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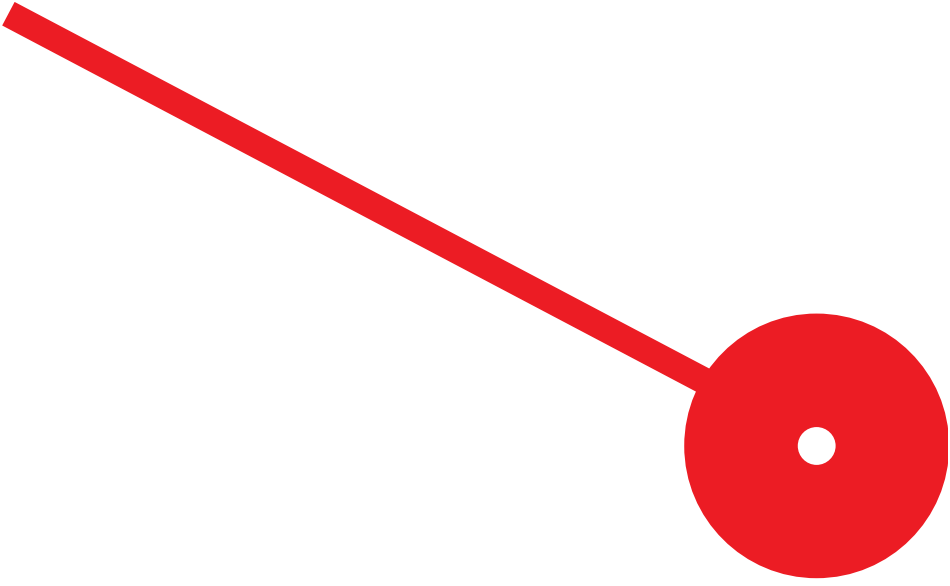
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MESTRADO
Intercultural Studies for Business

EAST
ASIAN CULTURAL
INDUSTRIES: CULTURAL
EXPORTS AND
PROTECTIONISM
Filipa Marques Guedes

10/2025

Nome. EAST
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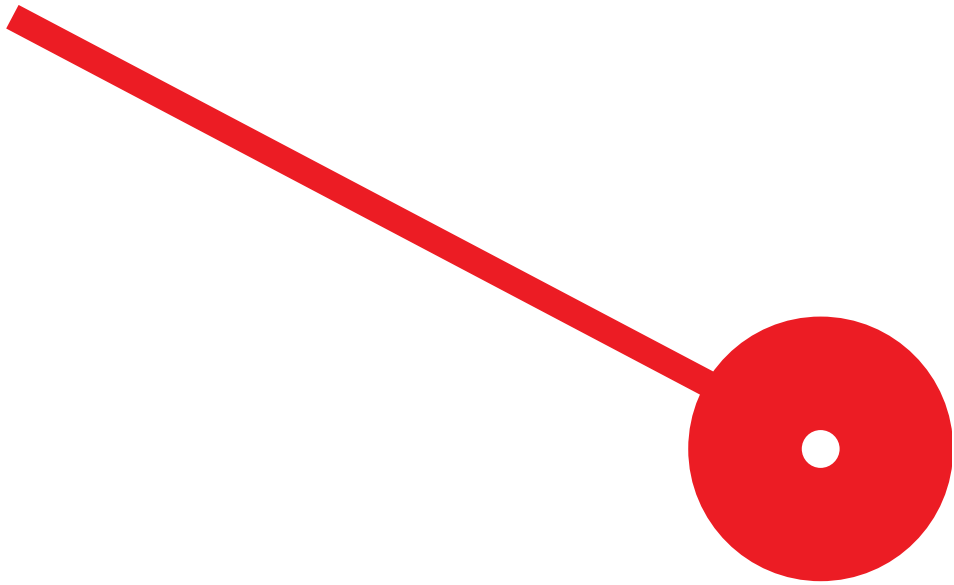
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Dissertação de Mestrado apresentado ao
Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e
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Business, sob orientação de Doutora Carina
Raquel Oliveira Cerqueira.

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ASIAN CULTURAL INDUSTRIES: CULTURAL EXPORTS
AND PROTECTIONISM
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I have been working on this dissertation for what feels like the longest time, and it both pleases and saddens me to part ways with it. It is a result of many months of me living in my head, wondering if it would ever be possible to deliver something that makes me proud of all the time I dedicated to this topic. This would not be possible without all the support that was given to me.

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Resumo:

A presente dissertação examina a evolução das indústrias culturais nos países do Leste Asiático, focalizando o Japão, a China e a Coreia do Sul. Historicamente conhecidos pelas suas fortes medidas protecionistas, durante várias décadas o comércio com estes países era limitado e o acesso aos mesmos igualmente restrito. Somente durante os séculos XIX e XX, marcados pela troca no poder político, foram aplicadas medidas para a abertura destes países, incluindo a entrada em várias organizações mundiais, tal como a Organização Mundial do Comércio.

Através de uma análise histórica comparativa, torna-se possível identificar os principais eventos que mudaram a trajetória destes países e a forma como os mesmos passaram a ser encarados pelas principais potências mundiais, incluindo a Restauração Meiji no Japão, as Guerras de Ópio na China e a crise financeira na Coreia do Sul.

Todos estes acontecimentos históricos levaram à abertura das economias e consequente interesse, por parte dos países asiáticos, em obter sucesso mundialmente. A mudança de perspetiva levou a um investimento nas indústrias culturais, motivado pelo crescente sucesso das mesmas.

Esta dissertação pretende elaborar um mapa histórico de forma a perceber o que influenciou a mudança de protecionismo para abertura e de que forma isso afetou a economia e cultura dos países do Leste Asiático. Analisando os diferentes produtos culturais exportados, é possível identificar os vários benefícios e consequências de uma política mais liberalizada.

Palavras chave: Protecionismo cultural, Indústrias culturais, Leste Asiático, Entretenimento

Abstract:

The present dissertation examines the evolution of cultural industries in East Asian countries, focusing on Japan, China, and South Korea. Historically known for its strong protectionist measures, for many decades, trade with these countries was limited, and access to them was equally restricted. Only during the XIX and XX centuries, marked by changes in the political power, measures were applied to open these countries, including joining various world organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation.

Through a comparative historical analysis, it is possible to identify the key events that changed these countries' trajectory and how they came to be viewed by the main world powers, including the Meiji Restoration in Japan, the Opium Wars in China and the financial crisis in South Korea.

All these historical events led to the opening of the economies and consequent interest, by the East Asian countries, in achieving worldwide success. The change in perspective led to an investment in the cultural industries, fuelled by their growing success.

This dissertation aims to elaborate on a historical map to understand what influence the change from protectionism to openness and how it affected the economy and the culture of East Asian countries. Analysing the different exported cultural products, it is impossible to identify the various benefits and consequences of a more liberalised policy.

Key words: Cultural protectionism, Cultural industries, East Asia, Entertainment

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Lista de abreviaturas

AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BOJ	Bank of Japan
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CHA	Cultural Heritage Administration
EIC	East India Company
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JAMCO	Japan Media Communication Centre
KBS	Korean Broadcasting Service
KCC	Korean Cultural Centre
KMT	Kuomintang
KOCCA	Korean Creative Contents Agency
KOCIS	Korean Culture and Information Services
METI	Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry
MITI	Ministry of International Trade and Industry
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MOFERT	Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRC	People's Republic of China
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, East Asian countries have emerged as one of the main exporters and investors of cultural products, competing with Western countries, which have been dominating in cultural production for centuries.

From Japan's "Cool Japan" strategy to South Korea's emergence with *hallyu* and China's constant growth within the global film and digital industries, the region's cultural industries have become central to both national and financial development and international influence through soft power. The governments' involvement marks an important step in recognising the value of culture.

This ongoing openness to the outside did not occur spontaneously but is rather a result of a long history of protectionism, which has led new governments to introduce more liberalised policies aiming for financial growth, innovation, and global recognition.

From the beginning, culture was seen as a method of nation-building in East Asia, used by figures of power to maintain a cohesive environment, restricting other cultures from influencing their own. However, as these countries became more liberalised and in contact with foreign nations, governments began to understand that culture could produce economic and political benefits.

This dissertation studies Japan, China, and South Korea's path from protectionist nations to global-oriented economies through cultural industries. While early protectionism led to wars and conflicts between the East and the West, it also laid the foundation for the growth in cultural production registered in the past two decades. The government's protection allowed industries to grow in a stabilised environment, benefiting them upon entering the global market.

At the same time, with globalisation, cultures are meant to be affected, as there are no boundaries to what is shared and consumed. As such, even with the government's early efforts to protect cultures, there are still risks associated with opening up. This dissertation focuses on the paradox between protectionism and globalisation and reflects on whether opening up was the best decision for East Asian countries.

In chapter one, key concepts are introduced and explored, guiding the analysis, which include topics of entertainment, cultural industries, globalisation, protectionism, soft power, and experience economy. Understanding how protectionism and globalisation impact culture is the foundation for this dissertation.

The second chapter serves as an historical guide, starting with the origins of protectionism in East Asia and exploring the turning point, when openness was first introduced and began transforming the region. It focuses on the transition between closed and limited environments and economies, to the start of liberalisation, studying the different approaches of Japan, China, and South Korea, and what influenced them. The government's role in this evolution is also approached, including the various measures applied in each country.

In the third chapter the different cultural products are introduced, aiming to compare and understand how each country has developed its own export-oriented policies, and how each resulted in different outputs. From Japan's sole focus on exporting *anime*, *manga* and video games, South Korea's late investment in the music and series production industries and China's limited liberalisation of the film and TV industries, the governments' intervention and the cultural products' success is analysed.

The last chapter focuses on the benefits and consequences of the countries' opening up policies. While it stimulates economic growth and can be beneficial for cultural sharing across the world, which facilitates soft power, it also raises questions on cultural homogenisation and national identity, as well as the commodification and capitalisation of culture. This chapter reflects on different instances when globalisation impacted cultures and offers strategies for governments to maintain the balance between highlighting and protecting cultures.

Focusing on an historical and political analysis, this dissertation relies on literature review of scientific articles, books, and governmental documents, aiming for an easy, yet rich understanding of the evolution of East Asian cultural industries.

As such, this dissertation aims to study how East Asian cultures have changed throughout the last centuries, focusing on the relation between closed and protectionist economies and liberalised policies, which shaped how the countries are seen today.

CHAPTER I – RECOGNISING CULTURAL INDUSTRIES: SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS

1 Cultural Industries: Significant Aspects

1.1 Entertainment: The Pillar of Culture Production and Exchange

Due to the simplicity and commodification of the term “entertainment”, many scholars deem it unfitting to study (Shusterman, 2003). Therefore, although the number is growing, there is still a limited amount of scientific research on the concept. To put it simply, “entertainment is whatever individuals find entertaining” (Bates & Ferri, 2010, p. 2). This is, however, a straightforward way to look at this concept, which offers much more than the definition appears to suggest.

Bates and Ferri (2010) dive into the etymology of the word “entertainment” or “entertain” as it was first introduced. With Latin and French origins, the word derived from the words *intertenerere* and *intretenir*, which mean “holding between” and “hold together”, respectively. The earliest registration of the term dates back to the 15th and 16th century, and afterwards it was often associated with the action of having guests in one’s house, which is considered today as hosting (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.).

This initial definition of the term was greatly related to the behaviours of the host, who was expected to have proper manners and hosting skills. “Entertainment” was also used in William Shakespeare’s 1598 comedy “Love's Labour's Lost”, where he describes it as an occupation, and a means to spend time (Shusterman, 2003). Since then, the definition of the term has undergone changes, mainly to include new forms of entertainment that have been created since. The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) states nineteen different meanings have been listed regarding the word “entertainment”, twelve of which are considered obsolete. However, the key concepts remain. Shusterman (2003) explains that other English words often associated with the perception of “entertainment” are “amusement” and “distraction”, an ode to the initial definition.

Turner (1977) adds that entertainment is “*liminalizing*”, which directly ties to being in the threshold, not quite in or out of something. Therefore, according to Turner, entertainment is used to help people find a transitional space, where they can step out of their daily lives and let themselves be entertained away from worries. However, through being “*liminalizing*”, Turner approaches entertainment as something temporary, not something to be experienced at all times of the day, but rather a passage in one’s daily life.

There are a couple of concepts that overlap with what entertainment can be seen as, and through analysing them, the meaning of entertainment will become clearer.

Entertainment is often tied to the concept of leisure. Leisure is mostly considered to be related to after-work hours (Haller et. al, 2012), the time when individuals can freely allocate their focus and attention to the activities they enjoy. There are various definitions of this concept, with some researchers considering it a conscious decision on how one spends their time, while others defend that leisure is not confined to a specific time, contrary to the belief that leisure only occurs outside of work (Wilson, 1980, p. 21).

McLean and Hurd (2011) defend that although the most common definition of leisure is tied to after working hours, nowadays leisure is more than after work activities, and is no longer seen as just a “temporary release from work used to restore one for more work” (McLean & Hurd, 2011, p. 20). Still, to McLean and Hurd (2011), leisure does not equal freedom from obligations, as one might choose to participate in activities in their free time that imply a commitment to something, like raising a dog or being a part of an orchestra. Weybright and Caldwell (2024) also explore the concept of leisure time related to what external factors can influence it, such as family and social constructs, and how it can be both structured and unstructured, therefore not limited in time and space.

Bryant and Zillmann (2002) consider that entertainment is a direct response to the growing amount of leisure time (in this case, after-work time) available nowadays. As people gain more freedom in how to spend their time, they are keen to seek methods to keep them entertained. Bryant and Zillmann explain that entertainment forms are part of “well-defined rites”, developed by cultures a long time ago. Although these rites were used to maintain the social hierarchies and structures of the cultures, they were also a source of entertainment, evoking amusement in both the audience and those who participated. Therefore, entertainment is not a new concept, but rather, people now have more time to focus on it.

Nakatsu et al. (2005) present the differences between active and passive experiences and why both are equally considered entertainment. Active experiences relate to what involves the active participation of people (e.g. practising sports), while passive experiences are those when people are more relaxed, usually at a pace where they feel comfortable (e.g. watching movies). Usually, “active” is everything that relates to physical activity, while “passive” involves more mental presence (Nakatsu et al., 2005).

Preference for one of the forms explained above might be influenced by more than just individual inclination. Most times, the choice is also influenced by the cultural space people are involved in. While personal preference plays a key role in determining whether individuals engage with active or passive entertainment, cultural norms and values also play a vital role in shaping these preferences. Saroglou and Jaspard (2010) study how humour, a passive form of entertainment, can be negatively impacted by religion, as it might be considered a sensitive topic. Such research showcases that individuals are never fully in control, as cultural elements can influence them in their daily lives.

The pattern in available research on the topic, however, is the polarisation of West versus East entertainment. Morris and Leung (2015) analyse how creativity is seen through both lenses. While Western industries prioritize creativity and classify originality as an important trait, Eastern industries focus more on practicality and functionality. As such, Eastern countries have a tendency to use methods that have already been used previously, instead of aiming for innovation. These features are in tone with the cultures of the countries, since the West focuses more on individualism, while the East focuses more on collectivism (Morris & Leung, 2015). Therefore, Western countries focus more on active entertainment, as the main focus is always to create something new. Whereas Eastern countries rely more on passive entertainment, as they are more likely to re-use what has already been done, therefore creation that could be understood as more passive.

Cultural norms, however, not only influence whether an individual is keener to choose active or passive entertainment, but they can also impact the type of content people consume. A study conducted by Kim et al. (2014) on the cultural differences in entertainment preferences between Korean and U.S Americans found that American people seek escapist movies, generally characterised by action and adventure – traits of “active” entertainment forms. Meanwhile, Koreans gave more emphasis on movies that provoke an array of emotions, traits of “passive” entertainment forms. Kim et al. (2014) explain that the different preferences showcase how the two cultures are different, as Western culture relies on happiness and satisfaction, while Eastern cultures are based on a balance between positive and negative emotions.

Besides being influenced by cultural roots, entertainment is also often tied to the concept of “popular culture”. Browne defined popular culture as “the television we watch, the movies we see, the fast food, or slow food, we eat, the clothes we wear, the music we sing

and hear, the things we spend our money for, our attitude toward life” (Browne, 1972, as cited in Bates & Ferri, 2010, p. 3).

This term, however, can be looked at from many points of view, as it deals with the word “popular”, which can be subjective. Williams (1985) presents a possible definition of popular culture as being culture that is, overall, appreciated by a large group of people. Again, this highlights the vulnerability of the concept, as it is directly tied to what is considered popular, even though each person has their own opinion on what is, and is not, popular in their life. Shusterman (2003) adds that culture is ever changing, and since popular culture and entertainment are directly tied to culture, the difficulty in defining the concepts will keep on existing.

Shusterman (2003) also touches on the necessity and difficulty to distinguish high and low culture, within the concept of popular culture, as it has been a topic of discussion for many years. While high culture refers to cultural products associated with higher social classes (e.g. theatre and classical music), low culture is associated with mass-produced media and products, often tied to medium and low-income classes (e.g. television shows). The boundaries between the two sometimes blur, as lower, popular culture can become high culture, and vice versa. Literature poses as a good example to study, with authors like the Brontë sisters being considered part of the lower reading culture when they started, yet with time their works have gained value and have since been seen as part of high culture.

The distinguish between high and low culture, however, is still very noticeable in society, and can be tied to how entertainment is perceived. Shusterman (2003) explains that what is considered entertainment may vary depending on people’s lifestyles and the cultural context it is integrated. Reading a book, for example, might be considered work in a scholarly environment, whereas reading it for enjoyment is looked upon as entertainment.

Looking at Browne’s definition of popular culture, it is possible to point out a few key words that will help to define the overlapping characteristics between popular culture and entertainment. Entertainment, as a simple concept, as described previously, is everything that people find entertaining, such as television, movies, and music, just like Browne describes. Mukerji and Schudson (1991) admit to the difficulty of defining this term and relate it to the beliefs, behaviours and objects that are commonly accepted by people, and with which people are likely to engage. According to their definition, popular culture is

what is positively received by the people. This includes both “local traditions, and mass beliefs, practices and objects generated in political and commercial centers” (Mukerji & Schudson, 1991, p. 3).

If entertainment is crudely defined as any activity designed to delight and, to a smaller degree, enlighten through the exhibition of the fortunes or misfortunes of others, but also through the display of special skills by others and/or self, it becomes clear that the concept encompasses more than comedy, drama, and tragedy. It engulfs any kind of game or play, athletic or not, competitive or not, whether witnessed only, taken part in, or performed alone. It subsumes, for instance, musical performances by self for self or others, of others for self, or with others; similarly, it subsumes dancing by self, of others, or with others. (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002, p. 550)

Given the possible subjectivity of what can and cannot be included in the term “entertainment”, it is important to define common grounds on which scholars can agree on. Lieb (2001) argues that if entertainment is seen as anything that entertains an audience, then there must be guidelines on what makes something entertaining. To understand entertainment is to understand why people seek these experiences to keep them from their daily routines.

Vorderer et al. (2006) explore the psychology behind entertainment, and how it is key to understand why people seek the experiences entertainment offers. To assume people need reasons to seek entertainment is to assume that entertainment is a response to a desire or opportunity, rather than a product itself. Therefore, entertainment can be considered an activity that is influenced, or triggered, by products (e.g. music might trigger people to look for it as a means of entertainment). Ultimately, the choice depends on the audience, not the product. Entertainment, then, is defined by people’s feelings and behaviours, which will dictate what they look for in it (Vorderer et al., 2006).

In sum, the concept of entertainment is complex and can take on various orientations, depending on which concepts it is associated with. While it can simply be defined as a service or products that people enjoy, either to escape their reality or to join a popular

wave, it can also be associated with society and cultural practices. Furthermore, entertainment can also be studied through psychology, as it is driven by people's needs and desires. These different perspectives showcase that entertainment cannot be defined solely as a service or product but should also consider the environment it is inserted in, through cultures, emotions, and psychological behaviours.

1.2 Cultural Industries: Meaning and Significance

Culture is a complex topic and requires open-mindedness and a willingness to fully understand its depth. Although it feels easily understandable, culture is subjective since it depends on historical, geographical, and personal factors. A deeper analysis is necessary to understand the origin of culture, as well as its complexities. This broad understanding of culture will be essential to discuss its role in specific areas, such as cultural industries and cultural tourism.

Li and Yan (2024) focus on regional culture, which has been around since the beginning of time, and “contains rich historical heritage and showcases unique cultural connotations” (Li & Yan, 2024, p. 144). To them, culture is a result of history, as it stems from the experiences people have had. From these experiences, people develop traits and habits that can influence communities, some of which become part of one's culture. Culture is what defines spaces, as different regions represent distinct cultural characteristics (Li & Yan, 2024).

As such, culture is what shapes societies, since it influences the way people think and behave and view the world. Zhang and Lauer (2017) present how culture influences the way people interpret things. From living to telling stories, people are a product of their cultural background, which include where they live, the time when they live (e.g. New York in the 1990s was not the same as New York in 2025, therefore, even in the same location, people will have different experiences depending on the time they lived), and what subculture (particular context) they are inserted in. The same happens for those who are listening to the stories and in contact with people who do not share the same culture.

To better comprehend the role culture plays in the decision-making process, as well as how people interpret different cultural production (such as art and literature), Chesnokova et al. (2017) conducted a study on 500 humanities undergraduate students from Brazil and Ukraine, where the students were asked to read Edgar Allan Poe's 1827 poem “The Lake” and answer a set of fifteen questions regarding their experience. The poem was

available in English (a foreign language to the surveyors), Portuguese, Ukrainian and Russian (the mother language of the students). The study found that the Brazilian students found the poem “darker” than Ukrainian students, both when in English and Portuguese. The Russian students, however, identified the “darker” themes more easily when reading in either Russian or Ukrainian, rather than English.

Chesnokova et al. (2017) explain that these results are in line with the culture of the countries, as Ukrainian folk poetry is often seen as sad and gloomy. Therefore, by extension, what is written in that language has more probability of being interpreted as such. This explains why Ukrainian students found the poem “darker” when reading it in their mother languages. The study suggests two things: cultural backgrounds may have influenced how both groups perceive the English version of the poem, thus explaining the different reactions to the same version; and how the translated version’s interpretations may have been influenced by the language the poem was translated to, as well as how it was translated, since languages carry different emotions with them.

The key takeaway is that culture is at the core of people’s decisions and experiences. People’s ideas, beliefs, and values, which all originate from the culture in which they are embedded, influence how they will look and interpret things. Therefore, people from different parts of the world, or from different timelines, may not reach the same conclusions when exposed to the same experiences (Zhang and Lauer, 2017).

Lentz (2017) argues that nowadays, culture is often defined too broadly, as a simple set of values and norms that determine how humans should act. Due to the oversimplification of this definition, Lentz argues that the concept is being neutralized, that is, losing its value. Furthermore, since culture is studied in many different research areas, the inclusion of everything in the term leads to a loss of analytical value, to the point where Lentz proposes whether culture should, or not, be preserved as an analytical category. This becomes particularly relevant when studying cultural industries, since a clear understanding of culture is essential for analysing how cultural products are produced, consumed, and marketed. Understanding how culture has evolved from a social construct to taking part in a country’s economy, however, requires a more in-depth approach, as culture plays a vital role in the creation of cultural products and services.

It becomes, then, important to understand the notion of culture being used as a business, or a combination with the economy. “In the process of driving regional economic

development, governments and cultural departments have realized that culture is an important resource” (Li & Yan, 2024, p. 144). As more people become interested in different cultures, communities and governments start seeing the potential in it. As a result, many services and products are created to provide people a unique and “traditional” viewing of culture. Cultural production, which is the *economisation* of culture, can be achieved in two main forms: creation of cultural products which can be sold, and tourism (including all services related). As highlighted by Li and Yan (2024), this production is backed by the government’s efforts to meet the growing demand for cultural experiences.

Cultural products are heavily influenced by a country’s culture: “[c]ulture can be manifested in activities such as music, literature, visual arts, architecture, theatre, cinematography, and lifestyle” (Makhmudova, 2022, p. 99). The creation of products, activities and experiences related to these cultural elements is seen as cultural products. Through the creation of these cultural products, countries can explore new markets. This is often driven by tourism, as well as demand from consumers seeking authentic cultural experiences.

The concept of authenticity within cultural studies, however, is yet to be defined concretely. Reisinger and Steiner (2006) discuss how the difficulty to define what is authentic in culture should be an indicator that it should not be considered a topic to address in the field. This is based on the notion that authentic takes on different meanings depending on who is addressing it. While modernists/realists measure authenticity by previously defined standards, “a fixed and knowable reality” (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006, p. 66), constructivists tend to judge what is authentic by their own preference, making it subjective.

Boccella and Salerno (2016) explore the evolution of what was, and is, considered cultural production. According to them, the concept of “cultural products” has been used since the 1980s and has since grown to accommodate a variety of industries, including art, literature, fashion, media, and crafts. Even so, these products and the industries related to them only began to showcase their power at the beginning of this century. 2001 marked the beginning of a progressive and steady growth of income generated by culture (Boccella & Salerno, 2016). This includes both cultural products and tourism, which is a key player in the dissemination of culture.

In today's globalised world, it is impossible to separate culture from tourism, which is the most direct way in which culture translates into economic return (Li & Yan, 2024). Regardless of a country's size or its culture's global visibility, foreign interest facilitates the development of tourism. It specially impacts small or remote regions, incentivising investment in tourism creation, which highlights their unique cultural elements.

