

Jim Dator

# Living Make-Belief: Thriving in a Dream Society

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# Living Make-Belief: Thriving in a Dream Society

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# Preface

I know how to tell a lie convincingly. The truth is, poetry is a lie resembling a truth. Hallelujah. I've seen it all. Look long enough and anything becomes a still life—plain and decaying, just like you and me. ... Come quick, the sun is diving into the sea.

Ana Codjoe, "The Pitchman's Sorrow Pitch," published in *Poetry Magazine*, November 2023.

I know how to tell a lie convincingly. The point is, poetry is a truth resembling a lie. Hallelujah. I've seen it all. Look long enough and anything becomes a still life—poised and decaying, just like you and me. ... Come quick, the sun is dying into the sea.

Ana Codjoe, "The Pitchman's Joy Pitch," published by *Poetry Magazine*, November 2023  
Used by permission of Ana Codjoe.

America and much of the rest of the world is transiting from agricultural/industrial/information societies into dream societies. In this book, I seek to explain how and why this transformation is occurring, encouraging that we each and collectively embrace it—that we adopt a surfer's pose, study the waves, check with other surfers, choose our spot, prepare our minds and bodies, dive in and enjoy the exhilarating ride, knowing we will all wipe out in the end.

This is in contrast to what most people are doing now instead which is either denying the transformation or seeing it as a catastrophe, and praying things will return to normal. They will, of course, eventually, but the new normal will be a fluid, dynamic, precarious, exciting world of images, imagination, synthesis, and dreams, and not the comparatively staid and predictable fact-filled past that humanity once knew, or imagined.

The following chapters explain my understanding of what a dream society is in contrast with earlier human conditions; describes some of the major drivers that provoked this world of make-belief—from K-Pop, through climate change, to Trump—and sketches a design of quantum governance that might enable human beings to thrive in the refreshing turbulence.

The first three chapters discuss the idea of social change underlying this book—that social change is a consequence of environmental, biological, social, technological drivers, and chance, often seen as "waves of change", and creating (chronologically since the emergence of *Homo sapiens sapiens* in the Holocene Epoch), hunting and gathering, agricultural, industrial, informational, and, most

recently dream societies. The emergence of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu* 한류) of Korean popular culture encouraged by governmental policy and entrepreneurial activity is an early indicator of the emergence of a global dream society.

It is essential to understand that I am implying neither progress nor regress in this sequence. Just substantial and important change to which those who experience it learn to survive and thrive. No one of the “societies” is better or worse than any others. Neither am I implying a totalitarianism in each “society”. The labels I give (and which many scholars use, while others reject) describe one major feature among many. I also don’t mean to say that all agricultural/industrial/information/dream societies are alike. There are many variations of each, and yet enough significant similarities to merit their designation. Other labels could be used. An argument is sometimes made that actual social change is far too messy to fit into any categorical system, especially this one. Nonetheless, I believe it has sufficient empirical support to be useful, to the extent anything can be known empirically about either the pasts or the futures.

Chapters 4 and 5 show in some detail how changing communication modes (from oral to scribal to printing to electronic) facilitated the changes of societies from hunting and gathering to dream societies. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on how the rise of manipulable visual images eroded concepts of truth, logic, and reason that had themselves been enabled by crucial aspects of printed words in industrial/information societies that had previously obliterated fluid ways of thinking and being that were characteristic of oral, scribal, agricultural societies. More recently, the prominence of literary fiction, advertising and credit cards, amusement parks and world fairs, organized sports, electronic games and simulations, recreational drugs, and spaceflight have led to the demise of rational information societies, and to the rise of weird dream societies.

One of the main reasons a dream society is likely to continue to unfold, broaden, and thrive is because of advances in artificial intelligence and life, made most dramatically apparent by the “sudden” appearance of ChatGPT on November 30, 2022. Chap. 8, “Dreaming in the Anthropocene”, suggests that if “the future doesn’t need us any more”, as many fear, that is perfectly okay because *Homo sapiens sapiens* are perpetually evolving “human becomings” and not immutable “human beings” anyway. Rather than deny or resist, we should embrace and nourish the metamorphoses of our cybernetic children and artilect companions.

