

The History of Censorship in South Korean Entertainment Since the Korean War

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Signature Page

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate history and evolution of censorship in South Korean entertainment from the end of the Korean War to the present day. Through a comprehensive examination of major historical events, governmental policies, and societal norms, it highlights the weight of censorship and its impact on the rapidly evolving economic and social policies of South Korea. Beginning with the aftermath of the Korean War, it examines the initial purposes of censorship and its transformation through different political regimes, the democratization movements of the late 20th century, and the globalization of Korean culture in the 21st century.

This paper also provides an overview of the legislative framework, key laws, and regulations that govern censorship in South Korean entertainment, including those related to content classification, obscenity, and national security. It delves into the history of the roles and responsibilities of regulatory bodies such as the Korean Media Rating Board, Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, and Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, explaining their processes and criteria for content evaluation and restriction.

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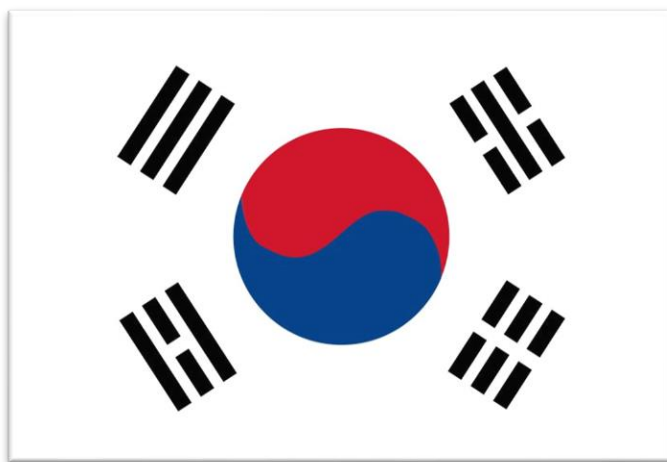
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The History of Censorship in South Korean Entertainment Since the Korean War

Country Overview



World Atlas



Britannica

South Korea, officially the Republic of Korea, was formed in its current form in 1948, after World War II. Korea has a long history, going back to 2333 BC. Until 1910, it was ruled by Kingdoms. In 1910, Korea was annexed by Japan. Between 1910 and 1945, Japan went to extreme measures, inflicting brutal repression on Koreans, trying to wipe out the Korean language and cultural identities to make Koreans culturally Japanese. After Japan's defeat in World War II, the Korean peninsula was divided into two zones at the 38th parallel and was occupied by the United States and the Soviet Union. Post-war occupation ended three years later when on August 15th, 1948, the Republic of Korea was officially established in the South. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established in the North on September 9th, 1948. On June 25th, 1950, the North invaded the South, beginning a 3-year war between the two. The Korean War ended on July 27th, 1953, after an armistice agreement was signed, dividing the

Korean Peninsula into two at the 38th parallel. The South was pro-U.S. and held a mostly democratic government, while the North was a communist, pro-USSR government. For the next 30 years after the Korean War, South Korea would see rapid industrial development and economic growth (CIA). In the 1980s, Korea started to shift its economy towards high-tech and computer industries (BBC). In 1987, the country revised its constitution, allowing the direct election of the president for the first time (CIA). The current President is Yoon Suk Yeol.

South Korea's official language is Korean. There is no national religion in South Korea, but the country is primarily atheist, with 57% of its population claiming no religious affiliation (Britannica). The South Korean government is a unitary multiparty republic with one legislative house (the National Assembly). According to the World Bank, the 2024 estimated population is 51,742,000 people. This is a 0.08 percent decline from 2022. South Korea borders one country, North Korea. It is surrounded by the Sea of Japan to the east, the East China Sea to the South, and the Yellow Sea to the west. The closest country in proximity to South Korea is Japan (besides North Korea).

Consumption of Entertainment

Nearly 47% of Koreans listen to music daily, 38% listen multiple times a week, and the remaining 15% listen less than once a week (Statista). Music is mostly consumed through streaming, about 63.7%, while around 33.1% download music to listen offline, and 3% from physical CDs (Statista). Unlike many countries, physical sales in South Korea are a thriving business. Within the first half of 2023, 55 million physical albums were sold, with 13 albums selling over 1 million copies each (Peoples). Circle Chart, a leading tracker of local album sales, reported that the top 400 physical albums sold 116 million copies in the first 11 months of 2023 (Yonhap).

South Korea is widely known today for its export of Korean-Pop music, or K-pop for short. While classified as a genre, K-pop is more of an umbrella term for the Korean music industry, encompassing many different genres. The most popular type of music in South Korea is ballads. The ballad (also known as adult contemporary) genre in South Korea dominates the charts and many modern ballads incorporate R&B/soul. Mainstream pop music, rock, dance/electronic, hip-hop, and R&B/soul are among the most popular genres in South Korea.

Trot and Soundtracks are unique genres that perform very well in South Korea. Trot music is the oldest form of Korean popular music and is very popular with the older generations in the country. Introduced in the 1960's, the genre blends traditional Korean folk songs, Japanese Enka, blues, swing, jazz, and other western genres (Kim). Soundtracks, or "OST's" as they are called in Korea, are considered their own genre and have a large presence on Korean charts. According to Lim Ha-Young, music director for popular drama *Twenty-One Twenty-Five*, "OST's make up at least 10% of the songs on domestic K-pop charts at any given time." (Kim)

American and other western artists see commercial success in South Korea. American music, in particular is very popular in South Korea. Apart from the close relations between South Korea and the United States going back to the Korean War, modern K-pop was born out of American hip-hop in the 1990s. While the influence of American music on K-pop is still prevalent today, the genre has created its own signatures and distinctive features over the past two and a half decades.

