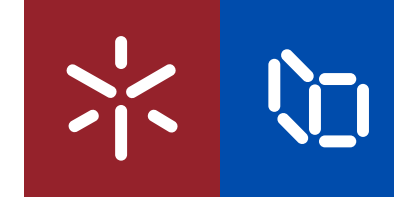




**Culture shock: North America vs South Korea  
- From a European Point of View**

Beatriz Moreira Pinto da Fonseca

UMinho | 2021



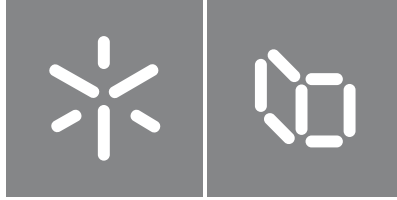
**Universidade do Minho**  
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November 2021





**Universidade do Minho**

Instituto de Letras e Ciências Humanas

Beatriz Moreira Pinto da Fonseca

**Culture shock: North America vs South Korea  
- From a European point of view**

Master Thesis

Master's degree in English Language, Literature and Culture

Supervised by

**Professor Jaime Costa**

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## **Agradecimentos**

Gostaria de agradecer aos meus pais, por estarem sempre ao meu lado, a apoiar-me durante este processo de escrita. Espero ter-vos deixado orgulhosos.

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A todos vós que moldaram o meu futuro, estarei eternamente grata.

## **Statement of Integrity**

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Code of Ethical Conduct of the University of Minho.

# **Choque Cultural: América do Norte vs Coreia do Sul – De um ponto de vista Europeu**

## **Resumo**

Esta dissertação irá investigar como as disparidades culturais presentes nos Estados Unidos da América e Coreia do Sul têm um impacto nas suas sociedades, especialmente no que toca aqueles cuja herança cultural pertence a ambos os países e como o choque cultural poderá acontecer a partir destas disparidades.

Ao comparar ambas as nações, esta pesquisa irá focar-se em como a cultura tem a capacidade de afetar a projeção de um país e como o seu povo é visto pelo resto do mundo.

Irá começar com um capítulo de contextualização de forma a analisar a passada relação entre a Coreia do Sul e os Estados Unidos e para esclarecer a noção de Confucianismo.

Em seguida, irá haver uma comparação dos países em questão pela doutrina de Hofstede, cujos tópicos irão ser usados como parâmetros durante o resto da pesquisa.

Nesta dissertação, os processos de Globalização, Multiculturalismo, e cultura popular serão explorados para obter uma resposta em relação à questão da evolução cultural e como esta poderá transformar um específico grupo de pessoas.

A última parte desta pesquisa incorpora como as comunidades estrangeiras são tratadas em cada país e como os tópicos previamente desenvolvidos têm um impacto nestas situações específicas.

Finalmente, a tese irá ser concluída com uma compilação dos resultados destes fenómenos e o seu impacto nos Sul Coreanos e nos Americanos.

**Palavras-chave:** Choque cultural, Coreia do Sul, Estados Unidos da América, Globalização, Multiculturalidade.

# **Culture shock: North America vs South Korea - From a European point of view**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation will investigate how the cultural disparities present within the United States of America and South Korea impact their societies, especially regarding those whose cultural heritage belongs to both countries, and how culture shock can be observed from these disparities.

By comparing both nations, this research will focus on how culture can affect the country's projection and the way their people are perceived by the rest of the world.

It will begin with a contextualization chapter in order to analyze South Korea's and the United States' relationship throughout the years and to clarify the notion of Confucianism.

Followed by a comparison of the countries through Hofstede's doctrine, which topics will be used as parameters throughout the rest of the research.

In this dissertation, the processes of Globalization, Multiculturalism, and popular culture will be explored so to obtain an answer to the question of cultural evolution and how this may transform a specific group of people.

The last part of this research incorporates how foreigner communities are treated in each country and how the previously developed themes have impacted these specific situations.

Finally, the thesis will conclude with a compilation of results from these phenomena and their impact on South Koreans and Americans.

**Keywords:** Cultural Shock, Globalization, Multiculturalism, South Korea, United States of America.



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## **Introduction**

To better understand the effects of the different cultures and how cultural shock may happen it is my intention to present a more complex and enhanced guide to cultural disparities between the United States of America and South Korea. This dissertation and its research were carried out by exploring distinctive aspects concerning the development of both civilizations by focusing on traditional aspects that originated popular culture as we presently know it.

In my dissertation, I will only focus on South Korea because, even though the entirety of Korea is considered a region as a whole, South and North Korea cannot ever be seen as one due to their significant differences as far as culture and politics are concerned.

I must point out that I am fully aware that while I wrote this dissertation, the relations between South Korea and the United States of America continue to evolve together with many other factors that contribute to these connections.

The goal of my dissertation is to investigate the movement known as the Korean Wave and its transnationality. I will, therefore, describe how this movement has been acknowledged and developed outside of South Korea, with an emphasis on the United States of America. This is an imperative and significant factor in my research because the opposite has been done many times. As we know, there is a multitude of studies pointing out at how the United States of America as a world superpower, influences Asian countries, but there has been, not surprisingly, very little research about how such a small country as South Korea has been influencing the USA.

I intend to compare the many different aspects of the contrast between Western and Far Eastern civilization by comparing social manners, festivity gatherings, traditions, the view upon military service, and educational discrepancies alongside what is termed as popular culture.

Culture shock is bound to happen with these disparities, I aim to reveal how this affects many other cultural topics and consequently how it influences the societies and cultures of those living in a foreign country or a country with mixed ethnicity.

As it has been noted before, when it comes to information about Asian countries, there is comparatively very little data about South Korea, people tend to focus more on Japan and China since they are more influential in world and economic affairs.

Despite being recognized as a powerhouse and home to some of the major worldwide brands, such as Samsung or Hyundai, South Korea has not yet received the acknowledgment it deserves. This is very evident in cultural and social terms.

When it comes to popular culture, this phenomenon may come across as an undemanding subject in terms of research or, even, as a topic for research, however, the truth is that this portion of culture is what influences our present. And even if it may seem like a light topic, it is the modern-day version of a nation's cultural makeup, something to be aware of at all times since any culture never stops evolving.

With the help of innovation provided by social media and other platforms that project various types of culture from one point of the world to the other, it may seem hard to keep up with this ever-going and everlasting production of content that seems to be always emerging.

Certain movies or songs may impact someone anywhere in the world in a way that they find meaningful, this only arises due to the fact popular culture has become more and more global. This is the topic I intend to develop throughout my thesis dissertation, popular culture's impact on Multiculturalism and Globalization.

# 1. Contextualization

## 1.1. Historical Background

The Korean War began in 1950 (June 25<sup>th</sup>) and ended in 1953 (July 27<sup>th</sup>).

This war started after the Second World War and constituted one of the most dangerous conflicts taking place during the Cold War. At this point, Korea had been free from being a Japanese colony for more than three decades.

The ideological tensions between the winning allies of WWII became apparent, the Soviet Union and China became very close to an all-out world conflict. Korea suddenly became the center of possible foreign intervention; an international conflict would soon explode.

The Korean War was overshadowed by the catastrophe brought about by World War II in which, many nations, other than just the contending parties, were still trying to recover for the damages it had left. In what seems something rather surprising, the international community at the time was not able to focus their attention on this new emerging conflict and this was the reason why it was later became known as the “Forgotten War”.

During the colonial period, the Korean people were stripped off, or so it seemed, of their own culture, everything that showed their original national and pointed at their cultural heritage was prohibited.

“The Japanese colonization ended only in 1945, but Korea’s new freedom was quickly eclipsed by division into the North and South when the Soviet Union was allowed to occupy the North.” (SHIM et al. 2008:06)<sup>1</sup>

The Soviet Union occupied the territory that is now known as North Korea, whereas the USA occupied the present-day Republic of Korea, also known as South Korea. Sadly, one country Korea had been split in half: The Northern part was being ruled by Kim Il Sung (김일성) and was backed by the Soviet Union which simply meant that it became a communist dictatorship.

The starting point of this cold war dates back to 1950 when Kim Il Sung (김일성) invaded the southern zone of Korea. The United States of America, being under the presidency of Harry S. Truman at the time, took that invasion very seriously on account of believing that the Soviet Union was behind it and

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<sup>1</sup> SHIM, Teresa Youn-Ja, KIM, Min-Sun & MARTIN, Judith N. (2008) *Changing Korea: Understanding Culture and Communication*, page 06. New York: Peter Lang Publishing

they were not to tolerate the communist expansion. During the Cold War, geopolitical balance meant peace, this was seen by the U.S. as an intolerable act of aggression that had dangerously increased the tensions between the two blocs.

In only a few months, the troops from the North had taken over nearly all the territory of southern lands. The United States was determined to help the South under the pretext that communism should not continue to spread out. With the help of American troops, the South was able to get rid of the northern invaders and sent them back to their original territory. The line of invasion fluctuated throughout the years of the conflict which involved Chinese armed forces as well.

Armed warfare lasted until 1953 when finally, an Armistice was drawn after three years of constant war, suffering, and tragedy. It was agreed that the territory of Korea as one country would be divided and there was created a border to separate the whole country into two parts, indicating the division of North Korea and South Korea as two individual countries and different states.

Despite the cessation of hostilities, the conflict, now between the two Koreas, would go on as part of the Cold War. All these periods of conflict made it hard for the country to be able to carry on with their normal cultural life throughout all the conflict which made it harder to properly acknowledge some of the initial features of Korean culture which often generates inaccuracies or misinformation about this period.

This USA-South Korean connection was maintained even after Armistice, which was of major importance since the area was suffering from the devastation caused by the war.

The United States became such a big resource of economic aid to South Korea that this help was converted into the US having a say in South Korean politics. The economic help was so fundamental that, as a consequence; the United States of America was able to hold the privilege to input some of their ideas into Korean state affairs.

“(…) often let its preferences be known about Korea enacting democratic measures, such as return to civilian rule during the Park Chung Hee era (Eckert et al. 1990, 361).” (MARINESCU et al. 2014:124)<sup>2</sup>

This state of affairs made the South Korean population think that the influence of the USA government was somehow excessive and could, sometimes, be perceived as if they were meddling in their country's political projects.

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<sup>2</sup> MARINESCU, Valentina., ANDERSON, Crystal S. et al. (2014) *The Global Impact of South Korean Popular Culture: Hallyu Unbound*, page 124. United Kingdom: Lexington Books

At the time, Korea became dependent on Western countries and their aid, since, to a large extent, they were the ones supporting the South Korean economy. During the post-war period, Koreans were being subjected to western culture but only to a certain degree due to a fair amount of censorship imposed by president Park Chung Hee (박정희) that put limitations on popular culture, for example, movies screened at movie theaters which might contain anything that could be interpreted as a sign of communism. This censorship escalated to the point where artists or scholars could be arrested. Many American songs were prohibited then under these very terms of suspicion. For instance, this was the case for the hit of the 1960's "Blowin' in the Wind" by Bob Dylan<sup>3</sup>.

This constitutes one of the reasons why *Hallyu*<sup>4</sup> only started to spread and be widely influential in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to permissiveness and easing of cultural policies alongside the widespread use and availability of technology.

South Korean industrialization brought about agile growth due to the consolidation of the connections of the government and the nation itself. Besides promoting a patriotic sentiment, this drive also helped enhance the practice of the Confucian ideology, regarding the state and the concept of hierarchy.

To put back the country together after the destruction of the war, the government took advantage of Koreans considerate, supportive and patriotic natural motivation for the prosperity of the country. With the nation's total devotion to its very traditions, it became easier to lead the country's finances and state affairs.

Korean's consideration for the common society is implied within their solidarity. This altruistic characteristic derives from the Confucian mentality of togetherness.

"they believe in self-sacrifice." (SHIM et al. 2008:19)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "South Korea Banning 'Decadent' Foreign Music, Including Many Protest Songs". (1975, December 28<sup>th</sup>). The New York Times. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/12/28/archives/south-korea-banning-decadent-foreign-music-including-many-protest.html>

<sup>4</sup> "*Hallyu*" means Korean Wave, it refers to the popularity of South Korea's cultural front exportation (especially popular culture) which spreaded globally like a wave. This term is more thoroughly elucidated in chapter 5.1. *Hallyu: Korean Wave*.

<sup>5</sup> SHIM, Teresa Youn-Ja, KIM, Min-Sun & MARTIN, Judith N. (2008) *Changing Korea: Understanding Culture and Communication*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing

## 1.2. Confucianism

The still pervading presence of Confucius as an acclaimed Chinese sage of Ancient times, made possible the reassessment and acceptance of values and social codes still meaningful for present-day Korean society.

Confucianism can be interpreted in various ways, but it is mainly seen as a philosophy or, better, even as a quasi-religious creed. In general, it is a traditional method to conduct life with a determined principle and ethical view. What we may term as a philosophy of life, a way to live life to its fullest and in a harmonious manner.

Even though Koreans may follow other religions such as Christianity or Buddhism, Confucianist ideals are most certainly likely to be maintained within their values alongside their most varied religious beliefs since Confucianism has profoundly been impacting politics and sacred beliefs as a philosophy from ancient times until the present.

It is important to point out that Confucius himself was not the one who devised or, better, gave the name to this doctrine, he simply merged the values he believed to be important into a pronouncement. He intended to update ancient values to keep traditions available in the community. He defended routine and viewed society as an increasing force – he had as primary intention to promulgate ancient values and traditions so that the community could give them continuity.

“(…) conviction that cultivation of the self is the root of social order and that social order is the basis for political stability and enduring peace.” (WEIMING, 2019)<sup>6</sup>

This statement leads us to understand that in the Confucianist belief of power hierarchy, it is important to point out that those at the top of the pyramid must lead and be an example for the rest.

One of the main characteristics of Confucianism is its notion of power and how those who follow the doctrine believe that authority belongs to those in places of leadership, the higher you go in the pyramid, the higher the amount of dominance and influence that someone is able to attain. This concept of power is still very much present in the Korean culture where, for instance, in the heart of a typical Korean family, the one in charge is the father who is seen as the head of the family.

“Government’s responsibility is not to only provide food and security but also to educate people. Law and punishment are the minimum requirements for order; the higher goal of social harmony, however,

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<sup>6</sup> WEIMING, Tu (2019, August 12). “Confucianism”. Encyclopedia Britannica Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Confucianism>



can be attained only by virtue expressed through ritual performance. To perform rituals, then, is to take part in a communal act to promote mutual understanding.” (WEIMING, 2019)

Filial devotion is one of the biggest values esteemed by the doctrine of Confucianism. It is believed that in order to archive excellence one must be grateful to their parents and keep in mind that they owe their lives to them. This, however, is not a synonym for being inherently obedient to progenitors. This assumption makes it so that family becomes the central part of life, which later develops into communitarian thinking.

Confucianism mostly revolves around self-discipline and harmony concerning life in a community. Accordingly, to Confucianism thinking, the individual is supposed, for instance, to change so as to live on good terms with their neighbors, this is believed to be an altruist act for the higher good in humanity. It so becomes that a distinctive component of Confucianism is precisely the appreciation for the community.

## 2. Comparing Countries: Hofstede

Geert Hofstede<sup>7</sup> developed a system in order to facilitate the comparison of countries. This system is divided into six dimensions (Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence) that Hofstede used to measure each country and correlate them. Each category represents a different characteristic of the nation and shows how a determined topic can culturally impact their society. I will be using those values as a guide to explain the disparities.

I am, once again, aware that the United States of America is a multicultural nation and that it englobes the conjunction of many cultures. Nevertheless, the U.S., despite having this complexity in its makeup, are still one country with one culture, even if it is multicultural.

Cultural aspects may vary from state to state but a cultural shock will not be felt if one moves from Indiana to Oregon as much as it would be felt if someone moved from a state within the US to a different country.

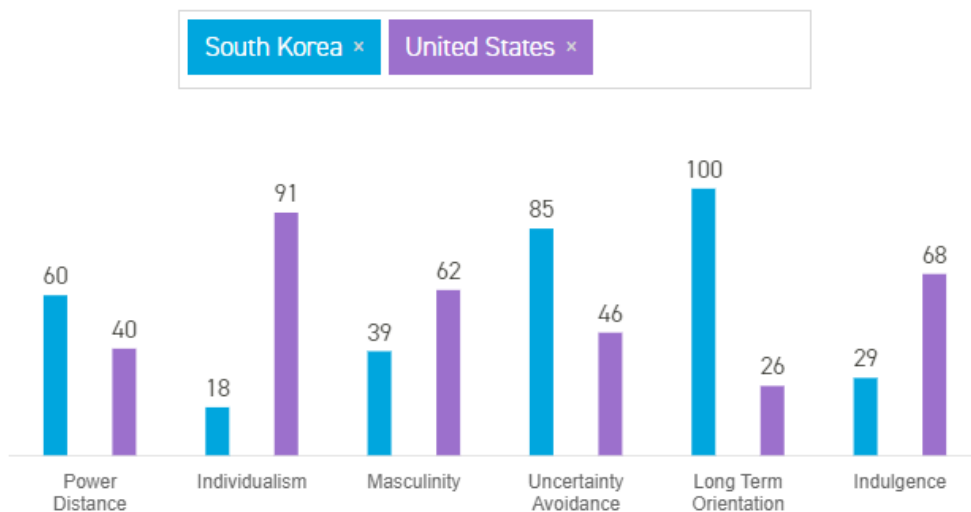


Figure 1 - Hofstede Insights Country Comparison between South Korea and the United States of America<sup>8</sup>

Culturally speaking, the disparities of Eastern and Western conducts and beliefs or interpretations exist, revealing a big discrepancy.