The rest of the book focuses primarily on features of governance in industrial, informational, and dream societies. Each “society” has its own suite of governing modes, and we urgently need now to design forms of governance that are fit for a dream society. No current governance system anywhere is. Chapter 9 shows how the men who wrote the US Constitution for a small, decentralized agricultural country in 1789 faced and addressed several design challenges that more or less sufficed at the time but soon led to disasters and are wildly dysfunctional now. Chapter 10 reviews a long litany of things said to be wrong with US governance currently and what to do about it, none of which understand that the United States needs governance appropriate for a dream society. Chapter 12 reveals Trump as a dreamweaving response to this situation. However, in order to make clear that in some ways Trump

is by no means unique in American history, Chap. 11 first presents six American political precursors—Ben Tillman, Theodore Bilbo, Huey Long, George Wallace, Newt Gingrich, and the Tea Party. Chapter 12 then examines Donald Trump as a dream society paragon (Trump as performer, Postmodern Trump? Trump as Suffering Savior) as well as listing a number of dreamweaving wannabes worldwide. But a dream society has many facets. Six people who in contrast to Trump are dreamweavers in their own intent and style are identified: Madonna, Taylor Swift, Ohtani Shohei, Oprah Winfrey, Kanye West, Elon Musk.

Chapter 13, “Towards Quantum Governance of a Dream Society”, reviews scholarly work linking quantum physics and governance design and examples of emerging quantum awareness in a dream society, and concludes with a sketch of a design of quantum governance for a dream society.

The current drivers and features of a dream society are by no means the end of the story. Old and new drivers of change push on. Chapter 14, “Beyond Words and Images”, summarizes some recent research in basal cognition, cell synchrony, cooperative intelligence, and communication among animals, plants, fungi, and molecules that might enable human becomings to join in the conversation on more universal terms, move beyond the paralyzing restrictions imposed by reliance on human languages.

In some ways, this book epitomizes a dream society because, while I rely on what many other people say (aka “research”), I also shamelessly valorize my own experiences and fantasies. Nonetheless, it is firmly old-fashioned as well, among the last of a dying text-based breed being vanished by fabricated images and sounds of the dream society, and, eventually, perhaps, by electrochemical signals that will enable us cyborgs to laugh, sing, and dance more fully with dogs, trees, fungi, and microbes in the common language of life.

In the meantime, as the old song foretold,

Say it’s only a paper moon  
Sailing over a cardboard sea  
But it wouldn’t be make-believe  
If you believed in me.

In spite of my obvious infatuation with robots and AI, I wrote this book entirely with the very human compassionate research assistance of Dr. David Brier of Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii at Manoa, superb editing advice from Dr. Vali Hawkins Mitchell, and the semi-intelligence of Google and Google Scholar. No (other?) AI was involved until the very end when I compared the governance design that Perplexity offered at my request with the one I had written myself.

Honolulu, HI, USA

Jim Dator



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# Chapter 1

## Waves of Change



**Abstract** This first chapter sets the stage for the rest of the book by reviewing the idea that humanity has gone through four “societies”—periods distinguished by significant technological, environmental, social, and other differences) since we emerged from the Pleistocene epoch into the Holocene epoch 12,000 years ago—hunting and gathering society, agricultural society, industrial society, information society. According to six publications that first identified the emergence of a fifth “society” (Sternberg E, *The economy of icons: how business manufactures meaning*. Praeger, Westport, 1999; Jensen R, *The dream society: how the coming shift from information to imagination will transform your business*. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1999; Pine II BJ and Gilmore JH, *The experience economy: work is theatre and every business a stage*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 1999; Postel V, *The substance of style: how the rise of aesthetic value is remaking commerce, culture and consciousness*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2003; Pink DH, *The MFA is the new MBA*, Harvard Business Review, 2004; Pink DH, *A whole new mind: moving from the information age to the conceptual age*. Riverhead Books, New York, 2005), humanity may now be emerging into a dream society and the Anthropocene Epoch.