Tourism has an impact on many sectors of the economy. Li and Yan (2024) present examples of fields that are directly affected by tourism, which include transportation, the hospitality industry, and the service industry. Tourism contributes to an increase in consumption, which is then directly tied to an increase in economic return to the "hosting" country. The hospitality sector, in particular, which involves the consumption of food and beverages, as well as accommodation, might be the sector that most benefits from tourism. As such, examples of services from the hospitality sector include, but are not limited to, hotels and other kinds of accommodations, restaurants, cafes, and other catering services, as well as bars (Page, 2007). The increase in search for these services translates into a demand for more personnel, which directly creates job opportunities, many of which are filled by residents of the area.

Furthermore, tourism also contributes to other sectors, although indirectly. Most times, the positive economic return generated by tourism activities is used to upgrade infrastructure, such as buildings, roads, airports, and overall public spaces. This provides residents with a better quality of life. Due to the interest in culture-related activities, governments may also invest in activities that will offer the opportunity to be more in touch with culture, which may include the upgrading of heritage sites (Garg & Patil, 2024).

However, tourism also has consequences. Mass tourism is a significant issue that many scholars highlight (Milano et al., 2024; Koens et al., 2018). It can lead to the degradation of cultural sites, loss of identity, as well as the destabilisation of locals' daily lives and routines (Panić et al., 2024). To combat this, sustainable measures (e.g. dispersing tourism, which benefits both overcrowded cities by reducing visitors and other cities in the country by redirecting tourists and visitor limits through bookings or entering fees) should be put in place to ensure that the experience is enjoyable for both the visitors and the local communities.

As previously mentioned, cultural products and tourism are the two areas where culture and economy meet. Due to its importance, this combination of sectors is usually referred to as cultural industries. Cultural industries function as the connector between cultures and tourists and refer to the sectors of the economy that focus on the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural goods and services. The integration of culture into industries such as entertainment, heritage management, creative services and others contributes not only to economic growth – through the export of cultural products and the national economic boost generated by tourism – but also enriches societies by promoting identity preservation, diversity and cultural exchange (Ericsson et al., 2024).

Cultural production differs from mass production in that cultural goods and services are valued not for their utility (or production value), but for their cultural significance. Lawrence and Phillips (2022) explain that cultural products, either goods or services, are not valuable because they satisfy the consumer's needs (e.g. a jacket protecting them from the cold), but because they allow the consumer to make up its value, combining their feelings with the culture presented to them.

However, for cultural industries to continue to thrive, people must understand and accept the value of culture. For instance, in 2022, the European Union reported having more than two million enterprises within the cultural industries, accounting for 6.3% of all businesses within the business economy and contributing almost 200 billion euros in added value (Eurostat, 2025). It is important that people start seeing culture as a key part of a country's economy. Boccella and Salerno (2016) reflect on the necessity of national and international powers to continue to ensure that cultural industries get the support needed, calling for the creation of policies that will "(...) give the cultural and creative sectors their role in the economy of territories and make it the heart of the local economic development patterns, even in underprivileged territories" (Boccella & Salerno, 2016, p. 292).

1.3 Globalisation in Culture

Globalisation – the global integration of different countries, cultures, economies, and politics (Urbaite, 2024) – plays a huge role in the spreading of cultures, thus some look at it as something from which cultures benefit, while others see it as a threat. It is characterised by "increasing interconnectedness and interdependence" (Kerubo, 2024, p. 61). From one perspective, globalisation has allowed people to be as connected as

possible, which enables everyone to be in contact with different cultures, giving them a global platform (Mazurkevych et al., 2024); while on the other side, both scholars and locals warn about the risk of losing cultural heritage through the same global platform (Assmann, 2010).

Nowadays, globalisation is enabled by the digital world, where everything is available within a few seconds of research, and even though there is no wrong or right answer, it is important to understand the consequences of this phenomenon. Even if opinions are divided on whether globalisation poses an advantage or disadvantage for culture, only time will define the true consequences of it. Until then, studying both sides will give a better understanding of the final result. However, results may vary depending on the conditions of a country and its culture, so coming to a full conclusion about the aftermath of globalisation may be tricky.

Before globalisation, there were few to no means of being in contact with others, thus knowing about other cultures was not easy. Telecommunication tools such as television, radio and the internet were responsible for the interconnected world known today. Because of it, people were offered, for the first time, the possibility of getting to know how other countries operate on an almost first-person experience (Hamdi, 2013).

Merung et al. (2024) explore how globalisation affects cultural identity, affirming that in a global world, local cultures are ever changing, as they are forced to accept foreign elements, and are invited to apply some of those as their own. These exchanges greatly impact cultures. Cultural identity is the group of traditions, beliefs, behaviours, and languages that are characteristic of a certain group, forming their group identity (Urbaite, 2024). Kerubo (2024) adds that it is characterised by a sense of belonging to said group.

Susanto et al. (2024) view the globalisation of culture as a threat, defending that it provokes cultural erosion through the loss of cultural identity, which results in a diminish of cultural heritage, as well as a loss of identity and belonging to a community. In some cases, cultures blend, which results in the loss of some their elements, including language and practices (Kerubo, 2024). Qarlibaevna (2025) talks about cultural imperialism, the name given when a culture “invades” another, causing the one invaded to lose certain components of itself.

However, it is important to note that globalisation also brings benefits to cultures, especially through the integration of local economies into a global market. It generates

the opportunity of creating and producing goods and services that can be enjoyed globally, which results in the creation of job opportunities and the development of previously overlooked areas (Kerubo, 2024). It also plays a part in cultural preservation, with studies showing that globalisation positively contributed to the increase of cultural awareness, especially with the growth of the digital world (Urbaite, 2024). Hiswara et al. (2023) report on how modern technology is being used to preserve different languages that are at risk of extinction, due to the existence of more dominant languages globally, as it aims to keep those cultural elements alive.

1.4 Protectionism: The Shield of Cultural Identity

Protectionism can be seen as a response to globalisation. As previously discussed, globalisation can have many downsides, mostly for smaller countries and cultures, which are bombarded with the standard Western culture, and are greatly affected by it. Baughn and Buchanan (2001) explain that talks about cultural protectionism are fairly recent, recalling the 1998 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Multilateral Agreement on Investment negotiations, where leaders could not agree on measures for the protection of cultural industries in Europe, which ended up being one of the factors as to why the agreement did not happen. At the time, nations advocated for protectionist measures, arguing that it was needed to shield their cultures from foreign dominance, particularly the United States, which already had considerable influence.

Protectionism is proposed as a measure of control towards imports, and can take on multiple shapes, such as: tariffs (which make the goods more expensive, therefore serving as an incentive to consume national products), quotas (which limit the number of goods that can be imported), subsidies (which assist national producers, to allow them to compete with foreign producers), among others (Baughn & Buchanan, 2001). All of these were initially created for the trade of physical goods but can also be applied to cultural production.

Baughn and Buchanan (2001) point out the three main reasons why countries call for protectionism on culture:

1. A possible alteration of culture due to exposure to other, more dominating cultures – this assumes that dominating foreign cultures have a negative impact on local cultures and might provoke change or destroy cultural values and behaviours.

2. The loss of cultural diversity due to homogenisation – as dominant cultures gain more territory in a country’s market, the fear is that people will forget about the local culture; therefore, homogenisation will take place, and communities will be lost.

3. Big economic impacts of a growing foreign dominance – due to the economic advantage of foreign countries, nations may not be able to counter back, especially if they do not have the economic power to produce cultural products in the same quantity, and a lot of times, quality.

All the reasons above focus on cultural identity and the risk of losing it when competing with other cultures. Leerssen (2006) argues that cultural nationalism, the protection of culture, focuses on cultivating it (i.e. promoting and preserving a culture), which is part of a nation’s identity and serves to distinguish itself from others, highlighting its uniqueness. Kish (2001) adds that protecting and preserving a country’s culture is essential to maintain sovereign equality (i.e. the idea that every country, regardless of size, wealth or international power, is equal under the law, and has the right to govern themselves with the interference of other nations, including in culture). Besides, in doing so, a country is also protecting its people’s rights of freedom, since culture is an outlet of expression, and can be endangered when in contact with other, more dominating, cultures.

However, it is important to note that not all efforts are successful towards their initial goals, and some scholars admit to the ineffectiveness of protectionism. Kish (2001) reflects that no amount of protectionism can actually preserve a culture or even promote the growth of domestic industries. This is mainly due to the ever-growing digital presence of people. As a result of the globalisation of not only markets but also social media outlets, cultures are inevitably going to be affected by it. No matter how big governments' efforts are at trying to stop globalisation, it is impossible to keep people in the dark in the digital environment nowadays.

He (2017) dives into the censorship that takes place in China, where people have limited access to content online. With the government setting limits on the amount of foreign news and works, the Chinese population is left with little freedom to choose what to watch and consume. Still, people find diverse ways to watch “illegal” content, namely by using pirate websites, which provide them with a greater availability of choices. This shows

that regardless of the governments' tight control, foreign cultures will still manage to infiltrate through the borders created.

Portman (1993) adds that despite the government's efforts to restrict foreign content from entering a country (and therefore influence its culture), such restrictions can only be successful if the people willingly accept them. If people are already feeling disconnected from their own culture, and the only way to keep them in contact with it is by government enforcement, then that culture has already lost its relevance (Portman, 1993, as cited in Kish, 2001 & Van Harpen, 1995). Haneş and Andrei (2015) also add that if a nation has already lost the spirit that used to keep it together, then the country has long lost its ability to deal with an international crisis. Therefore, relating to Portman's claims, if people are no longer connected with their culture, it is impossible for governments to stop other cultures from appealing to them.

Kish (2001) argues that a culture will be influenced by others if a connection is established, and vice versa. As such, instead of focusing on trying to stop the unstoppable, governments should focus on creating strategies that take advantage of the global world and work with it towards the preservation of the country's culture. Dealing with the growing wave of globalisation that has been happening in the past decades, many governments have found the use of soft power as a tool to keep their culture afloat, as it stands at the centre of international negotiations and the country's international position.

1.5 Soft Power: Using Culture as Influence

Joseph Nye, professor from Harvard University, first introduced the concept of "soft power" in his 1990 book "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power". Nye (1990) defined it as the ability of a country to influence other countries, without applying coercive pressure (i.e. use of force, threats, or any type of intimidation), thus providing this concept as the opposite of "hard power". Haneş and Andrei (2015) explain that soft power is composed of political, educational, cultural, and diplomatic power.

Political power is seen in the strategies applied by governments and includes national and international measures. It is characterized by cohesion and stability. Cultural and educational power translates into the quality of educational services in a country. As soft power is a tool to influence, educational and cultural power takes on the same lead. It is seen in media, such as television, radio, films, books, newspapers and more, and showcases the power to influence both nationally and internationally. Diplomatic power

is seen as everything that relates to foreign affairs and includes political relations with other countries and the policies surrounding it, as well as the country's ability to project itself into the international scene, including the contributions it makes to the world (Haneş & Andrei, 2015).

The combination of all these strategies is what makes countries successful in the use of soft power as an influential tool. Notably, culture plays a central role in this. Since culture can be considered a nation's values (i.e. the motivator of their ideologies and behaviours), it is impossible to ignore culture's role in the decisions a country makes. Culture is what influences people's views, ideas, political stances, religious identity, and many others (Haneş & Andrei, 2015). Therefore, culture is at the centre of the decision-making process since governments act on behalf of their country and its beliefs.

Countries usually apply soft power by spreading their culture and values, which other countries may use when establishing relations. Baruah (2024) explores some methods of soft power, which include "cultural exchanges, media influence, and the promotion of national values and ideas" (Baruah, 2024, p. 363).

These include cultural diplomacy, which derives from Mannheim's definition of public diplomacy as the communicative efforts at spreading political ideas, either through television, radio, or other means, also known as propaganda (Mannheim, 1994). Nowadays, propaganda is more toned down than it was a few decades ago, and cultural diplomacy is probably the closest acceptable form of it (Baruah, 2024).

According to UNESCO (2022), the term "cultural diplomacy" is used when a country uses its culture to promote itself to the rest of the world and is based on the characteristics that are unique to that country, which then promote cultural diversity. Behari (2014) explains that diplomacy involves communication and negotiation between governments of different countries and is often associated with diplomatic missions in other countries, as well as cultural exchanges. These can all be considered forms of soft power, as a country is opening to other to reach a negotiation that will benefit both.

1.6 Experience Economy: The Economic Drive of Culture

With the rise of tourism, people have started seeking experiences related to the country they are visiting and exploring. There are several types of tourism, which categorise the reasons people travel to another country. Many have tried to list the reasons that make

someone visit a foreign country, and the list has evolved over the years. In 1939, Poser was the first to introduce the concept of “types of tourism”, and since then scholars have studied and adjusted Poser’s distinction (Tureac & Anca, 2008).

Tureac and Anca (2008) point out six types of tourism, which have previously been considered by other scholars: tourism recreation, therapy, visitation, reduced distance relaxation, transit by tourism and professional tourism. One thing most of these types of tourism have in common, is that people are looking forward to experiencing something in the place they are visiting, be it because of health, professional commitments, or simply personal preferences. This constant seeking created what is known as the experience economy.

The term “experience economy” was first introduced by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore in 1998. In their Harvard Business Review article “Welcome to Experience Economy”, Pine and Gilmore (1998) affirm that experience economy has emerged due to customer’s growing desire for new and unique experiences, which led businesses to create new forms to provide it. They add that companies should not allow this to happen passively, but rather intentionally.

As businesses introduce experiences to their goods/services offers, they not only distinguish themselves from competitors, but also create an opportunity for higher profits (e.g. while a regular café only charges customers for what they consume (i.e. the product and service), themed cafés, such as Prada café, which offers customers a full Prada experience, with themed food, beverages, tableware and atmosphere, charge for the whole experience, creating a higher profit for the brand).

“Consumers experience a higher level of “demand satisfaction” and thereby an increased perceived value, while the company is able to extract an added value in relation to increased profits through higher prices or increased sales, or both” (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011, p. 252). As such, this concept is directly tied to the value given to new experiences. Revisiting their initial definition, Pine and Gilmore (2013) add that people see experiences as a valuable addition because the memory of it remains with them for a long time, leading to personal fulfillment.

Sundbo and Sorensen (2013) relate the concept to people’s need for experiences, arguing that those are the main focus of the experience economy. The key to understanding this is to broaden the idea of what an experience is. Many have argued whether an experience

needs to follow certain steps or not. Sundbo and Sorensen (2013) dive into the different ideologies of experience, including whether it needs to be authentic or not, or to teach something and whether it needs to be extraordinary, or can be a simple definition of moments that happen in daily life. “Experience, in the context of the experience economy, could be defined as the mental impact felt and remembered by an individual caused by the personal perception of external stimuli” (Sundbo & Sorensen, 2013, p. 4).

Experience economy is, then, what provides tourists and visitors with experiences they would not have in their day-to-day lives. Mostly, these are tied with cultural industries, which encourage people to be involved with a culture that is not theirs, therefore something out of their daily routine.

As previously seen, not all types of tourism are related to culture, as people may often visit other countries for health or professional reasons, for example. However, it is inevitable to associate tourism with leisure time since it is the main reason most people visit other countries. Tureac and Anca (2008) affirm that tourism related to leisure is “the most important type of tourism” and explain that people usually practice it by resting and displacing themselves from their day-to-day routine. As such, people seek experiences that they do not live daily, or that are secondary in their lives, such as walks and excursions.

It is important to note that people may not be visiting a country with the sole objective of exploring its culture, as Tureac and Anca (2008) note by affirming that tourism visitation is still characterised by a small number of participants. However, other types of tourism often provoke people’s interest to explore the area they are visiting, which ends up with people connecting with the country’s culture, even though it was not the reason they visited.

Experience economy, however, does not have to be limited to the country of origin, even if most time it is. Severino and Silva (2023) explore the concept of cultural events held around the world, whose main focal point is not the culture of the country they are being held in, but to create a space where people can experience the culture of a country, which they may not have the chance to visit.

Severino and Silva (2023) highlight the various Japanese cultural events that happen globally. This includes “Anime Expo”, held Los Angeles, and the “Japan Expo”, held in Paris, two of the biggest events which represent Japanese culture outside of Japan, which,

in 2019, reached 350 thousand and 250 thousand visitors, respectively. Spain and Portugal have also registered large number of visitors for Japanese-focused cultural events.

Visitors from events in Spain, France and Portugal have named the “diversity of Japanese pop-culture elements” as one of the main reasons to choose and attend these cultural events (Severino and Silva, 2023, p. 480). “Experience (...) has great value to people who demand it and are willing to pay a high price for experience-stimulating business activities” (Sundbo & Sorensen, 2013, p. 5).

Nowadays, the experience economy is evaluated and selected by its level of authenticity perceived by consumers. However, it relies on personal and cultural preferences, which might lead individuals to “buy or not buy based on how real they perceive an offering to be” (Pine & Gilmore, 2013, p. 29). As a result, consumers are ever more careful when selecting places, services and goods that provide different cultural experiences.

CHAPTER II – PROTECTIONISM AND GLOBALISATION IN EAST ASIA

2 Protectionism and Globalisation in East Asia

The development of East Asian countries has been deeply tied to the countries' relation with protectionism and the rest of the world. While Japan, China and South Korea have adopted different measures, the aim was the same for all, to protect their domestic industries from foreign influence. This chapter explores the history of protectionism in the three countries, from its origin, through periods of war and colonialisation and the turning point, where an openness to the outside world was introduced.

2.1 The Historical Roots of Protectionism in East Asia

Historical records indicate that protectionism is deeply ingrained in East Asian cultures. To comprehend the depths of it, it is necessary to study and understand the many ways in which protectionism has been applied in the region. Focusing on three main countries – Japan, China, and South Korea (hereafter Korea) – which are most known for protectionism and about which there are more studies showing the different sides of history.

As mentioned above, East Asia has always been known for its closed-off policies that prevented foreign influence. Japanese history highlights the *Sakoku* period (1635-1853) as one of the earliest signs of protective measures. Although the term only emerged later on, the word *Sakoku* takes on the meaning of “closing country” and is often related to the concept of a country that has no contact with foreign nations (Kazui, 1982). The word surged as a way to explain the Japanese protectionist stance during the Edo period (1600-1868). Due to fear that the rising Christianity would undermine the Tokugawa Shogunate's (the military government of Japan at the time) authority, the government severed relations with the outside world, leading to a two-century-long period of strong protectionism in Japan (Hellyer, 2002).

The *Sakoku* period in Japan was characterised by an emigration ban (Shizume, 2018) and strict foreign trade limitations, with only four nations managing to maintain relations with Japan: South Korea, the Ryukyus (a country, at the time, ruled by Japan and China), the Netherlands and China. However, even among the four, Japan applied different rules and policies (Kazui, 1982).

South Korea maintained tight formal diplomatic relations with Japan, based on mutual trust and respect. The Ryukyus also kept diplomatic relations with Japan, but with a

vertical hierarchy, with Japan being considered superior. The Netherlands were the only European nation Japan kept relations with, although dealings were limited to private trade. China, on the other hand, was kept on a tight leash when it came to trade negotiations. Only private trade was allowed, and diplomatic relations between the countries were not in place (Kazui, 1982). Hellyer (2002) explains that Japan's governor wanted to create a "Japan-centred world" that could compete with China, thus relations between the countries were weak.

Japan never became as powerful as China, but the *Sakoku* period did offer prosperity to the country. Kazui (1982) recognizes that in this period Japan closed itself to the majority of the world. However, those same policies made the country more aware of foreign relations, which resulted in the subsequent development of new relations with closer countries, namely in Northeast Asia. Hellyer (2002) adds that Japan took this period to develop itself, free from the influence of foreign powers, which resulted in the country being more self-sufficient, seen in the production of goods that, until then, were imported.

At the same time, China was living through the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Protectionism was not a new concept in the country, it had already been applied in the previous dynasty, the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), where sea shipments were prohibited and international trade faced tight restrictions (Foster, 2017). During the Qing Dynasty, the Canton system was introduced, which further limited the access to sea trade. This system was used to control goods entering China through seaports, where foreign traders were forced to comply with China's regulations (Wakeman Jr., 1978).

Due to the limiting nature of the policies applied, foreign trade was mostly one-sided. The East India Company (EIC) was an English company responsible for trade with Asia. The EIC bought goods from China and, in exchange, would offer goods from Europe. At one point, the EIC was exporting around 7 million USD worth of Chinese goods to Europe annually, whilst China was only consuming 3.5 million USD worth of European goods, showing the discrepancies in trade due to China's foreign trade policies (Wakeman Jr., 1978).

Besides imposing trade limitations, the Chinese government also started restricting British merchants. These restrictions included banning merchants from taking their wives to Canton (the only seaport where foreigners could trade in China, located in Guangzhou) to forbidding them from being in the port during winter. All these combined ultimately

led to discontent from British merchants and commercial and cultural feuds started arising between the British and the Chinese (Hang, 2016).

In the 1720s opium consumption in China was growing significantly, mostly imported by foreigners. This created a big issue in the country, since the drug had an addictive nature. Noticing this problem, the Chinese government tried to forbid the sale of opium for smoking purposes in 1729 and later, in 1799, the imports of opium for the same purposes. By this time, the government became wary of the influence the British had in the country.

The East India Company was the main party responsible for the exportation of opium to China, thus becoming the first target of the government. When the Chinese government threatened to cut the profitable tea trade that was held between China and Britain if the EIC did not stop bringing the drug into the country, official imports of opium in China stopped. The EIC, however, started selling the drug directly to British merchants, who then brought it to China, therefore not resolving the problem (Newman, 1995).

To combat this, in 1814 and 1831, the Chinese emperor imposed even stricter restrictions on the importation and sale of opium, although they were still unsuccessful. By the 1830s, the trade balance between China and Britain favoured the latter, mostly due to the high consumption of opium in China. In the same decade, the government tried to eliminate the internal trade of the drug, but because the measures applied did not show results, the focus shifted to the foreigners who traded it in the country (Miron & Feige, 2005).

The 1839 measures are considered China's last efforts at closing the country off to the influence of foreigners. At that time, the emperor assigned an imperial commissioner to eradicate the opium problem in the country. At that, the first physical conflicts arose, with the Chinese destroying the British's opium held in Canton without offering compensation. However, trade was not interrupted since the British did not surrender and continued to bring more of the drug. As a response, China stopped food shipments to the British ships in Canton. Conflicts between the two nations continued until Britain sent reinforcement ships to Canton, ignoring China's continued warnings. Ultimately, British forces were able to capture key points of China and block Canton, which led to the Chinese acceptance of defeat (Miron & Feige, 2005).

With Britain's win against China, the first opium war ended, and the Treaty of Nanjing was signed in 1842. The treaty's main objective was to benefit the British. At that, a few intentions were set, according to Sobin (2023):

- There was to be equality between Britain and China – ending the, until then, Chinese dominance in the country, where British merchants were seen as inferior.
- British territoriality was required, which granted that British people who resided or worked in China had the right to be trialled under British laws and jurisdiction, instead of Chinese laws.
- A solution had to be found regarding the trading imbalance between the countries, especially since, without opium, the Chinese had always had the upper hand.
- Trade between China and Britain was to be expanded – this included giving Hong Kong to the British, as well as opening new ports for British trade.

A second Opium War occurred between 1856 and 1860, ending with the same result as the first one: Britain won, which further opened the legal trade in China. This was settled in the 1858 Treaty of Tientsin (Miron & Feige, 2005). As a result of these two treaties, China was forced to open to foreign trade, marking the beginning of the end of protectionism on a large scale in the country.

During this time, Japan was seeing a similar path happening in the country. As previously mentioned, the *Sakoku* period in the country lasted for more than two centuries. The end of this period was marked by the USA expedition to Japan, led by Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, between 1853 and 1854 (Métraux, 2021).

Commodore Perry's mission's main objective was to open Japan to foreign nations, making it easier for trade to thrive. Reports at the time showed that foreign merchants were poorly treated when trying to enter Japan. The 1846 *Lagoda* incident is often used as an example of this. The American ship wrecked on the coast of Japan, and the crew later reported the cruel treatments they were subjected to, including being “beaten, malnourished, forced to trample on crucifixes, and threatened with beheadings during a seventeen-month confinement” (Keith, 2011, p. 183).

Thus, one of Perry's goals was to make dealings with Japan easier, whilst guaranteeing that foreigners were not treated with cruelty. Due to Japan's geographical position, the country was in the middle of important trade routes between China and the Western world, thus serving as a place where ships would seek supplies, such as coal and fresh provisions, including food and water. This further justified the desire to have a friendly relationship with Japan (Métraux, 2021).

Perry's mission succeeded, and the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed in 1854, granting protection to foreigners who were stranded in Japan, as well as the opening of two Japanese ports for American ships seeking supplies. This expedition used a mix of "hard" and soft power, which were key to its success. Keith (2011) reports that Perry's strategy was both cultural and martial. This expedition, especially because it was accompanied by warships, caught the Japanese by surprise, which ultimately led to them being unprepared to respond and therefore pressure them into complying with the American requests (Hones & Endo, 2006).

In general, the Americans treated this mission as righteousness; they believed they were doing Japan a favour in introducing the country to the American ideals: commerce, Christianity, and republican principles. Keith (2011) explains how Americans saw the Japanese, which is noticeable in correspondence about the country. They would often consider themselves the "eldest guardian" of Japan, which was often referred to as the "youngest sister". There was a constant infantilisation of the Japanese people, and Americans thought it was their right "to kindly" impose this cultural value upon the "semi-barbarous" Japanese.