<sup>7</sup> Geert Hofstede (1928-2020) was a Dutch academic who studied how culture can be influenced by different values. Hofstede was pioneer in delegating for intercultural research and studies. The findings of his research and his theoretical ideas are used worldwide in both psychology and management studies.

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/south-korea.the-usa/>

## 2.1. Power Distance

“(…) all individuals in societies are not equal – it expresses the attitude of the culture towards these inequalities amongst us. Power Distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”; “(…) power being defined as the degree to which a person is able to influence other people’s ideas and behaviour.” (Hofstede Insights)

The difference in terms of Power Distance between both countries is not that significant, being South Korea at 60 and the United States at 40. This 20-value discrepancy comes from the conception that each nation has of hierarchy. The value of 60 in the column corresponding to South Korea’s power distance, implies that the population does not question hierarchical positioning, they respect that order.

South Korea is a country whose foundation was built under a Confucian doctrine. This aspect of their ancestry is what influences their population to accept that there is a different social stratum within the community and therefore the power distance becomes more notable than in the United States of America.

Nonetheless, this topic of power distance is the one, between the item chosen by Hofstede’s doctrine to evaluate the discrepancies of each country, where the United States and South Korea are most close to each other.

High power distance is accepted in South Korea because hierarchy is instilled in society. In the United States of America, people believe that inequality needs to decrease, however, in South Korea, inequality is more accepted.

## 2.2. Individualism

“[Individualism] (…) is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. It has to do with whether people’s self-image is defined in terms of “I” or “We”. In Individualist societies people are supposed to look after themselves and their direct family only. In Collectivist societies people belong to ‘in groups’ that take care of them in exchange for loyalty.” (Hofstede Insights)

Due to its Confucian values, South Korea is a country that values collectivism whereas the United States is ruled by a dominant sense of individualism. This is confirmed by Hofstede’s theory plus the Hofstede Insights website<sup>9</sup> which provides us with country comparisons and the numbers of its statistics.

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<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/south-korea.the-usa/>

The fluctuating cultural aspect of individualism versus collectivism indicates to us, up to what degree an individual of a certain culture or country will behave in relation to autonomous behavior or, on the other hand, behave as a “communal being” reliant on others and who, conversely, others may rely upon as well. And it is within this topic that South Korea and the United States of America diverge the most.

South Koreans are people who are commonly portrayed as being ruled by their intuition and reflectiveness therefore, they are most likely to communicate in a more vague or inconclusive manner. Consistency and cooperation are seen as of major significance within their gatherings and social circles. On the contrary, conducts and actions which are more detailed, logical, or definite are usually refrained from, and Korean people shun away from them.

Whereas Americans are interpreted as being more logical and more likely to adjust to change and to demanding activities, they generally communicate straightforwardly, this explicit and direct method of socializing is perceived as being the favored method when it comes to social intercommunication.

The outward qualities and mutual ideas of self that belong to such a collective country as South Korea tend to be more centered around the rest of the population and into confirming and ensuring that their practices, their vocabulary, plus the way that they talk, and that their ambitions or devotions are the same as the whole of the community so as to achieve a more cohesive and mutual satisfaction.

Individualism is not a valued characteristic within South Korean society, which explains the lower rate (18) within the statistics provided by Hofstede Insights (see figure 1).

This percentage also makes us understand the Korean people are portrayed as such a considerate public and this clearly acknowledges their civility within the community.

When it comes to the correlation of Individualism and the topic of business, we are presented with two very different business worlds. Where in South Korea, the relationship between workers is valued and taken into account when it is time to make a decision for hiring someone or making a promotion. The same does not happen in the US, where efficiency is the main concern, the idea of hierarchy is not as present as in South Korea as we can understand by the previous topic of Individuality. Therefore, American workplaces are structured differently, there is more freedom to approach their superiors and show eagerness to do the work, with that, the exchange of ideas and information is done more casually than in South Korea where the conversations with a superior member are particularly very formal.

In South Korea, relationships are prioritized, and in the United States what is most important is the value of the work of the employee and the beginning of their career.

“The society is loosely-knit in which the expectation is that people look after themselves and their immediate families only and should not rely (too much) on authorities for support.” (Hofstede Insights)

### 2.3. Masculinity

A country is characterized within the masculine category if it is competitive, and the goal is success instead of happiness. Whereas a country is considered feminine if likability is what drives people, the quality of life is prioritized versus achievements.

“A high score (Masculine) on this dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the winner / best in field – a value system that starts in school and continues throughout organisational life.

A low score (Feminine) on the dimension means that the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life. A Feminine society is one where quality of life is the sign of success and standing out from the crowd is not admirable. The fundamental issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (Masculine) or liking what you do (Feminine).” (Hofstede Insights)

Once again, we see the effects imprinted by the Confucian doctrine, the fact that South Korea is seen as a feminine country is a result of their collectivist mentality and their idea that one shall thrive not by being the center of attention but by living a joyful life.

The US is seen as a masculine society, that is linked with their Individualist aspect, culminating in the idea that in order to be successful one must be the best at that field, the goal is to beat the others that are on the move with them – we can understand that by the lack of collectivism present in the United States. Americans seem to prioritize their professional life because their goal is to have a successful career, so they can show off the assets they have acquired due to their hard work as if considering them as prizes from their hard work, that is how they see the joy in their work life.

Looking at this topic from a European point of view, it is easy to understand how Americans become so dedicated to their careers. Taking into account the work conditions that they are presented with, for example, when it comes to leaves, American companies normally only provide their employees with an already determined number of sick days per year and they may get fired if they exceed that total. Whereas in Europe it is normal to be able to take as many days off as one needs in order to recover from an illness.

In a world where most people strive for success the difference is that Americans want to work successfully to show off their success whereas Koreans want to work in order to live successfully.

## 2.4. Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance comes from the notion that one cannot predict the future, it measures how open we are to deal with what is ahead of us in our lives and the unknown. Each culture deals with this differently, some are willing to accept the future and do not let the doubt define their next steps where others feel the need to organize their lives to avoid eventual ambiguity.

South Korea is a nation that highly tries to avoid uncertainty, they have a need to have a plan and to be organized, therefore not knowing their future is a big cause of stress which they deal with by organizing their lives with various sets of guidelines

“(…) time is money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard, precision and punctuality are the norm, innovation may be resisted, security is an important element in individual motivation.”  
(Hofstede Insights)<sup>10</sup>

This also causes Koreans to be people who do not accept others effortlessly, this can be shown by the fact that it is legal to bar the entrance of foreign people or people who do not look Korean at certain establishments in South Korea, I will elaborate on this matter later, in chapter *6.2. American communities settled in South Korea*.

With almost an average score on Uncertainty Avoidance, we can recognize that the US is perpetuated as a country that is more accepting of newness - new trends, new fashions, new ways of thinking and perceiving the world. Americans tend to be more open-minded to new things and new opportunities. As a result, in the U.S. there is more acceptance towards different mentalities and there is more liberty in the way of living. Whereas in South Korea, people tend to be very focused on the same ideas that rule the majority of the community.

## 2.5. Long Term Orientation

This is the subject where we can identify the highest discrepancy between South Korea who displays a 100 score and the United States of America which features a 26 on the scale.

"Long Term Orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift. It's opposite pole, Short Term Orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues

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<sup>10</sup> Hofstede Insights website. Retrieved from: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/south-korea.the-usa/>

related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face' and fulfilling social obligations." (Hofstede, 2001:359)<sup>11</sup>

Koreans are pragmatic and, therefore, their score is the highest. They value persistence and endurance instead of prioritizing their free time, they set their goals at long term targets and are intentional on their spendings, making them save in order to qualify for what they aim to accomplish.

The USA is seen as a country with short term orientation because they do not plan for the future as in comparison with South Korea. Americans seek instant outcomes over long-term commitments such as investments, therefore they are seen as a nation that spends their earnings and cherishes their free time more.

Americans value how people perceive them and feel the need to demonstrate suitable behavior so that they will not be judged within the community. Americans give grand importance to tradition in a way that their beliefs usually come from the way that they were raised, this is connected to the idea of having a good notion of good and evil or right and wrong, which may be connected to the US being a country in which Christianity is the dominant creed.

"This may concern issues such as abortion, use of drugs, euthanasia, weapons or the size and rights of the government versus the States and versus citizens. The US is the one of the only "Caucasian" countries in the world where, since the beginning of the 20th century, visiting church has increased."  
(Hofstede Insights)

## 2.6 Indulgence

Indulgence assesses notions referred up to which degree people are able to control themselves from giving in to their cravings by considering how they were brought up. Those nations which can control themselves are seen as Restricted and those that do not as Indulgent.

"Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms." (Hofstede Insights website - National Culture)

South Korea is a Restrictive country with a significant low score (28). This restriction occurs in South Korea, in very obvious terms, for instance, in the high beauty standards. In beauty, we see their restraining characteristic, they do not indulge in their meals to keep up their physical appearance and

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<sup>11</sup> HOFSTEDE, Geert. (2001) *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations across Nations*. Page 359. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications 2nd ed.

restrain themselves from rewarding themselves too much, being it with meals or free time, there is a higher emphasis on self-control, and indulging is viewed negatively.

The United States is seen as an Indulgent nation, with a score of 68. Americans believe in the rewarding mechanism where if you succeed at something you must celebrate with indulgence, this attitude is then, perceived as justifiable. This may be translated into any type of addiction, being it drugs or food as we can understand by the obesity rates of the US where a high percentage of the people is considered as overweight (see figure 2).

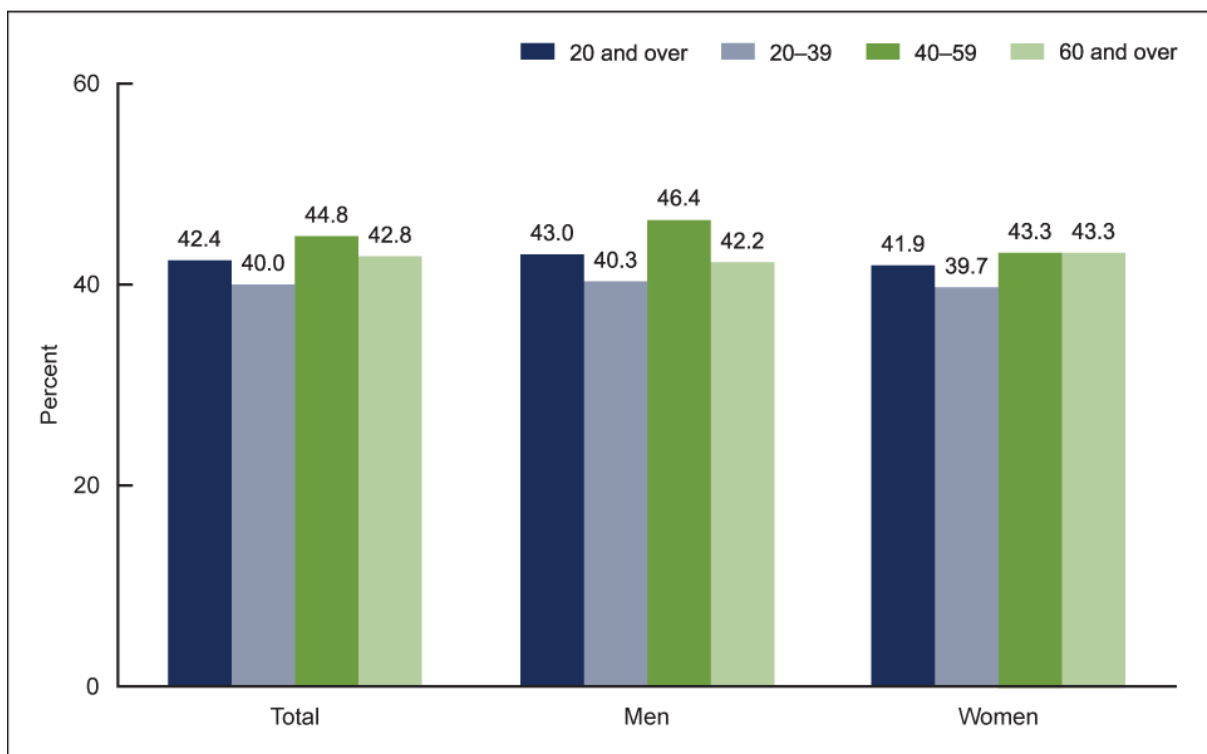


Figure 2 - Prevalence of Obesity among adults aged 20 and over, by sex and age: the United States, 2017-2018<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Figure provided by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db360.htm>



### 3. Globalization

Globalization is defined by the World Health Organization as “(...) the increased interconnectedness and interdependence of peoples and countries, is generally understood to include two inter-related elements: the opening of international borders to increasingly fast flows of goods, services, finance, people and ideas; and the changes in institutions and policies at national and international levels that facilitate or promote such flows. Globalization has the potential for both positive and negative effects on development and health”.

It implies trading acceleration alongside evolving developments, being it related to products, individuals, or cultural traditions, anywhere in the world. A very important aspect of globalization is the fact that it builds and advocates for cooperation and connections between distant places and their societies, throughout the globe.

This phenomenon paired with the concept of culture can be seen as the exportation of one country's culture to the other countries in order to make available the consumption of what they sell. In the case of the United States of America, what is being sold is the *American Way of Living* and the *American Dream*. The globalization of culture also means that if various countries are taking in other countries' cultures, there may, in the end, be overlapping with their own traditions.

This undeniably has its effect upon how in globalization the concept of culture may suffer from or benefit from a positive or negative influence. When countries embrace the traditional values and principles of other cultures, it seems as if their individual culture is being forgotten over a new global culture.

The exportation of culture is heavily impacted by globalization since it is due to it that people are able to better understand the daily life of other humans, the language they speak, and their daily habits.

Through popular cultures like music or cinema, there is an easy distribution of content that provides an insider's look into a faraway nation which, in consequence, makes selling products easier if they seem interested in the concept of the culture that is being exported through the media. For example, if a character of an American Tv Series is seen drinking coffee many times, any watcher from a different country will be interested in the taste of the said beverage, therefore once there is an opportunity to taste American coffee, they will be more eager to try it or if celebrities are seen with a specific coffee brand, that brand will become more popular, we can see that if we consider the chain of coffee shops *Starbucks* which are spreading all across the globe. In fact, South Korea is, as of 2021, the country in the world that has more licensed *Starbucks* coffee shops, next to the United States.

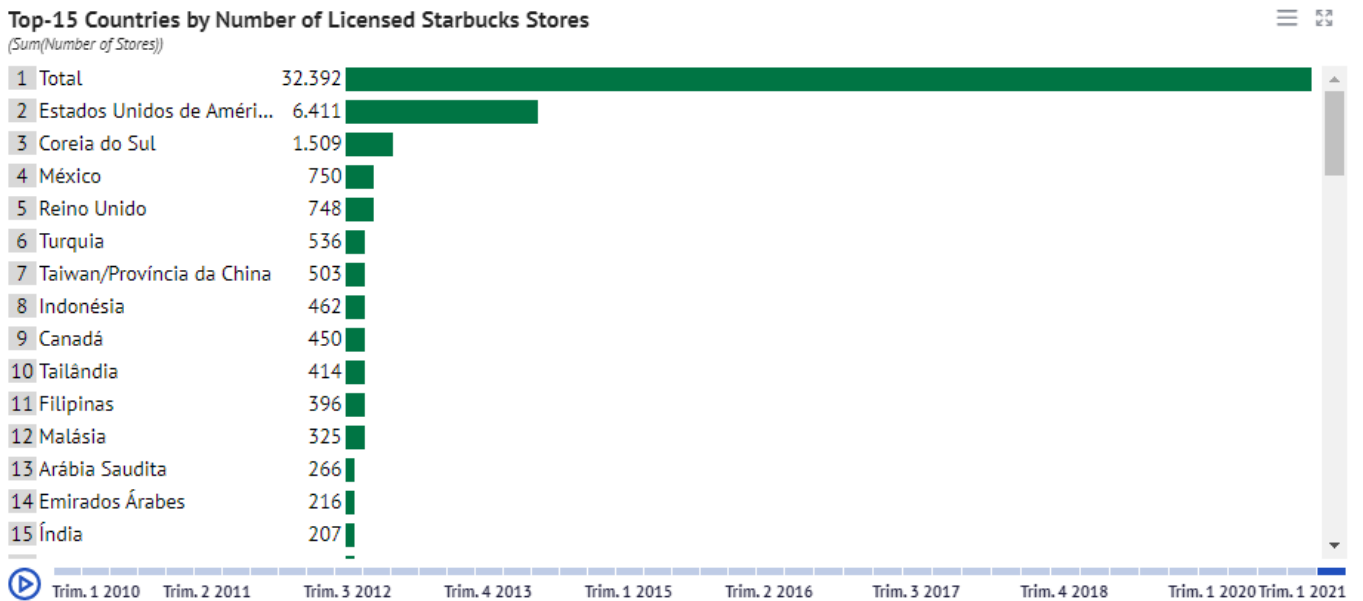


Figure 3 - Top 15 Countries by Number of Licensed Starbucks Stores (Data retrieved from knoema website)

The exportation of culture due to globalization also happens with scenery, for example, if a piece of specific music or movie speak of or portray a determined region of the United States, the person who is not from the USA and who is consuming the media item will have a bigger interest in visiting, therefore, this will have an impact in increasing the traveling and touristic flow and consequently having an impact on the country's economy.

