customer group (Lee et al., 2016).

2.2.1 First Generation

In the beginning, it was very hard to differentiate between dance music groups and idol groups. They both focused on the performance and dance aspects of their music. However, idol groups started going through special training period under the leadership of their recording agencies during those times. This can be seen as almost the only difference between idol groups and dance music groups since their music was almost the same (Kim, 2012: 81–84).

The beginning of K-Pop can be dated to the group and its immediate success upon debut. It is also believed to be the beginning of the First Generation of idol groups (Lee, 2021).

Other successful K-Pop groups in the First Generation are with *H.O.T.* used as a guide until today. A few examples of those groups are *Secks Kies*, who had a very similar career to the group *H.O.T.*, *Shinhwa* (신화, Sinhwa), which debuted in the year 1998 and is active until today, and *G.O.D* (지오디, Chiodi), who are mostly known for their approachable image they had when it came to their fans.

The leading girl K-Pop groups in the First Generation were *S.E.S* (에스이에스, Esüiesü) and *Fin.K.L* (핑클, P'ingk'ül). The biggest difference between those groups was their images. *S.E.S.*'s group image was about cute and shy girls, while *Fin.K.L* took more of a mature concept.

During the years when these groups were active being in a fandom was very different to what it is now. Physical sales were still the main part of counting how successful a group is. Fans were recording performances on TV, and if there was a possibility to attend a concert, fans had to queue for hours to get a chance to buy tickets (Lee, 2021).

2.2.2 Second Generation

Starting with the Second Generation the timing of the generations gets a little bit tricky. There is no exact rule on when one generation starts and when it ends. This is mostly decided by fans, and it differs by a few years. Overall, it is believed that Second Generation started around the mid-2000s and ended sometime around 2010 to 2012 (Sauer, 2021).

Those groups started gaining popularity outside of Korea, sometimes even outside of Asia on a bigger scale than its precentors. Their recording companies switched to recording and managing companies that took care of almost every aspect of their artist's life. The biggest ones, sometimes even referred to as “the big three”, are *JYP Entertainment*, *YG Entertainment*, and *SM Entertainment*. Those entertainments were older ones, already producing idols during the First Generation. However, with Second Generation they became bigger and slowly turned into the companies they are today. Music also slowly became more experimental, and each group had its own sound and concept (Kim, 2012: 98–106).

At first, the most popular singers during this generation were soloists. Be it the members from the disbanded groups of the First Generation or completely new faces in the industry. K-Pop boy groups like *BIGBANG*, *SUPER JUNIOR* (슈퍼주니어, Syup'yōjuniō), *SHINee* (샤이니, Syaini), *2PM* (투피엠, T'up'iem) and *2AM* (투에이엠, T'ueiem) slowly turned the public eye back to K-Pop groups.

However, girl groups of the Second Generation are the ones that sparked the interest in K-Pop once again. Popular K-Pop girl groups of that time were *KARA*, *2NE1* (투애니원, T'uaeniwōn), *GIRLS' GENERATION*, also known as *SNSD*, and especially *WONDER GIRLS* (원더걸스, Wōndögölsū). *KARA* was the first K-Pop group to enter the Japanese market. *WONDER GIRLS* were the first K-Pop group that had such big popularity outside of Asia, that they tried to enter the American music market by having another special debut with a song, which lyrics were only in English (Lee, 2021).

2.2.3 Third Generation

The Third Generation is believed by fans to start right after the Second and it is active until today (Sauer, 2021). However, the transition is not that evident. The biggest difference between the generations, why it is not evident, is the fact the Second Generation groups were still active while the Third Generation groups started debuting. Also, the content made by those groups was not only on TV or on the radio. They started recording special reality shows not only for TV broadcasting but also for different types of online broadcasting be it for example *Naver* or *Youtube* or even *Netflix*. This fact also helped the groups become popular all over the world. Since the Third Generation world tours all over the world became a new sensation and K-Pop slowly started appearing in foreign media as well (Lee, 2021).