Wonder why a liar and groper like Trump was elected president of the United States?

I believe it is because we live in the early stages of a dream society where Trump is one exemplar of how to thrive in a world of make-belief. The dream society has only just begun and you had better learn how to be a compelling dreamweaver if you are not already.

Here, let me show you how and why.

This book is about a future—the immediate future and a longer range vision of the world and our places in it. It is not a charming account of some alluring utopia (an impossibly good place)—nor is it a fearsome dystopia (a warning about a horrible place of agony and angst) though dystopias are so very popular now. Rather, it is my understanding, after a lifetime as an academic and consulting futurist, of where we are and where we are trending, and how we can make the best of it with understanding and resolve, and without whimpering and complaining. It is thus a

“eutopia”—the best possible real world I can imagine given my understanding of how the world works and what our degrees of freedom are. One metaphor for this that I often use is “surfing tsunami”. The future is approaching us as sets of very large waves. Almost everyone is ignoring them, focusing instead on relatively trivial matters of the present with their backs to the ocean. If we don’t turn around and act, we will all be swept away. If we do turn around, carefully study the waves, prepare our minds and bodies, ask other surfers about the conditions of the wave, wax our boards, jump in and paddle out, carefully choosing a wave to ride, we might experience an exhilarating adventure while knowing we will wipeout at the end.

Free will is a very contentious concept—it very well might be an illusion; perhaps a dangerous illusion (Mitchell 2023. Sapolsky 2023). But since many of us have a strong sense that we can decide how to act and then experience the impact of our decisions, I suggest we accept that sense as just one more strange part of the synthetic reality in which we all live, and try to do “the best we can” even if somehow life is nothing but a paper moon floating in a cardboard sky in a Barnum and Bailey world of make-belief, as the old song says.

However, in order to understand what is happening now, we need to know where we came from, where we are—and where we seem to be headed. So, throughout this book, I spend some time characterizing the past, in part to help us seriously contemplate a very weird future by understanding how weird and unexpected the pasts were to those who experienced them. History is often told by politicians and moralists as a series of “just so” stories with inevitable trajectories, whereas every aspect of it could well have been quite different—unless it is indeed true that the motion of every molecule has been predetermined from the Big Bang, and humans indeed have not a whit free will at all.

While the primate genus, *homo*, has been around for millions of year, the first *homo sapiens* evolved about 550,000 years ago in what geologists call the Pleistocene Epoch while contemporary humans—*homo sapiens*, *sapiens*—emerged about 12,000 years ago as the Earth’s geological Pleistocene Epoch gave way to the Holocene Epoch. Since that time, humans and our environment have continued to co-evolve. and can be characterized and distinguished by (among other features) the evolution of the dominant subsistence and technological bases of our ways of life, namely: from hunting and gathering societies; to agricultural societies; to industrial societies; and to information societies. (Nolan and Lenski 2014, Bell 1976, Toffler 1980, Castells 1996, 1997, 1998). Over that time, we *homo sapiens*, *sapiens* have vastly multiplied in numbers, increasingly impacting, modifying, and transforming our environment so that the Earth moved from the Pleistocene and Holocene Epochs into what is now called the Anthropocene Epoch in which most entirely “natural” processes characteristic of the Pleistocene and early Holocene—including humans ourselves—have been rendered more and more “artificial” (Bonnieuil and Fressoz 2016).