As previously seen, Perry and his troops first approached the Japanese with "hard" power, although no force was used, since the Japanese succumbed to the pressure. At the same time, Perry focused on what Keith (2011) refers to as "cultural diplomacy", also known as soft power (i.e. using culture to influence diplomatic relations). Through the expedition, the Americans held various demonstrations of science, technology, and musical performances, which surprised the Japanese (Keith, 2011).

These cultural presentations, paired with diplomatic meetings during two visits, resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa, the first step in combating Japanese protectionism.

Contrary to the two previously mentioned countries, South Korea's large-scale protectionism did not come until much later. By the 19th century, Korea was a closed-off country that few knew much about. The country kept relations mainly with China and Japan, on two different spectrums. The Korean-Chinese relation was one of suzerainty, that is, China partly controlled Korea, something Westerners noticed when they arrived in Korea in the same century. While the relation with Japan was more complicated. They had primarily formal diplomatic relations, with casual visits between the two. However,

Korea had deeper relations with Tsushima, a Japanese island between Japan and Korea (figure 1). Tsushima depended on Korean trade, therefore, economic relations were held between the two (Hara, 1998).

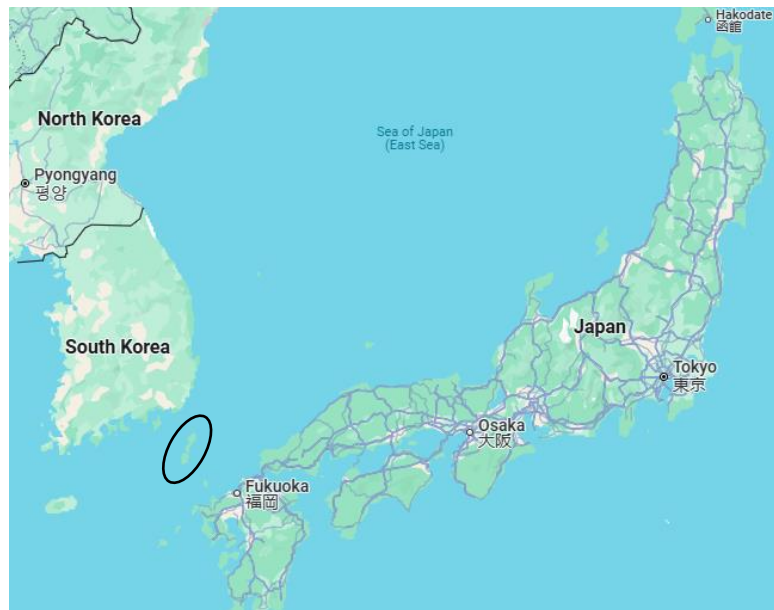


Figure 1: Tsushima
Source: Google Maps

Due to a lack of studies related to protectionism at this time, it is difficult to understand the foreign policies that were applied. Rausch (2020) speaks on the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), which ruled at this time, and describes the Korean foreign approach as isolating, explaining the motive behind this was a desire to “remain pure”, that is, not be influenced by external powers. Lew (2000) adds that the country’s contact with foreign nations was kept to a minimum until 1876, with land borders and seaports closed.

Noticing what was happening to China, which had been forced to open by Western powers, and with a wish to be free from them, Korea slowly started depending less on China and more on Japan. The governments of the two countries had started discussions about a potential deal, but only after an ultimatum from the Japanese did the Korean government agree and accept it; thus, the “Treaty of Friendship and Commerce”, also known as the Treaty of Ganghwa, was signed in February of 1876 (Lengerer, 2020).

This marked Korea’s first step into foreign relations, with the treaty establishing its independence (therefore ending the, until then, Chinese suzerainty), the opening of three Korean ports to Japanese trade, the protection of vessels from both countries when

entering the other, as well as affirming Korea as equal to Japan. The latter, however, was contradicted in the same treaty, where Japan was granted extraterritoriality. It is considered by scholars (Lengerer, 2020) to be the first modern unequal treaty signed by Korea.

During the 1880s, the Korean government started to implement various reforms to strengthen the country, which included treaties with many countries with which Korea did not previously have any relations. This included the Korean American “Treaty of Amity and Commerce”, signed in 1882, followed by treaties with Great Britain and Germany (1883), Italy and Russia (1884), France (1886), Austria-Hungary (1892), and Denmark (1902). Korea had finally opened to the Western world (Lew, 2000).

Despite all of this, Japan’s influence on Korea was ever-growing. Because of its strategic position, the Soviet Union had also shown interest in the country. After a series of occurrences between the countries, in 1894, Japan launched a surprise attack on Russian forces in Korea, and the Russo-Japanese War broke out, lasting one year and ending with the Japanese victory, which maintained their control over Korea. The country was considered a protectorate of Japan. The status, however, only lasted five years, and in 1910 Korea officially became a Japanese colony (Lew, 2000).

From then onwards, Korea lost its power as an independent state and was considered a part of Japan, following and complying with Japanese laws. Japan made sure Korea lost all its culture and values by banning their costumes and their language, as well as political institutions (Rhyu et al., 2024). Under the colonial law, Japan used Korea mainly for resources: the country’s productions would be exported to Japan, Korean lands were handed to the Japanese, and workers moved to Japan (Park, 2010).

With no autonomy over trade and economy, Korea was subjected to the rules of the Japanese. Trade was exclusively done with Japan at unfavourable rates, with Japanese goods entering the country freely, leaving Korean businesses with no power to compete. When the colonisation period came to an end, in 1945, with the Japanese defeat in World War II, Korea was destroyed and powerless, divided by the 38th parallel (figure 2) into two parts. The Soviet Union occupied the North of the country whilst Western forces, mainly the United States, occupied the South, aiming to stop the Soviet Union from controlling Korea (McCune, 1949).

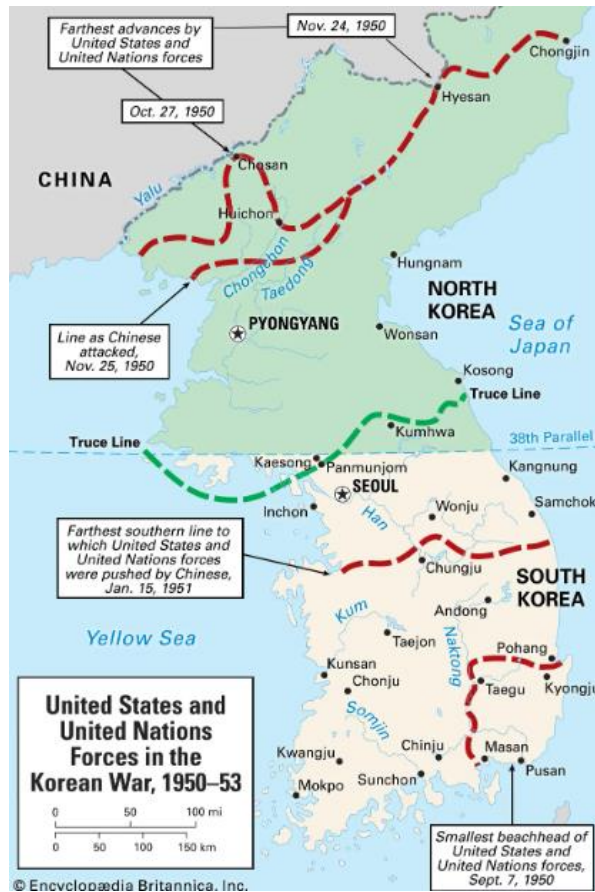


Figure 2: The division of the Korean peninsula
 Source: Britannica

This separation, as well as being under control, ultimately led to the Korean War (1950-1953), which forced an already vulnerable country to fight itself and led to even more destruction and a separation that lasts until present day (Zhang, 2024).

Once the war ended and after being left destroyed, South Korea sought international aid to begin its reconstruction. As such, in the late 1950s, the country relied heavily on the help offered by the United States, which had already been supporting South Korea during the war. Syngman Rhee, the first Korean president, used this aid as both a way to reconstruct the country and a tool to strengthen his power – he did what the people had wanted. Humanitarian and financial support was used to rebuild the country and its economy. Trade was re-established, with the United States becoming the main country Korea imported from (Xing, 2024).

By the 1960s, however, South Korea shifted to a more protective approach to its economy. Under the presidency of Park Chung Hee, the country began imposing protectionist

measures such as regulatory tariffs, import restrictions, and, in some cases, bans. These aimed to help strengthen and protect vulnerable industries, such as the automobile industry, which saw high tariffs being imposed on foreign cars entering Korea, unless sold by parts, which could be assembled in the country. This decade and the following ones saw the country implementing what had been established in the Foreign Trade Act of 1957, which restricted trade and incentivised exports (Attar & Kazemi, 2017).

This system was applied until the beginning of the 1980s, when the country slowly opened through a process of financial liberalisation due to pressure from foreign powers, such as the United States, and institutions, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Kwon, 2007).

As previously stated, protectionism has deep historical roots in the East Asian countries, particularly Japan, China, and South Korea, which have all implemented measures to close themselves off to the rest of the world. Examples of this are the *Sakoku* period in Japan (1635-1853), when the country shut itself off to prevent foreign influence, as well as the protectionist policies applied in China during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, which were marked by trade limitations. Although not as early, or as profound, South Korea has also used protectionism to protect itself from the world, following many years of oppression at the hands of foreign powers.

By the 20th century, however, there was a shift in these countries, which started applying more liberalising measures, opening more to the world. Following periods of deep closeness, the next section will explore the turning point in the history of East Asia, showcasing the main events and factors that led to the change in foreign approach.

2.2 The Turning Point: From Protectionism to a Global World

As previously seen, for a long period of time, East Asian countries have kept themselves closed to the world. Protectionism was used as a tool to shield themselves from foreign influences while also keeping their sovereignty. From closed borders and seaports to trade limitations and overall isolation, the protectionist measures used were endless and ever evolving. Even so, after centuries of seclusion, by the 20th century, the world saw a change in the way East Asian countries portrayed themselves, as they slowly implemented policies that opened their markets to the West.

To understand East Asia today is to understand the history that shaped the region. Following the first steps into openness in the 19th century to the policies implemented in the decades after, this sub-chapter will analyse the turning point in history that changed China, Japan, and South Korea to the present version of them.

After losing both Opium Wars, China was left with little power and was forced into signing a series of unfair treaties that benefited the British, such as the Treaty of Nanjing, previously analysed in section one of this chapter. From then on, China was obliged to open to foreign trade, especially with the British. At the time, the Nationalist Party of China, also known as *Kuomintang*, opposed the unfair treatment to which China was subjected (Fung, 1987).

Fung (1987) mentions the different treaties that China celebrated, including the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), the Treaty of Tianjin (1858), and the Chefoo Convention (1876). These treaties all benefited the Western (mostly British) citizens in China, giving them special rights that did not apply to other foreigners, while Chinese citizens in Western countries were judged under the country's national law. Each of them offered more privileges for foreigners, while China's power got weaker, and the country had no way to fight these unfair treatments.

Since all the mentioned treaties were imposed by force, using military power, China's government had no option but to forcibly sign them and accept the changes. Possibly the most damaging part of these deals was introduced in the Treaty of the Bogue, signed in 1843 as a follow-up to the Treaty of Nanjing (1842). There, the British made the Chinese sign the "most-favoured-nation" clause, which was then added to all subsequent treaties, and obliged the Chinese government to adopt the same position towards all countries that had treaties with the country. This meant that if China were to concede any benefit to one country (e.g. lower taxes), the same measures applied to all countries with which China had treaties, without any additional deals needed (Fung, 1987).

Frustrated with the way the Qing government was making no efforts to protect China from the ongoing attacks by the West, as well as due to ethnic tensions, people started protesting. This culminated in the 1911 revolution, also known as the Xinhai Revolution, led by Sun Yat-sen, which led to the fall of the Qing empire and implemented the first republican government of China (Rhoads, 2000).

Having led the revolution, Sun Yat-sen was then proclaimed the provisional president of the Republic of China, a position he gave to Yuan Shikai, a military commander of the Qing dynasty who helped during the revolution (Rhoads, 2000). As a soldier of the previous dynasty, once in power, the Yuan tried to create his dynasty, which failed due to the ever-growing power of local warlords (military leaders). Following his death in 1916, the existence of warlords became a problem in China, as it created division and instability in the country, which became leaderless (Bloch, 1938).

At the time, many internal wars broke out between warlords, which were often influenced, and even conducted, by foreign powers, which used the opportunity to protect their economic interests in the country. Yunnan and southern Kwangsi (Guangxi) were directly controlled and influenced by France, areas located around Hong Kong and Shanghai were under British control, and provinces of Manchuria were divided between Russia and Japan. This division showcased the failure of the 1911 revolution, which aimed to end foreign control in China, but resulted in a growing overtake (Isaacs, 1938).

The end of the warlordism era, as it is known, began in 1926, with the Northern Expedition, a military campaign launched by the Chinese Nationalist army together with the Chinese Communist Party. Aided by the Soviet Union, the army was able to attack many areas controlled by the warlords, aiming to unify the country once more (Eastman, 1977). However successful the alliance was in defeating the warlords, it was short-lived. After conquering the areas that previously were under the control of the warlords, the Nationalist party (KMT) aimed to also take back what was in the possession of the British (Sutton, 1977).

The British control and influence in the country were seen as the main obstacle to reclaiming China, which the Nationalist party defended. In response to demands, the British gave back some cities, but refused to let go of Shanghai, which by then was an international city that conducted business with foreign powers. Having slowly advanced towards Shanghai with the help of the communists, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT, attacked them, which ultimately led to the end of the alliance between the two parties, the beginning of the Chinese civil war and with Britain continuing to possess control of certain parts of Shanghai (Sutton, 1977).

By 1937, during the civil war in China, a small argument broke out between Chinese and Japanese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge in the city of Wanping, which began a series of

bigger conflicts between the two and resulted in the Second Sino-Japanese War, due to Japan launching a full-scale invasion of China (Leong, 1979). This war led to the deaths of 20 million Chinese people, another 15 million wounded, destruction and bombing of Chinese cities, and great damage to the Chinese economy (Che et al., 2015). During the attack, the Nationalist Party of China suffered the most, as they were the most active party fighting against the Japanese, which caused the loss of soldiers, equipment, and financial resources. Furthermore, the rural population felt abandoned by them. This ultimately led to the rise of the Communist Party (CCP) in China (Johnson, 1962).

The Second Sino-Japanese War ended with the Japanese defeat in World War II and marked a period of change in China. With the Nationalist Party weakened, the Communist Party was able to defeat them. By 1949, the CCP had become the major force in the country and proclaimed it the People's Republic of China (PRC). Mao Zedong, the party's chairman, took power (Jacob & Subba, 2022).

During Mao's rule, the Chinese Communist Party frequently launched 'revolutionary' campaigns, which were used as a way of governance. Ou and Xiong (2021) present some of the main campaigns executed during this time, including:

- The Anti-Rightist movement (1957-1959), which targeted right-leaning people (often seen as those who supported capitalism) and led to further destruction of democracy in China with the continuation of the one-party system in the country (Li, 2001).
- The Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), an attempt to quickly industrialise the country and increase agricultural production. It was marked by the formation of farming communes and the increase in steel production. This campaign failed due to unrealistic farming goals that could not be met because of poor planning and weather conditions, which led to an estimated 16.5 to 30 million deaths due to starvation (Li & Yang, 2005).
- The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a movement that was characterised by violence against the people and sought to end capitalism and traditional elements of Chinese culture. This period saw the persecution of those "deemed incompatible with the socialist system" (Ou & Xiong, 2021, p. 3) and the death of 1.1 to 1.6 million people. The CCP, and especially Mao, wanted to eliminate the "sour olds" of the Chinese society, "the old ideas, culture, customs and habits"

(Schoenhals & MacFarquhar, 2006, p. 92). This meant changing culture and education, which was seen by Mao as too Western and elite.

Overall, the Mao era was characterised by a state-controlled economy. The system began to change after Mao's death in 1976, when the transition towards a less centralised economy started. Soon after, the country began to shift, and economic growth was recorded. The transition from one leader to another, however, was not smooth and brought political uncertainty to the country. Only two years after Mao's death, in 1978, a sense of stability was brought back to China with the rise of Deng Xiaoping (Fewsmith et al., 2017).

Deng Xiaoping had already been part of the CCP before, although his powers were stripped when he was attacked following the Cultural Revolution. He went back to the world of politics in 1977, whilst China was still under the rule of Hua Guofeng (Mao's chosen successor). Under Hua's leadership, Deng was responsible for science and education, something that he strategically used to make major changes and gain people's support. Mending some of Mao's policies, Deng reopened universities and reinstated the national college entrance exam (Fewsmith et al., 2017).

By the following year, Deng Xiaoping succeeded Hua Guofeng as the ruler of China. His leadership was marked by economic reforms in the country which resulted in the opening of China to the exterior world. Deng invested in education and technology following his plan to modernise the country (Bader, 1997). As such, he led the country to "a period of explosive economic growth" (Naughton, 1993, p. 491) and marked the beginning of an open China through a series of various policies.

China's historical trajectory, from deeply rooted protectionism and foreign-imposed treaties, through devastating wars that left the country helpless and continuous revolutions, shaped the nation's cautious and almost suspicious approach to openness. With a state-controlled economy under Mao, only after Deng Xiaoping's rise to power was a turning point registered, under Deng's opening policy. This ultimately led to modernisation, economic growth, and a crescent integration in the global economy.

Similarly to what China went through, as seen in the previous section, Japan was forced to open itself following the USA expedition to Japan in 1853, where Commodore Matthew Perry implemented a plan that ended Japan's 200-plus year-long isolation from the world (the *Sakoku* period). Following that, Japan was forced to sign a series of unequal

treaties with many Western powers, including the Treaty of Kanagawa, celebrated in 1854 with the USA (Keith, 2011).

During this time, the military government of Japan, the *Tokugawa Shogunate*, was falling as people were showing their discontent with the treaties signed, which undermined the country, and the opposition was growing. Small groups of *daimyos* (powerful Japanese magnates) like *Sastuma* and *Choshu* intensified their opposition to the government and asked for reforms. The discontent ultimately led to the Boshin War, between government forces and the opposition, which led to the end of the Edo period and established a turning point in the country's history (Crespo et al., 2016).

In 1868, the Meiji Restoration began in Japan. By April, the government promulgated the Charter Oath (figure 3), also known as the Imperial Oath, a document composed of five articles, which laid out the principles of the new Japanese regime. In the five articles, the new government pledged to respect public opinion and promote relations with other countries. Mainly, the Meiji government wanted to project a message: they would listen to their people (a step towards democracy), unite the country, and ensure freedom. They also understood the importance of modernisation, aiming to learn from the West (Breen, 1996).

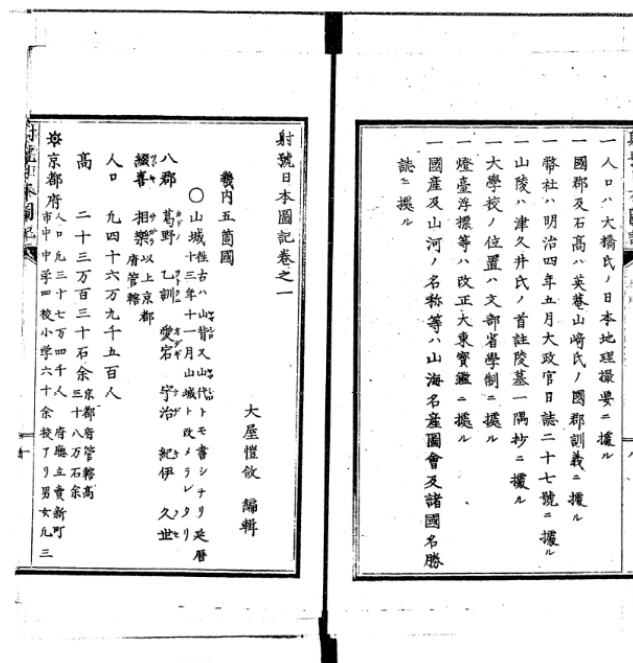


Figure 3: The Charter Oath (1868)
Source: Next Digital Library

Learning from the situation in China, and wishing to differentiate itself, Japan began a period of modernisation and industrialisation. While China began implementing scientific advances and military techniques from the West with the aim of proclaiming and re-establishing the traditional power of the Empire, Japan saw it as an opportunity to grow and to put itself on the same level as the Western powers (Crespo et al., 2016).

As previously mentioned, one of the main contributors to the fall of the *Tokugawa* government was the *daimyos* who opposed the system. Each *daimyo* governed a part of the Japanese territory, a *han*. During the Edo period, Japan was divided into more than 250 *han*, which represented around three-quarters of the country's area. Each had its laws and economy. This posed an obstacle to the Meiji government, whose aim was to unite Japan, centralising power. As such, the *han* system was abolished in 1871 (Bolitho & McClain, 1991; see also Nagahara, 1962).

The *Iwakura* Mission was Japan's first step into adopting Western approaches and opening to the world. Led by Iwakura Tomomi, this mission consisted of around 50 government officials who travelled to Europe and the USA from December 1871 to September 1873. Having so many high-ranking representatives travel around the world to restore international relations was never seen before and showed the importance it had to the Japanese. Saburo (2002) identifies the mission's three main objectives:

- Build and maintain international relations with countries with which Japan had previously celebrated treaties, as well as showcase Japan's power as a newly emerged economy and country.
- Revise and renegotiate previously signed treaties which harmed and were unfair to Japan – the country's government was aware that this could not be resolved by force, thus aimed to use soft power techniques to change it.
- Learn from the Western economies and possibly import techniques and knowledge to Japan, which would be used to develop the country.

This mission was the starting point of Japan's journey towards development. Intending to be recognised as an equal to the Western nations, Japan began establishing an open and competitive economy, whilst also looking out for itself. Taking advantage of its cheap labour workforce, as well as the industrialisation happening in the country, Japan began producing and exporting more (Saburo, 2002).

One great example of this is the cotton spinning industry, which began growing in the country. Due to previous treaties which did not allow Japan to implement import tariffs, and therefore protect its industries, it was not until the 1880s that the cotton spinning industry began recovering. Thanks to Japan's advantage of low wages and technological adaptability, this industry fully recovered and gained an advantage against imported goods, which were the only solution until then (Akamatsu, 1962).

Besides that, Japan started exploiting coal resources in the country. The rise of these exploitations, paired with the growing consumer goods industries, resulted in a rapid development of coal mining, electricity companies, railroads, and shipping businesses. Through these developments, more machinery and raw goods were imported to Japan, which led the country to continuously advance in industrial production and exports (Akamatsu, 1962).

This technique was the most frequently used by Japan, which practised a dual structure of international trade. Whilst previously Japan exported raw materials, the situation changed between 1880 and 1910. From these two years, exports of primary goods, such as food and live animals, fell from more than 80% to less than 20%, while manufactured goods exports, such as textiles, grew from less than 10% to approximately 70%. By this time Japan imported raw materials from Western countries, such as the USA and India, transformed them into final goods, and then exported them, primarily to China, with exports to the country growing from 20% to 40%, between 1880 and 1910 (Meissner & Tang, 2018; see also Crespo et al., 2016).

At the time, Japan focused on exporting to less developed and close countries in Asia, with which they could become trade partners (Meissner & Tang, 2018). By 1910, Japan recorded a positive balance of payments with China (255 million yen), North America (331 million yen), Korea and Taiwan (54 million yen), Oceania (27 million yen), and Africa (3 million yen) (figure 4). The overall balance of payments with Asian destinations was negative, due to Japan's high imports from India, but it still showcased the importance of trade with the region, especially China, the country to which Japan exported the most, as previously mentioned (Hunter & Sugiyama, 2002).

Year	Asia				North America	Britain	Other Europe	Latin America	Africa	Oceania	Total
	Korea & Taiwan	China	India	Asia total							
1876/1880	n.a.	-1	-1	-2	28	-59	9			1	-22
1881/1885	0	2	-18	-9	54	-49	25			2	23
1886/1890	-4	6	-29	-29	87	-83	20			6	2
1891/1895	-4	4	-32	-54	162	-128	49			8	37
1896/1900	9	92	-129	-105	74	-256	-34		1	10	-310
1901/1905	44	228	-280	-134	144	-264	-3	0	2	15	-240
1906/1910	54	255	-286	-76	331	-383	-1	-2	3	27	-100
1911/1915	16	481	-573	-115	388	-312	42	-6	-5	6	-2
1916/1920	-302	846	-701	157	5	53	446	15	-87	3	592
1921/1925	-1071	1002	-1141	-1511	517	-945	-587	23	10	-288	-2781
1926/1930	-799	952	-618	-666	685	-426	-771	46	79	-367	-1419
1931/1935	139	253	-28	921	-938	53	-505	191	405	-617	-491
1936/1940	3689	941	-162	4505	-2786	362	-728	-113	300	-249	1293

Figure 4
Source: Hunter & Sugiyama (2002)

Alongside these developments, it is important to recognise other changes that were applied to the country, which facilitated the expansion of trade: the currency and banking systems of Japan.

For the first decade of the Meiji restoration, “the Japanese monetary system was effectively a system of fiat currency and floating exchange rates” (Lothian, 1991, p. 268). The Japanese yen, introduced in 1871, was defined under different metrics. Initially, it was subjected to a bimetallic standard (i.e. tied to the value of both silver and gold). However, the value of the yen often oscillated under the market’s influence, depending on supply and demand (Lothian, 1991).