The constant evolution of technologies is another factor that contributes to helping the spreading of cultural globalization. If the availability of cultural products is bigger and of easy reach, it is only natural for cultural exchange to happen.

A good example of this is how events that are popular in one country can become popular in other, which is the case of Black Friday in the United States of America, the day following Thanksgiving, people wait for shops to open in order to purchase items with considerable discounts – this a tradition known of the USA but nowadays it happens almost globally. It started as an American-only practice but due to publicity alongside technology and globalization, other countries have now adopted it as well.

As mentioned before, Globalization has its upside and downside, and whereas Globalization is bound to continue to happen, it is also important to point out some of the aspects that may suffer from the progress of cultural Globalization.

Cultural loss is the most significant downside, dialects that are on the verge of disappearing and traditions that have been forgotten over new global ones are some of the components that have suffered.

## 4. Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a term that describes the conjunction of distinct cultures, in one location, without having a predominant culture, and still being able to operate individually. This referring to cultural backgrounds includes creeds, race, traditions, conversational methods, conducts, and attitudes.

It is described by the Britannica Encyclopedia as “the view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political culture.”

It implies an assortment of cultures that are in contact with each other, but which do not blend with one another. Their cultural characteristics are concluded and disconnected from other cultures.

Multiculturalism acknowledges the contributions and the concerns of different cultures. It, also, emphasizes the idea that minorities are victims of discrimination and are seen as individual movements however, they deserve cultural recognition. In order to be consolidated, these individual cultures need to be supported and protected by the law.

The concept of Multiculturalism in present-day politics reveals a discussion concerning the comprehension and response to the obstacles regarding religion and ethnic-cultural diversity. When someone is described as *multicultural* it emphasizes their diversity within the community.

Contrary to one of the effects of Globalization, the meaning of being *multicultural* is not about absorbing numerous cultures into one. Those who advocate for Multiculturalism defend the goal of having individuals from minorities celebrating and preserving cultural identities and traditions that differentiate them from the other groups.

Therefore, Multiculturalism, having as an aim fighting off cultural uniformity, is advantageous for immigrants and has an impact on their integration within their new country and its society, since cultural and ethnic diversification is no longer seen as a threat to the individual identity of the host nation.

Being aware that minorities have the need for extraordinary understanding and recognition, Multiculturalism may concern itself with various forms of improvements to the new cultural community as well as to the political realm. Current governments in multicultural societies tend to include individuals from different cultural backgrounds and geographical origins to gain new diverse perspectives.

Communities of minorities often encountered rejection, injustice, and even belittlement of their inputs and the constant questioning of their individualities due to prejudice.

Multiculturalism may be considered as a method of awareness and compensation for former injustices such as prejudice and segregation.

Multiculturalism has, as one of its main aims, to respect the interest of the different communities and the improvement of inclusivity in terms of perspective while repressing the insistence for their acculturation into the society. Multiculturalism is a procedure that by demanding appreciation and consciousness of diversity, reveals relevant problematics to political leaders and the general public regarding cultural issues. By so doing, it demonstrates a potential solution for the improvement of cooperation and support towards minorities and all of the groups suffering from discrimination.

Cultural diversity within a society helps battling oppression and prejudice, therefore, some of the groups that Multiculturalism supports, include people in need of shelters like refugees, immigrants, and their children who may eventually have been born in the new country but who were raised with their parents' culture and language and could become an object of social exclusion. In the case of the United States, we can take as an example all the minorities of the country such as the native Americans.

Societies that are considered to be multicultural and with populations from diverse ethnic backgrounds can create numerous advantages for everyone, however, many still regard these as a menace.

Cultural pluralism and ethnic inclusiveness enhance the community and help people expand their points of view.

#### 4.1. Multiculturalism in South Korea

South Korea is defined as ethnically homogeneous, therefore, at the moment, the country cannot be described as a multicultural society, however, Multiculturalism is growing day by day in the country.

This growth has led South Korean politicians and decision-makers to review their foreigner-related policies and to empower migration. In order to make South Korea a more welcoming community towards foreigners, they have been advocating for Multiculturalism and pursuing more flexible migration patterns.

As of now, South Korea is a country that lacks racial inclusivity, mainly because South Koreans are not familiarized with living and engaging with other cultures.

South Korea has a very specific culture in which tiny details are very relevant and which show a distance from Western traditions. For instance, regarding drinking culture, it is disrespectful to drink alcohol facing someone older, younger people must drink with their face turned to the side in order to show respect.

South Korea is not seen as a multicultural society at the moment, we must take into account that the development of Multiculturalism and the subsequent transformations needed is a slow and extensive process. The shift in immigration-related laws is only one of the signs that South Korea is eager to help its community becoming multicultural.

Immigrants coming to South Korea are becoming more and more numerous, this is partly due to the spreading of *Hallyu* but also because South Korea has progressively felt the need to hire foreigners in specific sections of business trade.

This happens mainly due to the decreasing of childbirth rates in the last decades that have culminated into the eventual diminishing of the laboring population and the automation of the Industry that made South Koreans improve the ideal of their lifestyle.

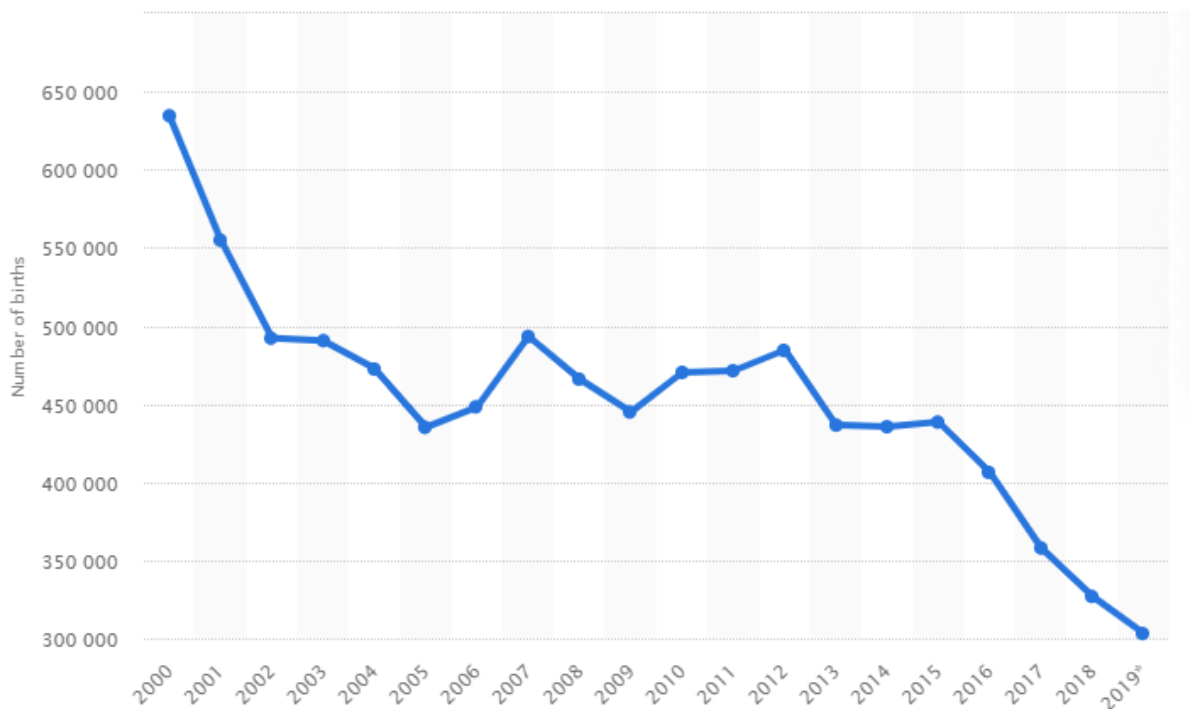


Figure 4 - Number of births in South Korea from 2000 to 2019<sup>13</sup>

Another reason why more Immigrants are settling in South Korea is that there is a considerable discrepancy between the male and the female gender within the portion of marriage age, because of the Korean society's preference for male children.

As a consequence, Korean men have felt the need to widen their horizons when searching for someone to bring up a family with and ended up marrying foreign women.

“Men will find it harder than ever to find a bride as the sex ratio at the age of first marriage declines in their disfavor. According to Chosun Ilbo analysis of Statistics Korea's 2010 census, the population at first marriage age – 29-33 for men and 26-30 for women – will rise from 111 men per 100 women this year to 119 in 2012, and to 123 in 2013 and 2014. The ratio is expected to decline a little to 119 men per 100 women the following year. (...) It seems likely that many men who have failed to find a partner who fits the conventional parameters will marry foreign women, older women, or divorcees. The number of foreign brides has declined after peaking at 30,000 in 2005, but that is expected to rise again.” - Gender Ratio Gets Worse for Marriageable Korean Men (Chosun Media: 2011)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from: [www.statistica.com](http://www.statistica.com)

<sup>14</sup> Retrieved from: [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2011/06/14/2011061400321.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/06/14/2011061400321.html)

All of these combined, make up for steady but continuous growth, in cultural and ethnic diversity, a trend that seems will not slow down or reverse soon. Making South Korea's population more diverse and racially inclusive day by day.

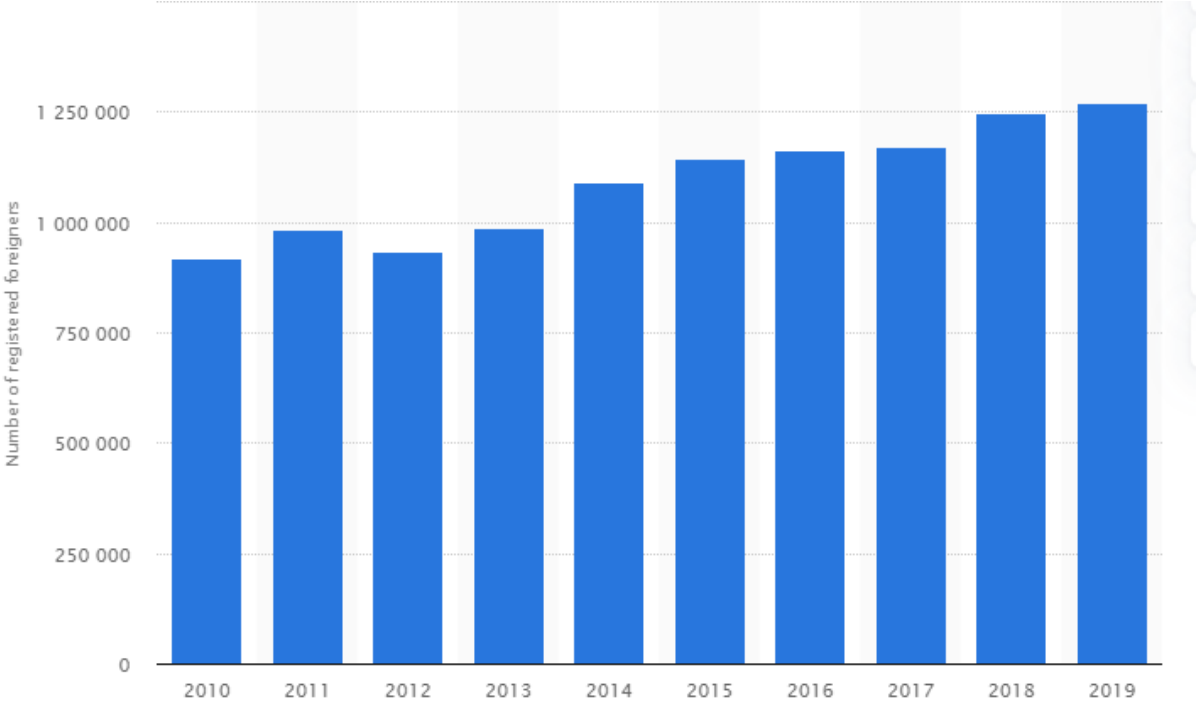


Figure 5 - Population of registered foreigners in South Korea from 2010 to 2019<sup>15</sup>

This is justified by the previous graphic, where we are able to see the growth of the foreigner population in South Korea, which is indeed happening gradually.

Regarding the foreigner population, South Korea occupies one of the lowest places among the country members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

<sup>15</sup> Retrieved from: [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)

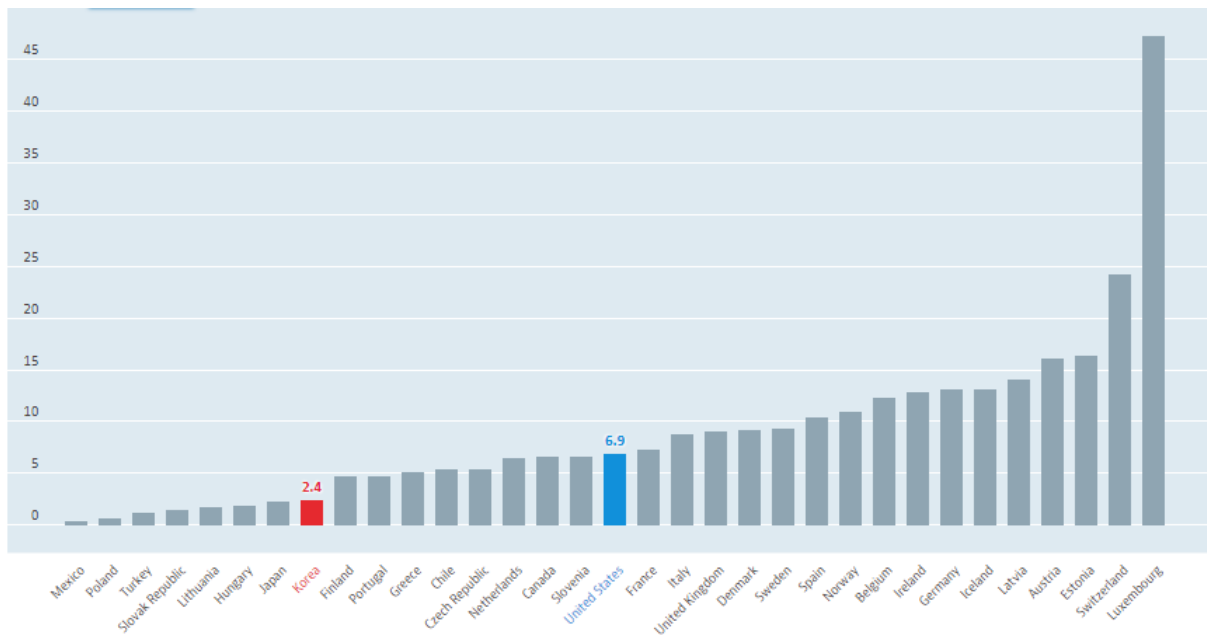


Figure 6 - Foreign population indicator as of 2019<sup>16</sup>

In comparison to some European countries, the number of foreigners living in either South Korea or the United States may seem like a very small percentage, however, we must acknowledge that in the case of the U.S., foreigners have been immigrating to the country for decades and decades, therefore the descendants of these immigrants make up a higher ethnic diversity percentage, without being considered foreigner since they were born there. This does not happen in South Korea; the number of foreigners present in the graphic is part of a new phenomenon that only started in the last few years.

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved from: <https://data.oecd.org/migration/foreign-population.htm>



## 4.2. Multiculturalism in the United States of America

Without any doubt, multiculturalism present in the United States of America has shaped the country into what it is today.

We may say that in the U.S., as in most countries, the language, culture, and history of the majority of the population are what orders and organizes it. With this, it is inevitable for foreigners and immigrants to face obstacles in their lives when seeking to pursue their routines differently.

There is a need to be more tolerant towards other cultures and their traditions, this is when Multiculturalism comes to help. It has the benefit to deliver harmony and understanding whilst bringing awareness to cultural equality. No culture should be discriminated against over any other all the while paying attention to the characteristics and needs of each tradition and belief.

Recognition of different identities is an argument of Multiculturalism. Religion, race, and language are the principal characteristics of cultural divergence. On that account, it is understandable that Multiculturalism is related indirectly to anti-discrimination and anti-racism, the idea of Multiculturalism is to be acceptant of all.

“We now are creating a country, the first country in world history which literally has to represent all of the world, which is to say it is not just Protestant, Catholic and Jewish; it is now Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim, along with Catholic, Protestant and Jewish. It is not just four or five languages, it is 150 languages. We have the challenge and the opportunity to create the first country in world history which literally is a reflection of the entire world. If we do that well, it will be an enormous accomplishment. If we do it poorly, if we have the same kind of tensions and struggles and fights and anti-immigration and racism that we had at the turn of the last century, from roughly the 1880s to the 1920s, it will be messy, and unpleasant and nasty, and not good for this democracy, and not good for this economy.”  
(Kenneth Prewitt)<sup>27</sup>

Multiculturalism helped the American civilization to comprehend the religion of minorities and to be more understanding towards them. A tolerant community is a more welcoming community, therefore, the Multiculturalism present in the U.S. is one of the measures that, when applied, is sure to make their residents feel more comfortable with their background and the culture they are assimilating in the USA.