The most prominent groups of this generation were *BTS*, *EXO* (엑소, Ekso), *NU'EST* (뉴이스트, Nyuisüt'ŭ), *GOT7* (갯세븐, Katsepŭn), *MONSTA X* (몬스타엑스, Monsüt'aeksŭ) when it comes to boy groups. When it comes to girl groups *BLACKPINK*, *TWICE*, *Red Velvet* (레드벨벳, Netŭbenbet), and *AOA* (에이오에이, Eioei) are a few of the most prominent examples of the Third Generation groups (Sauer, 2021).

2.2.4 Fourth Generation

Once again, the change from the Third to the Fourth Generation of K-Pop idol groups is a bit blurry. The beginning is believed to be sometime around the year 2019 and it once again continues until today and will continue far more into the future before a Fifth Generation will begin (Sauer, 2021).

Fourth Generation K-Pop groups are one of the most popular ones. This is because Second and Third Generation groups opened worldwide markets for their younger successors. Especially the group *BTS*, with their extraordinary career, helped K-Pop to get accepted in other than just South Korean markets. There is even a saying amongst K-Pop fans that “BTS paved the way for K-pop”. Due to this K-Pop artists can break never broken records, perform at shows that were mostly just for the American singers, and promote brands, which are not only Korean.

A few of the most popular groups from this generation are *TXT* (투모로우바이투게더, T’umoroubait’ugedö), *STRAY KIDS*, and *ATEEZ* (에이티즈, Elt’iji) as examples from boy groups. *ITZY* (있지, Isschi), *(G)I-DLE* ((여자)아이들, (yöja) aidül), and *AESPA* (에스파, Esüp’a) can be used as the most popular girl group examples (Lee, 2021).

2.3 Making a K-pop Idol Group

K-Pop is not a typical music genre. It is a systematically planned, monitored, and very thought through process starting from choosing the idols to form a group, choosing their concept, picking up the right producers, etc.

Young people, sometimes only 12 to 13 years old, with a dream of becoming a singer are recruited to go through complete training. Those going through this training are simply called “trainees”. To become a trainee, one needs to get noticed by an entertainment company. A person can get noticed by attending special auditions held by those companies. Or by sending them recordings of their dancing or singing abilities. Nowadays, another popular way is by competing in different singing or dancing shows (Soemarg, 2016).

After a person is accepted into the training system, they are required to sign a special contract stating the terms and conditions of being a trainee and what will happen once a trainee will debut. The most common term is about paying the company back all the expenses for the training system and how the profits will be divided between the singer and the company (Kim, 2013: 8–9).

The years-long training includes not just singing, dancing, acting, or producing lessons. It also includes learning foreign languages or learning Korean for foreign members, who came to Korea just to become a singer. Nowadays most entertainment companies also include some type of sexual education or special lessons on how to take the perfect selfie to upload on social media for example. Trainees who are set to debut also go through media training (Kim, 2013: 8–9).

To get picked into a debuting team a person needs to survive different monthly evaluations. Those are monthly held check-ups on how different trainees are performing. These consist of solo singing and dancing performances and group performances. To prepare for those performances trainees are training alone or with their group members every day for several hours. It is no secret that the training time a day can go as high as 15 hours a day.

Trainees are picked up depending on their skills in dancing and singing. However, as well as the skills, visuals are also an important part of K-pop. This means trainees' looks are also an important aspect. They need to, sometimes are even forced to, go through different beauty procedures and to follow different types of diets (Kim, 2013: 8–9).

2.4 The Dark Side of K-pop

This training system might bring great results, but it also is a target of criticism. Trainees and idols are usually overworked with almost no rest. They often must push through and perform even when they are sick or hurt. For Korean trainees or idols, it is very hard to meet their loved ones and family. They usually meet them only a few times during the whole year. For foreigners, it is almost impossible. They can go as much as not seeing their family and loved ones for years.

A big problem in the past was the so-called “slave contracts”. Due to the never-ending stress idols are put through, they suffer from different mental illnesses. As a result, they sometimes choose to determine their contracts and leave their group so they can live a normal life (Koreaboo, 2015). However, sometimes they take even more drastic measures and decide to take their own life. Which is a whole new problem in South Korea.