Before the yen, the Meiji government introduced the *dajokan-satsu*, a government note that was based on *ryō* (Japan’s currency unit tied to gold). The new currency was used around the country. However, excessive issuance of the *dajokan-satsu*, “due to massive fiscal expenditure toward the civil war and shortage of fiscal revenues” (Shizume, 2018, p. 333), led to inflation.

Only from 1878, and until 1897, did Japan adopt a more stable strategy for the yen, tying it to silver, in contrast to the gold standard used by many other countries. This created a challenge because the yen’s value would float when currencies tied to the gold standard, such as the British pound, would be stable (Lothian, 1991).

This lack of monetary stability made international trade and investment more difficult, as Japanese merchants and foreign partners faced high currency risks. As Japan's exports increased and its global trade ambitions expanded, the need for a more reliable financial

infrastructure became apparent. Thus, the Bank of Japan (BOJ) was established in 1882 as a semi-public institution. Japanese citizens were able to buy shares of the Bank after approval from the finance minister (Shizume, 2018).

In 1894, Japan began a series of treaty revisions with several countries, starting with Great Britain. Similarly to China, Japan was also under the “most-favoured-nation” clause with the British since 1858. The abolition of this, as well as other rights conceded forcibly, gave Japan the freedom to apply tariffs. By 1911, the country had full autonomy, having revised treaties with other Western countries (Shizume, 2018).

As the final step towards a beneficial trade relationship with the outside, Japan officially adopted the gold standard in 1897. This helped stabilise the currency, attributed international credibility to Japan and attracted foreign investment (Droppers, 1898).

Japan’s forced opening to the world after over two centuries of isolation marked an important time in the country’s history, leading to political, economic, and social transformations. The mindset shift was key to a rapid modernisation, understanding the importance of foreign scientific knowledge to development. Reforms in the major economic sectors, including finance, were needed to ensure that Japan could achieve the same status as other Western powers. This set the tone for Japan’s transition from a protectionist state to a modernised and liberalised global economy.

Following decades of repression under the control of the Japanese, as well as the devastating results of the Korean War, the 1950s and 1960s represented Korea’s attempt at rebuilding itself. By this time, the country had already been divided into two parts: the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (Lee, 1964).

Syngman Rhee, the first president of South Korea after the separation of the peninsula, never showed any interest in stepping into the international light, nor form any relations with foreign powers. This was considered disadvantageous for the country, as it slowed its development and economic growth and took away an opportunity for autonomy, as South Korea was still very dependent on help from the United States (Chun et al., 2010).

Attempting to protect itself, in 1957, South Korea introduced the Foreign Trade Act, a crucial step that shaped the country’s trade policies. The Act aimed to restrict imports and promote exports, to create a positive trade balance. The government regulated imports through quotas, bans and tariffs, while offering incentives to exporters (Tan, 2016).

When Rhee stepped down, after many protests took place, the country lived a period of instability, which only began shifting once Park Chung Hee took power, as previously seen. Unlike Rhee, Park understood the importance of international support to the country's development and thus began establishing and re-establishing diplomatic and commercial relations with foreign countries, including Japan (Fernandes, 2023).

Park, however, still implemented protectionist measures to ensure the economy would grow. As such, the country continued implementing an export-focused strategy, introducing a targeting system which, in detail, specified which companies and industries should export, what products should be exported and what markets were to be penetrated. The Korean Trade Promotion Corporation was also established to serve as support for Korean exports overseas. The growth was significant, with exports jumping from representing 2,4% of the Gross National Product (GNP) in 1962, to 31% in 1979. Through export promotion, the government also began promoting domestic production of goods to replace imports (Chaudhuri, 1996).

Park's gradual internationalisation measures set the stage for significant changes in South Korea's international stance. Until then, protectionist policies had been the main reason behind the country's economic growth, but by the late 1980s and early 1990s, South Korea began shifting towards integration with the global economy.

Aiming to become a member of the OECD, South Korea began developing social and economic plans to meet the organisation's standards in 1989. Between the members of the organisation, there were concerns that the country would not be compatible with the OECD's principles, especially on four main topics, according to Carroll and Hynes (2017):

- OECD's codes of liberalisation: the organisation defended free movement of capital and financial services, something that was still restricted in South Korea.
- South Korea, being a member of the Group of 77: being a member of a developing countries group, while applying to a developed countries organisation was seen as contradictory.
- Labour rights in the country: OECD's principles are aligned with the protection of workers' rights, but regulations were not yet in place in South Korea.

- South Korea's status: the country benefited from lighter trade and environmental regulations because of its developing country status, which contradicted the requirement of being a developed country to be a member of the OECD.

Some of these changes were not automatically implemented, as one year after the accession, in 1997, East Asia suffered from a major financial crisis, with South Korea being one of the main countries affected.

There were several factors which contributed to the financial crisis, including the speedy liberalisation of capital accounts – which was supported and suggested by international institutions, such as OECD –, fixed exchange rates tied to the US dollar – which led to the overvaluation of the East Asian currencies and subsequently the loss of investor trust –, as well as excessive foreign currency borrowing – which caused a currency mismatch and a bigger debt towards foreign countries, since the currencies lost value (Rodier, 2014).

Before the crisis, in 1996, South Korea had already recorded high results on the international scene. With a per capita income of over 10 thousand US dollars, the country was the third largest Asian economy and “the world's eleventh largest trading nation” (K. Kim, 2000, p. 4). However, the situation changed once the crisis was installed, and South Korea received the largest financial aid package from the IMF out of all the East Asian countries – 58 billion US dollars. This loan, nonetheless, came with conditions, aiming at reforming the country's economic sectors (Rodier, 2014).

These conditions included reducing government spending and increasing taxes to generate more revenue, liberalising capital accounts (freedom of money circulation), reducing trade barriers (such as tariffs and restrictions), and changing the labour market laws, making them more attractive to businesses (Hayo & Shin, 2002).

This led to a series of changes in the country's financial sector, the biggest being the end of the *chaebol* monopoly. *Chaebols* were large family-owned businesses that controlled smaller companies and received support from the government – largely tied to the rapid economic growth registered in South Korea before the crisis (Lee, 2008). To combat this, the IMF wanted fewer trade barriers, which would make domestic industries exposed to imported goods, increasing competition and efficiency (International Monetary Fund, 1997).

The 1997 financial crisis thus represented a pivotal turning point in South Korea's history, not only economically but also socially, as it accelerated economic reforms and trade liberalisation. Consequently, it marked the end of the rooted protectionist measures the country applied until then and shifts its focus towards deeper integration with the global markets and economy.

The distinct experiences of these three countries show how the 19th and 20th centuries marked important periods in China, Japan, and South Korea's histories. It translates how all of them were pressured by the Western powers to open, which led to the end of the protectionist systems that had resided for centuries and forced them to modernise and integrate into the global economy.

Japan's forced opening triggered rapid industrialisation, which benefited the country and positioned it on equal footing with Western powers. China's approach was slower and more cautious than Japan's. Internal conflicts made the country more hesitant to change, trying to maintain traditional elements while implementing selective Western technologies. South Korea's turning point led from a protectionist system that resulted in rapid growth to a successful globalisation process, fuelled by the outcome of a financial crisis.

While different, these countries' examples translate the common themes of protectionism in East Asian, from carefully approaching foreign influence to keep sovereignty, to being forced to liberalise economies and markets, whilst highlighting state-led initiatives, crucial in shaping the countries' policies.

The following sub-chapter aims to exemplify government policies that helped shape the country's position in the world, understanding the role they played in the transition from protectionist systems to liberalised ones.

2.3 The Role of the Governments

The turn to the 20th century was significant in Japan's path to liberalisation. The country's forced opening led to many challenges, mainly the need to adapt to the fast-paced liberalisation, "and although the circumstances of Japan's economy have changed drastically in the postwar years, the thinking of many Japanese policy-makers has not" (Curran, 1983, p. 106).

Due to its protectionist history, which by then was already part of Japan's culture, it was difficult for people to accept the new reality they were in. As such, liberalisation was met with resistance, and it took time for people's mentality to change. The beginning of the post-war era was challenging for the government, which had to balance wanting to protect the domestic industries with trade commitments, mainly after joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (Song, 2022).

Japan requested to join GATT in 1952, but tariff negotiations between the members and Japan were not possible at the time. There were two main reasons for this: the members were afraid of how powerful Japanese exports could be, as well as the fact that Japan still had import tariffs in place. To join GATT, Japanese trade policies had to change, as all members needed to comply with Articles I and III of the agreement (Pekkanen, 2001).

Article I, the "General Most-Favoured-Nation Treatment" clause, dictates that benefits given by a country should apply to all other members. This meant that Japan could not practice discriminatory policies and should give the same treatment to all members of GATT. Article III referred to "National Treatment on Internal Taxation and Regulation", which meant that no country could impose trade barriers on imports. Japan, then, was obliged to treat imports as domestic goods in terms of taxes and regulations (no tariffs, quotas or other barriers could be applied) (World Trade Organisation, 1994).

During the 1950s, Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), together with the Japanese government, was implementing measures to protect its small industries from foreign competition, by controlling imports. Upon joining GATT in 1955, MITI was met with domestic and international pressure to remove trade restrictions, which only happened in 1964, when Japan joined the OECD (Song, 2022).

Japan's transformation can be traced to this decade. The country was already part of the biggest international organisations – GATT, since 1955, the IMF, since 1952, and the OECD, since 1964. However, at the time of joining, as the country was still recovering from the devastation of the second World War, Japan received special status, allowing for few exceptions to the rules, which were then lifted (Keiichi, 1983):

- Japan did not initially commit to GATT's Article XI, "General Elimination of Quantitative Restrictions", which prohibits members from using quantitative restrictions (e.g.: quotas and import or export licences) on goods (World Trade Organization, 1994) – only doing so in 1963.

- Japan benefited from exemption to comply with the exchange control policy, since it needed to protect its economy. As such, only in 1964 did the country comply with IMF's Article VIII, which forbids members from applying restrictions on payments and transfers of international current account transactions (International Monetary Fund, 1944).

From that point onwards, Japan was recognised as newly liberalised economy, aiming to distinguish itself from the other East Asian countries, and take a central place in the global economic scene.

While multilateral agreements were essential in the liberalisation of trade, by the second half of the 1990s, Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), regional and bilateral agreements, became popular in response to the evolving global trade route. FTAs are seen as a good complement to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as they are implemented quicker and focus on drafting rules in areas in which the WTO does not apply. The main objective is to promote trade between two or more countries by reducing barriers (Masato, 2001).

Japan signed its first FTA with Singapore in 2002. Peng Er (2006) argues that the two countries were already each other's most important trading partners, posing the question of why this FTA was signed. Ando et al. (2022) add that from 1995 to 2016, Japan's exports to the world grew 1.5 times, while imports grew 1.8 times, and when analysing the Japan-Singapore FTA, no trade creation was documented. Peng Er (2006) questions the possibility of this FTA being Japan's first step into trying to combat China's superiority in the region, although such theory is difficult to prove.

Since then, Japan has signed multiple FTAs, mainly with other Asian nations, something seen as beneficial for the regionalism of East Asia. The government now implements a multi-layered approach to foreign trade, complying with WTO's non-discriminatory laws, while signing discriminatory agreements with countries from outside the organisation – this allows for benefits, such as tax reductions (Ando et al., 2022).

As of January 2025, Japan has 21 signed and active agreements in place, between FTAs and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which, in addition to trade, aim to strengthen economic cooperation between countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025). In 2020, together with ten ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) members, as well as China, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, Japan

signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), seen as the foundation for economic integration in East Asia (Ando et al., 2022).

From the beginning, the Japanese government assumed a key role in navigating the country's transition from a protectionist system to a liberalised economy, actively participating in global trade. Through reforms, gradual compliance with international organisations, such as GATT and the OECD, as well as the introduction of Free Trade Agreements, Japan was able to successfully balance the protection of its domestic industries with the challenges posed by increasing openness.

Contrary to Japan, China's liberalisation process was met with polarising opinions: supported by the elites and opposed by the conservatives. However, since China had a strong hierarchical system, most of the leaders' ideas became policies (Naughton, 1993).

Under Mao Zedong, China's foreign relations and trade were mostly nationalised, or simply did not exist. The country followed a simple trade plan where exports were used to finance imports, therefore keeping a positive trade balance. Once Deng Xiaoping came into power, unlike Mao, there was a shift in the perception of foreign nations, as Deng recognised and understood the importance of technology and knowledge imports to the development and modernisation of the Chinese economy. As such, Deng implemented an opening policy, aiming to attract imports and foreign direct investment (FDI) to improve the country's technological level (Prime & Park, 1997).

Deng's goal was clear: he wanted to modernise and grow the economy. To support his ideas, he reaffirmed the "four modernisations" plan previously introduced by Zhou Enlai, China's Premier (i.e. Prime Minister), in 1965. Zhou's plan divided liberalisation into two phases: first, China should build a self-sufficient industrial base, and then the country should abandon isolation and branch into international markets, leading to economic growth. It was evident that Deng's policies going forward would focus on economic development, which would only be possible if the country opened to the outside world, as well as the delegation of power and authority, ending centuries of authoritarian governments in the country (Naughton, 1993).

Pattison (1981) suggests that the most important factor in the Chinese successful liberalisation process was the government's flexibility when faced with challenges, contrary to previous rulers, which were very strict in decision-making (Pattison, 1981, as cited in Stoltenberg, 1984). What differentiated Deng was that he recognised other

nations' success and never hid his admiration for their economic accomplishments. On the contrary, he aimed to replicate them in China. To Deng, China had to be open to receive foreign technology and knowledge so that the country could develop and the economy could grow (Naughton, 1993).

As such, aiming to promote foreign trade in the country, Deng introduced the idea of creating Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in 1979. Previously, the closest China had to foreign trade were special export commodity production bases, established in 1971 by Zhou Enlai, which served as agricultural and industrial zones whose production was solely for export. However, Deng's goal was to no longer focus only on exports, but to promote imports and FDI and only then begin to increase exports (Stoltenberg, 1984).

Special Economic Zones were delegated areas by the government, which offered foreign investors tax and business incentives to attract foreign technology, aiming for rapid growth. Passed in July of 1979, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Equity Joint Ventures allowed foreign investment in China, making SEZs possible. The government, then, created four initial zones in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen (Naughton, 1993).

The objectives for these four zones were to introduce foreign capital, technology and equipment into the country, as well as teach the Chinese people how to work with it; to promote competition between domestic and foreign industries; to spread the knowledge gained through the country; and to create job opportunities. This plan was successful as by the end of 1981, 59,8% (1.7 million US dollars) of the total FDI in China was through SEZs, mainly Shenzhen, whose annual revenue quintupled from 1978 to 1981, and population grew from 30 thousand in 1979 to 1 million in 2000 (Stoltenberg, 1984).

Deng's policies created an attractive environment for trade and investment, leading to growing foreign capital and technological inflows, as well as growing exports. This growth led to the creation of new government departments to oversee foreign activity, such as the General Administration of Customs and the General Administration for Foreign Exchange Control, established in 1979, and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade (MOFERT), established in 1982 (Prime & Park, 1997).

Zhu Rongji, China's Premier from 1998 to 2003, became the main figure of the Chinese liberalisation, after Deng died in 1997. Zhu introduced a series of bold reforms to be applied in several areas, aiming to modernise the economy, improve the government's

efficiency and integrate China into the global economy. Zhu implemented reforms in State-owned enterprises, leading to the closing of unprofitable corporations; privatised public housing, generating wealth to the middle class, as a means to grow the private sector and, therefore, reduce government spending; and most importantly, Zhu wanted to restore the relation with foreign investors and nations and led the country to enter the WTO (Zweig, 2001).

By the end of 2000, Zhu also proposed that China sign an FTA with the members of ASEAN, which would later lead to the creation of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), signed in 2010. At the beginning of the century, however, China was focused on the WTO and its multilateral agreements (Cai, 2002).

China acceded to the WTO in 2001, and similarly to Japan, had to commit to a few rules that were not yet implemented in the country, according to Jain (2016):

- China had to comply with the non-discriminatory treatment in place, which meant that foreign goods and companies in the country would receive the same treatment as the domestic industries.
- Dual pricing had to be removed, meaning that products in the domestic and international markets had to be priced the same.
- Export subsidies on agricultural products had to be removed.

Besides the regular conditions for accession to the WTO, which all members had to comply with, China was also subjected to additional rules, making its accession protocol unique. At the time of accession, China agreed to “WTO-plus” commitments and “WTO-minus” rights, which meant that the country would have additional commitments (e.g. obligation to government transparency) and fewer rights (e.g. members of the WTO were allowed to take special trade defence measures against Chinese exports). These measures were put in place due to the member’s “concerns about the disruptive potential of China's WTO membership given the specific nature of its political, economic and legal system” (Grieger & Dietrich, 2016, p. 2).

Accession to the WTO resulted in the revision of over 2300 Chinese laws, regulations, and rules, as well as the reduction of import tariffs, which fell from 15,3% in 2001 to 9,9% in 2005. To the Chinese government, these concessions would be worth it, since being part of the WTO would give China access to a large and stable international market, where the country’s products would thrive. Which proved to be true, since even with all

the additional measures in place, China still managed to become the world's number one exporter in the world, in 2009, and surpass the United States, becoming the biggest trading nation in 2012 (Jain, 2016).

Only after being integrated into the WTO did China begin expanding its trading systems and showing interest in the creation of regional trade agreements in 2001 (Wang, 2011). These liberalisation efforts, backed by the Chinese government, as well as its WTO accession, marked an important point in China's global integration and led to economic growth and the establishment of China's place in the international economic environment as a major trade force.

Following the Japanese invasion and the Korean War, South Korea began rebuilding its economy and relied on large inflows of foreign assistance. By the 1960s, the government implemented an export-led trade strategy, often referred to as industrial policy. The state selected a few companies to invest in, aiming for the development of the industries they were part of. Subsidies, export incentives, and licensing were among the group of measures taken, which led to a rapid industrialisation and consequent economic growth in the country. By the end of the decade, South Korea had already become one of the fastest-growing economies in the world (Westphal, 1990).

As previously seen, under Park Chung Hee's presidency, the idea of economic liberalisation was introduced and conducted through the 1980s. The reforms and measures introduced, however, were still considered very cautious, with the government in control of many sectors, including credit allocations (Lee et al., 2002).

Full-scale financial liberalisation only began under Kim Young-Sam, when he was elected president, in 1993. Once in power, his government announced a five-year liberalisation plan, focusing on the financial environment of the country, with policies including the reduction of entry barriers for foreign financial activities and capital account liberalisation. Kim believed that openness and liberalisation were important for the development of the country. However, this transition to a full liberalised economy exposed some of the country's financial weakness, including *chaebols* (Chang et al., 1998).

Chaebols were among the companies that benefited from the government's industrial policy in the 1960s and had since grown to be powerful corporations. While Kim Young-Sam tried to implement reforms to control their power, under his anti-corruption plans,

most were unsuccessful, since the measures and punishments for infringement were not significant enough. Because of this, paired with the lack of effective oversight by government officials, *chaebols* continued to have freedom to rule their companies as they pleased, without many limitations, which led to bad financial decisions (e.g. Samsung, an electronics company, entered the car industry in 1993) (S. Kim, 2000).

The results of this unconstrained financial freedom and inadequate choices were equally as bad. By 1996, few were the *chaebols* that were making money, and most of them heavily relied on international funding. During the 1970s, the debt-equity ratio, a financial tool that compares a company's debt to creditors with its total equity (i.e. worth), was already over 300%, which in some cases almost doubled by the 1990s – meaning that *chaebols* owed more to creditors than what the companies' shares were worth. This led to the collapse of many major *chaebols* by the beginning of 1997. These structural problems, alongside the high dependency on external capital, resulted in the crash of the Korean economy during the 1997 financial crisis (Pirie, 2006).

During the crisis, there was no doubt that strong economic reforms were necessary for recovery; thus, when Kim Dae Jung came into power in 1998, aiming for liberalisation, there was no significant opposition. From the start, Kim was very critical of *chaebols*, whom he blamed for the crisis, and often mentioned their collusive relationship with the previous governments. As such, one of his financial liberalisation policies was to introduce and promote foreign investment in the country, which would undermine the power, and in cases monopoly, of *chaebols* in the Korean markets (Pirie, 2006).

Kim's goal was clear: he wanted to establish a parallel system in which both democracy and the economy would develop. It would not make sense to only focus on one of the two since, to Kim, they could not be separated; to modernise the economy, democracy had to develop, and vice-versa (S. Kim, 2000).

Under Kim Dae Jung's government, and following strict orders from the IMF, measures to reform *chaebols* began. To successfully implement his reform plan and steer away from the failures of the previous government, Kim Dae Jung's policies focused on four main areas: finance, corporations, labour, and the public sector. S. Kim (2000) explains the main policies created to reform *chaebols*:

- Changing the ownership structure to separate it from the management, which would allow for tighter control of corruption, since power would be distributed.

- Companies were obliged to provide full financial reports and conduct an audit by external independent institutions, which would make them more transparent and accountable.
- Operations from one company could not exceed three business lines (previously, *chaebols* would own multiple businesses in various sectors), which would result in more efficient companies.
- The debt-equity had to be reduced, making these companies more stable and less dependent on loans.
- Transparency and accountability were mandatory, preventing corruption.

During this period, the government implemented reforms across various industries, selling failing banks and companies to foreign investors, nationalising struggling financial institutions, restructuring *chaebols*, and overseeing debt restructuring plans and deals, worth billions of dollars (Pirie, 2006).

Once Kim's presidency was over, in 2003, South Korea was already well underway with financial recovery and economic liberalisation. His successor, Roh Moo Hyun, carried on his principles of how economic liberalisation was needed to achieve development. However, while Kim's liberalisation plans focused on the financial environment of the country, Roh began implementing policies for external trade liberalisation. As such, he invested in major trade agreements to further open the country and develop the economy (Koo, 2010).

Contrary to China, whose WTO accession only happened in 2001, South Korea has been a member of GATT (which, in 1995, became WTO) since 1967. This allowed the government to shift its focus to other possible trade agreements early on, besides the multilateral agreements that are part of the WTO. As a result, much like Japan, South Korea spent the latter part of the 1990s in negotiations to enact the country's first FTA, signed in 2003, with Chile. Since then, South Korea has signed 22 Free Trade Agreements worldwide, implementing a strategy to become an FTA hub (Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

President Roh was a firm believer that free trade and market openings were the key factors that led to economic growth, which led to a presidency focused on the liberalisation of South Korea and its economy, with the main step being the establishment of FTAs, since they would offer access to export markets, which the country could use to its benefit (Koo,

2010). The government's continuous liberalisation policies and reforms led to the development of South Korea, which became a modern and liberalised economy. It also integrated the country into the global market, assuring South Korea's image of a good partner through the strategic use of trade agreements.

It is, then, impossible to deny the role FTAs had in the liberalisation of trade in East Asia. Therefore, it is important to understand what they mean for the region, and how and why they were created.

Before the 1990s, the trade environment in East Asia was very different. There was no government intervention that aimed to promote trade in the region, so any economic integration that happened between the countries was solely due to market forces (i.e. supply and demand). However, after that, the governments took an interest in being more involved in trade, in line with the liberalisation objectives set by many. As such, the countries began betting more on trade arrangements, through international initiatives, such as Free Trade Agreements, and regional organisations (Shen, 2018).

While previously most countries focused mainly on their export-led and foreign investment attraction strategies, the 1997 Asian financial crisis brought the need for strong regional cooperation. At the time, the regional institutions, like ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), were already in place – Japan and South Korea were founding members of the latter, with China joining two years after the foundation. However, the organisation's laid-back approach to liberalisation, including individual and voluntary initiatives, led to many considering that APEC would not be able to meet its set goals for the region (Manger, 2014).

As such, East Asia's biggest exporters, China, Japan and South Korea, began pursuing trade agreements, with hopes of reciprocal trade liberalisation between countries. Previously, ASEAN members had already begun seeking regional trade agreements, but only after the 2000s did the phenomenon begin on a full scale. In 2002, the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between China and ASEAN marked the start of a wave of FTAs in the region (Shen, 2018).

Manger (2014) reflects on the main reasons for the surge of interest in regional trade agreements, concluding that the most important one was so that East Asian countries would have a backup plan, should WTO negotiations fail. If that were to happen, the countries would lose their access to the big and stable markets used for exports. Manger

adds that the added security of regional markets would also ensure that the countries would gain credibility of liberalisation and therefore keep and attract more foreign investment. The huge growth of FTAs established is also due to the continuous pursuit of “hub” status by some of the countries. Being an FTA hub meant that a country would play a central and vital role in the region, due to its many connections throughout the area.

While the regionalism established in East Asia was the result of group efforts, it is important to recognise the role China played as a major economy and influencer in the area. Switching from a casual approach, in 2012, China adopted a more aggressive strategy for its future FTAs, aiming for both regional and global agreements. As such, the state council, China's highest executive body, published a comprehensive document on China's FTA construction plans, including both short and long-term goals, as well as the conditions of who and when China wanted FTAs to be celebrated (Shen, 2018).

Since then, the number of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements in East Asia has registered exponential growth. More recently, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, signed in 2020 by 15 countries, including China, Japan, and South Korea, marked an important step in the regionalism of the Asia-Pacific region. Aiming for trade and economic growth, the RCEP focuses on the reduction of import barriers and the simplification of processes like rules of origin (Salamatov et al., 2022).