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<sup>27</sup>Retrieved from the former Director of the United States Census Bureau, Kenneth Prewitt's interview with Public Broadcasting Service  
<https://www.pbs.org/fmc/interviews/prewitt.htm>

“(…) we should properly calibrate our tolerance for multiculturalism with our insistence on also supporting a unified national culture. We shouldn’t try to completely stifle all rival identities (whether Catholic, Jewish, or Baptist; Irish-American, Chinese-American, or Mexican-American; or whatever else), but neither should we neglect the building of an American identity. We should accommodate some religious or cultural objections to generally applicable laws, as we have done for centuries in countless ways. But we shouldn’t (and generally don’t) accommodate objections when the accommodation would substantially harm others.” (Volkh:2011)<sup>18</sup>

Multiculturalism in the United States of America creates acceptance of the minorities’ culture without altering American culture, it cultivates a co-existence of communities that are meant to have their cultural backgrounds thrive individually and still be able to be emerged within American culture and be a part of that without having to choose between cultures.

Multiculturalism definitely evolves with Globalization which makes both of these phenomena present in American culture, therefore American pop culture will have an impact on other various cultures. This is due to the fact that American popular culture such as movies, tv shows, and music are the most marketed and consumed pop culture around the globe, it will inherently have repercussions on others.

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<sup>18</sup> Eugene Volokh, “Multiculturalism: For or Against?” (2011)

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2011/03/multiculturalism-or-against-eugene-volokh/>

## 5. Pop Culture

Popular culture can be interpreted as what is popular and is more commercialized, but it also means that it is contemporary culture, the culture that we are living at the moment or have lived through in the near past.

Often, popular culture is looked down on and seen as having a low cultural value, however, popular culture surrounds us and is responsible for various situations that affect history and the economy.

In this chapter, I intend to present aspects of contemporary culture from both South Korea and the United States and explain how this portion of culture can have an impact today.

“Culture shock” is a term described by the Cambridge dictionary as “a feeling of confusion that results from suddenly experiencing a culture with customs that are not familiar to you”. It happens when cultural disparity is visible, and people are presented with a reality that is not in accordance with their cultural habits.

### 5.1. Hallyu: Korean Wave

As a first step, before the process of exploration on this theme, there is the need to explain the meaning of *Hallyu* and what it is. The word derives from the Chinese language and can be translated as “Korean Wave” (*Hán Liú* 韩流) and reflects in its meaning that the popular culture of South Korea spread out to the rest of the world just like a wave. This Korean Wave does not correspond to South Korean culture, it is rather a reflection of the Korean culture in other countries.

The phenomenon of the Korean Wave started to become well-known and spreading out to neighboring countries during the latter part of the 1990s. There must be considered the reasons for this movement's expansion. It is believed that one of the major factors that made it so appreciated by the multitudes was the fact that, at the time, the performances were considered cool and pure at the same time. The songs, for example, normally did not include explicit lyrics and this pleased those who guided themselves by Confucianism considering that the Korean Wave, in this regard, stood accordingly by principles of Confucianism. However, the number one ingredient for their success is, without a doubt, the looks of the Korean idols – South Korea is known for taking beauty very seriously, that's why it is the capital of plastic surgery. Those symmetrical faces accompanied by perfectly synchronized choreographies are pleasing to the eye and become captivating.

The elements of K-pop groups have the looks necessary to succeed in the entertainment business and even though they may be alluring, it is their hard work that engages the fans, their commitment to their roles as performers, and their need to archive the perfect conjunction of dance and singing - their efforts to achieve perfection is something that is not certainly seen in any other country of the world.

There are numerous reports of situations where idols pass out on stage due to overworking, there are many accounts of performers still keeping going with the dance routine even if they have suffered an injury. It was once reported that the members of the K-pop group BTS (방탄소년단), tend to need respiratory care after their performance, they exhaust themselves in such an extreme way during their stages performances that they have oxygen cans available for them in their backstage.<sup>19</sup> It is this type of unseen devotion for their dreams that mesmerizes their fans.

Instantaneously, members of Korean pop groups started to get invited to appear in foreign variety shows and asked to take their shows outside Korea. This is considered a phenomenon because it happened on its own, it came from the artists. It only took Korea to pay attention to its own culture for *Hallyu* to succeed. Nevertheless, only after its clear international success was South Korea decisive in aiding and boosting the movement at home.

Social Media has been a major contributor to this cultural expansion. It is through social media and apps that most fans can accompany the happenings of the South Korean entertainment industry. The technological advances make it easier to keep up with the entertainment events such as live streaming of concerts, press conferences, or interviews in actual time which explains why the South Korean cultural boom has been increasing in the last few years.

*Hallyu* has had an enormous impact on society, both for South Korean people and for the rest of the globe. The Korean Wave walked hand in hand with Multiculturalism and Globalization and by broadcasting the Korean culture to the world, it helped to bring awareness into situations of racism, making people aware of discrimination, and, consequently, it assisted people from Asian ethnicities to be more accepted into their communities around the globe. It also paved a way for South Korean tourism that had been inexistent, boosting the country's economy in almost every cultural aspect.

South Korea was seen by the rest of the world as a country with a very fragile cultural front. Therefore, when the Korean Wave started to spread out, many thought it would not last long, but the Korean Wave traveled a lot farther than Asia and has now gotten visibility and acclaim all around the globe, bringing

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<sup>19</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mevd\\_ghPDGo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mevd_ghPDGo) [video file]

along not only K-pop and Korean dramas but also, other lesser-known aspects of Korea such as Korean gastronomy, K-Beauty, and Korean culture and language classes.

Korean culture itself became a complete industry on its own from which the country could take advantage and profit from. To expand its tourism, South Korea decided to target and focus on *Hallyu* and those who come to the Republic of Korea because of it. These types of tourists are known to go to South Korea specifically to visit *Hallyu*-related content such as the sets of specific Korean dramas, K-pop agencies, or even restaurants and cafés that are owned by celebrities. We can take as examples the *Aewol Môngsant* cafe in Jeju island, owned by G-Dragon, the cafe *Dudart* owned by Jay Park, or the *Samgeori Pujutgan Central City* Restaurant owned by the YG entertainment.

Being a highly technological country, South Korea took advantage of the moment and the show business and with that, resorted to social media and idols to promote the tourist industry. The K-pop group BTS (방탄소년단) were proclaimed Ambassadors of the city of Seoul for various years, promotional videos were made starring the members of the group in some of Seoul's most emblematic sites (see "BTS' Life in Seoul" by VisitSeoulTv<sup>20</sup> and Seoul x BTS "See you in Seoul" by Seoul City Official<sup>21</sup>

The scenery portrayed in Korean dramas and K-pop music videos helps instigate the curiosity of other countries for Korean culture.

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<sup>20</sup> Visit Seoul Tv – *BTS' Life in Seoul* promotional video (September 13<sup>th</sup> 2017)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5ZkwX\\_9xMo&list=PLIHLmcNliQdaoXjCOvbWO\\_aTpm5wTsD2&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5ZkwX_9xMo&list=PLIHLmcNliQdaoXjCOvbWO_aTpm5wTsD2&index=4) [video file]

<sup>21</sup> Seoul City Official - [*Seoul x BTS*] *See you in Seoul* promotional video (September 11<sup>th</sup> 2020) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6\\_oQDbF6pvk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_oQDbF6pvk)



Figure 7 - Itaewon landscape in *Itaewon Class* Korean drama (Netflix, 2020)<sup>22</sup>

For example, it is common for fans of K-pop to wish Happy Birthday to the members of their favorite groups publicly and in grand ways. Quite often, fans pitch in together to buy billboards and advertise their best wishes to the celebrity, eventually those giant billboards with the face of the singer or actor/actress also become a sightseeing spot so that international fans can take pictures with them.



Figure 8 - Seoul Metropolitan Station displaying billboards with birthday messages to Korean actor Lee Jong Suk<sup>23</sup>  
 This type of advertising makes publicity more appealing to the consumer who chooses to visit Korea due to *Hallyu*. Many foreign visitors visit the country because of their interest in Korean dramas and K-

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from <https://thetravelintern.com/k-drama-filming-locations/>

<sup>23</sup> Retrieved from [https://weibointl.api.weibo.cn/share/170266657.html?weibo\\_id=4545450063172382](https://weibointl.api.weibo.cn/share/170266657.html?weibo_id=4545450063172382)

pop and their wishes to see, not only, the filming locations in real life but also to know and visit the very same places their favorite artists go to.

Nowadays those who visit a foreign country tend to weigh in the aesthetically pleasing component of the country, therefore consumerism and media propagation go hand in hand. South Korean establishments make great usage of aesthetics (StyleNanda Pink Hotel and other facilities).

“Before being promulgated globally Korean culture adopted and adapted aspects of American culture through cultural exchange as a result of long tradition of American engagement.” (ANDERSON et al., 2014:123)<sup>24</sup>

The phenomenon of *Hallyu* was able to arise and increase by virtue of technological advancements, which, by itself, works in favor of the propagation of Korean popular culture considering that the internet helps in the distribution of websites where one can view Korean dramas since Korean television channels which stream the soap operas are not always available for Americans and they most likely would not be able to understand the plot without subtitles. In this case, there are websites specially dedicated to the streaming of Korean dramas, movies, and variety shows with subtitles in many languages. In some websites, there is even an option where the subtitles appear not only in English but also in Korean characters so that those viewing can associate the English word with the characters and slowly learn the Korean language.

Easy access to the transnational people makes the spreading of the culture much more efficient. For instance, “*Gangnam Style*” by PSY was one of the first encounters many had with Korean culture, especially K-pop, it constituted a real phenomenon due to its fast-rising fame at the time it debuted. This first hit worked like a sample and trial of Korean culture which paved the way for many other Korean artists.

The *Hallyu* movement represents a change of direction in the flow of the music industry market since it traditionally originated in Western countries towards the rest of the world. The continuous consumption of Korean media without any doubt has had a direct positive impact on South Korea’s economy.

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<sup>24</sup> MARINESCU, Valentina, ANDERSON, Crystal S. et al. (2014) *The Global Impact of South Korean Popular Culture: Hallyu Unbound*, Ch.3 Hallyu in America, p.123

### 5.1.1 K-pop and its Industry

When it comes to the cultural market, South Korea has a dynamic and effective front while exporting a wide range of culturally related works and devices. Despite, the fact that video and computer games represent a bulkier part of the offer, music, literature, cinema, and tv shows are also effectively bearing and conveying an image of many aspects of Korean culture, therefore, it is natural that these different products face divergent situations in the market of exportation.

It is easier for games to be more successful as far as exportation is concerned since they have a larger base and less competition, the same does not apply to the rest of the entertainment industry.

Size of Music Exports as a Percent of Korean Cultural Exports					
Category	2014	2016	2017	2018	%
Music (including K-pop)	335,650	442,566	512,580	564,236	5,9
Broadcasting (Tv shows)	336,019	411,212	362,403	478,447	5,6
Movies	26,380	43,894	40,726	41,607	0,4
Publishing	247,268	187,388	220,951	248,991	2,6

Table 1 - Size of Music Exports as a Percent of Korean Cultural Exports<sup>25</sup>

As the graphic shows, there has been a constant growth within Korean cultural exportation. The categories of Music and Broadcasting have a higher percentage of growth, musical exportation has been growing gradually since 2014 and has almost doubled their numbers in just four years. Whereas broadcasting had some ups and downs, in 2014 the exports overcame those of music but that did not last long, in 2017 it dropped but rose again in 2018, which I believe was due to the rise of the exportation of Korean dramas that are contained in the category. The movie section is the one with the lowest percentage between the four categories but its growth, although steadier compared to the others, has been notable. The publishing branch started unfortunately with a notable drop from 2014 to 2016 but has since recovered, showing a 2,6% growth.

At the moment, according to the statistics provided by the IFPI (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry) global music report, South Korea occupies the 6<sup>th</sup> position within the global music market and its development has been strong.

<sup>25</sup> Table's data obtained from the Korea Creative Contents Agency (KOCCA) as of 2019.



Top 10 Music Markets 2019			
01	USA	06	South Korea
02	Japan	07	China
03	UK	08	Canada
04	Germany	09	Australia
05	France	10	Brazil

Table 2 - Top 10 Music Markets of 2019<sup>26</sup>

The Republic of Korea progresses with its global sale expansion annually, each year the number of music sales increases, being it physical copies of albums or song downloads.

“Asia saw overall growth of 3.4% in 2019. This was a slower rate of growth than the previous year (+12.3%), largely as a result of a slowdown in the region’s largest market, Japan (-0,9%), which saw a decline in physical sales (-4.8%), the dominant format in that country. Excluding Japan, Asia experienced double-digit growth (+11.5%), boosted by strong uptake of paid subscription streaming. Because of the size of the Japanese market, physical sales remain the largest revenue stream in the region (48.5% of the market total); however, 2018 was the first-time physical’s share fell below 50% of all revenues. Asia’s next three largest markets – South Korea, China, and India – all experienced strong growth, with South Korea seeing an increase of 8.2% and double-digit gains of 16.0% and 18.7% respectively in China and India.” (IFPI Global Music Report 2020 – The Industry in 2019)<sup>27</sup>

Japan is the single biggest buyer for the Korean music market followed by China and South East Asia which makes these countries the major destiny for exportation of this cultural product.

Korean music has been very well received in the U.S., however, we must take into consideration that, despite the rapid growth of sales in North America in recent years, generally, the US still only takes up a narrow portion of the musical market of South Korea.

Many do not understand the “abrupt” appreciation for Korean music and question its emergence, however, the truth is that K-pop is not a new genre of music, it has been around for quite a long time, it started to gain awareness throughout the decade of the 90s. There are numerous K-pop idols such as J.Y. Park, Rain, and the elements of the group *Shinwa* whose careers go back more than twenty years.

<sup>26</sup> Data obtained from the International Federation of Phonographic Industry (IFPI) Global Music Report (2019)

<sup>27</sup> “Global Music Report: The Industry in 2019”. (2019). International Federation of the Phonographic Industry. Retrieved from: [https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Global\\_Music\\_Report-the\\_Industry\\_in\\_2019-en.pdf](https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Global_Music_Report-the_Industry_in_2019-en.pdf)

Even though K-pop was able to become popular in North America, that does not mean it has been an easy way, it has been more difficult for K-pop to gain admirers in the United States than in other countries because K-pop is a foreign concept, which revolves around foreigner artists and the prejudice is still very prominent, meaning that their reception of South Korean artists has been tainted with the subconscious and unacknowledged intolerance and discrimination of race. The fact that K-pop was able to come through and become popular nonetheless, shows how this younger generation is a part of a period where people can connect beyond borders.

Sometimes K-pop songs may sound familiar which may lead to some people thinking that it is an imitation of other songs considered to be from Western artists. However, if we look back in time, we understand that new forms of music have consistently represented modernity.

During their trainee years, idols are trained in different styles of performance to be able to adapt to new trends. It is normal for Korean pop groups to tweak their comebacks accordingly to American trends in order to do better in the American music market, they have as a goal to be successful in North America as if this country were a way to measure their popularity.

This type of procedure seems to point at the fact that the relevance of one country's cultural significance is measured by others. The impact of North America in developing an album or comeback is so relevant that the management of a group will take into account the measurements that will make their groups be able to succeed in the United States, which, in turn, makes us consider if the evolution of Multiculturalism and the propagation of cultures affects the origin of the content and the fact that its value for others is to be determined outside its own source.

The goal of Korean groups to become popular in the United States became so evident that quite often the companies that manage the groups would adjust their new singles in order to match the new current trends of the U.S.A. For instance, if Hispanic and Latin music was popular at the moment, they would make the group release a single featuring the same type of sound or even featuring a Hispanic artist. We can take as examples Super Junior (슈퍼주니어)'s song "*Lo Siento*" featuring Leslie Grace, and songs as "*Airplane Part.2*" by BTS (방탄소년단).

The idea that the United States of America represents success, is not something new, it comes from the past few decades. In the 1930s, Korean traditional music was outsold by all-new genres such as tango or the blues. In 1945, when the Second World War finally ended, American soldiers who were stationed in Korea were generally provided with live entertainment by Korean artists, who in order to appeal to

this specific public, took the charge of studying American hits and planning an adequate choreography so that they were able to make these soldiers a little less homesick with their performances.

These performers took the most popular American songs, translated them to Korean, and adapted them so they would fit within the political atmosphere of the time. The artists rearranged the songs to please the Americans who were stationed in their country, but they also tried to appeal to the Korean audience. They did not only take inspiration from the already written hits, but they would also create their music but always with these other genres kept in mind. The fact that these types of performances were successful and lucrative contributed to the rise of numerous Korean artists.