K-pop has a large visual component to it. Lead singles off albums or EP's (called mini albums in Korea) are usually accompanied by choreography, and music videos are heavily invested in, with high production values. Because there is such a large visual component to K-pop, South Korea has weekly music shows that air on TV where K-pop acts perform to promote

their music. These shows act as weekly charts as well, where at the end of every show, the act with the highest charting song (according to each show's different criteria), wins a trophy for winning the week. There are six different music shows a week (The Show, Show Champion, M Countdown, Music Bank, Show! Music Core, and Inkigayo).

Radio stations in South Korea are independently owned. However, KBS (Korean Broadcasting System), the largest broadcaster in South Korea, is governed by its Board of Governors who are nominated by the Korean Communication Commission (KCC) and appointed by the President of South Korea (Kazuma). The KCC is similar to the FCC in the United States. However, a major distinction between them is that the FCC is an independent government agency, whereas the KCC is a subordinate organization of the Blue House/President of South Korea. Two of the five Commissioners on the board are directly appointed by the President, and the other three are nominated by the National Assembly and approved by the President (KCC). Even though there is no direct way for the government to stop plans and are not subject to approving their budget, they have influence over the highest decision-making body within KBS.

TV and film are growing industries in Korea. Compared to the U.S. average of 3.51 films, Koreans watch an average of 4.37 films per year per capita, one of the highest numbers in the world (these numbers are pre-Covid 19 Pandemic) (International Trade Administration).

In 2022, the size of the Korean gaming industry was estimated to be \$17.6 billion and is considered one of the top-four largest gaming market worldwide, according to the 2022 White Paper on Korean Game published by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA). Over the last five years, the Korean gaming industry recorded an average annual growth of 10 percent (International Trade Administration). Massive investments into high-speed internet connectivity and a culture of internet cafés helped boost

Korea's gaming industry, especially in PC games. Recently, Korea has been putting efforts into moving into the mobile gaming market. In 2022, more than 62 percent of Korean gamers used their mobile phones as their main gaming device (International Trade Administration).

Sports are a popular pastime in South Korea. Its two most popular sports are soccer and baseball. In 2019, approximately 7.5 million people visited stadiums to enjoy professional baseball games (Korean Cultural Center NY). Hiking is also a popular sport for Koreans, as the mountainous terrain of the peninsula provides thousands of hiking trails of varying difficulty. Known as the home of e-sports, South Korea was one of the first countries to recognize e-sports as a sport. Since 2001, the Korea e-Sports Association (KeSPA) has systematized the athlete management, rules, and competition methods for e-sports. Currently, South Korea has the largest number of world-class e-sports players (Korean Cultural Center NY).

Censorship

Late 1940s and 1950s

The National Security Act was signed into law on December 1, 1948, just a few months after the establishment of the Republic of Korea. The stated purpose of the National Security Law is to prevent anti-state acts from threatening the security of South Korea. "Anti-State groups" are defined in the law as "domestic or foreign organizations or groups whose intentions are to conduct or assist infiltration of the Government or to cause national disturbances." (National Security Act). The intention of the act was to subvert any threats from the communist north. Within one year, 188,621 people were arrested or imprisoned under the National Security Act (Neary). Many experts and non-governmental organizations dealing with human rights have

condemned the South Korean legal system for repressing fundamental human rights such as freedom of ideology and conscience, freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, right to participate in politics, right to life, prohibition of torture, right to liberty and security of person, humane treatment of inmates, right to labor, right to liberty of movement and residence, right to privacy, and freedom of association (Park). The National Security Act became the De Facto Constitution of South Korea and was amended over seven times, with each revision aiding the suppression of dissent and securing political power.

Syngman Rhee was the first president of the Republic of Korea. Born in 1875, the leader spent much of his life outside of the country he would come to serve. His political career began in 1894 when he founded the first daily newspaper in Korea and organized protests in opposition to Japanese and Russian designs on Korea (Breen). In 1897, he was jailed for his participation in an anti-corruption protest. For seven years, he was subjected to torture. After his release and the Japanese takeover of the peninsula, Rhee fled to the United States where he became the first Korean to earn a doctorate from an American university. Rhee earned a bachelor's degree from George Washington University, a master's from Harvard University, and a doctorate from Princeton University. During his time in the United States, Rhee spent decades campaigning for Korean independence. After World War II, he returned to Korea and became the first president of the new established Republic of Korea in 1948.

Throughout the Korean War, Syngman Rhee's administration was packed with instances of corruption and scandal. His opponents in the National Assembly were on track to overthrow him in the 1952 elections, and to avoid any chances of this happening, Rhee and his allies within the government bribed many National Assembly members, and opening disparaged others, equating their disapproval of him to their communist enemies in the North (Wilson Center

Archive). He was re-elected in 1952. Throughout the rest of his tenure as President, Syngman Rhee and his Liberal Party were scrutinized for his corruption and poor performance in improving the country's economy. He was forced to resign in 1960 after the public discovered the murder of a student protestor was covered up as accidental drowning. He left Korea and died in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1965.