By far, the overwhelming majority of humanity’s time on Earth has been spent living as hunters and gathers in small, nomadic, (arguably peaceful, egalitarian and abundant) bands of a few dozen or hundred people each. Some of the bands slowly evolved into habile and eventually hereditary kingships. While a few isolated urban

communities of several thousand people existed earlier, larger cities with ruling, military, religious, educational, commercial and related occupational classes arose in various parts of the world by about 5000 years ago. Since their lifestyles were sustained by the labor of farmers, fishers, loggers, and miners who comprised the majority of the surrounding population, such agricultural societies eventually became the dominant mode of social organization until industrial societies with most people living in cities and working in factories and supporting activities first sprang up in the eighteenth Century and flourished from the middle of the 19th. The first post-industrial society, eventually designated a service and then an information (or knowledge) society, was identified after the second world war when for the first time most people in a few emerging post-industrial societies were no longer hunters and gatherers, farmers, or factory workers. To be sure, many people—often entire communities—continued to hunt, farm, and labor in factories, but more and more people in more and more parts of the world thrived as lawyers, managers, administrators, researchers, teachers and the like. They did not grow or make anything except words. Or (as waiters, typists, bank tellers, flight attendants, hairstylist, etc.) they provided services for others.

Some observers contend that the movement from one of those “societies” to “the next stage” was a sign of human progress. Every day, in every way, life was getting better and better for humanity generally. Hunters and gatherers were declared primitive, backward, ignorant, in need of “development”. “Civilization” (literally meaning “life in cities”) was proclaimed to be a material, intellectual, spiritual, aesthetical, and ethical improvement over hunters and gatherers who could not even read or write. Industrialized mass production, powered by fossil fuels, enabled masses of people to have masses of goods they never even dreamed of before—and indeed, didn’t even exist. But wait! Life in the sleek urban towers of an information society was cleaner, purer, healthier, more fun and free than getting up with the chickens and scooping the poop, or toiling in dark satanic mills, many commentators insisted. Development—especially economic development characteristic of modern societies—spread, forcefully if necessary, worldwide.

But others strongly disagreed. Life as hunters and gatherers was not “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”, they argued. The domestication of plants, animals and women was not a progressive step forward. In fact both longevity and daily health of hunters and gatherers was superior to that of farmers—not to mention what “domestication” meant to peasants, enslaved person, animals, and—yes—plants and fungi. Agricultural practices brought many diseases and unwholesome diets and lifestyles. Industrial societies were worse yet, with plagues, poverty, pollution, and pathologies beyond anything endured before. At the very least it seems that each society had its bright side and its dark side; its progressive features and its regressive and oppressive features; its proponents and opponents. If there was a golden era for humanity, did it lie in our futures, presents, or pasts—or forever only in our dreams?

Then, from 1999, several books and articles appeared that proclaimed, each with its own nomenclature, that, not only was the dominant industrial society over, but so was the information society. The way to become rich and famous now was not to

hunt and gather, not to own and farm acres of land, not to manufacture and sell endlessly innovative products—certainly not to write and try to sell and yet somehow still to own and protect more and more words. That was then. Now fame and fortune is based on creating and disseminating well-formed fantasies, dreams, images, concepts, experiences. You need a shtick that gives meaning to things, that provokes shock and awe. It is the stories attached to things, and not the things themselves or what they do that is important. The titles of these books say it all: *The economy of icons: How business manufactures meaning* (Sternberg 1999), *The dream society: How the coming shift from information to imagination will transform your business* (Jensen 1999), *The experience economy: Work is theatre and every business a stage* (Pine II and Gilmore 1999), *The substance of style: How the rise of aesthetic value is remaking commerce, culture and consciousness* (Postel 2003), Pink 2004), and *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age* (Pink 2005).

Of course, these notions were not wholly new. Some of the foundational ideas leading to them include (Huizinga 1950; McLuhan 1951, 1962, 1964, 1967, 1970; McHale 1959, 1967a, b, 1969; Appadurai 1986).