This demonstrates how the entertainment industry was established in Korea. Many say that the beginning of K-pop took off with the debut of the group “Seo Taiji and Boys” (서태지와 아이들) in 1992 with their song “I Know” (난 알아요). They are considered to be the founders of the K-pop of nowadays because of a series of different characteristics that their performances gathered, such as synchronized choreographies, songs involving melodic chorus and sections of rap all in one song, together with fashionable aesthetics as well as a polite personality, all of this positively contributed to draw a continuous and progressive commitment and dedication from their fans.

One of the members of “Seo Taeji and Boys”, Yang Hyun Suk founded one of the major entertainment companies of South Korea, ‘YG Entertainment’. This type of entertainment management is very characteristic of the South Korean entertainment industry since these types of companies are seen almost as a school to produce idols. We cannot find companies with these features, for instance, in America or Europe, since they serve as record studios and record labels, talent scouting, music production, events, and concerts management. The standard concept for a successful idol was developed by one of these companies, SM Entertainment. They aim to portray a specific type of talent where the artist is not only in harmony with South Korean beauty standards but has also talent in performing and in entertaining and since it has been proven successful, this model is still followed by South Korean entertainment corporations to this day.

This optimal construction of how a South Korean performer should appear and behave was specifically designed and set by these entertainment agencies to make their artists into idols so that the artists would have higher levels of engagement with their fans due to their posture, beauty, and talent altogether. Due to this training phase, some people perceive K-pop as a type of fabricated pop. Stating an opinion like this is equivalent to rejecting to understand that the concept behind a K-pop training

agency is designed to work as a school that provides intensive training so as to create and shape artists into K-pop idols.

This represents the duality present in the South Korean music industry between being a musician and performer and being a product of the training years spent in the entertainment industries. Due to their training years, these artists are prepared to impersonate different styles of dance and aesthetics, since they focus on diversification and range.

K-pop does not only revolve around music, it is the creation of a modern cultural product. The biggest difference between South Korean pop music and pop music from the USA is the fact that the artist who sing K-pop go through these training years. South Korean aspiring idols go through this process willingly because they know that even though it is severe, it is the best way to succeed within the industry and make a debut. They start their training program at a very young age.

“I think what makes K-pop, K-pop is the time we spend as a trainee. We all lived together, sort of like a boarding school, like a training version.” (Jennie Kim, 2020)<sup>28</sup>

The idol is the center of the whole business and the rest revolves around them once they make their first appearance and gain fans. The ideal idol is supposed and trained to be a role model at all times, to have a social personality, and be genuine and sincere so that in that way, their fans feel eager to demonstrate their support and devotion. They are trained to be seen as examples, no one wants to idolatry someone that seems to be a bad person, therefore these artists are taught how to behave as the epitome of good manners and also have brilliant intellect and high levels of attractiveness.

The fact that these normal human beings can achieve this level of greatness both, cultural and talent-wise, alongside beauty and kindness somehow transmits a message of hopefulness to the common citizen. We must address that this commitment that idols go through during the process of their trainee years demonstrates a great sacrifice each one of them made to be able to entertain people. As a result of this, in their turn, people show adoration and admiration for them.

The role of being an idol in the South Korean Entertainment Industry is not easy, these artists have so many rules they must obey that they can hardly behave like normal human beings, always being in the public eye they are not able to commit any type of error because any slip could seriously endanger their career.

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<sup>28</sup> Retrieved from Netflix's documentary *BLACKPINK: Light Up the Sky* (2020)

These idols are completely aware that their careers are in the hands of their fans and supporters, and they acknowledge this and give them credit for it. Idol group members have a great sense of gratefulness and make videos<sup>29</sup> and messages expressing their gratitude, it is normal for these groups to make videos of seasonal greetings to wish their fans a happy new year or send them their best wishes during any kind of holiday and consistently create extra material to keep up with the fans' interactions.

This is a prominent characteristic of K-pop, the fact that fans have easy access to connect and bond with the idols through social media. They are trained to interact with their fans to thank their support, therefore the uploading of videos and live streams on multiple platforms is encouraged. There are even special mediums such as apps that help fans feel close to the K-pop members (*WeVerse* app). This builds a strong relationship between the two parties which enables the fans to become part of the singer's lives and to connect with people of similar interests, as well as reassuring the support of the fan community toward the members of the group.

K-pop is not a different genre of music, K-pop is part of the pop genre. What makes it distinguishable from the general pop music made by American artists is the gigantic process that is behind a K-pop group and its producing method. The major difference between K-pop and the rest of pop music is what the artists have to go through to debut as a group, alongside the team that is behind them to try and obtain perfection. It is a visually driven performance.

“We’re just Korean people trying to do music, so if Korean people make music, it’s K-pop? I don’t even get it. It’s Korean pop. The only thing (different) is language. Why don’t they do that for every country? What is K-pop?” (Teddy Park, 2020)<sup>30</sup>

Semantics are overlooked in K-pop songs. In one song, we are able to encounter Korean lyrics and English lyrics, as well as some words or expressions that do not make sense. This happens for the greater good of having audio that is pleasing to hear, a tune that becomes catchy and addicting to the one that is listening, in some songs, words are sung randomly and some even are made up to rhyme.

“Dance wow fantastic baby, boom shakalaka, boom shakalaka” (BIGBANG, 2012)<sup>31</sup>

The lyrics’ lack of structure makes it easier for people who do not understand Korean, and even English, to enjoy K-pop because the focus is on the visuals and the sound.

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<sup>29</sup> BANGTANTV - BTS Happy Chuseok Greetings <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnq0ExzP49Q> [video file]

<sup>30</sup> Retrieved from Netflix’s documentary *BLACKPINK: Light Up the Sky* (2020)

<sup>31</sup> Retrieved from BIGBANG’s song “Fantastic Baby” (2012)

With the expansion of *Hallyu*, K-pop groups have become more comfortable in showing their heritage, in the last few years we can see a growth of Korean culture symbolism present in K-pop music videos and performances, which was not common before. In the early half of the 2010's most idol groups' aesthetics revolved around western trends, which they assimilated into their outfits and backgrounds. Now, their pride upon their culture has resurfaced.

Elements such as the *hanbok* (한복), the Korean traditional attire, has become a popular outfit, we can take as an example the modernization of the hanbok that the members of BLACKPINK wore in the “How You Like That” music video as well as the hanbok worn by the artist Agust D in the “*Daechwita*” (대취타) music video that borrows the name from a traditional Korean genre used in ceremonies.

Adding to this, Korean traditional folklore has become part of the lyrical plot of some songs, and Korean traditional instruments and dance movements are being implemented as well.



Figure 9 - BLACKPINK members wearing modern versions of the *hanbok* for their music video "How you like that" (2020)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Retrieved from BLACKPINK's music video "How You Like That" (2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioNng23DkIM>



Figure 10 - Min Yoongi wearing the *hanbok* for the music video of his song "Daechwita" (2020)<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Retrieved from Agust D's music video "Daechwita" 대취타 (2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGIAWJ2zWWI>

### 5.1.2. Korean Tv: Variety Shows and Korean dramas

As it was demonstrated in Table number 1 (see chapter 5.1.1. K-pop and its Industry) when it comes to the cultural exportation of South Korean movies, a small growth within the percentages was registered. However, since the year 2019 was not represented within the statistics, I believe that a still more significant growth will be revealed. In 2019, South Korean cinema had a massive break-through when “Parasite” won the Oscar for best movie, making it the first time in the history of the awards that a foreign movie won that category, which is even more special since there is a category for Best International Feature Film, which “Parasite” also won. This award not only brought fame to its director, Bong Jon Ho (봉준호), and its actors but also shone a light on the South Korean entertainment industry which made people recognize their talent.

Once people started listening to Korean pop, it did not take long for those fans to be introduced to Korean dramas (or vice versa), which generated an even greater impulse to the propagation of *Hallyu*.

The fame and success of Korean dramas became so prominent in the USA, that there is an assortment of Korean dramas or variety shows who have been adapted into television series for the American public. These adaptations include, among others, “The Good Doctor” (2017) starring Freddie Highmore and which was adapted from the 2013 Korean drama of the same name; the animated cartoons “YooHoo & Friends” series of 2012 which is based on a 2009 Korean version and “The Masked Singer” (2019), a singing competition which is a reworking of the Korean variety show “King of Mask Singer” (미스터리 음악쇼 복면가왕) original from 2015, both of these series involve a group of various people who sing, that may be talented or not, and whose identity is unknown until the end of the episode, both shows are presently still being produced. Most of these shows include Koreans or Korean descendants in their productions to connect the adaptations.



## 5.2. American Wave

When the Second World War ended, the world was no longer the same. The war caused the mind and spirits of the Western people to be profoundly shocked. Therefore, the United States felt the need to assume and take control over the Western world in the political and economic realm as well as in the area of the socio-cultural revolution.

Suddenly, artistic innovations were no longer searched in European capitals, instead, New York became the modernization focus. The post-war economic prosperity of the USA cultivated a thriving lower class who aspired to achieve cultural ascension.

During the post-war period, due to their prosperity and abundance in society alongside technological progress and cultural dynamism, the United States captivated more attention than ever before.

Hollywood movies and television shows started to be copied in Europe and Asia which in their turn helped to spread the values and stereotypes of the “American Way of Living”.

American popular culture is how the US wants to be transmitted to the rest of the world. The American way of living is the idea of success and prosperity.

“These audio-visual media provide a dominant means by which images of the “American” way of life, whether political, social or economic, are transmitted around the world. It is through these media that the rest of the world sees American values and lifestyles.” (CROTHERS, 2010:13)<sup>34</sup>

For those who were part of the lower class and had known the difficulties of the war years, owning a house filled with home appliances, a television in the living room and a car in the garage were the dreams they were hoping for, it was a joy worth living for. Housewives were mesmerized with soluble coffee, instant soups, and pre-cooked food since it relieved them from the time they perceptibly dedicated to different home chores. Even though it was quite criticized by conservatives, “Coca-Cola” became the favorite and iconic drink of Americans, and fast food spread to the whole world.

The basic principle of the American Dream emanates from the highly valued individualism of Americans, and this is tied to their belief in equal opportunities to attain the promise of American wealth and freedom to pursue it (expressed in any measure of attainment) together with consumerism, makes the American Dream (homeownership, expensive cars, lots of material goods, etc.).

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<sup>34</sup> CROTHERS, Lane (2010) *Globalization and American popular culture*. Chapter 1: American popular culture and globalization, page 13. Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group

The American Dream revolves around the lack of collectivist thinking, their belief to succeed independently, and their conviction that the US is the country with the greatest number of favorable circumstances to succeed. The American Dream gives people hope for success. Americans, therefore, measure their success by material properties such as houses and vehicles, they prioritize the instant feeling of possession instead of investing as we see in chapter 2.5. *Long Term Orientation*.

When it comes to trying to understand North American culture, we face difficulties since there is not an exact description of what it is neither what it comprises. Many North Americans describe USA culture by naming the traditions and history of their country.

The amplification of American Culture has become so massive that it has been complicated to pinpoint what can be considered culture or not. It becomes a more complex topic since there is no agreement on the origin of the culture of the United States (Naylor 1998:01)<sup>35</sup>, adding to this, the Individualist attitude of Americans, makes it hard for them to see the American community as a culture.

“They tend to respond rather negatively to any suggestion that they are part of a collective, or larger group, with whom they might share the ideas and practices they perceive as unique to themselves.”  
(NAYLOR, 1998:01)

Any group of people is part of a culture, the fact that the US might be an agglomeration of different cultures does not mean that the country as a whole was not able to create its own culture throughout the years. Even if it may oscillate from person to person, the American people have their own behaviors and thoughts that distinguish them from the other countries of the world. And even though American residents may differ one from another in almost every aspect of their beings due to Multiculturalism, they continue to have something in common, they reside in the United States of America, and for most of them, this is the land of freedom and opportunity.

That said, to be considered American the birthplace does not have to be the United States of America. In theory, there is no need to share a set of values in order to be part of America, this is partially due to Globalization. Even those who do not master the English language can experience the nationalist feeling of having the United States of America as their home and nation. Immigrants, for example, become a part of the American nation by believing in it and sharing their love for the land, the fact that they choose the USA to be their home is enough to be part of it. Those who bring their ancestor’s culture only add up to the Multiculturalism present in the culture of the USA.

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<sup>35</sup> NAYLOR, Larry L. (1998) *American Culture: Myth and Reality of a Culture of Diversity*. Ch.1: The idea of Culture, p.01

“Culture is learned, not inherited. While many Americans believe that the only thing necessary for membership in the culture group is to be born in the United States, being born in the country only gives one the rights of citizenship. This alone does not make an American.” (NAYLOR, 1998:94).

The question of whether any culture present in the USA could be considered American culture has many different answers. How is it possible for America to have its own culture when it is a product of cultural combinations and it is spreading due to globalization and media consumption?

American culture is real, and its existence contributes to various aspects of the present. The USA is such a major generator of popular culture that it is a fact that the consumption of this product affects and influences the rest of the world.

The USA is a multicultural country; therefore, it can be difficult to pinpoint what was produced within “American Culture” and what derived from the immigrants that have settled there. Nevertheless, this is what makes up the concept of “American Culture”, an amalgamation of the many cultures present there alongside the innovation that the “American Way of Living” mentality added up to this notion.

The spreading of American pop culture took advantage of Globalization even more than in any other country since the USA is a mass producer of popular content.

American brands as part of the global market have proven successful overseas. Brands and food chains such as *Apple*, *Coca-Cola*, and *Starbucks* are only a few examples that are fully available worldwide.

In order to make their brands accessible to a worldwide market, there is a need to create company chains in numerous countries, in doing so these companies contribute to the phenomenon of globalization and, in their turn, make it grow faster.

During the late '90s, visual media represented the major slice for exports from the USA. This projection of content makes us understand how the growth of *Hallyu* correlates to the growing number of exports South Korea has achieved and how these relate to the expansion of the country's media in the rest of the globe.

Culture can be provided by many different departments, and by anything that is correlated to a country or a group of people. When people think of cultural aspects, one of the topics that may come to mind could be its cuisine since it constitutes a good representation of communal relationships, however, “fast food” is not one of the common thoughts that derive from cuisine unless we bear the United States of America in mind.

The giant of the fast-food market is McDonald's. According to statistics<sup>36</sup>, McDonald's owned 39,198 restaurants across the globe in 2020, and the number continues to grow.

“(…), McDonald's stands as a powerful symbol of American cultural globalization. Its symbolic golden arches logo is as distinctive as the American flag. Its restaurants grew in the presence of drive-through lanes at many of its stores. What could be more American than to not have to get out of one's car even to eat? McDonald's is thus both an indicator of globalization and evidence of the American cultural way of life.” (CROTHERS, 2010:130)

McDonald's is also adaptable; their franchises take into account people's tastes and create specific meals and products to make their customers enjoy the brand globally. Singapore has a matcha ice cream option, Portugal has a *McBifana* sandwich, India has chicken and vegetarian burgers instead of the original beef patty due to religious singularities. This adaptability is a great part of their success globally.

In 2021, McDonald's collaborated with the South Korean group BTS and came out with a BTS meal, a menu consisting of chicken McNuggets, a drink, and two limited-edition sauces (Cajun and Sweet Chili). This is not only proof of the influence of the Korean Wave but also of the power of McDonald's as a business.



Figure 11 - McDonald's BTS Meal (2021)<sup>37</sup>

\* Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/219454/mcdonalds-restaurants-worldwide/>

McDonald's is without a doubt a symbol of American culture, this chain portrays the success of the American Dream towards the rest of the world.

Coca-Cola became famous because it was reachable, you could find it anywhere and it was available to anyone, it did not have a target audience. You can drink Coca-Cola if you are a millionaire or someone from the lower class, its unique flavor made it appealing to people from all walks of life.

The American retail industry has become so popular in the rest of the world that people know the name of U.S. supermarket chains like *Walmart*, *Target*, or *Trader Joe's*, without having them in their country.

Another important symbol of American culture is the blue denim jeans, which started as a staple piece for the working class due to their durability but quickly became a popular attire amongst all Americans with the rising popularity of western cowboy movies since celebrities such as Marlo Brando would be seen wearing them. During the Second World War, American navy soldiers would wear them in combat and therefore it became associated with the United States of America in the rest of the world.

“To keep our fighting men supplied, the Navy now needs large additional supplies of these garments. Your efforts in producing Navy dungarees are just as vital as those of the workers turning out munitions of war. The Navy counts on your full cooperation so that none of our fighting men will be deprived of the dungarees they need.” (Rear Admiral W. B. Young, 1944).<sup>38</sup>

Blue jeans became such an American symbol that they ended being banned from North Korea, where anything associated with the United States of America is seen as a capitalist symbol and therefore seen as against the country and a threat to the North Korean communist ideology.

Popular culture is a combination of numerous topics: art, cinema, music, food, social happenings, etc. It is undeniably a product of American culture because of the extent it reaches, and all cultural topics are automatically related to contemporaneous globalization.

The product that is sold to the rest of the world as American pop culture has many constituents behind it from different nationalities. If we think about American pop culture as a metaphor for a cake recipe, we can understand that the ingredients that compose the products may come from different places, as people have different nationalities, due to globalization and the Multiculturalism present in the U.S., the final product, however, the cake is still considered an American cake even though some of the

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<sup>37</sup> McDonald's BTS Meal (2021). Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/26/business/bts-meal-mcdonalds-merchandise/index.html>

<sup>38</sup> Telegram sent Levi Strauss & Co. from Rear Admiral W. B. Young, U.S. Navy Chief of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts (August 16, 1944). Retrieved from: <https://www.levistrauss.com/2020/09/30/world-war-ii-levis/>

ingredients may have come from different parts of Asia or Africa or any other place. This makes American popular culture a combination of principles, methods, and processes that celebrates them as indications of American culture.