These group liberalisation efforts and regional trade agreements made East Asia a key player in the global economy. All the different signed FTAs, including the RCEP, showcase the region's commitment to liberalisation, integration, and development. While there are still many challenges to end protectionism for these countries, they have managed to find a turning point, which has benefited them.

CHAPTER III – KEY INDUSTRIES IN EAST ASIAN CULTURAL EXPORTS

3 Key Industries

As seen in the previous chapter, East Asian economies have developed since the end of the 20th century, having opened and liberalised. In the region, trade agreements became an important tool to guarantee access to export markets. However, most FTAs have not made any strong commitments regarding the trade of services and investments, besides those already established with the WTO. As a result, by the early 2000s many foreign companies still faced barriers when trying to enter the East Asian regional markets (Shen, 2018).

This is the case of cultural industries in the region. As previously explained, cultural industries are responsible for the production of goods and services aiming for economic development, including films, music, television, video games, and others. Although they can be seen as a way to preserve culture, that is usually not the main concern at production.

Cultural industries in East Asia have been growing since the 1990s, when they underwent a revolutionary transformation due to the countries' transition from protectionist to liberalised states. In the past, cultural products (such as TV) were used by the government as a tool for national-building and to avoid the penetration of foreign culture, deemed as harmful. Censorship measures included the Chinese propaganda of "spiritual pollution", which detailed the risks of foreign ideas, aiming to advocate against it (Carrico, 2017), as well as the Korean ban on Japanese products, as a response to colonialisation, which only ended in 1998 (Jin & Otmazgin, 2014).

The governments' positions on cultural industries changed once they recognised the success registered by the private sector in the exports of cultural products. They recognised its value, both socially (as a form of soft power, distributing their culture and ideals worldwide) and economically. In Japan, exports of merchandising and media related royalties tripled in revenue from 1993 to 2003. South Korea represented the 8th largest cultural industry in the world by market value, in 2010. China, although in a slower progress, also saw its TV production grow, a sector which stopped depending on government subsidies since the 1990s (Jin & Otmazgin, 2014).

Since then, these countries have been investing in the creation and development of their own cultural industries, entering the North American and European markets, even when

the initial focus was the East Asian region. Regulation on foreign ownership has also changed, with the governments being more open to foreign investment (Otmazgin, 2014).

Through the present chapter a more in-dept analysis of each country's contributions will take place, aiming to understand how these cultural products helped shape the image of the countries.

3.1 Japan: The Global Influence of Anime, Manga, and Video Games

Among East Asian countries, Japan stands out as a pioneer and one of the most successful cases of cultural exportation. Combining authenticity and government strategies, Japanese cultural exports were able to successfully enter both regional and global markets, much earlier than any other East Asian nation.

Japan's cultural exports represent a wide variety of products, including *anime* (animation), *manga* (comic books), video games, music, as well as a developed industry focusing solely on merchandising. Many of these are recognised and consumed not only in Asia, but also in the United States and around Europe, where they have achieved great success since the 1990s.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, these cultural products have come to represent more than just entertainment, they have become a government instrument of soft power, influencing people's perceptions of the country. Japan's approach to cultural industries entails a combination of protectionism and a global strategy, since the government still imposes barriers on domestic industries, whilst actively promoting the exports of their cultural products.

Although some of these cultural products can be traced back to the 19th century, the conditions in which the country operated at the time made it difficult to recognise its value. When Japan lost the second World War and was, consequently, temporarily occupied by the United States, all content was supervised by authorities, limiting what could be portrayed in *anime*, an entertainment form still developing at the time. Only after the occupation ended was growth registered in the industry, following technological developments of the 1950s and onwards (Otmazgin, 2014).

The decade of 1950, particularly, established the beginning of modern *anime*. By the middle of the decade Japan saw its first full-colour animated feature film, produced by Toei Animation, the first major animation studio in the country. Toei Animation was

established in 1956, aiming to become the Disney of the Eastern world. Some of its most famous directors would later, in 1985, create Studio Ghibli, another influential animation studio, known worldwide for its creations (Akbaş, 2018).

According to the Nippon Communications Foundation (2023), Studio Ghibli's creations have topped the Japanese Box office since their creation, with "Princess Mononoke" (1997) generating more than 20 billion Yen (137 million USD), "Spirited Away" (2001) having a revenue of almost 32 billion Yen (215 million USD) and "Howl's Moving Castle" (2004) registering almost 20 billion Yen (133 million USD) in sales, representing the studio's biggest movies.

The success of these projects, as well as older ones, are partly due to their international distribution. While in the beginning *anime* was introduced in the United States by small fan groups, pirating and some broadcasting channels, it quickly caught the attention of bigger distribution firms, who began investing in it. Otmazgin (2014) names a few companies that invested in the distribution and promotion of *anime* during its boom in the 1990s. It includes American corporations such as 4Kids Entertainment, which began distributing *Pokémon* through the United States in 1998, and Funimation, which signed a deal with Toei Animation (Studio Ghibli's main distributor at the time) in 2009, beginning distributing various titles through its website.

Disney had also signed a deal with *Tokuma Shoten* (Studio Ghibli's parent company at the time) in 1996, through Buena Vista Home Entertainment, allowing for the distribution of majority of the studio's movies on video and DVD, including what would become one of the studio's most popular projects, *Princess Mononoke* (Ruh, 2010). In 2017 Disney sold its distribution rights and three years later Netflix announced Studio Ghibli's movies would be available in its streaming platform (Gilbey, 2020). Having *anime* available in major streaming services, such as Crunchyroll (former Funimation), Disney and Netflix has made it easier to access this form of entertainment, for both fans and non-fans, helping to spread Japanese culture worldwide.

Besides the private sector, public institutions have also contributed to the success of Japanese culture dissemination. The Japan Foundation, created in 1972, was one of the first cultural institutions in the country, and is still considered one of the most important. Aiming to develop relations with foreign nations through cultural exchange, it was one of the country's first steps to propagate its culture. By 1991, the government had also

helped established the Japan Media Communication Centre (JAMCO) – a non-profit and non-governmental organisation which curates and maintains a selection of various video programs to be distributed to developing countries’ television broadcasters, free of charge, helping Japanese TV and pop culture gain recognition globally (Akbaş, 2018).

While the success of cultural industries began independently, it is also important to understand the government’s role in its promotion. As previously mentioned, the 1990s marked a turning point for Japan’s cultural industries, namely *anime*, *manga*, and videogames, which had managed to penetrate global markets. At the time, the country was going through an economic recession, registering slow growth in the majority of its industries, except for “teen-centric” industries, including telecommunications and entertainment, which rapidly became the fastest growing industries, and the most successful in exportation (Daliot-Bul, 2009).

Recognising the loss of Japan’s international industrial competitiveness, the government introduced a new policy, in 2002, focusing on intangible intellectual property, especially creative and innovative products, such as *anime*, *manga* and video games. The “Intellectual Property Basic Act” was created to help Japan build a stronger and more competitive industry, focusing on creating new ideas and innovate, while also protecting it (Intellectual Property Basic Act, 2002).

Aiming to promote growth in the creative industries, Japan established several agencies to help achieve it, including the Head Office for Intellectual Property Strategy (2002), which aimed to create and implement a national strategy for intellectual property; the Committee for a Tourism Nation (2003), created to encourage tourism in Japan; the J-Brand Initiative (2003), which sought to strengthen Japan's national brand worldwide; and others. By 2010, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) launched the Cool Japan Promotion Office and the Council for the Promotion of Cool Japan, in 2013, allocating a budget of 50 billion Yen (almost 340 million USD) to promote Japanese culture and products globally (Iwabuchi, 2015). The Cool Japan Fund, a public-private sector partnership was also set up to offer financial support for the international promotion of Japanese content and products (Holroyd, 2019).

The term “Cool Japan”, typically used in government’s initiatives was coined by American journalist, Douglas McGray, in 2002, in their article titled “Japan’s Gross National Cool” in which McGray argued that, although Japan was facing a recession, it

was also becoming a cultural superpower. McGray (2002) also explained that through its role in global communication, Japan was already applying soft power, as its culture was already well-known around the world.

While the “Cool Japan” initiatives have been promoted as a form of cultural diplomacy, scholars have pointed out that they align more with nation branding than diplomacy. Fan (2010) describes nation branding as the process of creating and easily altering a country’s images to the outside world, implying a constant monitoring of the country's reputation, especially among its targeted audiences.

Iwabuchi (2015) argues that although Japan’s cultural diplomacy initiatives claim to focus and prioritize international cultural exchange, they often work more as branding strategies than as sincere efforts to reach a mutual understanding and cultural interchange. Iwabuchi points out that Japan’s unwillingness to recognise and take responsibility for its historical violent past with China and South Korea serves as a clear example of failed diplomacy. This contradiction shows that Japan’s soft power efforts are more focused on the nation’s reputation than in a genuine commitment to cultural exchange, which would require the country to acknowledge its past and reconcile with the other nations.

However, the global rise of *anime*, *manga*, and video games, even without government support, shows the true power of these industries, who grew organically, catching people’s interest even before the government began promoting them. While government initiatives have helped these industries take on new markets and reach new audiences, it is also important to recognise their value outside of that, since, at the beginning, they were loved by their creativity and not marketing.

3.1.1 Anime and manga

In 2001, after the creative *boom* of the 1990s, Japanese digital content was already valued at 11 trillion Yen (74 billion USD). By 2015, METI estimated that its media and content industry was valued at around 210 billion USD, becoming the second largest in the world, only behind the United States (Holroyd, 2019).

Prior to that, however, there were already registers of *anime* fans pushing for the growth of the genre. Mckevitt (2010) reveals a time when, in 1983, around two thousand people who were attending the final night of the World of Science Fiction Convention stayed until early morning to watch a Japanese movie, at the time something not commercially

available in the United States. These people, fans of the *anime* genre, stayed even when told that the organising party got sent the wrong movie, and that no subtitles would be provided.

Throughout the initial stages, *anime* fans proved to be the main responsible party for the growing popularity of the genre, as they were the ones pushing for more movies and series to be available in the US, even creating the first American *anime* fan club in 1977, in Los Angeles (Mckevitt, 2010).

As such, the main challenge for the Japanese government when supporting *anime* in the early 2000s was never to build an industry from scratch, as it already created profit and attention before the government's intervention. The challenge was to increase content exports, for which they needed to concentrate on penetrating global markets. Since then, Japan's approach to exports changed, from an initial sophisticated technology image strategy, to focusing more on its animated movies and digital products. As a result, in 2003, *anime* consumption in the United States generated almost 5 billion USD in sales (Otmazgin, 2014).

Japanese cultural industries stretch across various products that have gained international success, including *manga*, *anime*, and video games. Although these are three different industries, they can also be tied together and the most successful creative products usually operate in, at least, two of these industries.

Japanese comic books, *manga*, are often where the success begins. Famous *manga* series such as "Dragon Ball", "One Piece", "Doraemon", "Naruto" and "Sailor Moon" have all been adapted into *anime* series and movies. Even so, audiences for Japanese entertainment products usually consume all forms of the same product (i.e. people who discover an *anime* are also interested in reading the *manga* it is based on).

One of the oldest characters to still be relevant today is "Doraemon". The *manga* began being published in 1969, through various children's magazines and by 1979 its *anime* version began being broadcast. The story follows a robotic cat, Doraemon, who travels back in time to help Nobita Nobi, a ten-year-old student. The episodes follow Nobita's daily life struggles and how Doraemon helps him navigate through them. With over 250 million copies sold, it remains one of the best-selling *manga* in history (Marshall, 2018).

The *anime* version has been released various times through different channels and is now available for streaming in HBO Max. In 2014, the movie version of the *manga* was released worldwide. “Stand by Me Doraemon” had a global box office of 186 million USD, the 46th movie with the highest grossing in 2014. The movie is now available in Netflix, recording 8.9 million views since the platform began its tracking, in June of 2023 (Marshall, 2018).

“One Piece” is another example of a lasting story with immense international success. The *manga*, which tells the story of a young boy, Monkey D. Luffy, who begins searching for a lost, legendary treasure called One Piece in hopes to become the King of the Pirates, was released in 1997 and has since broken records for sales. In 2015, it set the Guinness World Record for most copies published for the same comic book series by a single author and in 2022 the *manga* broke its own record by achieving 516 million printed copies, becoming the best-selling *manga* history. The *anime* version is produced by Toei Animation and was released in 1999 (McCullough, 2024).

Since its creation, 15 films have been released, the latest being “One Piece Film: Red”, released in 2022, which had the highest grossing box office among all films. In 2023, Netflix adapted the story into a live action series, which reached 100 million hours of watch time in its first streaming week, the most streamed TV series on the platform in the second semester of 2023. As of June of 2025, the series has 98.4 million views on Netflix (McCullough, 2024).

Besides the usual process of turning *manga* stories into *anime*, the Japanese entertainment industry is also well known for its standalone characters, like “Hello Kitty”. Created in 1976, Hello Kitty stands out as a character without a strong backstory to sell. Instead, having few personalities traits, the cat-like 8-year-old character, leaves space for audiences to create their own stories. The success behind the “Hello Kitty” franchise is merchandising. Mcveigh (2000) reported that, in 1999, the entertainment company who created the character, Sanrio, received a 3% commission on each “Hello Kity” product sold through agreed royalties with various companies.

By 2018, Forbes reported that the character had generated more than 50 billion USD since its creation, an average revenue of 8 billion dollars each year (Amos, 2019). Hosany et al. (2013) report that there are more than 50 thousand products related to the character,

with 500 being introduced each month. Merchandise includes clothing, school supplies, home appliances, motor scooters, and others. *Manga* and *anime* have also been produced.

Sanrio also benefits from numerous collaborations with brands across various industries. In 1999, the entertainment company collaborated with McDonald's Hong Kong to create the "Hello Kitty meal deal". Since 2005, there have been "Hello Kitty" planes, in collaboration with EVA Air. In 2009, the character was featured in American credit and debit cards, result of a collaboration between Sanrio and Bank of America. There are also two amusement parks dedicated to Sanrio's creations, including "Hello Kitty" (Hosany et al., 2013).

In 2018, the "Hello Kitty" bullet train (also known as Hello Kitty Shinkansen) was introduced in Japan. The ride is considered a must when visiting Japan and has been featured in millions of videos on TikTok (BBC, 2018).

"Hello Kitty" is one of the world's largest retail revenue franchises in the world, ranking second behind "Pokémon", a franchise which perfectly showcases the variety of Japanese cultural products. "Pokémon" was first introduced in 1996, as a videogame in Nintendo's Game Boy, but was soon transformed into *manga*, *anime*, and a merchandise character. The franchise was initially brought to the United States by 4Kids Entertainment, in a deal with Nintendo of America. This marked an important step in the history of Japanese entertainment, as 4Kids became one of the first non-Japanese companies to get licensing rights for TV and merchandising (Tobin, 2004).

As a game character, Pokémon is a species, different from the human king, and possesses different magical powers. The goal is to collect as many Pokémon as possible, to become a Pokémon master. In the *anime* version, the story follows Ash Ketchum on his journey to become a Pokémon master, showing his fights and the bonds he forms, especially with his first Pokémon, *Pikachu*. By 2000 "Pokémon" was already successful in the American and global markets, with the game generating 5 billion USD in its first year in the United States, almost as much as the whole gaming industry in the country, and the first movie grossing 25 million USD in its first two days, 85.7 million USD in lifetime gross in the United States and Canada (Carollo, 2024). As Tobin (2004) describes:

Pokémon is the most successful computer game ever made, the top globally selling trading-card game of all time, one of the most successful

children’s television programs ever broadcast, the top grossing movie ever released in Japan, and among the five top earners in the history of films worldwide. (p. 3)

Ever since, “Pokémon” has released mobile games, trading cards packs and many other merchandising items, while also launching the “Pokémon World Championship”. BBC reports that 13 thousand people attended the events in the European leg of the 2024 championship, in London (Oi & Ramsay, 2025). This success has catapulted the Japanese cultural industry.

The success of Japanese cultural products, in particular *manga* and *anime* have been responsible for the creation of a phenomenon called *otaku* tourism, where fans from all over the world travel to Japan to visit the locations where their favourite content was produced, increasing overall tourism in the country (Akbaş, 2018). This can also be tied to the government’s direct investment in *anime* promotion initiatives. In 2008, Japan’s Foreign Minister, appointed “Doraemon” as Japan’s first-ever official *anime* ambassador (figure 5), further tying the involvement of the government with the promotion of *anime* (Heng, 2017).



Figure 5: Doraemon as Japan's anime ambassador
Source: The Guardian

Heng (2017) also points out the 2016 Olympic games closing ceremony, which took place in Brazil. As the next country to receive the Olympics (in 2020), Japan participated in the ceremony with a promotional video of the country. From the beginning it is possible to see the integration of sporting and *anime* figures, including some of the country's most

well-known characters such as *Captain Tsubasa* and *Hello Kitty*. The video simulates a situation happening in Tokyo, where Japan's Prime Minister is trying to be in Rio de Janeiro for the closing ceremony, but realises it is impossible to make it on time. As such, the Prime Minister transforms into *Super Mario* and with the help of *Doraemon* he gets to Rio de Janeiro via an underground tunnel (figures 6 and 7), recreating the visuals of the Super Mario game.



Figure 6: Super Mario leaving Tokyo
Source: Perfectly Nintendo



Figure 7: Japan's Prime Minister arriving in Rio de Janeiro dressed as Super Mario, 2016
Source: The New York Times

The Japanese government has also been investing on growing the interest in *anime* and *manga* through cosplay (short for costume play). The term cosplay was coined in Japan in 1984, but the act has existed long before the term came to life. The term is used to describe the act of dressing up in costumes similar or identical to *anime*, *manga*, and video game's characters to portray them. While it has been popular in many countries, the act of cosplayed is usually tied to Japan (Guo, 2022).

The "World Cosplay Summit" was created 2 decades ago, and since 2006 it has been sponsored by MOFA. The annual convention promotes Japanese popular culture through various cosplay competition that attract thousands of participants. By 2016, the event had participants from 30 countries, and preliminary rounds were held due to the high interest in participating. Two cosplayers are chosen by each country and region to represent them (Ruan, 2018).

By 2016, Japanese content around the world was valued at 13.8 billion USD, representing 2.5% of the entire global content industry. Japan has also been considered the most creative country worldwide, producing 36% of the total creative products in the global market (Akbaş, 2018).

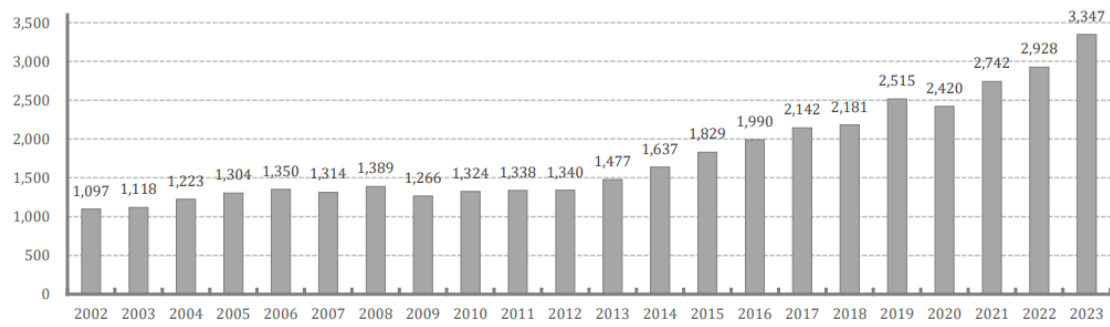


Figure 8: The Japanese Animation Market (Yen in billions)
 Source: The Association of Japanese animations (2024)

In 2023, the revenue of the *anime* industry reached its peak, at around 3 billion Yen (20 million USD), a 14,3% growth from 2022 (figure 8). The main contributor to this growth were international audiences, who made up 60,9% of the growth – this includes licensing, mobile apps and games, box offices, merchandise, and events. Domestic audiences, through streaming platforms, only represented 19,6% of the growth (Masuda et al., 2024).

This was the second time in history where the international market overtook the domestic market (the first one was in 2020), marking a good turning point in the consumption of *anime*. Since the government’s goal is the growth of *anime* exports, these numbers can be seen as beneficiary and as an indicator that the initiatives in place are working in Japan’s favour (Masuda et al., 2024).

The same can be seen within the *manga* industry, whose sales more than doubled from 2007 to 2022. The availability of content on both online and physical channels is one the main reasons for the constant growth of the industry. The ongoing growth interest in *anime* and the consequent growth of content in Western streaming platforms, like Netflix and Crunchyroll, have also sparked interest in *manga*. “Attack on Titan”, released in 2013, was one of the best-selling *manga* series of 2021 worldwide. Aoki (2024) reports that *manga* sales in the United States quadrupled from 2020 to 2023.

In 2022, the Japanese publishing industry was the third largest in the world, with a revenue of 9.3 million USD, through sales and licensing (WIPO, 2023). By 2024, the government recognised the value of these cultural industries and announced *manga*, *anime*, and video games as key industries – noting their important contribution for the economy and Japan’s foreign image (Masuda et al., 2024).

3.1.2 Video games

Alongside *anime* and *manga*, the international growth of Japanese video games represents another cultural export, representing once again the power of Japanese cultural products. While video games in Japan began gaining popularity during the 1970s, it was only in the two following decades that they were able to penetrate international markets. When doing so, the Japanese video game industry exponentially grew, revolutionising the game industry worldwide.

Nowadays, names like Nintendo and PlayStation are recognised worldwide when talking about games, showing the immense success that Japanese video games companies had on global markets. Franchises such as “Super Mario”, “The Legend of Zelda” and “Final Fantasy” quickly settled their place amongst the most recognised games ever. Portraying the same aesthetic as *manga* and *anime*, Japanese video games are known for their unique style and quality. According to Tobin (2004), a survey conducted in the United States in the early 1990s showed that American children recognised Nintendo’s Mario more than Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse.

Video game creation in Japan dates to the 1970s. However, it was not until the mid-1980s that advancements were recorded, with Nintendo entering the industry. Nintendo was created in 1889 and initially focused on the production of Japanese and Western card games. By 1978, the company began releasing arcade games and in 1980 ventured into mobile game hardware, releasing its first handheld console, named “Game & Watch”, which sold 40 million units worldwide (Koizumi, 2016).

In 1983, Nintendo released the Family Computer System (also known as Famicom or NES), scoring huge success in the domestic and international markets. This was responsible for the following growth of the console market in Japan, opening opportunities for future companies, like Sony and SEGA to enter the market. This coincided with the decline and collapse of the American video games market, leading Nintendo to surpass previous market leaders in the American market (O’Hagan, 2007).

This collapse was driven by an excess of low quality and identical games in the market which affected the consumer’s perception and trust. Combined with rising prices and the growth of the computer market, only companies who offered quality and low-price products, like Nintendo, survived the collapse (O’Hagan, 2007).

Within its first year, Famicom sold 1.2 million units worldwide, reaching 10.8 million units sold in August of 1987, and recording cumulative sales of over 61.8 million units worldwide, in 2003, when its production ended. The huge success led companies like SCE to enter the market, noticing Nintendo's competitive disadvantages (e.g. Nintendo worked with a small number of software development companies) (Koizumi, 2016).

SCE was created by Sony to enter the video game industry, and released its first game, PSX, at the end of 1994. One year after being released, the PSX had already sold 10 million units, reaching 70 million sold units by 1999, and scoring cumulative sales of 102.5 million units worldwide, by 2006 (Koizumi, 2016).

At the same time, SEGA was also trying to enter the video game market in Japan. By the early 1980s the company released two gaming models, which sold 160 thousand units in 1983. In 1989, SEGA began exporting to the United States, reaching 28 million units sold worldwide. However, future projects were not as successful when competing with bigger companies, such as Nintendo and Sony (Oóhagan, 2007).

By 2006, METI reported that Japanese game exports were eighty times over the number of overseas game imports, showing that Japanese video games were successful both internationally, and domestically. At the time, hardware and software exports had already surpassed 3 billion USD and Japan was on its way to become one of the biggest video games industries in the world (Oóhagan, 2007).

By 2014, the two main Japanese companies dominated the American video games market. Figure 9 shows that, together, Sony and Nintendo represented 64% of the total sales in the American market, competing with Microsoft, which represented 36% of sales. At the time, SCE's PlayStation was the console with most sales, selling 155 million units, followed by Nintendo's DS Series (154 million units) and Nintendo's Game Boy (118 million units) (Koizumi, 2016).

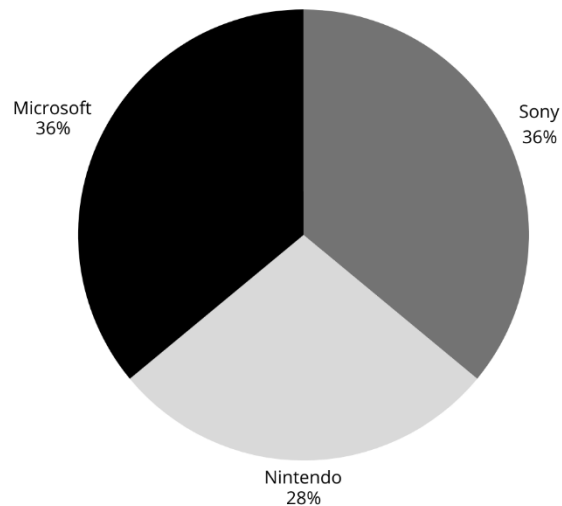


Figure 9: Market share by unit sales in the American games market, 2014
 Source: Adapted from (Koizumi, 2016)

Koizumi (2016) ranks the best-selling video game franchises until 2007, noting that twelve out of the first twenty titles are Japanese. Nintendo’s “Super Mario” ranks number one, with over 193 million units sold, followed by Nintendo’s “Pokémon” (155 million) and Square Enix’s “Final Fantasy” (68 million).

