

IMSUK JUNG

PREFACE

This edited volume brings together a selection of revised and peer-reviewed contributions presented at the international conference *K-Soft Power and Beyond: Korean Culture, Media, and Global Exchange*, held in May 2025 at the University for Foreigners of Siena. The conference was organized by the Center of Korean Research and Studies “Yun Dongju” (CeSK) as part of the *Seed Program for Korean Studies*, a research and academic development initiative directed by me and funded by the Academy of Korean Studies. The project was conceived with the aim of fostering interdisciplinary dialogue on contemporary Korean culture and of strengthening Korean Studies within the European academic landscape.

The notion of *soft power* has become central to understanding South Korea’s global presence over the past three decades. From K-pop and audiovisual media to literature, digital platforms, and language education, Korean cultural production has demonstrated an exceptional capacity to circulate transnationally while continuously renegotiating questions of identity, locality, and global exchange. At the same time, the accelerating diversification of media forms and audiences calls for analytical frameworks that move beyond celebratory narratives and address the tensions, limits, and transformations inherent in cultural globalization. It is precisely within this critical space beyond *soft power* as a unidirectional model that the present volume situates itself. The contributions collected here reflect the multidisciplinary nature of contemporary Korean Studies, drawing on cultural studies, media studies, literary criticism, film studies, linguistics, and pedagogy. Rather than treating Korean culture

as a monolithic export, the volume emphasizes processes: circulation, translation, adaptation, remediation, and reception. These processes illuminate how Korean cultural forms are continuously reshaped through interactions among local contexts, global markets, and translocal communities.

The first part of the volume focuses on K-pop as one of the most visible and debated manifestations of Korean soft power. Rather than approaching K-pop solely as an industrial or musical phenomenon, the chapters in this section foreground its political, discursive, and social dimensions. The first chapter of this volume is the contribution of **Soongbeum Ahn**, professor at the Department of Humanities and director at the K-Culture and Story Contents Research Institute from Kyung Hee University, and **Taeryong Kim**, professor at the Department of Christian cultural contents from Baekseok University. In *Rewriting the History of K-pop: Fandom Activism from the Local to the Translocal* they conceptualize K-pop fandom activism as a form of translocal practice. Drawing on theoretical frameworks developed by Arjun Appadurai and Arif Dirlik, the authors reinterpret fandom not merely as a consumer-based community but as a form of locality that evolves historically and politically. By tracing the transformation of K-pop fandom from the 1990s to the present, the chapter highlights how fan activism has emerged as an alternative discursive arena within globalized cultural flows.

The contribution of **Paola Laforgia**, author of *Fattore K* (add editore 2024), is entitled *Removing the K from K-pop? Limitations and Potential of One of Hallyu's Key Signifiers*, and it critically interrogates the semantic and ideological implications of the “K” label. By examining both its branding power and its limitations, the chapter explores how the term K-pop simultaneously enables global recognition and imposes categorical constraints. The discussion situates current debates—such as proposals to move beyond the “K” label—within broader strategies of cultural soft power and market positioning. Together, these chapters offer complementary perspectives on K-pop as a contested space where identity, power, and global circulation intersect.

The second part shifts the focus toward questions of memory, representation, and education, highlighting how Korean culture functions as a site of ethical reflection and pedagogical innovation. In *The Aesthetics of Memory and Resistance: Cinematic Practice of the Korean New Wave in A Single Spark*, **Taehyun Baek**, research professor at the K-Culture and Story Contents Research Institute from Kyung Hee University, examines Korean New Wave cinema as a practice of memory rather than mere representation. Through a close reading of cinematic form, rhythm, and narration, the chapter shows how social realism is reconfigured as a sensorial and ethical engagement with labor history and structural violence. By situating the film within the institutional and cultural discourse of the 1990s, the analysis illuminates the enduring relevance of cinematic realism in negotiating national memory.

The next contribution is *Teaching Korean Color Terms and Related Metaphors and Idiomatic Expressions*, accomplished by **Kyong-sook Yoo**, Korean language educator

at the King Sejong Institute in Preston. Her work addresses Korean soft power from a pedagogical perspective. Focusing on intermediate to advanced learners of Korean, the study proposes an instructional model that integrates cognitive linguistics, task-based learning, and authentic audiovisual materials. By examining color-based metaphors and idiomatic expressions, the chapter underscores the importance of cultural competence and discourse-level understanding in Korean language education, particularly in international contexts. This section thus bridges aesthetic analysis and applied linguistics, emphasizing the role of cultural mediation in both artistic and educational practices.

The third part of the volume explores the global circulation of Korean literature across both print-based and digital ecosystems, highlighting the coexistence of avant-garde poetic voices and highly commercialized narrative forms. *Kim Hyesoon's International Success: Speaking to All the 'Garbage' of the World* is the title of the chapter contributed by **Sara Bochicchio**, PhD student in Korean language and literature at the University of Turin. It investigates the international reception of one of the most influential contemporary Korean poets. By focusing on themes of abjection, grotesque imagery, and feminist critique, the chapter analyzes how Kim Hyesoon's poetic language transcends cultural boundaries while maintaining its radical edge. Particular attention is paid to translation and reception in the English-speaking world, offering insights into the global dynamics of contemporary poetry.

The contribution of **Kukjin Kim**, assistant professor at the University for Foreigners of Siena, is *Korean Web Novel: An Innovative Form of Literature?*. His work addresses the theoretical and methodological challenges posed by digital literature. By examining the origins, structures, and modes of consumption of Korean web novels, the chapter proposes a multidisciplinary framework for analyzing web-based narratives. The study highlights how digital platforms reshape literary production, readership, and genre conventions, positioning web novels as a key component of Korea's contemporary cultural landscape.

The chapter of **Irene Lustrissimi**, research contract professor at the University for Foreigners of Siena, *South Korean Soft Power Between Webtoon and Webnovel: The Solo Leveling Case*, offers a detailed case study of transmedia storytelling and cultural soft power. Tracing the evolution of Solo Leveling from web novel to webtoon, anime, and video game, the chapter demonstrates how OSMU strategies, platform infrastructures, and fan participation contribute to global cultural influence. The analysis underscores the strategic role of digital popular culture in redefining South Korea's position as a hybrid and innovative cultural powerhouse.

The present volume concludes with the special essay of **Bruce Fulton**, emeritus professor at the British University of Columbia. His contribution entitled *They Like to Sing and Dance: Intertextuality in Pak Chiyun's Sönginshik* is a richly layered analysis of intertextuality across literature, performance, and visual culture. By situating the music video within a long tradition of Korean literary motifs and

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initiation narratives, the chapter highlights the persistence of literary memory within contemporary popular culture. This contribution serves as a reflective closing to the volume, reinforcing the idea that Korean cultural innovation remains deeply rooted in historical and literary continuities.

As the outcomes of a collaborative international conference, this volume reflects the intellectual vitality of Korean Studies today and the importance of sustained institutional support for its future development. It is our hope that *K-Soft Power and Beyond: Korean Culture, Media, and Global Exchange* will serve not only as a scholarly contribution to current debates but also as a platform for further dialogue among researchers, educators, and students interested in Korea's dynamic cultural presence in the world.

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Imsuk Jung