The factor of Individualism that is referenced previously in chapter 2, *Hofstede: Comparing countries* is oftentimes present within American Tv shows where the plot is centered around one character who has to figure out his way on his own, whereas in Korean dramas or movies, the plot revolves around the main character but there is a panoply of other characters which may qualify for protagonists as well since their contributions influence the plot as much as the main character and there is bigger support of the community towards the main character.

In American films there may quite commonly be a set of characters away from their family, living in another state, or without connections to their family. There is a distance within the familiar nucleus, parents are either deceased or not present. This does not happen in the majority of Korean shows where family is almost always incorporated within the plot (*Crash Landing on You* (2019) and *Her Private Life* (2019)).

In Korea, a communal, social, or family ingredient is visually present. The element of community versus the individualism of American cinematography is one major difference between the two. We can take as an example the television series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) where the plot revolves around a mom-daughter that is the center of the show, every other character revolves around them, in South Korean cinema this individual focus plot is not as dominant, we can take as an example the plot of the movie *Parasite* (2019) or the Korean drama *Because This is My First Life* (2017) where the plot revolves around more than one specific group of characters.

Social status is also a theme of discrepancy when comparing cinematography. In South Korean programs the social status of a character is part of their identity and possibly a significant part of the plot with Korean dramas revolving around the themes of poor versus rich (*Flower Boy Next Door*, *The Heirs*). In American television, the social-economic status is not referenced, the story is able to continue without having to mention income and, therefore, some appear quite unreal. One example of this is the character of Carrie Bradshaw of "*Sex and the City*". Carrie is living alone in an apartment in New York City, having as her job a weekly column on a magazine, there is but a slim possibility for her to be able to afford rent in New York and her luxurious shopping with only a column as her paycheck. Her social status and economies are put aside for the sake of the plot of the show. This disassociation from the political and the economical realm is also present in the shows produced by *Disney Channel* who

become a great projector of American culture to the rest of the globe, we can take for example the sitcoms “*Shake It Up*” or “*Austin & Ally*”, that even though being family shows, the families seem to be far from the line of plot.

When we think about American Popular Culture, we go back to the 1950s. Which we may associate with Walt Disney, Coca-Cola, or McDonald's since they have had a tremendous impact on modern society. However, to compare American popular culture with South Korean popular culture we must only think of the cultural aspects regarding a few decades ago, not those who had their origin and/or peak in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Therefore, what comes to mind and which had a major impact globally in terms of popular culture and was produced in the United States of America in the last years is the sitcom “*Friends*” and movies from Marvel comics such as “*The Avengers*” (2012). – comic con and Marvel conventions all around the world, including South Korea.

How have these productions impacted the rest of the world culturally? In chapter 5.1.2. Korean Tv: Variety Shows & K-Dramas we talk about how some Korean projects originated American remakes in favor of demonstrating Korean cultural propagation, but this has been happening for years with American culture. When sagas like “*Twilight*” (2008-2012) gained fame in the USA, South Korea reacted by created Korean dramas with vampires in their plots (“*Vampire Flower*” (2014), “*Orange Marmalade*” (2015), “*Vampire Idol*” (2011), “*Vampire Prosecutor*” (2011), another example of this American influence is the show “*The Walking Dead*” which began in 2010 and since then has influenced many other series about zombies, we can see as examples in Korean dramas “*Kingdom*” (2019) and movies like “*Train to Busan*” (2016) or “*Horror Stories*” (2012).

### 5.3. Cultural Disparities

A major characteristic of the Korean language that contributes to the disparities between South Korea and the United States of America is the fact that the Korean language has politeness rules, that are the basis of a big amount of Korean culture.

As established in chapter 1.2. *Confucianism* and chapter 2. *Comparing countries: Hofstede*, we acknowledge that South Korea is a hierarchical society. This hierarchy is also present in Korean semantics. There are different types of speech (casual, polite, and formal) that are used towards different situations and different people. Manners and language go hand in hand, therefore when speaking Korean, someone can be perceived as rude or polite based not only on the discourse they choose but also on how they portrayed it.

Where in the United States the form of speech tends to be less formal due to the usage of the personal pronoun “you”, in Korea the people use specific titles or their names when trying to approach someone.

*“In Korea, one of the first things you ask, other than your name, is how old are you? And as soon as they say they’re older, it’s like, “Oh, you’re Unnie.” So, Unnie is basically what you call an older sister. We don’t call each other by names, It’s normally unnie if you’re older than me, and Oppa if you’re a guy.” (Jennie Kim, 2020)<sup>39</sup>*

When talking to someone older than you, in the Korean language there is a term for women to call older women, *Unnie*, when it is men talking to older women is *Nuna*, both of these have as their function to mean older sister, and they can be used for friends or people of similar age. When it is a young male speaking to an older male the term is *Hyung*, and if it is a young female approaching an older male, the term is *Oppa*. This is used in any circumstance to create a sense of proximity between two people.

Collectivism (see chapter 2.2. *Individualism*) is also present in the Korean language in the case that when Korean people are speaking of someone or something, they normally use the pronoun “our” (*우리*) to refer to it as “our” instead of “mine”, there is a feeling of community present. For example, when talking about a friend or colleague it is normal to say, “our Rachel” or “our country”, instead of just the name because it gives a sense of affinity.

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<sup>39</sup> KIM, Jennie (Blackpink member) in *BLACKPINK: Light Up the Sky*. (2020, October 14th) Netflix documentary. SUH, Caroline (Director), MONES, Cara, KAMEN, Jones, SIRULNICK, David & DUFFY, Zara (Producers).



This politeness is also present when you are having drinks with someone that is of different age. South Korea has a very specific etiquette that if not performed correctly could be interpreted as extremely rude and impolite.

Once again hierarchy is a concern, and elders normally come first, exceptions would be if business bosses are younger than their employees and cases of ranking. Elders have priority.

“As a junior you are expected to keep your posture correct and should not place your spoon and chopsticks on the table (indicating that you have finished eating) until the eldest done so. The eldest is also first to leave the table.” (LEE et al. 2009:38)<sup>40</sup>

When having a meal or gathering with superiors, those of inferior hierarchy must present the drinks to the superior with both hands holding the beverage.

To serve a drink properly, they must place their left hand below the drink while holding the drink with their right hand. And must present both hands when accepting a drink from someone superior and proceed to look away since it comes off as disrespectful to watch their superiors or elders drinking. If not done like this, it will be interpreted as rude.

This type of drinking culture is present in various Korean dramas, therefore those who watch them automatically absorb the country's culture which is another factor that evidences the positive effect of popular culture regarding the transmission of traditional cultural values.

In the USA this type of etiquette is not common, of course, some formal situations may ask for proper manners at the table, but it does not compare with the drinking and manner culture of Korea where these rules have to be followed every time the gathering involves people from different age ranges and hierarchies.

Still focusing on the theme of Korean food, an important ingredient seems to be *kimchi* which is so used in Korean cuisine that almost every Korean family owns a separate fridge just for the storage of this fermented vegetable.

“The same type of kimchi will taste different depending on the temperature at which it is fermented and stored. Optimal flavor and nutrition is normally achieved by fermenting kimchi for 2-3 weeks at 2-7°C and then storing it at 0-5°C. Allowing kimchi to freeze can detract from the flavor, so Koreans

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<sup>40</sup> LEE, Mi Hye, CHO, Hang Rok, KANG, Seung Hae, YUN, Young (2009) *Passport to Korean Culture*. Seoul, Korea: Korean Culture and Information Service, page 38

traditionally kept their winter kimchi underground. Nowadays. Refrigerators have been developed specifically for storing kimchi.” (LEE et al. 2009:34)<sup>41</sup>

Regarding the U.S.A. we associate the fridge as a symbol of American consumerism, the American fridge that has two doors, a compartment to make ice or for cold water and storage, and an enormous capacity of storage.

It became so emblematic of the consumerist front of the U.S. that nowadays whenever someone is in search of a bigger refrigerator, they will ask for an American fridge, the American people gave it its name due to the consumerism of the post-war.

The consumerist facet of Americans is often associated with their stereotype of being an obese nation (see fig. 2). The truth is that comparing the United States of America and South Korea, the two countries have very different approaches towards health and weight.

The obesity global levels of 2016<sup>42</sup> showed that the U.S.A was the 12<sup>th</sup> country in the world with a higher percentage of obese people (36,2%), contrasting with that, the Republic of Korea stood at 184<sup>th</sup> place with only 4,7% of the population being obese. This makes the United States of America, the most obese country of the members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCDE).

In South Korea the beauty standards are interconnected with every aspect of their lives, therefore if someone is overweight, they are automatically seen as lazy people and careless.

Beauty standards are always evolving, they change from country to country and from decade to decade.

The standard of beauty in America has always been that of someone who is white, with light eyes, blonde hair, and thin. Due to popular culture, this standard has taken a shift, with popular television programs such as “*Keeping Up With the Kardashians*”, tanning has become more popular and the thin silhouette that dominated in the previous years has started to proceed towards a fuller, hourglass type of body.

In South Korea, the beauty ideal is very specific and does not seem to have evolved as much as in the United States. The whiter the skin, the more beautiful it is for Korean people, symmetry is a big deal and that is why Koreans usually resort to plastic surgery. Koreans give great importance to skincare and believe that beauty comes from beautiful and healthy skin.

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<sup>41</sup> LEE, Mi Hye, CHO, Hang Rok, KANG, Seung Hae, YUN, Young (2009) *Passport to Korean Culture*. Seoul, Korea: Korean Culture and Information Service, p.34

<sup>42</sup> 2016 Global Obesity Levels, data retrieved from: <https://obesity.procon.org/global-obesity-levels/>

With the propagation of Korean culture to the rest of the world, many Korean brands of cosmetics and skincare have expanded thanks to the projection that Korean actors and idols have given them. By showing their beauty, people became interested in the products they use, and these brands started to grow outside South Korea.

In South Korea, the goal is to be perceived as youthful, therefore their ideals are skin with no pores, a small face, and big eyes, in order to portray a naïve visual.

In Korea, the desire of having white and bright skin comes from the association of tanned skin with the sun exposure of those who work in agriculture and their damaged skin, therefore associating tanned skin with lower class and lower incomes, contrasting with that, people with pale skin are the ones that work in offices, protected from the UV rays and have higher roles in society.

This idea is perceived in a completely contrasting manner in the U.S. since those who have tanned skin are seen as those who are to take vacations and tan their skin during holidays, and those with pale skin are the ones who cannot afford to stop working and therefore stay in their offices with no sun exposure.

Plastic surgery is starting to become more popular by the day in the United States with celebrities such as Kylie Jenner and Bella Hadid being known for their rhinoplasties or lip fillers. However, surgery is still a major taboo topic compared to South Korea, which is known to be the capital of plastic surgery. In South Korea, plastic surgery is so common that mono lid surgery is a normal birthday gift for young women. This procedure where they cut the mono-lid, known to be a physical characteristic of a big percentage of Asian people, and make a crease in the eyelid, turning mono-eyelids into double eyelids is related to high beauty standards of the country, especially because double eyelid portrays a western feature which is most desired.

For some, a surgical procedure can be something used to reconstruct some body part that is causing trouble to our health or that has been damaged due to accidental misfortunes but in South Korea, plastic surgery is seen as a means to the ideal face, some way to achieve the beauty trends and it is a common beauty treatment.

Media also contributes to it, South Korea is filled with commercials, billboards, and general propaganda advertising the perfect face and body, not only to females but towards males too, this affects the beauty perception of South Koreans, making them search for methods to achieve the goal.

The Korean beauty ideal consists of a V-shaped face, a sculpted nose, and double eyelids with pale skin and lean bodies. In such a competitive society as the Korean one, South Koreans believe that their set

of abilities is not enough to succeed, they need to be good looking as well, beauty standards in South Korea are so influential to the point that some jobs require a specific set of looks, you can only obtain certain jobs if you have the profile for it, which, in South Korea, includes the proportions and symmetry of one's face.

The education system in South Korea is completely different from the United States of America. For South Korean students the goal is to be admitted into a well-known college therefore they take their classes and their study very seriously. Whereas the normal school schedule for a high schooler in the U.S. is normally from 8h in the morning until 15h in the afternoon with a lunch break of an hour, making up a total of 6-hour school day, for a South Korean student the classes start at 8h in the morning and end around 16h, however their concern with grades and school success has such significance that is common for them to arrive at school earlier and leave later, because of this, dinner is normal to be served at school since the students continue to be in the building preparing for their college entrance exams. The college that which student enters dictates their success and the acceptance rate of the most acclaimed colleges such as Seoul National University and Korea University is so low that competition between the top-of-the-class students becomes extreme.

And it was only in 2012 that South Korean students stopped having school on Saturdays.

In South Korea, having extracurricular classes is also part of the routine of the students, these extra classes are taken in an institute called *hagwon* (학원) that specializes in intense studying and preparing for the exams.

“She rises at 6.30am, is at school by 8am, finishes at 4pm, (or 5pm if she has a club), then pops back home to eat. She then takes a bus to her second school shift of the day, at a private crammer or hagwon, where she has lessons from 6pm until 9pm. She spends another two hours in what she calls self-study back at school, before arriving home after 11pm. She goes to bed at 2am and rises in the morning at 6.30am to do it all over again.” (CHAKRABARTI, 2013)<sup>43</sup>

The extracurricular classes for an American student usually are more practical activities such as sports and hobbies.

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<sup>43</sup> CHAKRABARTI, Reeta. (December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013) *South Korea's schools: Long days, high results*. BBC News article. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-25187993>

Whereas in the U.S. both the students and the teachers have to change rooms between classes, in South Korea the students have their permanent class and classroom attributed to them and the teacher are the only ones that change from one classroom to another.

College entrance exams are taken so seriously in South Korea that everything stops so that the students can focus completely, construction works stop and even airplanes are not allowed to fly during that day.

Competition is so present among students that the pressure to succeed along with the fear of failure or failure itself is capable to drive them to suicide.

South Korea is amongst the world's top 5 countries with higher rates of suicide and is, amongst the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, the country with the highest number of deaths by suicide. (Fig. 12)

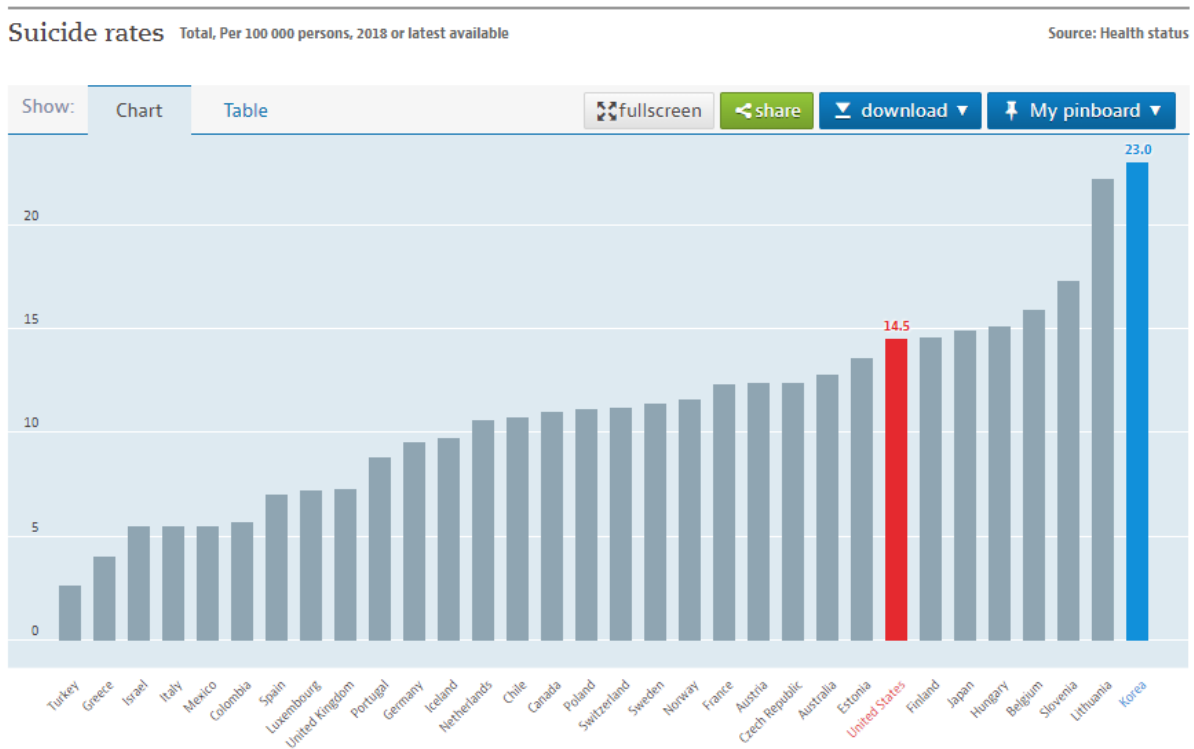


Figure 12 - Suicide rates amongst OECD countries as of 2018<sup>44</sup>

As stated previously, the study period of South Koreans is extremely prolonged, the same happens at the workplace where working extra hours is seen as a side effect of having a paying job, these labor hours can easily become too intense for the human being to handle simply.