An online survey conducted by Statista in April of 2023, asked participants (aged 18 to 64 years old) whether they recognised certain video games titles. Among all titles, “Super Mario” ranked as the number one most recognised, with 82% of participants saying they knew the game. Three more Japanese video games are on the top ten, with 76% of participants recognising “Pokémon”, 68% recognising “Mario Kart” and 64% recognising “The Legend of Zelda” (Statista, 2023).

Figure 10 shows the market share for the global video games market in 2025, highlighting Sony’s PlayStation has the market leader, responsible for 45% of global unit sales, followed by Nintendo (27%) and Microsoft’s Xbox (23%). This represents a constant growth of Japanese video games in the market, representing 72% of unit sales, following the same trends as the American market (figure 9).

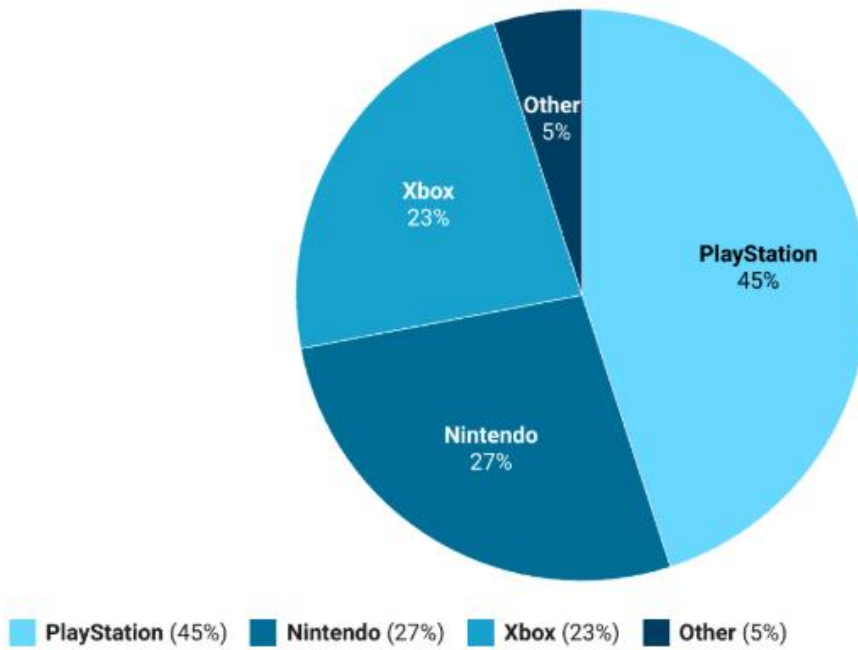


Figure 10: Market share by unit sales in the Global games market, 2025
Source: Market.us

According to Forbe’s “Global 2000 list”, which ranks the world’s largest companies, combining sales, profits, assets, and market value, in 2022, 14 Japanese companies were within the world’s 200 largest companies. Amongst them was Sony, ranking number 56, with 90 billion USD in sales. In 2025, the company dropped one place, and is now ranked 57th (Contreras & Murphy, 2022).

This shows the weight of Japanese video games in the world which, alongside with *manga* and *anime* have proved to be important cultural and financial assets. These industries exemplify the global power of cultural exports and pose as a role model for many other countries to follow. Recovering from an historical protectionist past, Japan has been able to become a global power, alongside countries who were already powerful when Japan began investing in its cultural industries.

The *manga*, *anime* and video games industries have become a great case study for other economies looking to invest more in their cultural products. As a pioneer in the East Asian region, Japan serves as inspiration for South Korea and China, who have also began investing in its cultural industries. Moreover, while through different paths, similarities can be found in the success of Japan, South Korea, and China.

3.2 South Korea: The Korean Wave (*Hallyu*)

Although South Korea's cultural breakthrough did not come much later than Japan and China's, the growth was slower and happened in different stages. This is largely due to the country's position within the East Asian region. Having been under the control of both the Japanese and the Chinese in the past had set South Korea back in terms of development and status.

Thus, even when the country began investing in the developments of cultural and entertainment industries, it was difficult to stand as itself outside of the continent. As a result, for many years, Korean entertainment was mainly consumed in Japan, China, and other smaller Asian countries.

Ryoo (2009) describes South Korea as an "in between country", as it is not considered a traditionally superpower (much due to its subordinated past) but should also not be considered a small country, as it has been making its way in the global seen, together with other, more powerful, Asian countries, such as Japan and China.

As previously seen, South Korea's liberalisation process began under Kim Dae Jung's presidency. Kim's open mindedness led the country to economic growth and massive development, changing from a destroyed country, following colonisation and the Korean war, to being one of the most important countries in East Asia, and the world.

In 1998, Kim announced that cultural industries promotion was key to the country's development and future and launched the "Hallyu Industry Support Development Plan", aiming to increase South Korea's cultural industry value, through the creation of a cultural promotion budget. In 1999, the government allocated 148.5 million USD to improve cultural content and promote creativity (Jin & Otmazgin, 2014; see also Jeong et al., 2024).

Previously, the government had also created the Cultural Industry Bureau (department) within the Ministry of Culture and Sports, in 1994. The Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology submitted a report stating that American movie "Jurassic Park" was worth as much as the sales of 1.5 million Hyundai cars – until then one of South Korea's biggest export products – prompting the government to begin recognising the value of cultural industries (Shim, 2006).

Since then, the agency has been renamed Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and is composed of one minister, two vice ministers and over 60 divisions, working in different sectors of the economy. Figure 11 shows the three main bureaus working on cultural industries and exports. Besides them, the agency also has the Digital Media Communication Bureau, the Culture Policy Bureau, the Arts Policy Bureau, the Copyright Bureau, and Media Policy Bureau who might also work on cultural exports (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, n.d.).



Figure 11: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
 Source: Adapted from Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism's Organisational Chart

Besides the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, there are other Korean cultural services responsible for the promotion of the country's culture regionally and globally, including the Korean Embassies around the world, the Korean Culture and Information Services (KOCIS), the Korean Creative Contents Agency (KOCCA) – which provides financial aid to cultural industries, such as music and film – and 37 Korean Cultural Centres (KCC), created by KOCIS, which help promote Korean culture through language classes, movie screenings, performances and events (Um et al., 2014).

From the 1990s onwards, through the different agencies mentioned and government projects, South Korea has invested in its cultural industries, aiming to increase its exports and revenue, giving place to a phenomenon called *hallyu*. Also known as the Korean wave, it refers to the growing popularity and interest in Korean culture and is divided in

two phases: the first and second wave. The first wave, which began in the 1990s and scattered throughout the 2000s, was characterised by small technological advancements and focused on the exports of Korean drama series (Gutierrez-Jauregi et al., 2025).

The late 1990s represented a time in which Korean drama series (hereafter K-dramas) began being transmitted in East and Southeast Asian countries. The first K-drama to gain foreign recognition was “What is Love?”, released in 1991, and broadcast by China’s national broadcasting station (CCTV) in 1997. The drama series focuses on two contrasting families (one conservative, and one modern) which are legally connected by the marriage of Dae Bal, the eldest son of the Lee family, and Ji Eun, the eldest sister of the Park family. The show focused on the importance of balancing modern and traditional ideals and achieved high viewership in China, ranking second in the country’s all time imported video content, at the time (Jin & Yoon, 2014; see also Khatun, 2024).

“Winter Sonata”, released in 2002, brought the *hallyu* phenomenon to Japan. The drama series, follows Joon Sang, an introverted transfer student, and Yoo Jin, who quickly become friends and begin dating soon after. However, Joon Sang gets into a car accident and can no longer remember the past, prompting him to move to the United States with his mother, leaving behind a life in South Korea, which he does not remember. The show timelapses to 10 years forward, when Joon Sang (now Min Hyung) travels back to Korea, and meets Yoo Jin, without knowing who she is. The love story achieved enormous success upon its 2003 release in Japan, being re-aired at the end of the year, and two more times in 2004, culminating in 38% of the population having watched it (Jin & Yoon, 2014; see also Han & Lee, 2008).

Besides K-dramas, the late 1990s and early 2000s, also marked the beginning of Korean pop music’s (hereafter K-pop) international success. This was largely due to the liberalisation of the country, which gave artists more creative freedom. Until 1987, the musical industry, and particularly pop music, was heavily censored in the country. From melodies being considered “too foreign” to lyrics being “too political”, the musical scene was tightly controlled. With the release of censorship, pop music was re-introduced in the country, and entertainment companies began producing artists (Oh & Lee, 2014).

In 2001, BoA – a K-pop artist under SM Entertainment – released the Japanese version of her song “ID; Peace B”, released in Korea the previous year. The following year she released her first Japanese album titled “Listen to My Heart” and received huge support

from the Japanese audience. Noticing the profit different between the Korean and the Japanese market, SM Entertainment's CEO, Lee Soo Man, began investing in language and culture learning, aiming for his artists to gain international recognition (Santos & Marques, 2022).

Other artists, such as Big Bang and TVXQ also received regional acclaim throughout Asia. At the time, the Korean music market was already the second largest in Asia, and the *hallyu* was contributing more than 1.8 billion USD to the Korean Gross Domestic Product (GDP), all whilst still not achieving its goal to penetrate the Western markets (Santos & Marques, 2022).

The first K-pop act to get significant recognition in the United States were Wonder Girls, who entered the market with the English version of their hit song "Nobody" in 2009. It was the first K-pop song to chart on the Billboard Hot 100, marking the breakthrough of K-pop into the American market. The song was followed by massive hit "Gangnam Style" by PSY (2012), which peaked at number 2 and spent 31 weeks on the chart, and became the first music video on YouTube to reach 1 billion views (Billboard, n.d.).

As previously mentioned, at the beginning, K-pop was promoted domestically and in other Asian countries, mainly in Japan and China. By the 2010s, however, K-pop reached Western markets. In 2011, one of the first K-pop concerts outside of Asia took place in Paris and showed the increasing demand of the genre in the region. Six thousand tickets were sold in 15 minutes, and a second date had to be added. In the same year, the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) sponsored a free K-pop concert, initially planned to be held in New York, but later moved to a bigger venue in New Jersey, due to the high number of expected attendees (Jin & Yoon, 2014).

The 2010s marked the beginning of the second *hallyu* wave. While the first wave focused on increasing the exports of K-dramas, with other Asian countries as the target audience, the second wave focused on global markets, and gave more emphasis to K-pop, while still focusing on K-dramas. The second wave's success is largely tied to technological advances, and the usage of social media and other promotional platforms. At the beginning, online music platforms, such as YouTube, helped promote K-pop to a global audience. Afterwards, social media outlets, such as Twitter (X), Instagram, and even K-pop focused platforms, such as V Live (for livestreams) and Bubble (for messages), took

K-pop to a different dimension, using the different platforms to create a more in-dept connection with fans (Gutierrez-Jauregi et al., 2025).

It is also important to recognise the government's role in the usage of the Internet. Noticing that its cultural contents were benefiting from it, the South Korean government began investing more in technology, namely the availability of high-speed internet throughout the country. This made South Korea one of the top countries with the fastest internet speed and smartphone usage, making it “a leader in the use of digital technologies in diplomatic practice” (Jin, 2024, p. 164).

With this, K-pop has been slowly growing into a powerhouse, and the late 2010s saw a massive-scale penetration in the Western music markets, especially with BTS, a Korean group who debuted in 2013, who managed to breakthrough the American market. Table 1 shows the biggest peaks of K-pop artists in the Billboard Hot 100 chart, by date of release, and highlights the monopoly BTS had in the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Date	Artist	Song	Peak	Weeks on the chart
31/10/2009	Wonder Girls	Nobody	76	1
22/09/2012	PSY	Gangnam Style	2	31
05/09/2020	BTS	Dynamite	1	32
05/12/2020	BTS	Life Goes On	1	3
05/06/2021	BTS	Butter	1	20
24/07/2021	BTS	Permission to Dance	1	7
09/10/2021	BTS (Coldplay)	My Universe	1	17

*Table 1: K-pop peaks at the Billboard Hot 100 chart
Source: Adapted from Billboard*

K-pop has been steadily growing for the past 20 years, but its penetration in the Western markets happened recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which scholars, such as Gutierrez-Jauregi et al. (2025) see as a contributor. While BTS had already entered the American market through the Billboard charts in 2017 with their song “DNA”, it only

peaked at number 67. The group did slowly rise on the charts, but it was not until COVID-19 that they managed to hit the top.

Due to the major restrictions faced at the time, the entertainment industry was forced to adapt to the new reality, since no in person events could be held. This is when K-pop showed its online strength. Through the constant release of online content on various social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, TikTok and V Live), performances and concerts, BTS were able to stay relevant during a time when everyone's attention was online. A favourable position when compared to the Western entertainment industries, which heavily relied on face-to-face interactions. Through COVID, the benefiteres were the ones who adapted the easiest and quickest (Gutierrez-Jauregi et al., 2025).

It is important to note the role TikTok played on the popularisation of K-pop during the pandemic. While TikTok has been around since 2016, it was during COVID that the app started being used on a mass-scale. With the ability to promote songs and create "viral" moments, K-pop companies began utilising the app to promote their artists. The phenomenon started when soloist Zico created his account in January of 2020 and invited fans around the world to participate in his "#AnySongChallenge", where five participants would be chosen to receive a signed copy of his album. The premise of the challenge was that people used his song to create and post a video with. To promote the challenge Zico posted a dance TikTok video with Hwasa (soloist and member of K-pop group Mamamoo), among other celebrities (Abidin & Lee, 2023).

This created a trend of dance challenges that became the norm in K-pop. Ever since then, whenever a group releases a new song (also known as making a comeback), the promotional strategy involves using a catchy part of the song to use as a challenge on the social media platform and members of the group doing collaborative TikToks with members of other K-pop groups to promote the new release (Abidin & Lee, 2023).

Although K-pop is a mix of different genres from around the globe, the industry still deeply relies on the Korean culture. From the training system to the promotional strategies and what is expected of an idol (name used to refer to a K-pop artist), it all stems from the culture of the country. As such, it is necessary that fans understand the culture to fully understand and enjoy K-pop, which prompts many to study the Korean language and explore the culture, leading to interests in other cultural industry's sectors, such as film, food and even tourism (Santos & Marques, 2022).

The K-drama industry has benefited from the enormous growth of K-pop, with investments from both the government and foreign companies, like Netflix, and is now a direct competitor to Hollywood. The film industry reached its peak in sales in 2022, generating 7.4 trillion KRW (5 billion USD). This comes after the success of movies like “Parasite” and drama series, such as “Squid Game” and “All of Us Are Dead” (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024). Following the revenue of the K-dramas featured in the platform, Netflix announced its plans to invest 2.5 billion USD in the production of Korean dramas and movies, between 2023 and 2027 (Fu & Wang, 2025).

“Parasite” is a South Korean produced movie that portrays two families from different financial backgrounds, the Kim family (who are poor), and the Park family (who are rich). After one of the Kim sons manages to secure a job at the Park household, the family schemes to arrange jobs for all of them, within the Park’s home. While the Park family is away the Kim family cosplays living in the house, and problems begin to arise. With a shocking ending, “Parasite” deals with topics of social and financial inequality and identity struggles and received critical acclaim worldwide. The movie received more than 300 hundred awards from 2019 to 2021 and was nominated for 6 Oscars, winning four of them, making it the first South Korean movie to win an Oscar, as well as the first non-English movie to receive the “Best Motion Picture of the Year” award (Santos & Marques, 2022; see also IMDb, 2022).

“Squid Game” is a Netflix original series, produced in South Korea, which follows 456 players who entered a secret contest to win 45.6 billion KRW (around 33 million USD). The premise of the contest revolves around a series of children’s games turned deadly – if a player loses, they die. Dealing with topics such as financial struggles and desperation, “Squid Game” has reached global success. Becoming the most watched series on Netflix, season one scored more than 265 million views (calculated dividing total hours viewed by the total runtime). Similarly to “Parasite”, “Squid Game” also made history as the first ever non-English series to win an Emmy Award. The show also created enough interest that two additional seasons were produced, with season 3 reaching 72 million views in the first four days of streaming (Otterson, 2025; see also Netflix, 2025).

Social media has played a significant role in the growing popularity of Korean series, such as “Squid Game”. Siregar et al. (2021) have analysed the popularity of the K-drama series on TikTok, one of the most used social media platforms. Divided by different elements portrayed throughout the first season, the study found that 11 billion hashtags

(#squidgame) have been used in the platform, with people recreating and parodying the K-drama's "red light, green light" game – where a doll commands people to run and randomly stop, and if someone is caught moving, they are killed. Besides that, they have also noticed a growing interest in the series' wardrobe, with many taking inspiration for their Halloween costume.

Figure 12 shows the browser activity of searches for "Squid Game costume" in Google, from December of 2020, until August of 2025. The biggest peak was registered in October of 2021, one month after the first season was released. Each year, in October, the Google searches register the yearly peak.



Figure 12: Google searches for "Squid Game costume" from December of 2020 to August of 2025
Source: Google Trends

Following the success of "Squid Game" in 2021, Netflix has embarked on the production of many other K-dramas, of which "All of Us Are Dead" registered the highest global success. The ongoing drama series is set in the city of Hyosan, where a failed science experiment leads to the spread a deadly virus in a high school, resulting in a zombie attack, leaving a group of students to fight for themselves while trying to leave the invaded school. Upon release, the K-drama became a global success, with more than 360 million hours watched in its first 28 days of streaming. The series reached the top ten in more than 90 countries, becoming Netflix's 5th most watched series at the time. Currently it is the 12th most watched series in the streaming platform, with a second season in production (Santos & Marques, 2022).

Overall, the success of Korean cultural industries is due to three main reasons: government investment, social media rise, and people's growing interest in the Korean culture. Due to the government's early realisation of the value of cultural industries and constant investment, the Korean culture is now widely popular around the world. While in 2013, at the beginning of K-pop's success the Ministry of culture, sports and tourism allocated a budget of 319 billion KRW (230 million USD) for *hallyu* assistance (Oh &

Lee, 2014), by 2024 the budget was 8.7 trillion KRW (6 billion USD) (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2023).

Table 2 shows the export value of *hallyu*-related products, including music, films, broadcasting, video games, and others. With a constant growth, South Korea’s trade balance of personal, cultural, and recreational services registered a surplus of 86 million USD, for the first time, in 2012, and has been growing since (UNCTAD, 2017). K-pop alone has increased its exports from 64 million USD in 2018, to 2 billion USD in 2022 (Park, 2023).

Year	Exports (billion USD)
2006	1,37
2011	4,30
2014	5,00
2019	12,30
2023	14,16

Table 2: *Hallyu* related exports 2006-2023
 Source: Adapted from (Santos & Marques, 2022)

Throughout the multiple export promotion initiatives, South Korea became the 8th largest exporter of creative goods, in 2022. Whilst promoting cultural exports, the Korean government also works closely with tourism, implementing programs to boost the number of visitors. From 2010 to 2012, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism implemented a “Visit Korea” campaign, which attracted 10 million international visitors. To successfully run this campaign, the Ministry appointed K-pop girl group Girl’s Generation, actor Bae Yong Joon (from Winter Sonata), figure skater Kim Yuna and animation character *Pororo* as ambassadors (Visit Korea Committee, 2025).

Since then, the “Visit Korea” Committee has launched two more campaigns, one from 2016 to 2018 and most recently from 2023 to 2024, with K-pop idol Cha Eun Woo as ambassador. The committee is also responsible for organising other tourism-boosting events, such as the Korean Beauty Festival, the Korea Grand Sale, the Korea Welcome Week, and the Local Treasures of Korea initiative (Visit Korea Committee, 2025).

Contrary to Japan, where the success of cultural industries, like *anime* and *manga*, developed organically, without direct government intervention, South Korea's cultural success has been heavily supported by the government, through financial support and benefiting initiatives. Arguably, Korean cultural industries might never attract as much attention without the government's intervention, as the country was focused on financial and manufacturing development, after going through a colonising past. Without it, South Korea would have not "been one of the leaders in cultural content creation and directed government support for specific parts of the creative industries" (UNCTAD, 2024, p. 6).

3.3 China: Soft Power Through Film and Television

Similarly to South Korea and Japan, Chinese broadcasting began through radio and soon after introduced television, in 1958, under the name Beijing Television, which would later change to China Central Television. At the time, Chinese drama series (hereafter C-dramas) were released domestically.

Overseas expansion began during the 1980s and can be divided into four stages: the budding era (1980-1991), the growth era (1992-1999), the challenge period (2000-2012) and from 2013 onwards. The budding era represents the beginning of Chinese TV series exports to other Asian countries as means of cultural diplomacy (i.e. to promote the Chinese culture and values). The growth era marked China's sincere efforts to sell C-dramas abroad. The challenge era happened at a time when Korean drama series were beginning to gain international recognition, making it difficult for C-dramas to compete internationally. Finally, from 2013 until present day, China has been focusing more resources into growing its cultural industries, making it available on global platforms (Zhang, 2022).

Nowadays, C-dramas are available for streaming in various global platforms, such as YouTube and Netflix, although the government has tried to globalise its national streaming platforms, such as iQIYI and Tencent Video. Unlike South Korea, however, every move is closely controlled by the government, making internationalisation more difficult (Fu & Wang, 2025).

While China began exporting its cultural products in 1980, it was not until the late 1990s that the government recognised the true value it could bring to the Chinese economy. As such, in 2001, China began implementing a "going out" strategy for radio, film and TV through the "Going Global Project", aiming to spread its influence worldwide,

economically, culturally, and ideologically. To do so, the government created financial benefits, such as tax cuts and funding policies to promote the “selection, dubbing and international distribution of Chinese TV series and other contents” (Zhang, 2022, p. 71).

At the beginning, production costs were high, and international profits were low, prompting producing companies to not be interested in expanding overseas, instead focusing on the domestic market. In 2004, exports revenues were less than 6.5 million USD, with 6680 hours of Chinese programs exported and 72644 hours of imported content (Zhang, 2007).

Compared to South Korea, who began investing on cultural production at around the same time, China retained favourable conditions to gain bigger success, since they had more financial resources and more advanced technological devices. However, constant state intervention and control have prevented C-dramas to reach the same level of international recognition as K-dramas and internationalise in a much slower pace (Fu & Wang, 2025).

Cultural exports to a global market began in 2013, when Chinese streaming platforms iQIYI and Tencent video began using YouTube as their main international distributor. At the time, Netflix already dominated the market for online streaming. Alongside, Viki co-existed as the main platform offering Asian films and TV programs. Understanding they would not be able to compete with already established powerhouses, such as Netflix and Viki, the Chinese streaming platforms began focusing on countries with big Chinese diaspora communities, instead of global markets (Sarkar & Yang, 2024).

The growth of cultural industries represents an important step for government’s influence. In 2016, Online Publishing Services Management rules stated that online content should promote the “core socialist values” of Chinese society. Using this argument, regulators began controlling not only the type of content that was produced, but also who was involved in it, including actors and directors. The obligation to represent the “core socialist values” was reinforced in the 2017 Film Promotional Law, where the government also confirmed special funding and tax incentives for the promotion of the film industry (Kokas, 2018).

Through this censorship, the Chinese government has also made it difficult for foreign production companies to invest in the country. Netflix has been trying to invest in the production market, as well as sharing its know-how, in hopes to gain easier access to the industry. Not able to operate within the Chinese market, the platform has resorted to

partnerships, such as the 2016 co-produced film “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny”, which was considered a national production, therefore not being subjected to as many restrictions as a foreign production (Kokas, 2018).

The biggest problem for Netflix and other Western production companies, while investing in the Chinese market, is the inability to use its own infrastructure, due to governmental laws limiting market access to national infrastructures. As such, to get its products inside the Chinese streaming environment, foreign platforms are forced to partner with national ones, such as the 2017 deal between Netflix and iQIYI (Shen, 2025).

In 2019, iQIYI and Tencent video released their own platform for global streaming, but their content is still available on YouTube. Sarkar and Yang (2024) note that this is mainly due to copyright issues faced when trying to enter other markets with a paid subscription service, as well as the lack of censorship when content is posted for free on the global platform. It also makes content available to everyone, making it easier to spread the Chinese culture.

The government continues to highlight the value of these online platforms, as shown in the Key National Cultural Export Projects for 2023-2024, where it was reaffirmed the need to continue having a group of export-focused cultural enterprises who able to compete in the global markets (Ministry of Commerce et al., 2023). The government also established the Chinese Film and TV Import and Export Association was established, in 2017, which has been working on the global promotion of Chinese media contents (Chen & Chang, 2024).

Currently, the two main streaming platforms where C-dramas thrive are YouTube and Viki. Table 3 ranks the most watched Chinese drama series on YouTube by average viewership per episode.

Name	Views (Average)
Boss and Me (2014)	96 500 000
Eternal Love (2017)	92 600 000
A Love So Beautiful (2017)	84 300 000
Put Your Head On My Shoulder (2019)	81 600 000
Princess Agents (2017)	77 500 000

Table 3: Top 5 YouTube C-dramas by average viewership per episode
Source: Adapted from (Chen & Chang, 2024)

“Boss and Me” tells the story of a man, Feng Teng, whose younger sister has a rare disease and needs a blood transfusion. One of the employees in his company, Xue Shan Shan, tests positive for blood compatibility and Feng Teng asks her for a blood donation. Being in debt to Xue Shan Shan, the CEO begins sending her lunch packs, and the two get involved in a love story. The C-dramas accounts for more than 3 billion total views on YouTube, averaging more than 96 million views per episode (Chen & Chang, 2024). The series is also available on Viki, where it scores a rating of 9.2 out of ten, through 21 thousand reviews, and on Netflix, where it currently records a total of 600 thousand views, since the second semester of 2023.