Syngman Rhee used the National Security Act to justify the arrests of countless civilians and government officials. The number of NSL-related arrests is impossible to precisely count, as many of the records from before 1964 are missing or were never created. However, the number is estimated in the hundreds of thousands (Park). Throughout the late 1950s, Rhee and members of his party became deeply unpopular as it failed to improve economic conditions and relied too heavily on the United States. In an attempt to silence and suppress media criticism, the National Security Act was revised. The notion of a state secret was redefined in 1958 to go beyond military matters and to include political, economic, social and cultural information (Neary). Article 7 was also revised, and under Section 1, stated that persons who have "benefited an Anti-State Organization by way of praising, encouraging, propagating, or siding with the activities of an Anti-State Organization, its membership or the persons who have propagated or instigated the disruption of the State with the knowledge that it will endanger the national security or survival or the basic liberal democratic order" would be punished with up to seven years of imprisonment. This revision gave Rhee, his future successors, and his party the legal justification to arrest journalists, poets, artists, professors, authors, and filmmakers (Park).

1960s-1970s

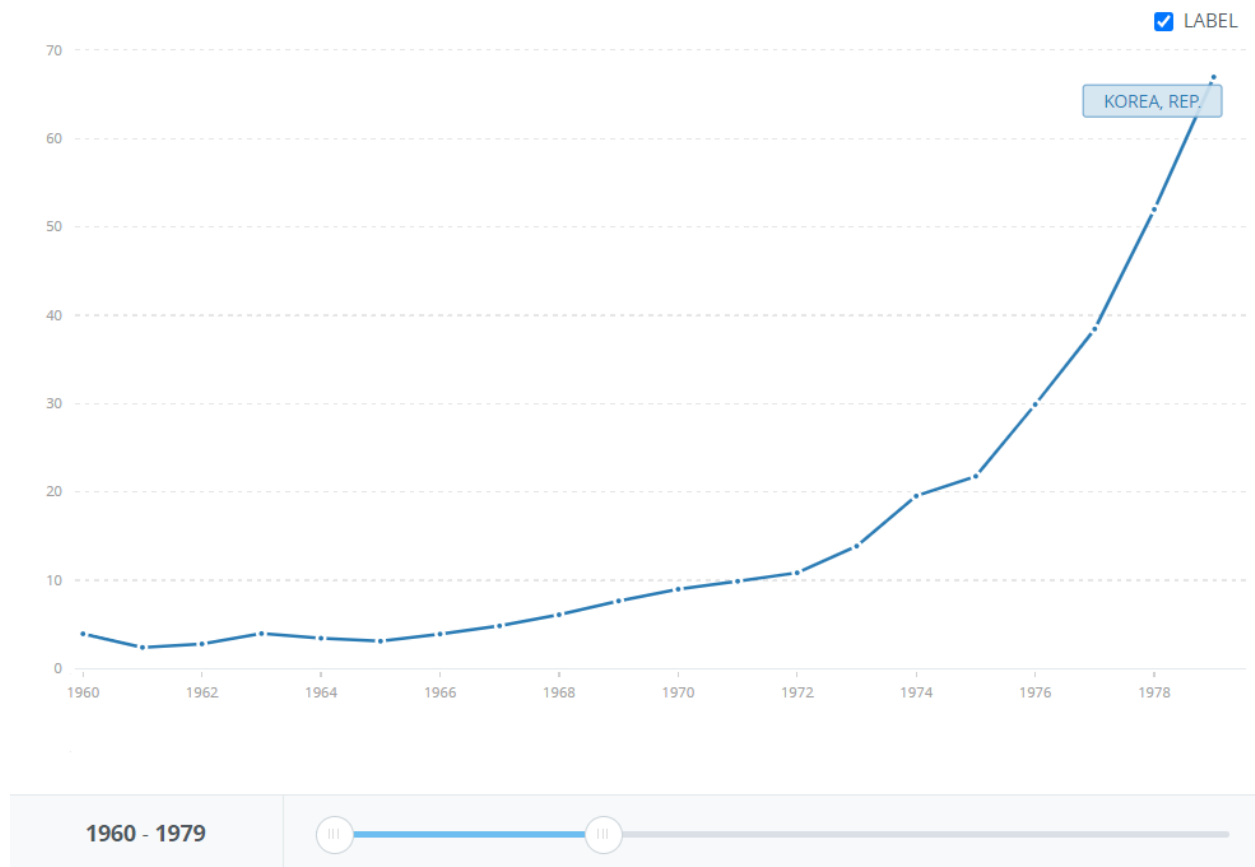
Constitutional amendments effective in July 1960 replaced the presidential system with a parliamentary form of government. Elections later that month produced a majority for the

Democratic Party and its leader Chang Myon became Prime Minister. The new government ultimately failed. Student dissatisfaction was still high, its policies surrounding North Korea were seen as weak by the public, and it proved unable to deal with the financial crisis bequeathed by the Rhee regime (Neary).

This government would not last a year, as in May 1961 the South Korean military took control over of the government with the reasoning being the current government would not save the country from communism and economic confusion. Following the coup, power lay in the hands of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, which assumed all executive, legislative and judicial power (Neary). The group was led by soon to be president, Park Chung-Hee.

Between the early 1960s and the late 1970s, the Korean GDP per capita rose by nearly 3000 percent, with an economic growth rate of 9.3 percent per year, all under the leadership of Park Chung-Hee. In 1961, when Park first came into power, South Korea's GDP was \$2.24 billion. By 1979, the South Korean GDP was \$66.95 billion (World Bank). Through land reform and heavy investments in manufacturing, industries such as steel, technology, and automobiles flourished, and the country became a powerhouse with a highly skilled workforce. Because the government was so focused on rebuilding the country after it was devastated during the Korean War, it could not handle any political discourse or social movements (DKDKTV). All media and entertainment were heavily regulated by the government and in many sectors, the government had close to full control over what the public was to see.

