

The Korean Wave Matters: K-Pop Band BTS and the Providence

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Recently, a Korean boy band hit the world stage and many of the youth generation have fallen in love with them. They've become so famous that even this band of seven boys was surprised to see the global level of reaction to their performances, far more than they anticipated.

The band is BTS. Their name comes from the English acronym of 방탄소년단 or *Bang Tan Sonyeondan*, literally "Bulletproof Boy Scouts" in Korean. They won the Billboard Music Awards for Top Social Artist for the past three years. They are

almost like the Second Coming of the Beatles, at least for our present generation of young people.



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This year, at least 100,000 fans in each city they toured turned out. In particular, they filled Wembley Stadium where Queen performed live in 1985. Their fans have created a kingdom-like quasi-religion of their own. On the Internet, such as YouTube, the band's fan club is called the ARMY.

Fans are especially amazed by the dramatic growth of the band. Their production company was not one of the three major companies in South Korea. As they sang in "Silver Spoon/Baepsae," there used to be a golden rule in the South Korean entertainment industry: a band should be promoted by one of the top three K-Pop companies to gain global popularity. But, BTS started at the

bottom. And none of the seven boys was from the capital, Seoul.

They were initially ignored after their debut because their music was totally different from prevailing trends. But because of that ignorance they went on to win the Billboard award, as sung in "DDAeng." The boys show their fans a humble attitude while singing "I Need U," "Best of Me" and "Illegal/Dimple." And they recently released the song, "Boy With Luv," dedicated to their fans.

BTS is known to write their own lyrics and sometimes compose their own songs and also produce. They're so talented, but that was not always the case. Their abilities came from hard work and desperation. This point is confessed in their autobiographical song, "We are the Bulletproof." So, one of their attractions is they not only disclose what they suffer from and criticize what seems unfair in society, but encourage people to overcome those difficulties and look for real nature, eventually to find hope.

They surely make their fans passionate with their songs in their own "Magic Shop." They sing about not only those issues most young people struggle with every day, as heard in the song "War of Hormone," but also of a longing feeling for lost ones as in "Spring Day." Their songs, like "Dope," touch upon sensitive social issues their fans face every day. They try to break through such constraints, as in "Fire."

BTS suggests many helpful things to overcome our current stagnation. In a funny song, "Go Go," they advise it's more productive to just go on rather than stay struggling in life. They even sing philosophically articulated songs, like "Epiphany," which describes how young people experience demotions and struggles to be grownups. It helps one get comforted, as in "I'm Fine" and "Run." It eventually drives one to love oneself. They are saying that it's "Not Today" to get discouraged.

Yes, I'm a fan of BTS, as you've already guessed. Though I'm not yet so devoted to be called part of the ARMY, I listen to their music — actually only to their music — almost every day. My first encounter with them was out of curiosity. One evening last year I watched a TV news clip showing that lots of Western young women were excited about BTS. I'd seen many Asian girls who were fans of K-Pop bands up until then, but seldom Western fans. So, I began watching various kinds of "reaction videos" of the ARMY on YouTube.

In the early days of being a fan, it was more fun to watch reaction videos than the official boy band music videos. It was an intriguing phenomenon to me. As a Korean, I kept wondering, "Why are Western youth so amazed by the band?" Then I began reading their lyrics once mastering all those music videos. I found myself becoming a fan of the band. I'd fallen in love with the performance and messages they deliver through those lyrics. They were just amazing. If I were younger, I would have practiced their wonderful choreography.

One of main factors drawing fans' attention is surely the lyrics of BTS's songs, which are quite different from earlier K-Pop bands who sang about the routine interests of young people. Instead, they sang of the hardships, difficulties, resentment, sadness, etc., experienced by so many youth these days. The lyrics even contain philosophical awakenings.

The song "The Truth Untold" reminds me of Unificationists' situation in that we speak a message others hardly love to listen to. That might have been Jesus' heart when he confronted great disbelief from the public. I still tremble to go out in the public as I first did in my early years when people were so mean to me when I was trying to deliver a message.

Another song, "Fake Love," quickly struck me recalling our own understanding of "True Love." And the title of another song, "Blood, Sweat and Tears," made me think of a passage True Father used in the earlier version of My Pledge, "Shedding sweat for earth, tears for humankind, and blood for heaven." It sometimes made me wonder if any of the BTS members might be Unificationist?

But at least they may have been influenced by our movement indirectly without being consciously aware. What matters most to me is that the message has been already spread to the world. That doesn't require it being done by any of us. The vehicle is just different, whether it be a Unificationist or a boy band, as God used different central figures in every era.



How did BTS come to headline one of the world's most iconic stadiums? Prior to playing a sold out Wembley Stadium, the band and fans reflect on their path to pop stardom (video courtesy BBC Radio 1, June 11, 2019).