<sup>44</sup> Retrieved from: <https://data.oecd.org/healthstat/suicide-rates.htm>

College entry exams put an enormous amount of stress on South Korean students because their college option is most likely to dictate the level of prosperity of their future, the higher their score on the exams the most likely they are to enter renowned colleges such as Seoul University which will open more doors when job searching.

This stress is also seen in the students from the U.S.A, however, their success route is not as likely to be dictated by the university they attend as much as in South Korea. But whereas in South Korea, seeking treatment for mental illness is looked down on, in the United States, that same stigma is disappearing, and everyday Americans understand more the impact that mental problems such as anxiety, stress, and depression have on their population and start to regard as normal to seek proper treatment.

Suicide in South Korea is most frequent amongst adolescents and the senior population, elder people many times feel distanced from their relatives since many live isolated in rural areas and without a livable income therefore they feel like a burden to their family and choose to end their lives to release them from their responsibility.

With Confucianist beliefs in mind, a grand part of South Koreans feel that they have as their duty to upkeep their family's respect and honor, therefore the thought of failing and disappointing their loved ones compels people to despair and therefore to commit suicide. The pressure for succeeding and pleasing their families is constantly present.

Nationalism constitutes a common ground within a group, common heritage, language, area, amongst other topics. A large part of being considered Korean takes upon the degree of service towards the country. Completing mandatory military service is seen as a nationalist concern and crucial to any Korean male citizen. It is compulsory, and those men who are unable to perform it, either due to disease or any other complication are looked down in Korean society and seen as inferior for not carrying out their duty as male citizens.

Americans are patriotic, they are proud of taking pride in being part of the USA and are eager to display it. In South Korea, military service is mandatory for all men for at least two years, they are able to choose the time they want to enlist until they turn 28 years old, by the time they turn 30 they must have completed the serving of the two years. In the U.S, military service is completely done by volunteers. For some Americans, enrolling in military service is, especially for the lower class, the only way for them to make a living.

“United States: 18 years of age (17 years of age with parental consent) for male and female voluntary service; no conscription; maximum enlistment age 34 (Army), 39 (Air Force), 39 (Navy), 28 (Marines), 31 (Coast Guard); 8-year service obligation, including 2-5 years active duty (Army), 2 years active (Navy), 4 years active (Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard); all military occupations and positions open to women (2020); South Korea: 18-28 years of age for compulsory military service; minimum conscript service obligation varies by service- 21 months (Army, Marines), 23 months (Navy), 24 months (Air Force); 18-26 years of age for voluntary military service; women, in service since 1950, are able to serve in all branches, including as officers (2020).” (CIA’s World Factbook)<sup>45</sup>

All South Korean men, excluding those who suffer from significant diseases and injuries, are obligated to serve. The only ones that do not have that obligation are the few that the South Korean nation sees as having already fulfilled the role of serving their country from another type of contribution, some examples include winning an Olympic medal or artists who contributed to making a name for the country. In this case, they will only participate in the basic military training that lasts a few weeks plus some more days along the course of the next six years, this provides them with the possibility to focus on their successful careers, instead of having to be subjected to the two years of serving in the armed forces.

As stated, Korean people give high importance to the duty of serving the military therefore those who serve are worthy of admiration, and the men who do not are seen as less competent of being a Korean man.

Patriotism in America comes from their traditionalist values and the Americans who serve in the army are very respected by the American society since these people volunteered to help defend their country.

“By ‘patriotism’ I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally.” (ORWELL, 1945)<sup>46</sup>

American patriotism revolves around being proud of their nation, the festivity that most invokes this sentiment is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the United States of America Independence Day where Americans celebrate their country by displaying the American flag, using the flag’s colors, and commemorate with fireworks, party gatherings, and barbecues.

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<sup>45</sup> CIA’s World Factbook, “Field Listing: Military service age and obligation”. Retrieved from: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/military-service-age-and-obligation/>

<sup>46</sup> ORWELL, George. (1945) “Notes on Nationalism”. Retrieved from: <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/notes-on-nationalism/>

From a European point of view, it is easy to perceive the length that Americans go to celebrate the independence of the United States.

Festivities and holidays are celebrated differently in the U.S. and South Korea. In the United States, they have Thanksgiving, a day to think about their blessings and to be spent in family, reinforcing the traditional aspect of the American population. Korea has its version of Thanksgiving, called *Chuseok* (추석) where family members reunited just as happens in the United States of America. Both of these festivities are extremely similar, besides not happening on the same day, they differentiate only by the fact that whereas in the U.S. a grand parade for the celebration takes place, in Korea, the festivities are centered mostly on the household where their ancestors also lay, and they take this day to pay their respects to them as well.

Another holiday that is celebrated differently in both countries is Valentine's Day. In the United States and around the globe as well, it is common to receive and give valentine cards and going out for dinner as a date. In South Korea, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February the tradition is for women to present their partners with chocolate, and only on the next month, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, which Koreans call the White Day, will men gift their partners with a gift in response of the one they received in the previous month, the name comes from the tradition of presenting their loved ones with white-colored presents, being white chocolate or white flowers.



## **6. Foreign Communities: United States of America vs. South Korea**

“In the last thirty years, millions of people have emigrated across cultural regions as they sought both economic opportunity and social and political stability in their lives. One consequence of these movements has been cultural contact. Immigrants brought more than their skills and talents to their new communities. They brought their cultures as well. Migration associated with globalization has intensified patterns of human cultural interaction.” (CROTHERS, 2010:16)

### **6.1. Korean Communities settled in the USA**

When it comes to Koreans who have immigrated to the United States of America there is a notorious disparity between the first generation of immigrants and their descendants, the second generation.

The first generation had to adapt themselves to a whole new country, culture, and community, whereas the second generation was already born into it. The duality is present in the circumstance that while the first generation was trying to readjust to the Western customs and trying to Americanize themselves to fit in, the second generation, who was already born into the American way of living, is bound to attempt bringing back their Korean heritage and are essentially proud to demonstrate their ancestors' culture. This duplicity of feeling the need to fit and blend in versus the eagerness of displaying their Korean side instead of trying to mask it, is, in its own, a political statement. The second generation of immigrants is reclaiming their identity as Korean-Americans.

Identity encompasses much more than race or ethnicity, someone can have multiple identities which can be layered depending on the context, for example, when someone knows how to speak more than one language, their personality may change accordingly to the language they are using, this is due to the cultural differences or social situations that comprehend divergent languages and may consist of a different voice pitch or particular mannerisms.

The United States is a country connected by the various cultures of its immigrants and its traditions. The embodiment of various identities from different backgrounds which can, together, perpetrate and entrust the commitment of cultural universalism gives the US an outlook of cross-culturalism and ethnic inclusiveness.

Korean Americans have two sets of cultural backgrounds present in their everyday life, the Korean household that has been most likely accommodated to American characteristics and, on the other hand, the American way of life they are subjected to outside their family home.

Multiculturalism seems implicit to the North American society, however, those who are part of the second line of immigrants tend to focus on their roots as if they were claiming them back and enunciating their heritage. This is seen as a political statement in which the second generation of immigrants want to manifest that they do not confine themselves into stereotypical boxes. Korean-Americans felt the need to establish their identity on their own terms and not be compromised to any prejudice, they grew up in a globalized America where their parents had to modify their values to adjust and now they want to bring out their heritage to the table and reconstruct the culture they were brought up in by proudly showing off their roots.

“In asserting their Korean-ness, the second generations are pursuing definitively American political and identificatory options.” (AHN:4)<sup>47</sup>

While being brought up in a community where Multiculturalism and Globalization exist, the second generation has been exposed to many ways of life with a thin line distinguishing the end of one culture and the starting point of the other, culminating in an amalgamation of individuals and circumstances. This aspiration of affirming their Korean background comes from the urgency to disclose who they are in the community that they exist in.

The intolerance and discrimination present within American society are some of the aspects that lead this second generation to instigate their search for their individuality within the unity of ethnicity.

Within the formation of identity and the characteristics or criteria that encompass them, there must be taken into account the self as an exclusive singular person and the individual as a part of a community, and all the factors that surround the equation. The one viable way to fully understand someone's personality is to put them into communal context and vice versa, in singular conditions, so to perceive their behavior as a whole and as an individual, the answer to identity shall be a combination of both forms, never just one half.

Even though America is seen as a civilization where Multiculturalism is accounted for, there is still a lot of preconceptions based on race discrimination presently.

Prejudice is not always intentional where people make comments about their Asian features and use racial slurs, it also implies making jokes about their food choices, for example when as children they would pack lunches for school with Korean food such as *kimchi* instead of the American typical lunches and their classmates would tease them. This type of ambiguous racism shapes the lives of minorities

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<sup>47</sup> AHN, Sang Ja, Putting the 'American' into 'Korean-American': The Social Identity of a Second Generation. United Kingdom, page 4

such as, in this case, Korean descendants, which leads to this generation to diverge from the common population in fear of lack of understanding and misjudgments.

This type of behavior generates a tendency where Korean-Americans value empathetic groups and therefore seek recognition in people similar to them instead of blending in within the American mainstream society since they feel as if they would never be fully merged in it because of their looks.

They long for the reassurance of not being judged and seek refuge in Korean-American groups because they know others similar to them will understand their values and culture and they will be able to easily socialize with someone who comprehends and appreciates their background, someone who has been through the same cultural experiences and also suffered from the lack of acceptance and for that reason, will not judge them. Not only does it make them feel at ease from having someone who participates in the same circumstances, but the Korean-Americans also appreciate the comfort of being able to discuss the same hobbies and topics with enthusiasm instead of having to accommodate and comply with the Americanized matters. This proclaims the importance of communal acknowledgment and compliance in the formulation and establishment of personal character.

Being able to share arguments without feeling uncomfortable is seen as a priority without trying to Americanize themselves as their parents previously had to do to be welcomed to their communities when they first arrived in the USA. Nonetheless, these descendants of Korean immigrants do not want to be seen exclusively as Koreans, they insist on proclaiming their genealogy, but they are, by all means, legitimately Americans. If the United States of America is portrayed as a multicultural territory, then it is only fair for them to be seen as multicultural people as well. They have the right to display their culture, and the freedom to do so, without being victims of any sort of aversions and rejections.

For the Korean-Americans they feel it is unfair to explain and legitimize their identity, they have double ethnicity and cultural background and they should not be taken as only half of whom they are due to the discrimination and misconceptions of other people who are not able to see beyond racial features.

The Korean part of their beings is already visible through their features therefore they regularly have the urge to justify and reaffirm the American component. Nevertheless, someone with such a background is free to choose to either accept to proclaim each side of their heritage, in this case, Korean and American, even though they might be inherent to it, their identity is theirs to be decided, one can feel in touch with their Korean heritage without having learned the language – you can acquire cultural understanding and cultivation without having the dominion of innate articulation within that matter.

Someone's identity is something that is always evolving. Group identity is not present in the union of the collective, identity is what dissociates them from one another, the disparities are what bonds them together, and personal identity comes from self-evolution but within a society, since it will also become a part of what shapes them.

‘In traditional societies, one's identity is fixed, solid, and stable. Identity is a function of predefined social roles and a traditional system of myths that provide orientation and religious sanctions that dictate one's place in the world and rigorously circumscribe one's realm of thoughts and behaviors.’ (HAN, 2008:13)<sup>48</sup>

When it comes to Korean-Americans, the USA is also a part of their cultural composition, but they have to battle constantly to prove their American side because of their looks, whereas a European-looking person would much easier be mistaken as a US citizen due to predefined prejudice.

I am specifically focusing my research on the South Korean immigrants in the United States; therefore, I must highlight that the Korean communities of the USA do pursue their fellow South Korean's companionship still, they do not project themselves into other Asian-American communities. The only resemblance they identify within those communities is the fact that Koreans, Chinese, Taiwanese, and other Asian families of immigrants are all put inside the same box socially.

Most Korean Americans feel as if the only characteristic binding them together with the other Asians is the injustices they have been suffering and enduring due to racial intolerance. Even though the Asian community may have a few common components, they are not enough for them to relate to each other socially, they exclusively relate to the other communities in political terms on account of having been addressed and labeled as Asians in general.

The creation of the term 'Asian American' was only conceived to facilitate the management of administrative powers so that the state could put together all of the Asian ethnicities and therefore would not have the trouble to analyze them individually. The same has happened to every minority, descendants of African countries and other territories have been consolidated into the black group minority as well as Hispanic people who immigrate to America from a multitude of different countries and are also all compiled into a category that diminishes them.

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<sup>48</sup> HAN, Eun-Jong. (2008) *A View of Identity as Developed by a Korean-American Teenager: Cultural Adaptation in a Korean Community in the United States*. University of South Alabama, page 13

Every one of them has dealt with the fact that Asians are characterized as being identical which brings us again to the need for Korean Americans to reaffirm and pronounce their cultural layers. Having a different cultural background is something that one cannot control but anyone of them can choose to address it or not, it is a personal decision to proclaim their identity.

The fact that Korean Americans are compelled by law, in many official and legal circumstances, to be represented as the generalization of their identification based on race is not only a form of hidden racism but also a severe case of identity invalidation and character overshadowing. The overlooking of this oppression only accentuates the urgency of this problem.

The fusion of all the identities that have been blended into one category stripes them away from their background and cultural ancestry but these citizens have learned that in finding the power in their voices, they are using their ethnicity to empower themselves and their community instead of being cornered and cast away. When they choose to speak up and proclaim their right to be an American citizen, they are facing up the abuses and the white supremacy present in some organs of power of the USA.

“The success of the Civil Rights Movement was a lesson, that one should assert one's rights if one wants to lead a life as an American. Korean-Americans who immigrated after 1960s, and have received their education in America, have learnt this American way of life.” (AHN:10)<sup>49</sup>

It is unfortunate already that Korean Americans have the necessity to claim their American side forasmuch it is part of them as much as any other American citizen. They should not have the need to promote their nationality to be given equal rights.

The United States of America advertises the aim to reach an idealistic community and carry it through an almost utopian-like extensive agglomerate of people who share the same ambition and intention.

To put the Asian communities together is a form of indirect prejudice. Therefore, the bond within each of these communities as individuals from the other Asian groups is important in order to make relevant this situation of unfair aggregation.

Racism is a degradation of society as a multicultural form. If there is no acceptance of cultural diversity there cannot be homogeneity in civilization, this thought creates cultural fractures and disparities.

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<sup>49</sup> AHN, Sang Ja, Putting the 'American' into 'Korean-American': The Social Identity of a Second Generation. United Kingdom, page 10

The second generation of newcomers easily understands that they are not equal to the common American who fits within the ideal of the American persona which easily generates a tumult of identity where they try to understand to each side they belong, to Korea or the United States? They do not look American but they were born there and it is the home that they know, in counterpart, their ancestors belong to the Republic of Korea but they cannot fully connect to the identity of a Korean citizen, no matter the amount of information they gather and learn about Korean because they have been raised in the United States and that is the reality they are familiar with.

“It is the expectation of American society, based on a universalistic attitude, and the pressures of cultural pluralism, that promote, and sometimes insist on, symbolic ethnicity for all. Having an ethnic identity is inherent in current American society.” (AHN:17)

The families who leave the Republic of Korea to immigrate to the United States frequently see their arrival at the country as full of new opportunities, this comes from the idolization of the American Dream that is deep-seated into the population, the idea of having the perfect family and a dog living in a suburban house with a white fence and being successful and unquestionably happy because the USA is portrayed as the land of opportunity and freedom by the media.

This worshiping of the country can lead some people to believe that they should be grateful they get to live in such an idealistic country and therefore never question the way that cultural and social dominance has been previously dictated as if they have been pressured or persuaded into believing in that. Contrary to that, the new generations believe that if they do not raise their voices they are consenting to something that does not take their best interests into account, by questioning their surroundings they are able to generate transformations and developments within the society and reclaim their culture in the way and also their standing in the U.S.

Being part of a minority group implies having to deal with prejudice. The expansion of Korean culture in the contemporary ages, however, makes people more open to embracing cultural disparities.

We must acknowledge that those Korean descendants who grew up in the USA do not only have the need to adapt to the American culture but also the Korean culture because the cultural disparities are present once they leave or enter their household.

The bonds we share with the people who surround us are what make up our persona. Those who possess double identity like Korean Americans tend to identify with what they live on a daily basis. If Koreans are surrounded by other Korean descendant families it is most likely for them to assimilate

their ethnicity because there is a constant exchange of information, social and cultural. These exchanges become fragments of their existence that altogether form someone's individuality. Furthermore, the consolidation and reinforcement of all of these individuals are what develops values and culture, being it ethnic or not.

“Identity is a bridge between culture and communication, and we communicate our identity to others within a culture. In turn we learn who we are.” (HAN, 2008:02)

South Korea is becoming an emerging power nation that is expanding not only its culture transnationally but also its economical enterprises, this has led to an expansion of the South Korean business market within the United States, in turn, these corporations have elevated the search for people who could fully understand both ends of the languages and the national values. This proficiency was needed to better delegate and communicate within the industry.