Korean GDP 1960-1979



World Bank

In 1962, Park Chung-Hee officially became president and immediately enacted legislation to censor entertainment. The Ministry of Public Information (1961) (to which the official censorship bureau belonged), the National Film Production Center (1961), and the Motion Picture Law (1962) were all created or enacted in the early days of Park Chung-Hee's regime. A number of policies outlined in these pieces of legislation forced production studios to merge due to strict and largely unattainable standards to be considered a film studio. Some of the rules included "(1) more than three 35-mm cameras, (2) a lighting system of more than 60 kW of power, (3) sound recording capabilities, (4) two full-time exclusively employed film directors,

(5) and more than two contracted actors and actresses.” (Kim). By 1963, 65 small film studios were merged into 16 major companies, eventually falling to 6 by 1979 (Kim). By making the number of film studios reduce down to 6, the government had a much easier time controlling the narrative of films produced.

The Motion Picture Law mentions four major criteria under the section covering censorship. (1) Films shall not depict anything that damages national authority or disrespects the Constitution; (2) films shall not disrupt national security, public morals, tradition and social orders; (3) films shall not damage the image of any countries that have diplomatic relations with Korea; and (4) films shall not discourage the spirit of citizens (Kim). These provisions allowed the government to rule whether a film matched the national agenda and effectively turned the film industry into a propaganda machine. The 1966 revision of the Motion Picture Law introduced “double censorship”. Under this new law, scripts had to be reviewed twice: once by either the Korean Motion Pictures Producers Association or the Board of Korean Art and Cultural Ethics, and once by the Ministry of Public Information. The Ministry of Public Information had the final say over any censorship decisions and had the power to nullify the decision of the Board of Korean Art and Cultural Ethics, minimizing the authority of these organizations and simply creating another barrier for film makers.

Another revision to the Motion Picture Law in 1974 appointed a Minister of Public Information and Culture. The Minister was given unrestricted authority over all applications for a film business. They could permit, prohibit, or cancel any application and also had control over ongoing film productions, giving them the power to stop a film at any point, even if they already cleared censorship reviews. Enforcement over censorship rules became more severe after the

1974 revision. The number of rejected scripts in 1970 sat at 3%. In 1975, that number skyrocketed to 80% (Kim).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, to bolster its anti-Japanese image the government also banned certain trot songs because of its “Japaneseness,” given the direct influence of Japanese “Enka” songs on trot. The most famous example is Yi Mi-ja’s 1964 hit “Tong Baek Agassi” which was deemed *waesaek* (Japanese in color or style), and the government prevented recordings of it from being sold until 1987 (Lie). Even though the Japanese influence on trot music was evident and Japanese descent was large in Korea during the time, trot music soared in popularity for its bright sound and positive lyrics. Trot music also flourished in the background of a rapidly growing economy, mass rural exoduses, and the rise of the television set.

Another foreign influence on music in the 60s and 70s was rock. Rock music was the American contribution to decades music scene. If trot was seen as too Japanese, rock music was too American, and faced more of the censor’s trot was subjected to. Its assumed associations with sex, drugs, and politics prompted the Park regime to place rock artists under heavy surveillance. Rock in South Korea was growing in popularity in 1973 and 1974, and the older generation grew paranoid over the influence the genre would have on the nation’s youth. This paranoia was not fully without its merits: the country’s early rock musicians, with their ties to the music scene of the military camp towns, did promote a lifestyle that didn’t shy away from sex and drugs (Lie).

Cultural inertia led to a multitude of governmental acts. In 1970, long hair was banned for men. In 1973, miniskirts. This all came to a climax in 1975 with Presidential Emergency Decree Number 9. With this decree, 222 South Korean records and 261 foreign records were banned on the grounds of everything from “negative influences on national security” to “pessimistic

content.” (Lie). Soon followed a wave of censorship from the Art and Culture Ethics Committee of the South Korean Federation of Cultural Organizations. They heavily censored any western-style rock music, calling the music banned “decadent” foreign influences. Any songs that were considered revolutionary, subversive, or antisocial were banned. Park Chung-Hee supplied the reasoning for the ban on the grounds that they were politically and morally harmful to the country’s youth (NY Times).

Among the list of songs banned, “Sometime in New York City” by John Lennon and Yoko Ono; “One on the Right Is on the Left” by Johnny Cash; “The C.I.A.,” by The Fugs, and a number of songs by Black Sabbath were blacklisted for being “Submissive and antiwar”.

“Blowin’ in the Wind” by Bob Dylan; “Dona, Dona, Dona” by Joan Baez; “Tom Dooley” by the Kingston Trio, and “I Shot the Sheriff” by Eric Clayton were classified as “Leftist and violence-inducing”.

“Me and Mrs. Jones” by Billy Paul, and a number of songs by Elvis Presley were listed as “Obscene”.

This sequence of governmental acts squashed rock’s presence in the South Korean soundscape, along with its companion cultures, including sexy clothing, marijuana and other drug usage, and anti-establishment sentiment.

