

## **The Korean soft power: the emergence of a new economic model**

The rise of the Korean cultural wave fascinates and intrigues audiences around the world. Beyond the attraction of K-Pop, Korean dramas and films, can we see the emergence of a Korean model, and are there any lessons to be learned from it? To fully understand the foundations of this phenomenon, it is necessary to recall the historical, economic, and social context of South Korea. While the country experienced a spectacular economic progress after the Korean War, building several of the world's largest industrial hubs, the Korean government made sure from the early 1960s to build a vast strategic program of knowledge and learning, focusing initially on education (while the literacy rate was 22% in 1945, the college enrollment rate reached 90% by the end of the 1970s), then on innovation, which led to the emergence of major industrial R&D policies.

At the same time, the great Korean filmmakers (Park Chan Wook, Bong Joon Ho, Kim Jee Woon...) born in the 1960s, who grew up and were trained in this movement, have largely contributed with others to the elevation of artistic and cultural creation, and the advent of democracy in the late 1980s after a long period of dictatorship that served as a catalyst. In this highly stimulating environment constantly advocating for development, everyone, whether attached to the industry or culture, was led to create value and progress.

To explain the striking force of the Korean cultural wave, one must also take into account the application of the Korean export-oriented approach. Indeed, exports have long been one of the most powerful driving forces of the Korean economy (over 42% of GDP). Fine analysis of markets and the ability to reach the core targets characterize this approach. In the 2000s, when Korean audiovisual production began to be exported, Korea and its cultural industries took advantage to the fullest of the introduction of new technologies and vectors of dissemination (smartphones, streaming, social networks) of the intangible economy. The Korean soft power then revealed itself in a dazzling way, symbolized by the hit song Gangnam Style (over 3 billion views on YouTube), which was followed by K-Pop groups, films, and dramas on audiovisual platforms.

Korea has thus been able to create a form of pop culture nourished by the vitality and dynamism of the country, but also by a very rich cultural heritage in many areas (calligraphy, painting, pottery, etc.). Korean pop culture, blending various influences, has also been capable of embracing modernity and delivering productions that perfectly align with contemporary times, all while staying true to its profound authenticity. This has allowed to win over new audiences seeking unique and distinct experiences that stand out from standardized and unoriginal offerings. In the process, Korea has gradually refined its own style, symbolized by the K label, which has become a true national brand.

Korea transcends the traditional concept of soft power. While content creators and production companies in cultural and creative industries are at the forefront of the Korean pop culture, the

government plays a vital role in providing support and amplifying their efforts through various initiatives, resulting in a more significant impact on the industry. Korea thus manages to bring cultural and artistic successes into a vibrant national heritage serving the strategy of constructing a national image while generating benefits for the entire economy.