2.4.1 Mental Health in South Korea

As of 2023, it was released that mental issues in South Korea are at 28,6% meaning that 3 out of 10 adults suffer from mental illness more than once during their lifetime. According to the World Health Organization, as of 2023, the suicide rate in South Korea is the fourth highest in the world. This might be due to the fact that South Korea is a country where competition is high, especially in an academic sphere. Koreans need to study almost all day so the chance to develop and maintain relationships is very low. They usually turn to alcohol, sometimes even to drugs, which makes the risk of suicide much higher. Once students fail academically, it is much harder for them to find a job. So younger people usually feel like a burden and that they have dishonored their families. All of that combined also puts them at an increased risk of suicide.

South Korea's government is trying to curb the suicide epidemic. They promised to increase mental healthcare access as they believe most of those suffering from the illnesses have a diagnosable and treatable mental health condition. They are also providing education for community leaders so they can also prevent suicides at the local level (World Population Review, 2023).

Sadly, even K-Pop idols and Korean actors suffer from mental illness and not all of them receive the treatment, which they need. For these past few years mental health prevention had been a talk in different fandoms due to popular singers and actors committing suicide. The first time the whole K-Pop fandom had been shocked was when K-Pop singer Kim Jong-Hyun (김종현, Kimjonghyōn) from the popular group *SHINee* had been found dead in the year 2017. His suicide opened the talks about K-Pop idols and their mental health, however to almost no avail. Year 2019 was another year that shocked the whole K-Pop fandom. Two popular singers *Sulli* (최진리, Ch'woejilli) and *Hara* (구하라, Kuhara) have been found dead only a few weeks apart in their apartments having committed suicide (ET Online, 2023).

2.4.2 Slave Contracts

Another big problem of K-pop is the so-called “slave contracts”. This term is used when a contract that is signed by a future idol has not fair or unjust terms and conditions. Be it the contract length, the artist’s rights, and obligations or the debt the artist need to pay. Parts of the debt are usually the costs the company had to pay while training the artist and preparing for the debut. The bad part of this debt is the fact artists usually do not know how much they owe and how much they paid back. The debt is paid back by the profits the artist made from their debut album and other albums during their career (Padget, 2017: 1).

However, some K-pop groups revealed, that years after their debut, they still did not get paid their share of the profits. This means that the debt, while they are paying something back with their share of profits, is getting bigger with every new album they produce (Koreaboo, 2020).

2.4.3 Sasaeng Fans

When it comes to K-pop and Korean popular culture overall, the term *sasaeng fan* (사생팬, sasaeng p’aen) is mentioned sooner or later. It denotes an obsessive fan of a celebrity. Sasaeng fans usually stalk or invade the privacy of their favorite celebrities by any means possible.

The term is composed of the syllables *sa* (私, private) and *saeng* (生, life). P’aen is obviously just the Korean pronunciation of the English “fan”. A *saesaeng p’aen* is thus a “private-life-fan”, and the problem about this is that it is not their own private life that such a fan is interested in, but the private life of another person, that is: the private life of the adored idol (Lansky, 2012).

It is believed that popular Korean celebrities might each have between 500 and 1000 sasaeng fans. Around a hundred of these are actively following them every day. Those fans are usually women aged between 13 and 22, who sometimes, in order to gain the attention of their idols, commit acts that border criminal offenses. There are cases when sasaeng fans said that they would rather have the celebrity angry at them since it means they remember them (Soh, 2012).

For example, once a fan tried to kidnap a whole group. K-pop idol groups usually travel together in a special type of van. A fan of the group *EXO* rented a van that was identical to the group’s van. Thankfully the group never entered the wrong van, and nothing happened (Koreaboo, 2018).

It repeatedly happened that sasaeng fans found their way into a group's home or their rooms in the hotel and took private pictures of them, for example when they slept.

Also, sasaeng fans like to send gifts. The range of those presents goes from new or used underwear to letters written in blood, telling them how much the idols mean to them (Koreaboo, 2018).

3 BTS

BTS, a short version of their full name 방탄소년단(Pangt'ansonyöndan), is a South Korean boy group, that was first formed in 2010 by the CEO of *Big Hit Entertainment*⁴ Bang Si-Hyuk (방시혁, Pangsihöök). It consists of 7 members, whose stage names are *Jin*, *Suga*, *J-Hope*, *RM*, *Jimin*, *V*, and *Jungkook*. Their real names are Kim Seok-Jin (김석진, Kimsökchin), Min Yoon-Gi (민윤기, Minyungi), Jung Ho-Seok (정호석, Chönghosök), Kim Nam-Joon (김남준, Kimnamjun), Park Ji-Min (박지민, Pakchimin), Kim Tae-Hyung (김태형, Kimt'aehyöng) and Jeon Jung-Kook (전정국, Chönjöngguk), respectively.