In 1970, the famous poem “Five Bandits” by Kim Chi-Ha was published in the literary magazine, *World of Ideas*. The poem consisted of satirical political commentary depicting the corruption among those in power. The five bandits that appear in this poem referred to large conglomerates, lawmakers, senior public officials, generals and ministers and vice ministers. The political poem criticized people in these positions, whose corruption amassed them tremendous

wealth at a time when they dominated development, by comparing them to the five traitors who signed a treaty allowing Japanese occupation of Korea in 1905. When the poem was published, the publisher and editor of *World of Ideas* were arrested, as well as the editor of *The Democratic Front*, a paper published by the New Democratic Party, which was the opposition at the time. The Park Chung-Hee regime claimed that this poem supported the propaganda by North Korea and arrested Kim for violating the National Security Act. He was released a year later, but in late 1972, after another poem of his was published, the government tried to force Kim to write a poem praising the government. After Kim refused, he was sent to an army hospital on the edge of the city for treatment of a case of tuberculosis from which he had recovered four years ago (Kirk). He was released months later after a collective of foreign writers petitioned for his release.

In 1972, Park Chung-Hee issued a new Constitution called the Yushin Constitution. The new Constitution heavily renovated existing laws. Many of these new laws gave Park Chung-Hee unchecked power and allowed him to suppress labor demonstrations and democratic movements easily. The largest renovation included abolishing the number of terms that can be served. Presidents were now able to serve an unlimited number of 6-year terms. This gave Park a guarantee to continue his dictatorship. The Yushin system pushed a narrative of impending communist threat and gave the government more reason to tighten national discourse and media control. The Yushin system gave incentives to filmmakers who promoted patriotism, supported the “spirit of Yushin”, and encouraged the public to be efficient (Kim).

As the economic growth of the nation became increasingly evident, criticism of the Korean government slowed in the late 60s and into the early 70s. However, protests began to pop up more in 1975, in response to Park’s decrees on May 13th, when he wielded his newfound power

to ban all criticism of the government and the Yushin Constitution (Neary). In response, the media was controlled more heavily.

In 1976, the Park regime instituted the Performance Ethics Committee. A subsidiary of the Ministry of Public Information, this committee conducted preliminary reviews of all performance and videos, striking down any productions deemed inappropriate or critical of the government (Han). Preliminary reviews were mandatory and any cultural products that circulated without approval were considered illegal. This committee was formed to limit free speech in music further. The committee had the full power to ban music, order artists to change lyrics to their songs, and pull existing albums from sale in Korea. The Performance Ethics Committee forced all politics out of music and encouraged musicians to sing about trivial topics. Before the cultural revolution in the 1990's, the most popular songs in Korea were ballads or trot music with messages of love, national strength, and natural beauty.

1980s

The 1980's in South Korea were characterized by political unrest, democratization movements, and strict censorship of the press.

In 1979, Park Chung-Hee was assassinated. His direct successor was Prime Minister Choi Kyu-Ha, who became Acting President shortly after a brief confusion over constitutional procedures. His time as president would not last long. On December 12, 1979, after months of strategic measures, Chun Doo-Hwan gained control of the military through a coup and put Seoul under military rule. On May 17, 1980, he expanded martial law to the whole country and established himself as a military dictator. This act also closed Universities, banned political activities and further censored the already heavily monitored press.

One of the most famous events in recent South Korean history took place on May 18th, 1980. In the southwestern city of Gwangju, pro-democracy students and civilians alike rose in protest of martial law. The protests began with students at Chonnam National University where over 200 students gathered outside the University's gates trying to attend classes when soldiers blocked entry to the campus. As students became restless and tried to force their way past the gates, they were fired on, killed, and beaten by military personnel. The protests continued throughout the city with some civilians raiding police armories and joining the students who were able to continue. On May 21st, the military retreated leaving the city under civilian control. 6 days later, on May 27th, the military re-entered the city with tanks, armored personnel carriers, and helicopters that began indiscriminately attacking the city. Over 20,000 South Korean troops were deployed from the US-sanctioned DMZ to suppress the uprising (BBC). Within two hours, the military regained control of the city. Throughout Gwangju, protests were brutally suppressed by the military and hundreds of protestors were killed and thousands injured. The number of casualties is highly contested, with the Chun's government reporting a little over 200 deaths, and the city of Gwangju claiming the number is closer to between 1,500 and 2,000 (Neary).





Korean media and press completely censored the Gwangju Uprising. Chun Doo Hwan banned any and all reporting on the Gwangju Uprising. Chun Doo-Hwan called together the heads of major media companies in Seoul and threatened to hold them accountable if reporters kept ignoring the ban. The new military government went as far as to place armored vehicles and armed soldiers in front of major media outlets across the country. Many journalists continued their efforts to report on Gwangju anonymously with as much information as possible; however, after May 27th, numerous journalists were illegally dismissed from their jobs. Chun's military regime committed 'media massacre', including forced mergers and abolitions of media companies (Ko Seung-Woo). The extent of media censorship on this issue within the country was huge. Many Koreans found out about the uprising after foreign media reported on the Gwangju "riots". Chun's government downplayed the severity of the violence and tried defending its actions by claiming the students were under North Korean communist influence.

Some of the most horrific information was kept so well from the public, that it was not confirmed and disclosed to the public that helicopters were used to fire on civilians until 2018.

Throughout the rest of Chun Doo-Hwan's regime, The National Security Act was cited in the arrests and imprisonments of hundreds of thousands of people, including 937 editors and journalists that were removed by general Chun Doo Hwan (Kraft). Newspapers, radio stations, and television stations were put under government control in the name of national security.

Chun Doo-Hwan officially became president in August 1980 after being elected by the National Conference of Unification, Korea's then equivalent of the electoral college. He had no opposition. After the Gwangju Uprising, his approval ratings among Koreans were low. His domestic policies surrounding censorship were no different than Park Chung-Hee.