Someone might say, if Rev. Moon is now free from the limitations of his physical body, why wouldn't he work with outsiders more freely. Therefore, the Korean Wave matters globally today, at least for the youth, who are the people for the years ahead, and who will be on earth longer than the rest of us.

Actually it's been quite a while since the Korean Wave or *Hallyu* (한류, 韓流) first spread around the world. It's represented in many forms of culture such as K-Drama (TV), film, fashion, cosmetics, and music. The music especially, known as K-Pop, has been very influential to younger generations. The Korean Wave each year attracts millions of tourists to South Korea.

Experts cite several reasons why the world is responding to Korean culture. One is the dramatic development of Korean history. In particular, Korea has long been the historical victim squeezed among its powerful neighbors. Such victimhood touches almost half the countries of the world which had been colonies of stronger countries. According to Divine Principle, Korea was intentionally driven on the path of providential history.

I was so impressed when I heard a testimony from an early close disciple to Rev. Moon. She once heard him make a prediction. He said, "One day the people of the world will rush to Korea to learn the Korean language." She confessed she laughed to herself because she couldn't imagine such a phenomenon happening in the future, especially when she looked around the reality of our first church covered by cardboard and dirt.

She realized however at the time of her testimony that such phenomena were already beginning. Father

Moon's prophecy was already coming true when the 1988 Summer Olympics were held for the first time in South Korea. Many international visitors walked the streets of Seoul. But, now I have really come to believe his prediction because of the phenomena of BTS. The worldwide ARMY of BTS fans learns Korean in order to read and sing its lyrics.

In 1971, Rev. and Mrs. Moon arrived in the U.S. By 1973-74, many American young people became excited about the messages they brought of family values of the Eastern world and the absolute value of God. In a way, I call them the first generation of fans of the Korean Wave, the ancestors of today's K-Culture fans.

A question arises here. How come Korean Culture is suddenly attractive to the world, especially to young people? Is it because Koreans are capable to affect the global community? In part, yes, but not entirely. Though I've tried to name a few factors, nothing fully explains this for me except for the Providence.

As Divine Principle reveals, Korean history has long been prepared for providential work. Korea should become the model of a new nation which can reveal the providential work of heaven. From the Bible, we learn many miraculous stories. Even an army of just a handful of soldiers, "Gideon's 300 Chosen Men," was enough to defeat an enemy according to the Bible. Why? It shows Heaven's power.

The Israelites are called the "Chosen People" in the Bible and also the Divine Principle inherits the biblical notion that they would have been very vulnerable without God's protection. The people themselves reveal the existence of God, who has worked through and with them. With God, a mere 300 soldiers can defeat the world of secular power and sovereignty.

I believe it's now Korea's turn. To show heaven's work, many things should happen mysteriously as the Korean Wave exemplifies. The world looks at Korea now for many different reasons: the providential interests of the first generation of fans of the Korean Wave, pure interest of K-Culture fans, and the curiosity of the world.

With that widespread attraction, Korea should sing and dance for the world. It's obligated. What kind of dance should Unificationists perform? It should be one to build peaceful unification as a model for the new millennium, so the world can recognize that a peaceful approach is attainable for the human race. It will be a really hopeful message for the global community.

The people of the world should not fear human extinction or global confrontation like world war. People would say, "If Korea has achieved peaceful reunification by overcoming all kinds of obstacles and difficulties, why can't we do that?" I believe many nations will follow Korea's example. Then it will fulfill the Will of Heaven: eternal peace on the earth.

Lastly, the leader of BTS, Kim Namjun, spoke at the UN, as part UNICEF's campaign, Generation Unlimited. From personal experiences, he shared many messages with the youth of the world. Of course, BTS fans reacted to his message over the Internet. They are so influential. So, BTS was able to speak directly to the people of the world.

I think it's a golden opportunity for Unificationists to spread our values to the world. It's like paving roads that lead to the hearts of people, especially the youth. From a providential point of view, it's preparation for the achievement of the Will of God. Then, one last question comes to my mind: "Are you influential enough for the world to listen to *your* voice?"

What BTS has shown from their success story of starting at the bottom, much as the Unification movement began from a very humble church, is that the message is the key attraction. As long as the message makes people feel touched, moved, and burst into tears, we can be very influential. The world will listen to us and to our message.

Tonight, try to watch one of the many reaction videos made by BTS fans. You may get goosebumps from the video if it shows a whole lot of fans chanting while singing along with BTS in Korean. It's the very scene that Rev. Moon predicted in the early years inside his first tiny A-frame church.

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Photo at top: *BTS performing at Wembley Stadium, London, in June 2019.*