The full name translates to “Bulletproof Boy Scouts”. This, as almost everything during their whole career, was planned and thought through since the lyrics of the group’s songs, especially during the beginning of their career, were mostly about breaking down the social norms that were forced on the young adults by South Korean society (Litchfield, 2022). According to a member J-Hope the name stands for “the groups’ desire to block out stereotypes, criticisms, and expectations that aim at adolescents like bullets.” (Kang, 2015). In July 2017, the group announced a new meaning to their name after the breakthrough into the mainstream market and a change in their music’s message. The new meaning of the name is “Beyond the Scene” which is meant to convey an idea of a growth from a boy to an adult, who faces troubles moving forward (Herman, 2017).

3.1 Forming and Training of the Group

The group was formed in 2010, with RM, who got discovered as an underground rapper, as the main member of the group. At first, the group was supposed to be just a hip-hop trio with Suga and J-Hope alongside RM. But, due to the falling sales of other hip-hop groups during this period, the CEO changed his mind and decided to train and debut more members to form a K-pop idol group (Romano, 2018).

⁴ Now known as *HYBE Entertainment*.

However, his way of training and managing the members was quite different from the usual. The members were open to being active in the production of their songs and had a say in the planning of their careers. Especially their “rap line” consisting of the members Suga, J-Hope, and RM is included in almost every song the group has ever produced until current times. They also had more personal freedom than the typical trainees during those times (Romano, 2018).

3.2 Debut and the Group’s Career

BTS debuted on the 12th of June 2013 with their debut album *2 Cool 4 Skool*. This and all the albums during the beginning of their career had a strong hip-hop sound, which was not very usual for K-pop groups of that time. The first two years of their career had attracted almost no positive attention from the Korean media. The group was called mediocre on a lot of different occasions and was facing harsh criticism from the Korean hip-hop community for their status as idols.

However, they were steadily gaining popularity overseas as soon as in the year 2014. Proof of this might be the fact, that they had an overseas performance at the 2014 KCON USA in Los Angeles and their albums started charting on Billboard World Albums Chart. By the year 2015 the group started being at the top of the charts in both USA and in South Korea (Kim, 2019).

After their success in 2015, the group was steadily growing and its place in both Korean and overseas markets got more secure. Their albums always charted on the top of music charts, their music videos broke numerous types of records. They got nominated and won different awards both in Asia and overseas. For example, they won RIAA gold, became the first non-English artist to chart at number one on the Billboard 200 and they won the Top Social Artist award at BBMAS (US BTS ARMY, n.d.). All those awards could be achieved mostly by the relationship the group has with their fans, who called themselves the *ARMY*⁵ (Mclaren & Jin, 2020: 109–110).

3.3 The Reason for BTS’ Success

The fact that BTS is nowadays one of the most successful groups is no surprise. One needs to just look at the sales of their discography, the records they broke, or the awards they won and can see hard proof of this group’s success. However, finding the reason for their success is a problem no one solved yet.

⁵ *ARMY* stands for Adorable Representative MC for Youth.

The focus of international media on BTS is very new so there are very few academic works of literature on this topic. Most of the literature is focusing more on the relationship between the group and its fans since they believe the fans are the main reason for the group's success. Their unlimited admiration and dedication to helping the group win the smallest awards are believed to be the reason for the group's success. The fans are known for sharing and promoting any new possible BTS-related information between themselves and even outside of the fandom. The group and its fans are both known to be doing a lot of charity work to help the less fortunate, which once again can help the group with propagation and growing popularity (Parc & Kim, 2020: 17–18).

However, on the other hand, some articles believe that without the quality of their music and how they promote themselves to the public and their fans, there would be no loyal fandom in the first place.