Chun's regime was ruling a different South Korea than Park Chung-Hee. Park Chung-Hee inherited a nation that was still reeling from the devastating Korean War. With over two million dead and its infrastructure demolished, Korea had to focus on rebuilding. While the 1950s saw slow progress, the 60s and 70s saw enormous economic growth in a period known as "the Korean Miracle". The national attitude during Park Chung Hee's regime was one focused on a common goal: rebuilding and economic growth. These citizens lived and served in the War and knew the importance of economic growth. They were willing to put their civil liberties to the side in order to prioritize the collective population.

Chun took power in 1980, with a younger generation joining society who did not experience the war. Many of them grew up in an expanding and flourishing economy. They were children when many families moved from rural villages to cities for economic prospects. Their priorities were different and focused more on democratic freedom than economic growth. The 1980's were

the beginning of the decades long shift away from collectivism and towards individualism in South Korea. Young Koreans began to express themselves more through fashion, music, and other forms of culture. They also began to voice their political opinions. The pro-democracy movements that took place in the 1980's was overwhelmingly organized and attended by younger citizens, many of whom were students.

This noticeable shift in the Korean public forced Chun Doo-Hwan to reevaluate the censorship policies of Park Chung-Hee's regime. Many censorship policies remained the same during Chun's regime, and in some instances, such as control over the press, they were expanded. However, the entertainment sector was granted some leniency.

Entertainment during Chun Doo-Hwan's dictatorship was characterized by the Three S's- Sex, Sports, and Screen. While there are no documents that prove this was an official policy of the government at the time, it is widely considered that Chun focused on building the Korean film and sports industries to distract from his largely unpopular domestic policies.

The Motion Picture Law was amended in 1984. This revision abolished the outright censorship of the film industry. Instead, a "pre-deliberation" system was adopted. This change, however, in essence did not change much. Deliberation of films was almost the same as censorship in terms of subjects, standards, and process (Im Sang-hyeok). Films against anti-communist ideology or the government were not allowed to be screened or even made. One of the smaller changes included allowing small, independent production companies to produce their films. The largest actual change in cinema policy was the allowance of nudity in Korean films. It is believed Chun wanted people "in cinemas to have fun" instead of focusing on public policy (Kang Hyun-kyung).

The sports industry was heavily expanded during Chun's regime. The Korea Baseball Organization League was launched in 1982 with six baseball clubs, helping the sport become one of the most popular in the country. President Chun threw the ceremonial first pitch in the opening games between the MBC Blue Dragons and the Samsung Lions at Dongdaemun stadium in southern Seoul. A pro soccer league was launched the next year, followed by a basketball league and traditional wrestling "ssireum.". The Summer Olympics were held in Seoul in 1988, and while this was after Chun was out of office, his regime secured the bid for it to be held in Seoul.

The most pivotal moment in recent South Korean history took place in 1987. The June Democratic Movement called for free and fair elections and the adoption of a true constitutional democracy. The movement was sparked by the death of a student activist Park Jung-Chul, who died during interrogation with federal police where he was tortured. Originally the police claimed he died of a heart attack, but a leaked autopsy report showed his death was caused by asphyxiation (Haberman). Massive protests erupted in Seoul, demanding the abolition of censorship and suppression of dissent. The movement grew into a nationwide call for political reform and an end to authoritarian rule. The movement ultimately pressured the government to concede to democratic reforms, leading to the first direct presidential election in nearly two decades and the beginning of a new era of democracy in South Korea.

Roh Tae Woo became for first directly elected president of South Korea in 1988. He was a close ally of Chun Doo Hwan and served as his Minister of State for National Security and Foreign Affairs, Sports Minister, Home Affairs Minister, President of the Seoul Olympics Organizing Committee, and in 1985, chairman of the ruling Democratic Justice Party. He won the presidential election largely in part to his June 29th speech, pledging to expand democratic

reform and popular vote elections. The first peaceful transfer of power in South Korea's history took place on February 25th, 1988.

By the end of the 1980s, after all of the political protests and movements that led to South Korea having its first directly elected president, young adults shifted their focus to personal expression. Many teenagers began to express themselves as individuals and started pushing the limits of what society accepted (DKDKTV). Because the music was so heavily censored and young people couldn't relate to anything on the radio, they would flock to any music that expressed their own experiences. This led to a major resurgence in the 1990s of foreign genres such as rock and hip hop.

1990s

Multiple Korean entertainment industries saw major reforms in the 1990's. Citizens pushed the government to grant them the liberties modern democracies should have, and as a direct result of the democratic movements in the late 1980s, the 1990s saw these liberties finally being written into law.

In 1992, the three-member group Seo Taiji and Boys debuted, and are considered as one of the most influential Korean musical acts of all time. The music scene in South Korea in the late 1980s and early 1990s was dominated by trot music and ballads. Pop and rock were also beginning to seep into mainstream music and were growing in popularity. Seo Taiji and Boys are widely accepted as the first mainstream Korean act to incorporate hip-hop and rap into their music. Their debut song titled "Nan Arayo (I know)" swept every award show and immediately skyrocketed the group to stardom. They were incredibly popular among teenagers and young adults. Their music discussed topics that teenagers could relate to and introduced a visual aspect

to their act with a focus on fashion and hip-hop dance. Seo Taiji and Boys' music pushed the boundaries constantly. Their music was bold, honest, and willing to tackle taboo subjects, such as mental health, political and social critique, alienation, identity and self-discovery. Even with its social critiques, their music somehow managed to pass the Public Performance Ethics Committees censorship thresholds.