As of August of 2025, Chinese streaming platform Tencent video has 8.94 million subscribers on YouTube, followed by iQIYI, with 6.4 million subscribers and YOUKU, with 4.42 million subscribers. In 2022, iQIYI reported that original C-drama “A Lifelong Journey” had reached 4.76 billion effective views via the streaming app, followed by “New Life Begins” (3 billion views) and “Love Between Fairy and Devil” (2.76 billion views) (iQIYI, 2023).

The top four C-dramas in table 3 are also available for streaming on Netflix and Viki, although with less acclaim. Since 2023, “Eternal Love” has 900 thousand views on Netflix and has a ranking of 9.7 out of ten on Viki, with almost 50 thousand reviews. “A Love So Beautiful” scores a 9.3 out of ten ranking in Viki, with 100 thousand reviews, but only 400 thousand views on Netflix. “Put Your Head on My Shoulder”, the fourth most watched C-drama on YouTube has the highest view count of all top five, with 1.7 million views on Netflix and 120 thousand reviews on Viki, ranking 9.5 out of ten. It is

important to note that all three C-dramas are available for free, with English subtitles, on Viki – an advantaged compared to Netflix, who works only through paid subscriptions (Netflix, 2023; Netflix, 2024a; Netflix, 2024b; Netflix, 2025).

With a growing number of drama series available for streaming, Netflix has been investing in promoting its Chinese catalogue. Currently Netflix displays a “Chinese Movies & TV shows” section, where watchers can browse the different options available on the streaming platform. Table 4 shows the viewership of the most watched C-drama on Netflix, “Hidden Love”, from June 2023 until June of 2025.

Period	Hours Viewed	Views
Jan - Jun 2023	100 000	-
Jul - Dec 2023	115 700 000	6 100 000
Jan - Jun 2024	43 400 000	2 300 000
Jul - Dec 2024	36 200 000	1 900 000
Jan - Jun 2025	37 300 000	2 000 000
TOTAL	232 700 000	12 300 000

Table 4: *Hidden Love* (released June of 2023) viewership on Netflix, 2023 to June of 2025
 Source: Adapted from Netflix “What We Watched” reports 2023 - 2025

“Hidden Love” is a love story between Sang Zhi and Duan Jia Xu, her brother’s friend who often visits their house. They met during childhood but lost contact growing up and get reunited when Sang Zhi enters college, where they fall in love. The drama series delves into topics such as friendship and family. Released in 2023, it quickly became one of Netflix’s most watched Chinese dramas, with 100 thousand hours viewed in its first days available for streaming. Since then, “Hidden Love” has accumulated more than 12 million views on the Platform, making it the most viewed C-drama on Netflix (Netflix, 2023; Netflix, 2024a; Netflix, 2024b; Netflix, 2025).

In the last two years, due to Netflix’s investment on the genre, many C-dramas have gained success on the platform. Table 5 ranks the top five most viewed drama series on the platform, all recording more than 2 million views.

Name	Release (Semester)	Hours Viewed	Views
Hidden Love	S1 2023	232 700 000	12 300 000
The Double	S1 2024	103 700 000	3 100 000
When I Fly Towards You	S2 2023	71 300 000	5 100 000
The Story of Pearl Girl	S2 2024	91 500 000	3 000 000
Everyone Loves Me	S1 2024	48 600 000	2 500 000

*Table 5: Top 5 C-dramas by viewership on Netflix
Source: Adapted from Netflix "What We Watched" reports 2023 - 2025*

While most C-dramas are made available to stream on various platforms, Netflix has been trying to obtain exclusive streaming rights. "Perfect Match", an historical drama that follows five sisters navigating through life in a big city, was released exclusively on Netflix at the end of 2024 and received 2.4 million views in the first half of 2025, making it one of the biggest C-drama debuts on the platform (Netflix, 2025).

Besides drama series, Chinese films have also been growing internationally. The film industry began gaining worldwide recognition during the 2000s. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" was one of the first Chinese movies to score international success. The movie, which is set 19th-century Imperial China, follows two warriors, Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien. When Li Mu Bai's magical sword is stolen, the two work together to retrieve it. While fighting to recover the sword Li Mu Bai gets stabbed and before dying confesses his love for Yu Shu Lien, who he has been in love with since the beginning. The global box office revenue for the movie was 213.5 million USD, ranking number 19 in the 2000 largest box office (Box Office Mojo, 2000).

It received 103 international awards, including the Best Foreign Language Film award at the 2001 Oscars, becoming the first Chinese movie to receive the award, much earlier than its Korean counterparts, whose first Oscar win was in 2019, with "Parasite". In 2002, another globally acclaimed Chinese movie was released. "Hero" follows the story of an unnamed person who fights those who attempt to kill the emperor, showing his encounters with them. The movie had a global box office of 177 million USD (LingJuan et al., 2025).

Released in 2021, “Hello, Li Huanying” (also known as “Hi, Mom”) became one of the highest grossing Chinese movies of all time, with a revenue of 825 million USD, setting the record for the highest grossing female director in the world, at the time (Lin et al., 2023). Currently, “Ne Zha 2”, an animation movie released in 2025 has the highest grossing box office for Chinese movies, with a revenue of almost 2 billion USD (Box Office Mojo, 2025).

Streams on Netflix tend to follow the same trend. In the top five most viewed Chinese movies, since 2023 (table 6), the first three are animated.

Movie	Genre	Views (millions)
Wish Dragon	Animation	61.5
Over the Moon	Animation	38.7
Next Gen	Animation	13.7
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny	Action	5.6
Green Snake	Animation	5.2

Table 6: Top 5 Chinese films by viewership on Netflix
 Source: Adapted from Netflix “What We Watched” reports 2023 - 2025

“Wish Dragon” was released in 2021 and tells the story of a college student, Din Song, who finds a magical teapot where Long, a dragon who grants wishes, lives. In the last 24 months, the animated movie was watched 61.5 million times. “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny” (2016) stands as the only non-animated movie in the top five viewership on the platform. As a sequel to the 2000’s movie “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon”, however, the film received a negative reception, with critics, such as BBC, pointing out the poorly written script and getting a 25% score (out of 100) on Rotten Tomatoes (Hoffman, 2016).

Overall, Chinese films have begun to gain worldwide recognition. In 2023, 12 Chinese films achieved success in the global market, with “Full River Red” and “The Wandering Earth 2” achieving box offices of 670 million and almost 700 million USD, respectively (Wang et al., 2025).

However, although Chinese productions have been growing, they have yet to achieve the same international success as its counterparts, especially South Korea, who began international expansion at the same time, but has been achieving greater success. “From the standpoint of international sales of Chinese films, it can be claimed that overseas distribution of Chinese films is still in its infancy, especially when compared to the enormous Hollywood studios or our neighboring Japan and Korea” (Wang, 2023, p. 42).

This is largely due to the censorship in place in the country. With laws and regulations controlling film production, screening, distribution, importation and exportation, as well as policies establishing specific topics to be included (e.g. the promotion of socialist values), creative freedom is limited in the industry (Dong & Meng, 2024).

With such tight rules on content, it is difficult for the industry to grow as much as South Korea’s, for example. Wang et al. (2025) argue that whilst China has the comparative advantage of better technological advancements, the impact of censorship is greater and prevents the country to reach higher levels and possibly compete with Hollywood. This censorship does not only apply to movie and series production, but also distribution. Narrowing the promotional channels (e.g. not allowing Netflix to operate in the country, only making it possible to access Chinese content through licensing with Chinese streaming services and production companies), makes it difficult to achieve high success.

Wang et al. (2025) report that many Chinese films are only able to reach global markets due to the government’s constant promotion, through state-organised film festivals and exports to specific countries and regions that have a tight connection with the Chinese culture (e.g. countries with a large community of Chinese immigrants).

Moreover, the firm refusal to let Netflix into the Chinese film industry has led the platform to seek other regions, namely Taiwan, where growing investment has been placed. A study conducted by Araujo and de Albuquerque (2024) sought to analyse the presence of foreign content recommended on Netflix in Brazil. The study found that from the 135 titles recommended by the algorithm, 51 were productions from the PRC, 48 from Taiwan and 36 from Hong Kong.

As of August of 2025, Taiwanese productions were included in Netflix’s “Chinese movies and TV series” highlights. With movies such as “Incantation”, which recorded 8.1 million views from 2023 to 2025, and TV drama series “Born for the Spotlight”, being featured under the international movies and TV Dramas categories (figure 13).

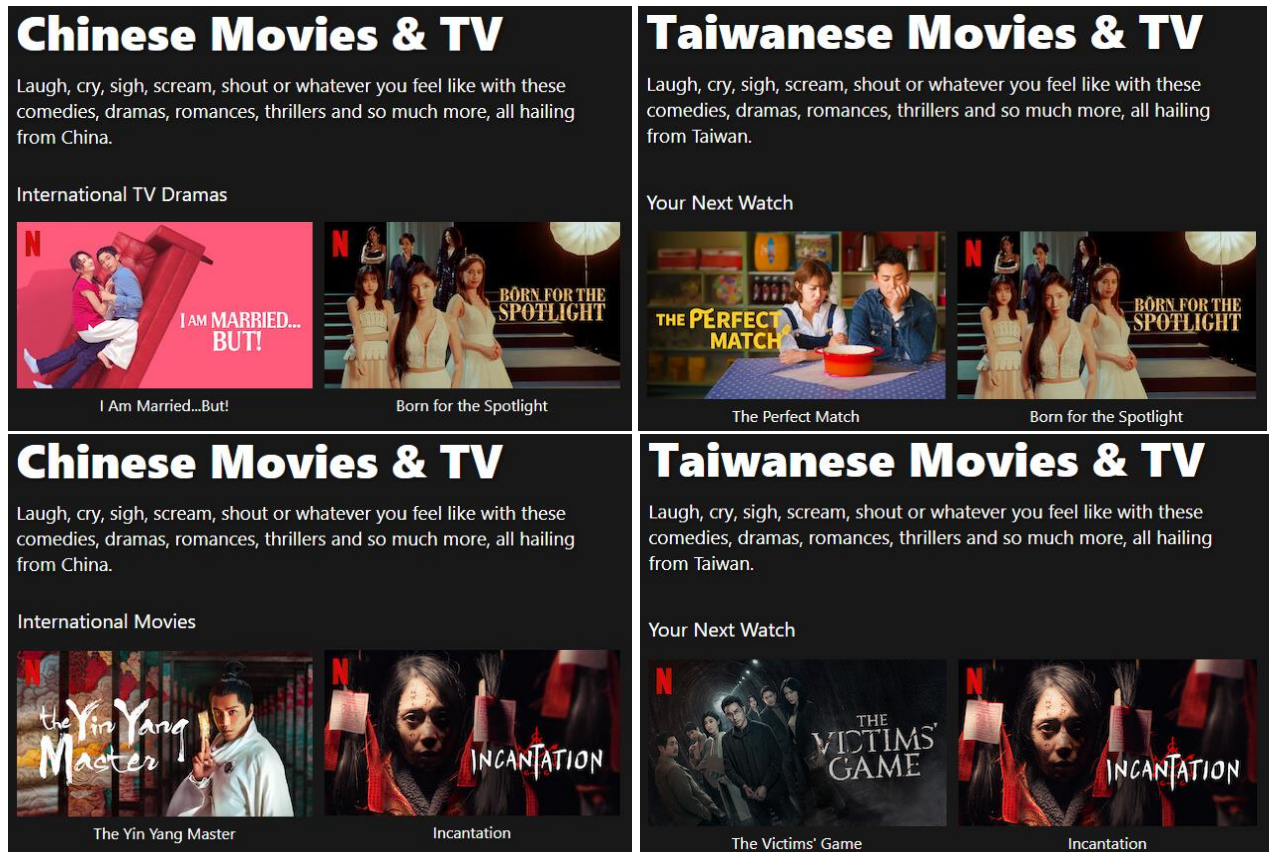


Figure 13: Taiwanese Dramas (top) and Movies (bottom) in the Chinese (left) and Taiwan (right) sections on Netflix
Source: Netflix

China’s cultural industry’s development has heavily relied on the government, through direct investment (e.g. subsidies and tax benefits) and export strategies. However, the censorship laws and regulations deny China the opportunity to grow a strong international image and be present in the global markets.

When compared to Japan, whose cultural industries’ growth was organic and set a steady pace to success, without much government’s involvement, China’s progress represents the opposite, with a slower growth, due to censorship, and a large dependence on the government’s support. While Japan’s development focused on creativity, China’s is controlled, due to the many restricting rules imposed.

In comparison to South Korea, who shares the same progress structure, with government investment in cultural industries, China had an economic advantage which, due to

ensorship, was not enough to be as successful as South Korea. The main difference poses in the growth rate. While Korea's development, with the government's contribution, took on an accelerated speed and has been consistently growing for the last decade, China's international success is unstable.

This analysis of Japan, South Korea and China's cultural exports showcases how each nation has applied different strategies to reach the common goal of internationalising its cultural industries, and how the different approaches translate into each country's soft power objectives. While Japan's path was mostly fan-driven, South Korea and China's relied more on governmental support.

All three countries have contributed to the growth of foreigners seeking for new cultural experiences, creating the experience economy, fuelled by tourism. These examples have successfully shown how East Asian countries have combined creativity with cultural identity, creating products and experiences that engage with international audiences and their needs, reinforcing their place in the global cultural market.

**CHAPTER IV – HOW OPEN IS TOO MUCH? PROTECTIONISM AND
GLOBALISATION IN CULTURE**

4 How Open is Too Much?

In the last few decades, the global cultural environment has been ever changing with the unprecedented effects of globalisation. Through global and local trade agreements, technological advancements and the growth of digital platforms which enable a global connection, cultural products have broken down barriers and reached across the world. While this has been a global phenomenon, and has affected many cultures, East Asian countries, like Japan, South Korea and China have registered a fast growth like no other, resulting in financial benefits and international power.

The ever-growing facility with which one can connect with a different culture, however, poses an important paradox for countries: how much can one's culture grow without being influenced by the outside? This reaches the concept of culture remaining local, and how global influence can lead cultures to change or even disappear, through cultural homogenisation.

For countries like Japan, South Korea, and China, who have a long history of cultural protectionism, openness does not happen in the same way as other Western countries, and even the approaches between the three differ. Japan has become more open to the globalisation of its culture, through *anime*, *manga*, and video games, although it still keeps its traditional elements within exports, such as themes, backgrounds and even language. South Korea has the most global focused strategy out of the three, with international collaborations becoming part of the reason for its global success. China, on the other hand, remains the most closed off. While cultural exports have been growing for the past decade, the heavy government control tries to assure that national culture remains the same, without much global influence.

Globalisation started centuries ago, but it was not until the end of the 20th century that it took on the power to unite the world as one. This phenomenon is characterised by the ever-growing openness of the countries all over the world. It refers to the integration of, not only countries, but its' cultures, costumes, and languages. As stated in chapter one, globalisation has long benefited from the growing presence of digital channels that allow information to reach each part of the world in a short period of time.

Overall, globalisation has many benefits that have been pointed out over the years, such as the global interconnectedness in place, the facilitation of trade and overall economic growth and better quality of life. However, globalisation's reputation within cultural

studies does not always take the same positive connotation. As a tool of reach and influence, globalisation directly crashes with what culture entails.

With over 150 different definitions, culture is a difficult concept to define clearly. Hong and Cheon (2017) focus on the common definition of the term, noting that culture refers to the shared costumes and beliefs of a certain group of people, which pass down through generations and tend to remain the same. Culture is usually passed within ethnic, religious, or social groups. Thus, if culture is something that remains untouched, globalisation can be seen as a threat.

Other scholars (Magu, 2015), defend that culture is not static and that beliefs and customs might change over time. Magu defends that people act as agents of culture, and when interacting with other agents, they exchange cultural elements, which will then pass onto others. However, it is possible to argue that the growing number of interactions due to globalisation takes a toll on culture, especially those of smaller groups.

Throughout the years globalisation has been under scrutiny, with an ongoing debate on the impact it has on culture. However, the division within cultural studies remains and it has not yet been possible to reach a consensus. As such, it is important to analyse both the benefits and risks of globalisation in culture and try to find a common ground where both can exist together.

4.1 Benefits of openness

Despite negative arguments about globalisation, it also has benefits. The increasing connectiveness associated with it leaves place for people to share their ideas and beliefs, and for others to much easily come into contact with cultures from around the globe. Cultural exports, which have been made possible by the openness of global barriers, have significantly opened doors for East Asian countries to become powerhouses in the global environment. The benefits are not only through direct financial return, but also to the growth of tourism and interest in East Asian cultures.

Hiswara et al. (2023) defend that globalisation encourages cross-cultural exchange, which leads people to become more interested in cultures different than their own. It also makes people more understanding. As they learn the various elements of one culture, communication will be facilitated, and people will learn how to deal with cultural differences easier.

Scholars who defend that globalisation is good for culture (Magu, 2015; Wheatley, 2024) are particularly keen of one argument: globalisation makes way for growth and for cultures to blend and create a mix of different cultures, also known as cultural hybridity. “Globalization, which accelerates cultural contacts between individuals, groups and nations, therefore, particularly through communication, provides the interactional forum to facilitate fusion and/or creation of hybrid cultures” (Magu, 2015, p. 634).

Wheatley (2024) adds that cultural hybridity leads to unique cultural features, as it is a result of two or more cultures merging. K-pop is a good example of cultural hybridity. While the basis of the industry is undoubtedly Korean, throughout the years K-pop songs have been influenced by Western sounds, especially hip-hop.

Jin and Ryoo (2012) studied the presence of the English language within the K-pop industry. Analysing the top fifty songs of each year in Korean music platform, Melon, between the years of 1990 and 2010, Jin and Ryoo noted the major English features that could be found, including stage names, song titles, and lyrics. The first big difference that points to the beginning of cultural hybridity is the number of artists that adopted English names. While in 1990 all artists presented themselves with a Korean name, in 2010, 41 out of the top fifty artists had an English artist name. The same process happens with English song titles, which have been a standard practice in the industry. While in 1990 only 3 out of the top fifty had their titles in English, in 2010 the number was 22. This is tied with lyrical production, with 60 American composers being given contracts to work with Korean entertainment companies, by 2009.

Barnes-Sadler et al. (2025) acknowledge Jin and Ryoo’s study and wishing to bring it up to date, given that since 2012, K-pop has become a global phenomenon, have conducted a similar study on K-pop songs. Analysing lyrics from the top ten bestselling albums from 2000 until 2020, they noted that the English usage in Korean songs has been growing yearly, with the last two years of the study (2019 and 2020) registering three times more English proportions in songs than in 2000.

Furthering this prevalence of English in the industry, the study shows that the 2020 album with the least amount of English (with an average of 74 English words) still recorded a higher percentage than the 2000 album with the highest amount of English (with an average of 45 English words). The study also shows that, while in 2000, the top ten albums analysed registered 42.9% of songs with no English lyrics, by 2020, the number

was only 2.1% (the lowest registered number being in 2016, with 1.2% of songs with no English, and in 2019, with 1.5%) (Barnes-Sadler et al., 2025).

Barnes-Sadler et al. (2025) point out, however, that while the English prevalence in K-pop has not yet registered big negative receptions, the dependence on the English language and further usage of it might lead interest away, since it takes out the language factor, which is one of the main reasons people began to consume the genre in the first place.

The global success of East Asian cultural products, especially K-pop and K-dramas, is another example of why globalisation is beneficial for culture. While all three countries have benefited from the increasing global environment, Korean entertainment has been the biggest benefiter of the growing online world, through the rise of social media, as discussed in chapter 3.2. Currently, social media outlets play a huge part in the promotion strategy within the music industry globally, but even more so within K-pop. “Nowadays, social media users now actively contribute to content creation rather than merely consuming it, establishing a bi-directional method of communication” (Shukri et al., 2025, p. 37).

As of September of 2025, BTS, one of the biggest groups in K-pop, has 48 million followers on X (formerly known as Twitter), 77 million on Instagram and 74 million on TikTok, reaching 200 million cumulative followers across platforms. As previously discussed, TikTok plays a central role for K-pop, with artist creating challenges in which fans across the world can participate in, leading to a global promotion of songs, with little physical or financial effort.

Globalisation can also lead to international partnerships which help revitalise industries. This is seen in the content production partnerships that Netflix has been establishing over the past years for the making of Korean content. For the past decade, Netflix has invested in the production of “original” Korean drama series, including the huge hit “Squid Game”. In 2021, the streaming platform invested more than 460 million USD in Korean content, adding the promise to invest another 2.5 billion USD between 2023 and 2027 (Fu & Wang, 2025).

Netflix’s investments, which are deemed as “Netflix original” series, are produced in collaboration with Korean production companies. Through its direct investment, Netflix incorporates local cultural themes and production styles. This not only generates job

opportunities for Korean actors, directors, and producer employees, but also boosts the global visibility of Korean culture. Kuo (2024) notes that during the production of “Squid Game”, Netflix kept production interference to a minimum, allowing the Korean producers, directors, writers, and others to create freely. For this K-drama alone, 16 thousand jobs were created.

Overall, globalisation can also serve as a platform for places and cultures which have been declining or forgotten, helping small cultures in risk of extinction. Wheatley (2024) provides the example of the Ainu culture, prevalent from Japan. As an indigenous group, the Ainu have suffered from cultural and economic marginalisation. During the 18th century, the Ainu people were forced out of their land, which led to the loss of traditions. They were also not able to practice their religion or speak their own language.

In recent years, however, more people have become interested in learning about the Ainu culture, which led to the establishment of the Ainu Culture Promotion Act, in 1997, replaced in 2019 by the Ainu Policy Promotion Act. This act promotes Ainu culture, including music, dance, handcrafts, and language. Besides this, the Japanese government has also opened the Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park, a national museum that promotes the life and culture of the Ainu people. Opening in 2020, within its first six months, the museum received almost 200 thousand visitors (Yomiuri Shimbun, 2021).

Tourism is one of the main benefits from globalisation. Through the connectiveness, people can get to know more cultures, and become interested in them, leading them to visit the places tied to those cultures. Tourism contributes directly through investment in the area, while also providing incentives for local communities to maintain and develop their cultural heritage, which, in a lot of times, is transformed into a product or service to showcase to tourists. It also leads to “to economic growth and cultural rejuvenation” (Wheatley, 2024, p. 2).

The increase of interest in a place or culture can lead to its commercialisation. “Commercialization is defined as a commercial relationship established around tourism products and activities” (Zhang et al., 2021, p. 3). Through the growth of tourism, many places begin adapting to the visitors, creating products and experiences specifically for them. This can stimulate a renewed local interest in learning traditional handcrafts, since it represents a good and profitable business opportunity as a response to tourism.

According to Zhang et al. (2018), a survey conducted by the World Tourism Organisation shows that approximately 40% of international tourists prefer destinations known for its cultural heritage, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage sites, museums, and other culturally significant locations.

Yang (2016) highlights Yunnan, in China, as a good example of how tourism can change one place and its culture. With a population of around 47 million people, one third of the population of Yunnan are from ethnic minority communities. Tourism in the province has been growing since the 1980s, and in 2016 it was already one of the top four industries in the region. Yunnan is known for its heritage tourism, and its most popular destination is Lijiang, which is considered a UNESCO heritage site since 1997.

In 2010, Lijiang's cultural industries contributed 1.5 billion CNY (210 million USD) to the economy, three times more than what it contributed in 2005. The region's GDP in 2012 was around 15 billion CNY, an average of 12 thousand CNY per capita. By 2023, Lijiang's GDP per capita was 54 thousand CNY, over 4 times more (Yunnan Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

However, while the region has seen many benefits from tourism, including high profits (in 2015 the tourism industry had a total revenue of more than 5 billion USD), improvement in infrastructure (especially in hotels and other tourism-related businesses) and economic reconstruction (Liu et al., 2020), Yang (2016) points out the commodification that takes place in Yunnan. Commodification is seen as “a process by which things or activities are transformed into commodities or services based on their exchange-value for trade” (Zhang et al., 2021, p. 3). That is, when products and services are produced for their monetary value, instead of their cultural/emotional value. In Yunnan's case, instead of creating businesses to maintain the culture alive, people are creating businesses because it is profitable, without much care about keeping the traditional culture. This is seen as “staged culture”, since it is not portrayed by members of those cultural spaces, but by big conglomerates.

Yang (2016) reports that many residents are leaving their houses and renting them out for tourists, since the rental market is profitable. This means that some places in Yunnan are no longer habituated by locals, but by temporary residents who are only visiting the

province. This leads to the loss of the Naxi culture because locals are spreading through various regions and leaving their cultural traditions behind.

This is, however, only one of the many problems associated with the globalisation of culture. While globalisation has played an important role in growing cultural interconnectedness, improving cross-cultural understanding, and stimulating interest in cultural traditions through digital channels and tourism, it is also important to recognise the risks associated with it.

4.2 Risks of openness

Globalisation has been one of the biggest contributors to the growth of East Asian culture worldwide, especially through digital media exports. However, it also presents as a source of challenges for these cultures, mainly when faced with other, more dominant, cultures in the global markets. As such, when considering whether to globalise a culture, it is necessary to study the associated risks in order to decide if it should be done.