According to Romano, there are several main reasons for the group's popularity. Reason number 1 is the fact they write their own songs and lyrics. This is not at all a norm in K-pop, which might make BTS feel somewhat special to some fans. Usually, the entertainment companies have a special team of producers, and the idols only record and perform those songs, having almost no artistic freedom. However, BTS members have such freedom. This, according to the second reason presented by Romano, is present in the lyrics of their song. Their songs usually have a deeper meaning talking about social or political norms (Romano, 2018). At the beginning of their career, the lyrics were mostly about the pressure teens and young adults might feel. Nowadays, their lyrics turned more mature. Some fans even say that they like the group so much because they feel like they could grow up with them as a person (Nguyen, 2020).

The next reason presented is their social media presence. In K-Pop it is a norm that idols usually do not manage their social media presence by themselves, rather they have managers and a special team for managing their social media networks. However, with BTS it is believed they manage their social media on their own (Romano, 2018). This might make the fans feel like they are talking with their beloved idol, which again might be another reason for their success. The fans are able to feel like that mainly due to the group's use of an app called *Weverse*. The app was founded by their entertainment company in 2019 with the motto "Official for All Fans" as a way for fans and idols to talk directly using Instagram-like methods of stories and artist-to-fan interactions on the main page of the app.

The last reason is the group's freedom. It was mentioned that they have their artistic freedom, however, the group overall is not under a "slave contract". It is believed by their fans that they are not tied down by a bunch of rules as most K-Pop idols are. They are free to do almost anything they wish to. Which might be another reason for their beloved fans to like them so much. They openly speak about their career issues, personal thoughts, and even about their mental health, which as stated before is a big topic in South Korea (Romano, 2018).

3.4 BTS' Impact on South Korea

So far no one has calculated the impact BTS has on South Korea. Most media and academic literature are looking at this subject economically. How much does BTS contribute to the South Korean economy? How much does the group help tourism (Nguyen, 2022)?

According to a 2018 report made by the Hyundai Research Institute, the group contributes over \$3.9 billion to the South Korean economy. This amount is the same as 26 mid-sized companies and their profits together. It is believed since 2018 the number got even bigger (Kim, 2018). Especially during the years of Covid-19 pandemic, the group kept contributing to the South Korean economy with songs and promotional materials made specifically due to the pandemic (Mamo, 2020).

When it comes to tourism, according to Yonhap News Agency, in 2018, 7% of foreign visitors came to the country because of the group. The Agency also reported that around \$1.1 billion of consumer goods were exported from South Korea just because they were related to BTS (Kim, 2018).

The Korea Tourism Organization also filmed a few promotional videos with BTS to promote different cities in South Korea. In 2017 the group recorded its first promotional video of Seoul. The group had also been chosen as Seoul's honorary tourism ambassador the same year (Chang, 2017). The next promotional video recorder in Seoul to promote the city was in 2020. This video was recorded with the wish of continuously inducing affection for the city and showing the city as a possible bucket list destination for the fans once the pandemic will end (Lee, 2020). The last two videos the members have recorded so far as honorary tourism ambassadors are from the year 2022. This time the videos were filmed in Busan and Daejeon to promote those cities instead of Seoul (Kim, 2022).

3.5 BTS in Media

As said before the focus of international media has not been on BTS for that long. Most of the articles on the Internet are explaining who BTS are, their music, talking about their achievements and records. However, since their break into the mainstream Western market, there are two topics talked about more than just simply explaining who BTS are. Those topics are their nominations for the Grammy Awards and since June 2022 their decision to go on hiatus due to South Korea's mandatory military service.

3.5.1 The Grammy Awards

The Grammy Awards are awards presented by the Recording Academy of the United States. This award is given to artists who have outstanding achievements in the music industry. The first awards were held in the year 1959. It is believed to be one of the most prestigious and significant awards in the music industry worldwide (Musical Instrument Museum, 2023).

So far BTS has been nominated for the Grammy Awards four times in a row since the year 2019. The first nomination was not officially BTS themselves but their art director HuskyFox for the visual package of the album *Love Yourself: Tear* in the Best Recording Package category. However, it was still a big milestone for the group and K-Pop overall, since this was the first time a K-Pop album had been nominated for the Grammy Awards (Mendez, 2022). In 2020 BTS received another Grammy nomination. This time it was in the Best Pop Duo/Group Performance category, which makes it the official first nomination of a K-Pop artist (Romano, 2018). That year's Grammy was also special for the K-Pop industry since it was the first time a K-Pop group was a part of the performances during the ceremonies.⁶

⁶ Due to the ongoing pandemic at that time the performance was remotely filmed in South Korea.