In 1995, one of Seo Taiji's songs became the catalyst for abolishing the pre-deliberation practice in Korea. Their song "Regret of the Times" was set to be released with their fourth studio album. The song (along with many other songs on the album) was politically charged. To give context of the time this song was being released, South Korea had just witnessed two national tragedies that occurred in previous years due to corporate corruption and negligence. In 1994, Sungsu Bridge collapsed, killing 32 people, and in 1995, Sanghoon Department store collapsed, killing 502 people and injuring 937 people. Both incidents occurred due to rushed construction and under maintenance (DKDKTV). "Regret of the Times" lyrics were critical of the systems in place that failed to keep the public safe and included lyrics "gone is the era of honest people" and "I wish for a new world that will overturn everything."



Seo Taiji and Boys



Regret of the Times Single Cover

The Public Performance Ethics Committee, under the control of the Ministry of Culture and Sport, blocked “Regret of the Times” from release and ordered Seo Taiji to change their lyrics. Their reasoning for the decision was that the song “viewed reality with too much negativity” (DKDKTV). This was not the band’s first time interacting with the Performance Ethics Committee, as they have had their songs banned from public broadcast before. However, this was the first time they were blocked from releasing music. The band refused to change the lyrics and instead decided to remove the lyrics altogether and just release the instrumental of the song (Herman).

After the public learned of why the lyrics were missing, the backlash towards the government for this was immense. There were protests outside of government buildings, offices were flooded with letters and calls, and citizens called for a change to censorship laws. The Public Performance Ethics Committee was completely overwhelmed, and the committee decided to stop all music pre-censorship practices in June 1996 (Takanami-Herman). Since then, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family has taken over the task of public broadcast censorship.

On October 4th, 1996, the Korean Constitutional Court struck down Articles 12 and 13 of the Motion Pictures Act, disinherit the Public Performance Ethics Committee of their right to pre-inspect films with the intent to prevent release of such content. South Korea’s Constitutional Court denounced their preliminary review system as unconstitutional, stating:

“A motion picture is a form of expression, and its production and showing should be protected by Article 21 (1) freedom of speech and press. It is protected also under the Article 22 (1) freedom of Science and arts since it is often used as means to publish the results of academic research or as a form of art.....Compared to Article 37 (2) that allows all liberties and rights of the people to be limited by means of statute for reason of national security,

public order or public welfare, Article 21 (2) stands for prohibition of censorship as a means at all, even if in form of a statute, when freedom of press and publication is at stake.

However, unconstitutional censorship is only a system of pre-inspection conducted by an administrative body with complete control on whether a material can be published or not, based on compulsory submission and supported by a mechanism enforcing the ban in the event that it is not licensed.” (Constitutional Court 93Hun-Ka13, Oct 04, 1996)

In 1996, the Public Performance Ethics Committee changed its name to the South Korea Art and Culture Ethics Committee (renamed the Korean Media Rating Board in 1999) following this decision, and adopted a rating system, very similar to the one we have in the US.

The Youth Protection Act of 1997 enacted the Censorship Review System into Korean Law. This purpose of this act was to “ensure youth grow up into persons of sound character by regulating the distribution of media products, drugs, etc. harmful to youth and youth's access to harmful business establishments and by protecting and relieving youth from harmful environments.” (Youth Protection Act). This system was carried out by different agencies depending on the materials under review for censorship: the Commission on Youth Protection under the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family over music records; the Korean Publication Ethics Committee over publications; the Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC) over broadcasted programs; the Korea Media Rating Board (KMRB) over videos and performances; and the Game Rating and Administration Committee over games (Roh).

As well intentioned as the act is to protect youth from inappropriate content and drugs, the unclear language of the Youth Protection Act gave all of these agencies generous room to make conclusions based on their own perceived definitions of harmfulness. Article 9 of the Youth Protection Act lays out the criteria for media products harmful to youth:

(1) if a media product is lewd or obscene to arouse youth's sexual desire; (2) if a media product is likely to urge youth to commit an atrocity or crime; (3) if a media product provokes or glamorizes violent acts in various forms, including sexual violence, and the abuse of drugs; (4) if a media product induces youth to gamble and speculation or is likely to significantly harm the healthy lives of youth; (5) if a media product is anti-social or unethical to hinder youth's formation of good character and citizen consciousness; or (6) if a media product is obviously likely to harm the mental or physical health of youth in any other aspect. (Article 9, Youth Protection Act)

What are definitions of: significantly harmful to the healthy lives of youth; anti-social; unethical; and likely to harm?

The Music Review Committee under the Ministry of Gender Equality and Gender recommends all ratings for music. The MRC has no legal basis and no publicly released guideline on how the MRC reaches its decisions. Their only rating classification besides ALL, is Rated R, which restricts availability to any person under the age of 19 (Roh). The Youth Protection Act and the Censorship Review System it put in place is still used to this day and is the main arm of censorship in South Korea. It is important to note that the Youth Protection Act has no authority to force artists to change their art for release, however, there are many instances of changed lyrics in music for public broadcast purposes.

In 1997, South Korea's economy took a major hit during the IMF crisis. The South Korean financial crisis of 1997, also known as the IMF crisis, was a pivotal event that rocked the Asian economy. Triggered by a combination of excessive borrowing, weak financial regulations, and corporate mismanagement, the crisis led to a sudden devaluation of the South Korean won and a sharp decline in investor confidence. Massive corporate debt, particularly among large

conglomerates, exacerbated the situation, leading to widespread bankruptcies and layoffs. In response, the South Korean government sought assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provided a record-breaking bailout package. This bailout came with stringent conditions, including financial reforms and corporate restructuring, fundamentally reshaping South Korea's economic landscape (Coe, Kim).