As mentioned above, the commodification of culture is one of the topics discussed when analysing the impacts of globalisation in cultures. Wheatley (2024) speaks on how the growing interest in certain cultures, and their costumes lead big companies to invest in products/areas related to them. While for those large businesses these cultures, which have a growing following, represent good opportunities with financial return, local businesses, which are often conducted by people of those cultural spaces, may not be able survive.

Ultimately, this leads to the closing of many local crafts and traditional industries, who do not have the financial capability of compete with global brands, which have years of success and big investors backing them up. With big conglomerates dominating the local market, the cultural significance of the product/service is lost, and homogenisation takes place, “where local uniqueness is often overshadowed by global standards” (Wheatley, 2024, p. 2).

Zhang et al. (2021) add that the commodification of culture results in the loss of the original meaning behind traditions, as it is no longer practiced by locals who grew up as part of a cultural circle, but sold by businesses who are not part of the culture, therefore losing its authenticity.

With global brands investing in smaller cultural products and services, many businesses face the risk of being taken advantage of. Upon the release of “Squid Game”, a Netflix production in collaboration with South Korean director Hwang Dong Hyuk, the K-drama received global critical acclaim, making it the most successful Korean series in history, as well as one of the biggest streaming series debuts in the platform (Otterson, 2025).

“Squid Game” marked one of Netflix’s biggest investments in South Korea since the company began investing in the country, almost a decade ago. After establishing a branch office in South Korea, in 2019, Netflix has been making yearly investments in the production of original drama series. In 2021, the company spent 16 trillion KRW (11 billion USD) in South Korean content, nearly as much as the entire industry’s annual revenue in 2017 (16.5 trillion KRW). By 2022, investment grew 25%, and 20 trillion KRW were spent (Kuo, 2024).

The ever-growing investments from Netflix put pressure on the production market, as the large production budgets make it difficult for the local industry to keep up. Korean companies, such as Wavve, Tving and Watcha, which also work with K-drama productions, were under pressure to maintain audiences, while having smaller budgets to work with. By 2022, Netflix registered more than 11 million South Korean users, almost triple the amount of Wavve’s subscribers (4.2 million), and double the subscriptions of Tving and Seezn (5.6 million), which were in the process of merging to try and compete with Netflix (Kuo, 2024).

Besides the constant pressure on the local industry, Netflix’s “Squid Game” production brought a bigger problem to life, the protection of intellectual property (IP). Before the production for the drama series began, Netflix signed a deal with director Hwang Dong Hyuk, which gave him no IP rights. As such, while “Squid Game” has generated millions, and increased Netflix’s value by 1 billion USD, the series’ director does not receive any royalties from the K-drama. This deal also gives Netflix the rights for possible merchandise items, licensing the show to other platforms, sequels, and adaptations, without needing the creator’s approval, or having to pay royalties from sales (Kuo, 2024).

This example shows how global companies can easily gain power over local industries, especially through the differences in revenue. It also shows the need for government involvement so that examples like “Squid Game” do not become a norm, where smaller cultures are taken advantage of.

Globalisation, together with the growth of cultural exports has fostered a growing interest in visiting cultural places. As discussed in the previous section, tourism numbers have registered an enormous growth as people got to know other cultures better, leading them to visit areas where certain cultures are located. While this has boosted the economy, and in some cases led to the preservation of certain cultural aspects, it has quickly become a problem of its own due to large number of visitors that travel each year.

Overtourism often leads to crowded places where visitors seek original experiences related to certain cultures, posing as a problem for locals. Ogino (2016) delves into the “doubling of the world” where people need to juggle living in a place where they have always lived and know, with the fact that that same place is also an historical landmark, which people like to visit. This can result in many conflicts of interest between locals, visitors, and governments.

Shukunegi is a small town on the Sado Island, in Japan. Serving as an important port since medieval times, Shukunegi is known for its historical atmosphere, as its buildings and overall environment has changed little. In 1911, the town, with around 100 traditional buildings, was designated a National Important Preservation Area for Traditional Buildings and Architecture. Since then, specific sections were opened for the public, including a museum, 3 traditional residences and temples (Ogino, 2016).

However, while Shukunegi has mainly become a tourism destination, many people still live in town. Because of its status as a preservation area, many houses, and even the town layout, are protected due to their cultural significance, meaning that residents are legally forbidden from renovating their houses, due to the Protection of Cultural Properties law. Due to the houses’ structure and construction materials (with walls made of ship-planks and roofs made of wood, weighted by stones), residents need to often seek the government’s approval to “modernise” their homes. However, they are not allowed to use modern materials or techniques, which may involve the further destruction of the houses, which can lead to higher renovation costs and special craftsmanship (Ogino, 2016).

The overtourism often leads to discontent of the local community, especially because the town is very small. This results in congested places, loud noises, and invasion of privacy, as tourists often take photos and try to enter private houses. The official website for Shukunegi showcases a message asking visitors to respect the residents, as well as asking tourists to behave during their visit to the town (figure 14).

Facts about the National Important Preservation Area for Traditional Buildings and Architecture

Date of Inscription	30 April, 1991
Buildings	220 (107 traditional buildings / 16 structures)
Integral Objects in the □ Surrounding Environment	108
Property	28.5ha
Criteria	3. The historical buildings and the surrounding environment show an outstanding example of a traditional settlement, and land-use which is representative of the local culture
Bibliography	Shukunegi Sonshi (Shukunegi Village Chronicle) 1947 Minamisado no Gyoro Shuzoku (Traditions in Fishing in south Sado) 1975 Shukunegi Dentoteki Kenzobutsugun Hozontaisaku Chosa Hokokusho (Report of the study on preservation policy for traditional buildings and architecture in Shukunegi) 1981 Shukunegi no Machinami to Minka I & II (Townscape and Houses in Shukunegi I · II) 1995

PLEASE SHOW RESPECT TO LOCAL RESIDENTS. Please do not litter or smoke while walking.

[Shukunegi Membership](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Related Websites](#)

© Association of Shukunegi Lovers

*Figure 14: Shukunegi official Website
Source: Shukunegi.com*

The same phenomenon has also been happening in China, whose government has taken a growing interest in the preservation of cultural heritage, mainly to create a national identity. The Chinese government has appointed the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Construction as the two main responsible parties for physical/tangible cultural heritage, while the Ministry of Culture is responsible for intangible cultural heritage (Svensson, 2016).

Recognising the value of its cultural heritage sites, particularly since the 1990s, the Chinese government has begun focusing on preserving physical spaces. Nowadays, the government has also recognised the historical importance of intangible culture, which led to the transformation of some traditional temples and ancestor ceremonies in sponsored festivals open for tourism. While this can be seen a cultural promotion, it often underplays the significance of culture for locals. In Zhejiang, locals note that the government has marketed its temple as a fun cultural fair, downplaying the temple's cultural meaning for religious and family rituals (Svensson, 2016).

While overtourism takes a direct toll on infrastructure and communities' daily lives and habits, it also presents a bigger issue for cultures, which stems from pressure to adapt to global standards, and change certain aspects to satisfy tourist expectations. As seen above, previously meaningful rituals are now being sold by governments as simple cultural festivals, which stripes cultures of the elements that distinguish them from other cultures.

As such, one of the biggest problems associated with the globalisation of culture and overtourism is its influence in cultural homogenisation.

Hiswara et al. (2023) speak on the issue of globalisation giving Western cultures a platform to overshadow other smaller and less known cultures, leading “to the erosion of indigenous traditions and values” (Hiswara et al., 2023, p. 100). That is, the loss of cultural elements which makes culture significantly different, resulting in a homogenisation, where different cultures become more similar, “standardizing diverse cultural identities into a single, homogeneous market” (Wheatley, 2024, p. 1).

Scholars (Allison, 2006; Mckevitt, 2010; Wang & Yeh, 2005) have been focusing on Japan, and how its’ cultural exports suffer from cultural homogenisation. Wang and Yeh (2005) study the presence of Japanese cultural products within Asian markets. While it is true that Japanese cultural products such as *anime*, *manga*, video games and even karaoke have been well received locally and globally, they all lack direct ties to the Japanese culture. Most of them are adapted to fit the standards of global markets (e.g. *anime* being doubled in English to make it more accessible for global audiences).

Cultural homogenisation, however, does not only happen through language doubling. Allison (2006) gives the example of famous Japanese live-action TV show, “Power Rangers”, which gained popularity during the 1990s. The children’s show scored huge success along the American audience, becoming the number one children’s program in both the American and global markets. However, this huge success cannot be tied to its Japanese cultural aspects. To be accepted into the American, the show had to be reshot and re-edited. Released in 1993, the American version (“Mighty Morphin Power Rangers”) featured American authors and a different story – while the Japanese version was considered a sci-fi fantasy show, which featured action scenes and battles, the American version followed a group of teenagers who were chosen to protect the Earth.

As such, while the premise of the show was based on the Japanese series, the language, authors, story line and script were all revised to fit the standards of the American audiences, leaving little room for the public to recognise the show as a Japanese product. Allison (2006) recalls people refereeing to the shows as an “American classic” and adds:

Several people in the children's entertainment business have confirmed that a Japanese show like this could never have been mainstreamed on network TV in

the United States with actors who were Asian instead of American or with credentials that openly announced their origins as "made-in- Japan". (p. 14)

Mckevitt (2010) joins the discussion of the homogenisation of Japanese culture, adding that people's first contact with *anime*, at least during the late 1990s and early 2000s, was not backed with any knowledge about Japanese culture. Because of this, and the American edition process of cutting Japanese elements (both visual and script) from the animation, a lot of Americans were unaware they were consuming Japanese media. This shows the intention to erase/modify culture (in this case, the Japanese culture) to fit into wider audience cultural standards (in this case, the American).

Hong and Cheon (2017) point out that the fast globalisation and consequence presence of multiculturalism can lead to the rise of nationalism. As the world becomes more interconnected through digital media and tourism, certain cultural groups begin feeling threatened by the merge of different cultures, which can lead communities to advocate for their national identity, as they feel overshadowed by global forces. This results in the rise of nationalist groups reclaiming traditional culture, while, at the same time, defending the protection of local values.

In sum, while globalisation has been a good channel for cultural exchange and economic growth through culture, it has also been the cause of several risks that threaten the preservation of East Asian cultures. Although it sheds light in unknown cultures and creates opportunities for development, it can quickly become a hazard for those cultures, through commodification, homogenisation and overtourism. As such, it is important for governments to create strategies that will help globalisation and culture co-exist, without one negatively influencing the other, especially in countries such as Japan, South Korea, and China, who are rich in cultural heritage.

4.3 Strategies

As globalisation continues to shape cultures worldwide, governments have to work on strategies which allow cultures to continue to benefit from it, without risking losing its unique elements. Countries like Japan, South Korea, and China, which have benefited from globalisation through cultural exports, have been developing different strategies to protect and preserve their national culture, while still being able to export them.

Governments now work closely with local communities to find ways to combat cultural homogenisation and the risk of losing traditional cultural elements. Strategies of cultural preservation have been put into place to guarantee that younger generations are still able to be in contact with their culture.

Wheatley (2024) proposes strategies that governments can apply which will not only preserve but also protect cultures against the risks of globalisation, especially cultural erosion, and homogenisation. In the age of interconnectedness, cultural preservation takes an important role, maintaining a sense of identity and community, fostering diversity, and supporting tradition, both in tangible and intangible culture.

Japan has been promoting tangible and intangible culture since 1950, with the enactment of Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties. The law surged as a response to the losses of cultural assets during the second World War and has been protecting and preserving the nation's cultural heritage, promoting Important Cultural Properties (tangible) and National Treasures (intangible). The term "National Treasures" refers to traditional art practices that are important for culture, while "Living National Treasures" are those responsible for the practice of such arts (Ogino, 2016).

While *anime* and *manga* are not considered traditional arts, and therefore cannot be considered National Treasures, some scholars (Shahiwala, 2022; Yamamura, 2018) have discussed how these cultural products positively impact Japan and therefore should receive similar protection.

South Korea has taken similar measures and, in 1962, promulgated the Cultural Property Protection Law, to protect and preserve cultural heritage assets that are at risk of disappearance. Under this law arts such as dance, music, theatre, and drama are designated as Important Intangible Cultural Properties. Similarly to Japan's cultural protection law, South Korea's also falls under the art practice, and not the practicer. Those are, however, also considered Living National Treasures, appointed by the Office of Cultural Properties. Living National Treasures are seen as masters of Important Intangible Cultural Properties and given the power to not only represent certain art forms but also teach them so that traditional is kept alive for the future generations (Koo, 2021).

The Chinese government has recognised the value of cultural heritage for decades, and in the early 2000s began to work on laws and strategies to protect it. The department of Intangible Cultural Heritage was established in 2009, under the Ministry of Culture, with

the aim to oversee intangible cultural heritage in the country. In 2011, China adopted the Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage, which protects and promotes traditional art forms, such as traditional craft and performing arts. This law works together with the Chinese National Intangible Cultural Heritage list, which defines cultural items that should be preserved. In 2022, 1557 items and 3610 sub-items, from varying categories such as traditional dance and music, opera and folklore, were recognised as China's intangible culture heritage (Wang et al., 2024).

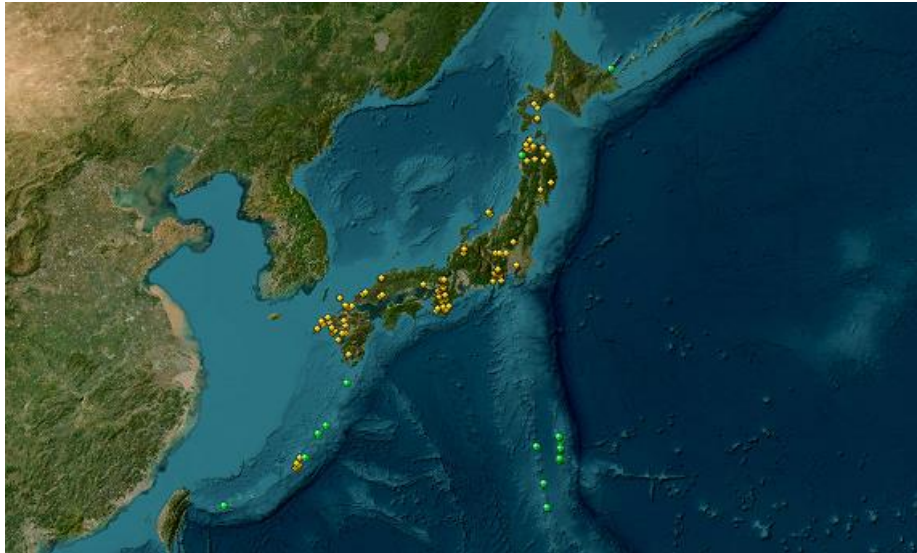
In 2019, the government also introduced the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Inheritors Identification and Management Measures law, which identifies people who are considered masters of traditional crafts, similar to Japan and South Korea's National Living Treasures. This law presents the responsibilities, obligations, rights, and support of intangible cultural heritage inheritors. According to the law, an inheritor is someone who possesses expertise in one, or more, intangible cultural heritage, either through apprenticeship or family lineage. To be considered an inheritor individuals must go through expert evaluations. However, even without being considered one, people can still pass on traditional cultural knowledge (Wang et al., 2024).

Wheatley (2024) highlights the role of UNESCO in cultural preservation. The organisation provides standards and regulations for the promotion, protection, and preservation of culture, both tangible and intangible. It also provides financial support for endangered cultures and emergency catastrophes, through programs and international funds. Since 2008, both Japan and South Korea had 23 UNESCO recognised intangible cultural heritage items, while China had 44.

Besides intangible cultural preservation, it is also important that governments manage tangible culture through sustainable measures. UNESCO takes an important central role in the promotion of tangible heritage preservation. Wheatley (2024) notes the importance of creating heritage sites, as it offers legal protection which can prevent human-created damage (e.g. inappropriate development work and tourism damage) and encourages local communities to maintain traditions, while also raising awareness of the historical importance of certain places.

After the declaration of World Heritage Convention, in 1972, which birthed UNESCO, Japan only began submitting locations for the status of heritage sites in 1993. The first Japanese cultural sites to be recognised by UNESCO were the Buddhist Monuments in

the Horyu-ji Area and the monument of Himeji-jo, alongside Yakushima, which is considered a natural site. Japan currently has 26 recognised sites, encompassing 21 cultural sites and 5 natural sites (figure 15), ranking number 11 in the countries and regions with the most UNESCO heritage sites. The latest entry happened in 2024 with the Gold Mines in the Sado Island (McGuire, 2013).



*Figure 15: Japanese properties inscribed on the World Heritage List
Source: UNESCO*

South Korea has 17 properties recognised by UNESCO (figure 16), 15 of which are considered cultural sites and 2 natural sites, ranking number 18 as the country with the most UNESCO heritage sites, tied with Czech Republic, Poland, and Portugal. South Korea's first accepted submissions were in 1995, with the Haeinsa Temple Janggyeong Panjeon, the Depositories for the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks and the temples of Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa. In 2025, the Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream joined the list of cultural sites under UNESCO, becoming the latest Korean heritage site to do so (UNESCO, 2025a).



*Figure 16: Korean properties inscribed on the World Heritage List
Source: UNESCO*

China is the second country in the world with the most entries on UNESCO’s World Heritage list, with 60 properties (figure 17), behind Italy (61). The country has 41 cultural sites, 16 natural sites and 4 mixed. Between Japan, South Korea, and China, the latter was the first to join UNESCO’s list, and has the most recognisable sites. The first entries were in 1987, with the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, the Great Wall of China, Mount Taishan, the Peking Man Site at Zhoukoudian and the Mogao Caves. In 2025, the Xixia Imperial Tombs became the latest Chinese site to join the list (UNESCO, 2025b).



*Figure 17: Chinese properties inscribed on the World Heritage List
Source: UNESCO*

Wheatley (2024) defends that besides the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage, strategic cultural promotion, when done correctly, can also contribute to cultural preservation. While state-led cultural promotion can sometimes lead to the reduction of cultural value for marketability, as seen in the previous section, it is essential that these initiatives not only maintain the cultural significance of the rituals and festivals, but also show respect to the local communities. Preserving the meaning behind these cultural festivities will promote national identity and the transmission of culture.

Japan has hundreds of cultural festivals happening each year. Hoang-Nam (2021) highlights the Awa Odori festivals that are scattered throughout the country. The name originates from the combination of “Awa”, the name by which the Tokushima prefecture used to be known as, and “Odori”, which means dance. As such, the Awa Odori festivals focus on showcasing traditional dance practiced by the local people of Tokushima.

For more than a decade, the Awa Odori festivals has been gaining global popularity, with more than 1 thousand registered dance groups in Japan practicing the traditional dance, which sparked the interest of worldwide audiences. It is now promoted as a cultural festivity and tourist attraction in Tokushima and has been sponsored by the local government since 2008. This festival is the perfect balance between local tradition and community and tourism, since the region has managed to keep its cultural significant rituals, while also attracting tourists and economic development to the area (Hoang-Nam, 2021).

Porcu (2022) studies another Japanese festivity which has been loved by tourists. The Gion Festival, a yearly festival happening in Kyoto, began as a ritual to appeal to the angry spirits of the dead, which were believed to cause plagues and other diseases. Participants build floating platforms and parade in the streets of Kyoto. Among participants in the festival, most see it as an activity that strengthens their sense of belonging to a community and taking part in an important cultural event.

Since 2009, the float ceremony has been considered a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage site, attracting visitors from around the world. It was also classified Intangible Folk Cultural Property by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, which promotes national interest as well. In 2019, Kyoto city published a Gion Festival inspired *manga* called “Let’s Visit the Gion Festival” (figure 18) available in Japanese and English. This

represents the efforts to modernise the festival, making it accessible for Japanese people and foreigners, while still respecting the cultural significance of the ritual (Porcu, 2022).



Figure 18: "Let's Visit the Gion Festival" manga
Source: Kyoto City Official Website

Besides this, Wheatley (2024) also points out how essential it is that governments allocate funding to help support traditional arts and crafts, ensuring local cultures survival by incentivising public interest and participation in learning. In addition, it is also important that governments provide financial support for local, traditional businesses that are facing global pressure and competition, guaranteeing that they are supported and can sustain the traditional industries, without the risk of homogenisation (Sanmee, 2024).

In 1999, the South Korean government established the Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) of Korea, which is responsible for preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage. As part of the government, the CHA provides funding for the continuous awareness of traditional arts and crafts. The CHA is also responsible for the Continuing Education Institute, which provides courses for people who are interested in learning traditional crafts. The agency also promotes other celebrations of Korean culture, such as

the Korea Intangible Cultural Heritage Week, which is held national and internationally (Korea Heritage Agency, n.d.).

Examining the impact of globalisation on culture, it becomes clear that the topic is complex and can vary depending on the environment it is inserted in. While globalisation brings many benefits, such as cultural exchange, economic development and shines the light on cultures at risk of extinction, it also poses many challenges for smaller cultures, especially through erosion and homogenisation. As such, it is necessary to analyse possible strategies which combine the globalised world with the need to keep a national identity, including cultural heritage preservation and government efforts to promote culture through funding and support.

There is no formula to understand how open is too much, as each country has different cultural and historical environments to consider. However, it is expected that governments are aware of the risks of globalisation, taking them into account upon choosing how much to open. Moreover, they should also be prepared to intervene should their cultures be at risk, therefore contingency plans must be established. “As governments pursue policies that promote globalisation and economic development, they must also consider the impact on cultural identity” (Sanmee, 2024, p. 17).

5 Conclusion

The evolution of East Asia's cultural industries from protectionist origins to globally influential creative economies reflects a complex paradigm between governmental intervention, market adaptation, and cultural identity. Analysing the path of Japan, China and South Korea, this dissertation sought to understand how each nation has dealt with globalisation after centuries of protectionism, while still trying to protect their culture.

While culture first began as a tool for nation-building, where governments would use it as a form of power, after the turning point to more open economies, it became an economic asset, as governments began recognising it for its potential to generate growth and as a tool of soft power.

Understanding the hardships of this transition, as well as how deeply ingrained protectionism was engraved in East Asian societies, was key to comprehending the policies applied by the governments throughout the years.

An analysis of commonly known concepts, such as protectionism and globalisation, was important to maintain a cohesive understanding of the history behind East Asian culture. Concepts of cultural industries, entertainment, soft power, and experience economy bring the topic to the present day, and showcase the growth stimulated by liberalisation. Chapter one introduced the groundwork to develop the idea of protectionism being turned into globalisation.

As such, to begin the historical map, chapter two focused on the importance of culture remaining "pure" for older East Asian countries and how that belief led to the overprotection of it, in hopes of not being influenced by external forces, such as Western cultures. This chapter explored how protectionism served as a means to strengthen domestic industries, giving them a platform to grow without having to compete with bigger, foreign industries.

The change in mindset, fuelled by ongoing globalisation happening at the time, led East Asian governments to study the possibilities of opening up, creating more liberalised policies. Becoming part of global agencies, such as the World Trade Organisation, also forced these countries to end most restrictions on foreign countries. The second chapter highlights the important role of the governments in these transitional processes.

As East Asian countries began being more open towards the rest of the world and globalisation facilitated access to different cultures and costumes, a growing interest in East Asian cultural products was registered, leading governments to recognise the value of culture, not solely as a political weapon, but also as a means to generate wealth.

Chapter three focused on the main products which were exported around the world and gave foreigners a better understanding of East Asian cultures, while also incentivising governments to invest in the production of cultural products, as they registered success in major Western markets.

As such, Japan began investing in the creation and development of *anime*, *manga*, and video games, producing the world's most well-known characters such as Pokémon, Super Mario, and others. South Korea, following Japan's example of a successful cultural production, began investing in its music and TV and film production industries, which resulted in many songs, movies and TV series topping the charts, even when competing with Western industries, which are stronger. China, while still implementing protectionism, has rapidly expanded its film and digital media industries. These three countries became the perfect example of cultural hybridity, where traditional cultural elements blend with global markets, balancing the need to keep traditions while also answering to the market's needs and desires.

Such a balance is not easy to achieve, and while Japan, China and South Korea have achieved great success in cultural production exports, it has also impacted their culture negatively. Chapter four focuses on real-life case studies of East Asian cultures which have benefited and been negatively impacted by globalisation.

While trying to understand whether globalisation brings more benefits than risks, it was not possible to conclude, as it depends on how local governments approach the topic. The last chapter concludes with suggestions for a continuous hybrid system, where protectionism and globalisation can both be applied at the same time, aiming to benefit no one culture over another.

Naturally, there is room for discussion on the future of East Asian cultures. As most of the scientific research around this topic focuses on the protectionist past of these countries, or on their cultural exports, a greater discussion on the impact of such quick globalisation on culture should be taking place. While it gives Japan, China, and South Korea the possibility to grow, it also puts pressure on culture to become what outsiders

view as authentic or traditional, leading to cultural homogenisation and over consumption.

This dissertation, therefore, aims to begin a new discussion on the influence of globalisation in cultures, and how East Asian countries prove to be a good example to study as they have evolved from protectionism to globalised and competitive economies within a few decades.

Through the development of this dissertation, as part of the master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business from Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto, I gained a better understanding on how culture impacts business and how, if used correctly, it can create many opportunities for success.

Studying Japan, South Korea, and China's business strategy to internationalise their cultural industries, as well as how protectionism affected how each country implemented policies, strengthened my ability to identify cultural motives behind business strategies. Ultimately, this dissertation deepened my understanding of how cultural production can be used to benefit a country's global image.

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