Following year's awards had been another eventful night for the group. The group was once again nominated in the Best Pop Duo/Group Performance category and for the first time they performed their single *Butter* during the ceremony. That year it was possible for the group to travel to the United States to perform there in person. However, this has been the third time the group had been nominated and did not win. The members tried to ensure their fans they do not mind the results right after the performance on the app *Weverse*, where they did a livestream⁷. Nonetheless, starting that year's awards fans have not been happy, and using *Twitter* and other online platforms they started calling the awards racist and no longer prestigious and significant (Mendez, 2022).

In this year's Grammy Awards, the group had been nominated for the first time in the main four categories. They scored another nomination in the Best Pop Duo/Group Performance category, their new single got nominated for the Best Music Video category and they also got nominated for the Album of the Year category. However, they did not win any of those nominations once again. Which unsurprisingly made the fans angry so much that there are articles about their reactions on the internet. Most of the articles are talking about how the fans are calling the awards racist by saying "Grammys fail BTS because the Grammys Awards are racist. No matter how much the artists are talented, relevant, and their songs top charts, but if you're not white from the United States you have no chance." (HT Entertainment Desk, 2023). Other fans were arguing that the Grammy Awards are disrespecting, using, and attacking the group indirectly. They even called the awards on being a rigged show and saying people should stop giving them any importance. The fans went as far as calling the show "The Scammys" in their reactions they posted on the internet (Soo, 2023).

Overall, it is all right to say that the group broke another milestone for K-Pop being the first group to get nominated and perform at the awards. However, it also opened another debate on if it is even possible for them to win the awards since they are an Asian group and most of the fans nowadays do not care about the Grammy Awards the way they did in the year 2019.

⁷ Livestream means when a video is sent over the Internet in real-time without having been first filmed and stored.

3.6 BTS and Military Service

3.6.1 South Korean Military Service

Since 1957 South Korean male citizens between the ages of 18 and 35 have to perform compulsory military service (Military Manpower Administration, n.d). Women do not have to perform the service. However, they are welcome to voluntarily join the military (Hong, 2002: 735).

When a South Korean man turns 18 years old, he is by law enlisted for *first citizen service*. Which in short means he is liable for military duty, but he does not yet have to serve. After turning 19 or 20 years old every man is required to do an Impairment & Disability evaluation. This is to determine if he is suitable for the military service. Men, if found suitable for military service, must enlist by the time they turn 28 and serve for at least 18 months. Men with past injuries, mental health problems, or diseases are found not suitable for the service (Hyo, 2014).

3.6.2 The Impact of BTS' Military Service

The oldest member of BTS, *Jin*, was born in the year 1992. This means he turned 28 by 2020 and at that time he still did not enlist in the military service. This fact opened a debate if the members should be given exemption from military service due to their impact on the South Korean economy. The members themselves always agreed that, if they would be called to fulfill their service, they would gladly do so (Mesmer, 2022).

The biggest problem in this debate was the factor of fairness. Opposing parties always argue that it would be unfair to other K-Pop singers who had to serve in the military while also having a big impact on South Korea. There were proposals for the members to fulfill their service in other possible ways the same way some noted athletes, actors, directors, or classical musicians had done. There were different types of citizens' polls asking the population if BTS should have been given an exemption. The majority of those polls came with simple results. The population believes the members should have been given military exemption (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2022).

This debate had been going on for years until June of 2022, when the group themselves announced they will be going on a group hiatus to fulfill their military service, while the members, who would not be in the military, would focus on solo projects, promising the group would be back as a whole by the year 2025. This also came as a relief to some fans, since for most groups' enlistment means disbandment or years of uncertainty if the group will ever have another comeback (Hughes, 2022).

The fact the members themselves ended up in the debate saying they will enlist in the military service opened another debate about what the impact of this decision will be on South Korea.