Language is our primary tool of externalizing the many complex feelings and thoughts we have as human beings, yet while not fully understanding a language, someone can become part of that language's culture, it is a fact that communication plays a big part in national individuality. Of course, the idiom takes part in each culture, but it is not a total reflection of such.

“Su is poor at Korean and she didn't understand Koreans' communication style yet. As a result, Su feels difficulties being a member of the Korean community even though she has learned Korean manners and culture from her parents, and used to eat Korean foods everyday. It shows how important language is in identity construction and cultural adaptation.” (HAN, 2008:13)

Culture is what conducts and builds the foundation of the values of each language and therefore communication differs from culture to culture, from the idiom to the way someone behaves, passing through slang and posture. The special attention and deliberation that cultural exchange demands go beyond the idiom. This emphasizes that the establishment of someone's personality traits is formulated through many factors being them cultural or not, although language plays a substantial role.

The Korean-Americans and the Koreans who emigrate to the USA often feel like they do not belong since the adaptation process is slow and can be cruel due to the prejudice many faces as being from a different race, the aversion also continues once they visit South Korea they feel like outsiders in their mainland, culminating in feeling like they cannot truly belong anywhere.

## 6.2. American Communities settled in South Korea

There is a difference between being a foreign person settled in South Korea and being a foreigner from America settled in South Korea. America is seen as a dream country and the rest of the world revolves around it and it is almost as if a privilege to be in contact with the American people.

Americans are seen in bright light. That way Americans that are settled in the United States are able to greatly bond with South Korean due to their fond reception

“Most Americans respondents reported that their life in South Korea is very positive and rewarding. In their own personal examples, they feel they are welcomed and treated very well by Koreans. Not only are Americans favorably treated, but also in being American there is prestige and the privilege to receive special treatment. The interviewees even feel that Koreans treat them much better than Koreans treat other Koreans.” (KIM, 2008:516)<sup>50</sup>

The language barrier is not an obstacle to Americans living in South Korea because Koreans are understanding and have almost any expectations for foreigners to be able to speak Korean and therefore are very considerate towards the linguistic interferences.

Although Korean people are very considerate and polite towards foreigners, there is still a distinction between Koreans and outsiders that does not seem to be surpassed easily. Whereas in America is not possible to distinguish Americans from tourists and foreigners, in South Korea is very obvious that those who do not appear Korean are most likely to not be from the country, therefore there is a separation that prevents foreigners to be fully integrated into the Korean society.

They are welcomed to the country but not to their traditions. When it comes to festivities such as *Chuseok* (추석), for example, it is unusual for Americans to be invited to attend mainly because Koreans are unable to see different people as Korean citizens and therefore feel like they would not understand their traditions.

The Korean ethnicity has been consolidated for years within the country's perspective of “*Koreaness*”. They have been told for decades that being Korean starts with Korean blood and from there they form this idea of nationalism based on bloodline unity (단일민족).

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<sup>50</sup> KIM, Yang-Soo. (2008) *Communication Experiences of American Expatriates in South Korea: A Study of Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN. A Publication of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association. Vol. 11, No.4, page 516. Retrieved from: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.549.4933&rep=rep1&type=pdf>



“(…) race served as a marker that strengthened ethnic identity, which in turn was instrumental in defining the nation. Koreans thus believe that they all belong to a "unitary nation" (danil minjok), one that is ethnically homogeneous and racially distinctive.” (SHIN, 2006)<sup>51</sup>

This concept generates a conflict for half-Koreans and for immigrants living in the country making it difficult for them to be recognized as complete Korean individuals in the eyes of society. A big part of the foreigners that come into Korea ends up doing labor work in agriculture or working in construction sites.

Slowly laws were made that helped foreigners and half-Koreans integrate themselves into society and protected them. Half Koreans started to be allowed to enlist in the military service, this option of being able to serve the country was crucial since, for Koreans, serving the Korean army is a big honor and it is what makes Korean men to be viewed as responsible adults and therefore being considered as part of the Korean people since they will be serving their country.

“All able South Korean men, regardless of their skin color or ethnic background, will be subject to mandatory military duty starting Jan. 1, as those who look distinctively from a multiethnic background will no longer be exempted from conscription.” (LEE, 2010)<sup>52</sup>

Universities started to have a quota of half-Korean students that had to be enrolled. This was because most of the students that were of mixed blood did not have the same opportunities as full Koreans due to bullying and cultural differences in their upbringing. Due to trafficking accusations, the Korean government provided foreigner brides with Korean language and culture courses and was more attentive towards the offices of international marriages; in order to help children of multicultural marriages, programs against racism and bullying were implemented and school reading materials were examined and altered if any racially insensitive content was found.

“The pronounced goal of their coordination is to facilitate improved life conditions and eliminate widespread social discrimination. Changes to citizenships laws, the implementation of multiculturalism education in public schools, special immigration provisions for contract brides, family and childbearing support for multicultural families, language and cooking lessons for contract brides, and a host of other family-focused issues have been proposed for policy action.” (LEE, 2008)<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> SHIN, Gi-Wook (2006). *Korea's ethnic nationalism is a source of both pride and prejudice, according to Gi-Wook Shin* (article). Retrieved from: [https://aparc.fsi.stanford.edu/news/koreas\\_ethnic\\_nationalism\\_is\\_a\\_source\\_of\\_both\\_pride\\_and\\_prejudice\\_according\\_to\\_giwook\\_shin\\_20060802](https://aparc.fsi.stanford.edu/news/koreas_ethnic_nationalism_is_a_source_of_both_pride_and_prejudice_according_to_giwook_shin_20060802)

<sup>52</sup> LEE, Tae-Hoon (2010). *Biracial male citizens subject to conion* (article). Retrieved from: [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/12/%20116\\_78908.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/12/%20116_78908.html)

<sup>53</sup> LEE, Mary (2008) *Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family*. Korean Studies Vol. 32, page 58. University of Hawai'i Press.

Regarding the topic of foreigners and immigrants, Korea seems to share the desire of becoming a multicultural space, but this idea is not reflected in their political realm where the laws are more prone or, clearly, in favor of cultural assimilation. Even if South Korea has set its goal of becoming a multicultural society in the future, the truth is that, at the moment, in order to be accepted by the Korean people, a foreigner needs to learn and adapt to the country's culture, this is when culture shock starts.

I believe that the desire for Multiculturalism in South Korea along with the aversion for assimilation, when a minority sacrifices its own culture to integrate with society, comes from the fact that once Korea was a Japanese colony (1910-1945) and the Korean people had to go through the process of assimilation during that period. They associate the method of assimilation with the past and perceive it as something distressing that they do not want to be linked with.

Assimilation being forced onto foreigners has often been proven unsuccessful, Randolph Bourne<sup>54</sup> criticizes the melting-pot theory, which required for immigrants to assimilate and melt together in order to become one common culture, as a way of eliminating foreign traces in the communities of immigrants. Bourne defends this by pointing out that approaches that revolved around assimilation stripped immigrants out of their essence which could not be regained and therefore the nationalism they were to assimilate would be empty of meaning.

“To seek no other goal than the weary old nationalism – belligerent, exclusive, inbreeding, the poison of which we are witnessing now in Europe – is to make patriotism a hollow sham, (...).” (BOURNE, 1977:255)<sup>55</sup>

Korean people do not want to force their culture onto others, therefore they desire multiculturalism, where different cultures can co-habit without blending culturally yet, diversity from the norm is still frowned upon and makes people who are immigrants, half-Korean, or even Koreans who do not look like the stereotype, a target of intolerance.

Discrimination is present in South Korea. Some establishments do not let foreigners enter by having a statement at the door explaining the impediment of service towards foreigners. Some of the bars give an excuse saying that they establish these limits as precautions because they are apprehensive of the behaviors of foreigners or saying that the reason is that their servers do not speak English, however, if

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<sup>54</sup> Randolph Silliman Bourne (1886-1918) was an American political philosopher whose writings shaped intellectual thinking of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>55</sup> BOURNE, Randolph Silliman. (1977) *The Radical Will: selected writings, 1911-1918*. Page 255. New York: Urizen Books

even an American can communicate in Korean, they are still not allowed to enter. By continuing to refuse entry based on race, these types of justifications become camouflage for blunt racism.

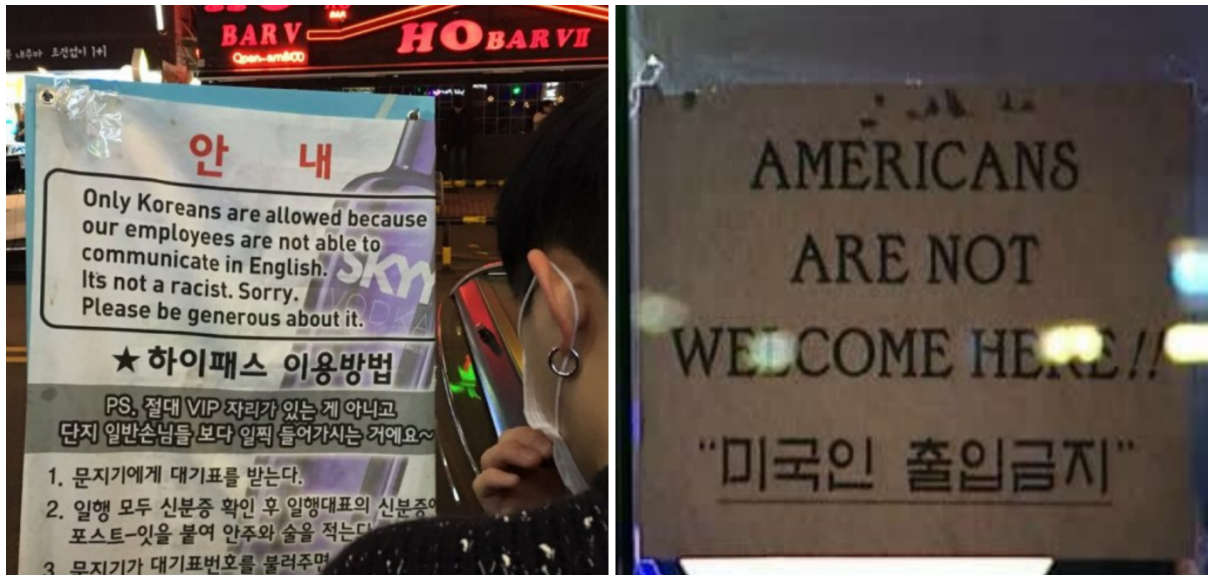


Figure 13 - Notices outside Korean establishments barring the entrance to foreigners<sup>56</sup>

In the professional field, South Koreans value trades based on the connections based on the relationships made with their business partners therefore, for Americans to have a successful career in Korea they need to learn to treat their business as relationships and bond with their clients to be prosperous in the trade.

“(...) for the first two or three meetings to really be insubstantial in terms of business; (...) One is the Korean culture tends to emphasize the relationship and to say “we’ll push the details off until we have to solve them.” The Western culture tends to look at the details upfront and try to say “If A, then B, if C, then D” (...).” (KIM, 2008:516)

Americans are more used to the individualistic culture, emphasizing clear boundaries between life in and outside work and between private life and public affairs.

Hierarchy is an essential part of business in South Korea and foreigners need to be aware that the ranking is extremely important and must be respected. This is one of the cultural aspects of Korean society that serves almost as a guideline for a harmonious business exchange. The hierarchy must be respected, and high positions should be treated with due respect and within Korean social norms.

<sup>56</sup> The Korea Herald – Korean only bars trigger controversy (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160221000207>

In contrast to this positive life experience, however, most Americans are keenly aware that the business environment is tough, and those are the factors contributing to a challenging life experience.

Intercultural challenges can be frustrating. Regardless of the extreme favoritism and friendliness toward Americans, many Americans feel that they are not able to ever blend into Korean society and become part of it.

This is because they treat them differently – with favoritism. And due to the concept, that Korean people have of what makes them Korean, foreigners are hardly seen as eligible to become part of Korean society if they do not have Korean blood.

## Conclusion

Cultural shock can be present even within the smallest disparities. Phenomena such as pop culture, *Hallyu*, Globalization, and Multiculturalism benefit in the embracing of differences.

Being able to understand the cultural background of a society is the key to understanding their behaviors and actions. Popular culture many times is seen as an inferior or lesser expression of culture, with my thesis I wish to bring awareness to the idea that this phenomenon is, in fact, a very valuable part of culture and modernity.

The Korean Wave, in a way, helped cease the perception that for cultural exchange to happen, societies must be able to share some sort of similar values.

Globalization opened a way for cultural flow, it made available information that generated a cultural exchange and mutual acceptance and made it possible for smaller countries such as South Korea to project their heritage and traditions to the rest of the world. This had already started many decades ago when Western culture started to be assimilated in many Far Eastern countries. This is present in consumerism, movie theaters, department shops together with the assimilation of a variety of Western trends.

Globalization is one of the reasons why cultural exportation is available to different people and why they can easily comprehend day-to-day life in contrasting cultures. It helped in widening culture tolerance and education and in the fostering and, propagation of businesses which on their own terms influenced economies.

I concluded that even if Globalization makes different cultures blend with each other, it is a great source of knowledge and provides awareness to cultural discrepancies

Multiculturalism is another variable of cultural exportation. Is the possibility for different cultures to co-habit without losing their meaningful identities.

Whereas the US is seen as multicultural, South Korea is a monocultural country and even though it speaks of aiming to become multicultural in the future, nevertheless by analyzing its cultural background we can conclude that Multiculturalism in South Korea is almost as utopian, since South Koreans do not let foreigners blend in their communities and traditions easily, this, however, does not imply that South Koreans are hostile to those of different countries, just that it is complicated for them to invite them into their culture.

In South Korea, we can conclude that Multiculturalism makes the entrance and acceptance of foreigners into the country and their relationship with the population, a much easier shift than it was a few decades ago.

The concept that Multiculturalism intends to portray is to be receptive to the differences that make up communities, it promotes open-mindedness therefore it is linked with anti-discrimination.

Welcoming Multiculturalism brings an emphasis into embracing different cultures and consequently fights prejudice. It helps people to embrace difference instead of attacking it.

It is important to highlight that racism and prejudice are still a common practice within many societies, but people are battling against it and hopefully, in the future, it will decrease.

Globalization made other cultures recognizable and allowed for their propagation. Multiculturalism allowed for their acceptance once they were settled in countries other than their original. Both work in a way that makes it possible for disparate cultures to be brought to different people and inherently contributes to bigger awareness and dissemination of information or knowledge.

Popular culture is a great means of information propagation. Without pop culture, many people would not have the cultural knowledge that television shows and music provides to communities.

Globalization and Multiculturalism paved the way towards the propagation and acceptance of cultural differences, but popular culture was the engine that made the consumption of different cultures possible, visual media is one of the fastest means of distributing information and being able to learn culturally through movies, tv shows, and even music videos, simply by consuming content, facilitated the knowledge and made relevant issues of American and South Korean people.

Without all of these, people outside the U.S.A would not know about the traditions of celebrations such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, popular culture moments events such as the Black Friday would not be happening in European countries as well and the Korean Wave would have not propagated so easily outside Asia, especially in the United States, where battling the media of the country is already complicated between the American culture, without phenomena like Globalization, the *Hallyu* movement would not have succeeded in the U.S. and therefore the Korean culture would not be within the knowledge of most Americans, making it harder for them to accept Korean traditions.

The search for identity becomes harder when the cultural background is dispersed, the feeling of not belonging in a specific circumstance rises. Concepts such as Multiculturalism help in blurring the

dividers of individuality so that more people can feel comfortable with their origins as well as their current context.

The rise of K-pop and its success has helped Korean Americans to feel proud of their cultural heritage. Now, more than ever, people seek courses to learn about Korea and more faculties are creating courses about the Korean language and culture. This type of connection with Korean content was inconceivable a few decades ago which shows the phenomenon that *Hallyu* is and the impact that it had, affecting South Korea's influence and engagement within the worldwide market.

Cultural shock is bound to happen no matter what since cultural disparities are evident, my thesis shows that even though cultural shock happens, pop culture, alongside Multiculturalism and Globalization affects this cultural encounter in a way that makes it more bearable.

These phenomena helped boost the economy and contribute towards an educated cultural front worldwide.

As the Korean popular culture is always evolving, it is important to be aware that the glory and fame surrounding the Korean popular industry might oscillate in the following years, especially according to the North American audience. Therefore, it would be intriguing to conduct similar researches in the future and compare them to this study, bearing in mind a different timeframe, in order to observe how temporal length affects this topic.

I also feel like it would be insightful to pursue, in the future, deeper research on the issue of the Asian hate wave that circulated in the United States of America during the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on Asian-American communities and therefore to see if it has had any repercussions on consumer habits regarding, among others, the Korean Wave.

During my research, I concluded that intolerance can be found in numerous places, no matter how different they may, in the end, be from one another, but movements such as Globalization and Multiculturalism help appease discrimination and make people more aware of diversity, therefore helping in creating a more accepting society.

My goal was to demonstrate that even if popular culture is seen as a lesser part of culture, their impact culturally can be just as intense as what is considered as high culture.

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