Many Koreans saw this as an embarrassment, especially after 30 years of major economic improvement. To help bolster South Korea's image to the rest of the world, the government began pouring money into the entertainment and tech industries in an effort to make culture and tech significant exports. This included forming a new Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism, with a specific department focused on K-pop (Chow). The government built massive concert halls and auditoriums, invested in and encouraged music TV programming, and even regulated karaoke bars to protect the interests of Korean artists. The National Film Promotion Fund, tax benefits, and training for the workforce in the cultural industries were supported. The Korean government's budget for supporting the cultural industries increased from KRW 5 billion in 1994, early in the presidency of Kim Young-Sam (1994-1998), to an average of KRW 640 billion under the Kim Dae-Jung government (1998–2002). The budget for the cultural industries grew to approximately KRW 200 billion, or 12.3% of the total budget for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Kwon Seung-Ho, Joseph Kim). This government backed support for Korean Culture and the arts led to the “Hallyu Wave” of the 21st century.

2000s- Current Day

The Hallyu Wave is a term used to describe the global rise in interest for Korean culture. This includes food, films, TV, music, and more. Korean Pop Music, or K-pop for short, has become a major export for South Korea. Largely considered to have begun in 1992 with Seo

Taiji and Boys, the genre has developed and grown into a global phenomenon. The Hallyu Wave began with the promotion of Korean acts in the wider East Asian Market in the early 2000s and expanded to global audiences in Western markets in the 2010s and 2020s. Korean artists like BoA and TVXQ became household acts in Japan in the 2000s, while bands such as BTS and Blackpink have dominated global charts in recent years. Korean TV and films have been gaining global attention as well, with titles such as *Squid Game* becoming the most watched media on Netflix and the film *Parasite* winning the Oscar for Best Picture in 2020.



Netflix



BTS

In 2012, the Korean Media Rating Board created the Video Product Rating Committee in response to the Promotion of the Motion Pictures and Video Products Act's Article 50 amendment, which banned online distribution of music videos which do not go through the KMRB's Censorship Review System. This committee's primary focus is on music videos and assesses videos on the same criteria and ratings as the KRMB. These ratings include: (1) 'Video suitable for all ages'; (2) 'Video intended for audiences 12 and over'; (3) 'Video intended for

audiences 15 and over’; (4) ‘No one under 18 is allowed to watch this Video’; and (5) ‘Video needs a certain restriction in screening or advertisement as it is considered a highly bad influence to universal human dignity, social value, good customs or national emotion due to excessive expression of nudity, violence, social behavior, etc.’ (Roh).

With K-pop’s large visual element, many artists have to work around both music/performance censors and film censors. If any of the governing censorship agencies finds an issue with a song, the artist can be restricted from promoting their song on public broadcasts. In the case a record is given an R rating from the Music Review Committee, its music video (if applicable) is automatically given a 19+ rating from the Korean Media Rating Board. If a music video shows any illegal acts, such as when PSY’s “Gangnam Style” depicted public property damage or when Blackpink’s song “Kill this Love” showed one of the members not wearing a seatbelt while driving, the video will be banned. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family have banned songs that mention liquor, cigarettes, sex, brand names, or anything else deemed “hazardous” (Lee). Once a song is deemed hazardous, anyone under the age of 19 is not allowed to purchase or listen to it online.

Based on the Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC) Censorship Review System, television networks have their own guidelines for artists that perform on their music programs. Both the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) require any applicants to submit the final version of their music recording, to re-submit the same song from a digital single when it is packaged in a regular album, to submit a separate written file for lyrics which is the same lyrics as the submitted records, to write Korean translation for English lyrics, and to indicate performers involved in the production of sound recording (Roh).

In many cases with mainstream artists, if there is an issue with specific lyrics in a promotional single, the phrase in question will be changed in order to fit broadcast standards. An example of this is the 2016 song “Lotto” by the boy group EXO. KBS and MBC blocked the original song from their music shows due to the word Lotto, claiming it promoted gambling. The group released the original version as it was created, but during their public broadcast performances, the title was changed to “Louder” and the original phrase “what should I do? I just hit the Lotto” was changed to “I yell towards you, Louder.”

Conclusion

Through its three initial regimes to its current constitutional republic, South Korea has grappled with media censorship and its place in society. Beginning as a war-torn country dealing with economic destruction due to the Korean War, South Korea has managed to grow into a developed tech powerhouse in a little over 70 years. Its journey to its current state of affairs has not been easy and was fought for over decades. The military regimes of Syngman Rhee (1948-1960) and Park Chung-Hee (1960-1979) cultivated and enforced a unified societal goal of reconstruction and economic growth, and in its execution, enforced strict censorship on all facets of entertainment, leaving no room for political dissent and distraction from the national agenda.

As the country achieved its economic growth, the 1980s saw a shift in societal priorities. A new young generation looked for freedom and the right of individual expression. Fighting the strict censorship laws in place, nearly a decade of protests and calls for democratization would eventually lead the citizens of South Korea to gain direct election rights in 1987. This change was the catalyst for the cultural boom of the 1990s and further shedding the controlling censorship laws that restricted entertainment industries for decades.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right of South Korean citizens. Their freedom of expression extends into the entertainment industry. However, censorship is still present in South Korea, just as it is everywhere else in the world. Public broadcast is highly regulated, and its regulating bodies are governed by a set of laws that are, in design, meant to protect the youth from inappropriate content, but in practice are used to censor outlier content from social norms.

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