According to Bang Si Hyuk, who is the CEO of BTS management company *HYBE Entertainment*, the group's enlistment will not only hurt his company but K-Pop as a whole. Right after the news of the group's decision to serve in the military, he said that the global growth of the music genre is slowing. He called the absence of BTS the first reason why global growth will slow down, maybe even stop altogether (Rawat, 2023).

Most of the overseas and Korean media are trying to establish how much will South Korean economy lose by the group being on hiatus. The group contributes over \$3.9 billion to South Korea's economy each year. Right after the group's announcement, shares of *HYBE Entertainment* dropped 2,5%. That is the lowest point in two years since the company went public (Nguyen, 2022).

It is believed that the sales from BTS will not disappear, since there will be members' solo activities and some group activities were pre-recorded. However, most Korean corporations are looking towards *HYBE Corporation*⁸ to see what they will do now, that the biggest money maker will be absent for years (Lee, 2022).

⁸ *Hybe Entertainment* is a part of this corporation.

4 Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to describe the economic and cultural impact the Hallyu wave has on South Korea with the second half of the thesis setting the group *BTS* and their career as an example to explore said impact more deeply.

Hallyu is a well-known phenomenon, which got even more popular in recent years. Be it Korean movies, dramas or K-Pop, all of those are getting more and more popular outside of Korea. Especially the K-Pop boy group *BTS* have an astounding career both in South Korea and overseas. Their career has set off and the group was able to break milestones and records no K-Pop group has ever done.

To better understand the impact and the unusual success of *BTS*, one first needs to look back at the history of South Korea and its music. While looking back at the national history it is easier to understand the need of South Korea to promote its culture outside of the country, since, after the Japanese colonial period when they tried to erase Korean culture, the country had been led by military dictators, who used Korean culture as a tool to build relationships with other countries. That might be one of the many possible reasons why the country and its presidents try to help the Hallyu wave in any way possible and utilize its power to the fullest. They even go as far as recognizing the Hallyu wave as a form of soft power by the presidents.

Once a person understands the history of K-Pop and how K-Pop groups work, one can clearly see how *BTS* are not a typical K-Pop group, which is why it is possible for them to have the career they do.

It comes without a doubt that *BTS* are the most successful K-Pop group nowadays, with other groups like *BLACKPINK* coming right after them. But no group's career is as successful as *BTS*'s. The group has broken tons of records and won a great deal of awards both in and out of South Korea. It is believed that "BTS paved the way" for K-Pop. However, calculating the group's impact on South Korea is rather difficult. Usually, the media and researchers try to look at this matter more so in an economic way with several research and reports on how much the group contributes to the South Korean economy.

Only in 2018, the group contributed to the economy the same amount as 26 mid-sized South Korean companies (Kim, 2018). While the contribution is believed to get bigger with every passing year. Another possible way mostly used is looking at how the group helps to boost South Korean tourism. It is believed some tourists come to South Korea just because BTS are a Korean boy group or are propagating different South Korean cities.

In the end, the thesis is focusing on the two most discussed matters as of 2020. The first matter is the complicated relationship between the Grammy Awards and the group's fans, *ARMY* (McLaren & Jin, 2020: 109–110). This topic clearly shows the never-ending support and adoration the fans have for the group. It took just a few years of the group getting nominated and never winning any category for the fans to turn their backs on the awards themselves and use their platforms to degrade the importance of the awards. On the other hand, this opened another debate about the fairness of the awards and questions about racism (HT Entertainment Desk, 2023).

The second matter at the end of the thesis is the military service of *BTS*. This topic is still very new since not all members have served in the military yet and the decision if they even should serve is also very fresh. So, there are only speculations about how this will impact South Korea. I believe this matter would make for interesting research in the year 2025, once all the group members would have already served in the military and one could try to find the actual impact it had on South Korea. So far, the only actual impact a person can see is the fall of *BTS*'s management company's shares.

To conclude, the group *BTS* for sure has an impact on South Korea. However, calculating the entire extent of it seems almost impossible and one can mostly look at it only from an economic point of view. What a person can see and agree with are the reasons for the group's popularity and success. The first reason for the success is the group itself with its members. However, the bigger reason, in my opinion, are the fans with their never-ending support and the relationship the group members and the fans have built over the years.

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⁹ All citations are written by APA Citation rules.

¹⁰All links provided were last checked and verified on May 10, 2023.

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