Nonetheless I was shocked when I first encountered these notions as indicators of a profound societal shift when Ernest Sternberg sent me a draft to read of what became his 1999 book. In the book he wrote:

It is still widely believed that we live in an information society in which the most valued raw material is data, production consists of its processing into information, efficiency depends on computing and scientific reasoning, knowledge and rational calculation underlie wealth, and society is dominated by an educated elite. These were revealing ideas when they were proposed almost thirty years ago, but as we begin the twenty-first century, the concept of the information economy has become a kind of collective wisdom, obscuring another economic transformation that has already overtaken us. The driving force in this newer economy is not information but image. Now the decisive material is meaning, production occurs through the insertion of commodities into stories and events, efficiency consists in the timely conveyance of meaning, celebrity underlies wealth, and economic influence emanates from the controllers of content (Sternberg 1999).

In the same year, Rolf Jensen wrote,

“The sun is setting on the Information Society—even before we have fully adjusted to its demands as individuals and as companies. We have lived as hunters and as farmers, we have worked in factories, and now we live in an information-based society whose icon is the computer: We stand facing the fifth type of society: the Dream Society”. “The Information Society will render itself obsolete though automation, abolishing the very same jobs it created. The inherent logic of the Information Society remains unchanged: replacing humans with machines, letting the machines do the work. This is reflected in the three waves of the electronics industry. The first wave was hardware. The second wave was software (where we are now). The third wave will be content; that is, profit will be generated by the product itself, not by the instrument conveying it to the consumer” (Jensen 1999).

Very importantly, Jensen said that society was finally moving from a dependence on writing to the dominance of audiovisual images: “Today, knowledge is stored as letters; we learn through the alphabet—this is the medium of the Information Society. Most likely, the medium of the Dream Society will be the picture”. Jensen

concluded that Henry Ford was the icon of the Industrial Age while Bill Gates was the icon of the Information Age.

“The icon of the Dream Society has probably been born, but she or he is most likely still at school and is probably not the best pupil in the class. Today, the best pupil is the one who makes a first-rate symbolic analyst. In the future, it may be the student who gives the teacher a hard time—an imaginative pupil who is always staging new games that put things into new perspectives.” “He or she will be the great storyteller of the twenty-first century.” “...Steven Spielberg [is] the closest we now have to a Dream Society icon” in 1999.

Similarly, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore asserted (also in 1999!) that “Experiences represent an existing but previously unarticulated genre of economic output. Decoupling experiences from services in accounting for what businesses create opens up possibilities for extraordinary economic expansion—just as recognizing services as a distinct and legitimate offering led to a vibrant economic foundation in the face of a declining industrial base. And a new base is emerging. Ignore the familiar hype: Information is not the founding of the ‘New Economy’....” “Recognizing experiences as a distinct economic offering provides the key to future economic growth...” (Pine II and Gilmore 1999).

Shortly thereafter, Virginia Postel commented in 2003 on this transformation: “We are now at a tipping point. Small economic advances that have built bit by bit for more than a century are reaching critical mass..... At the same time, recent cultural, business, and technological changes are reinforcing the prominence of aesthetics and the value of personal expression. Each new development feeds others. The result feels less like the culmination of a historical trend than the beginning of a new economic and cultural moment, in which look and feel matter more than ever” (Postel 2003).

Finally, even such a mainstream source as the *Harvard Business Journal* included a brief item in 2004 about the urgent importance of aesthetics and creativity rather than quantification and control in the future world economy:

“[B]usinesses are realizing that the only way to differentiate their goods and services in today’s over-stocked, materially abundant marketplace is to make their offerings transcendent—physically beautiful and emotionally compelling.” “[L]isten to auto industry legend Robert Lutz. When Lutz took over as chairman of General Motors North America, a journalist asked him how his approach would differ from his predecessor’s. Here’s what he said: ‘It’s more right brain. I see us as being in the art business. Art, entertainment, and mobile sculpture, which, coincidentally, also happens to provide transportation.’ General Motors—General Motors!—is in the art business. So, now, are we all” (Pink 2004) Pink expanded on these ideas in book form in 2005.

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## Chapter 2

# The Korean Wave



**Abstract** Yongseok Seo and myself discovered evidence supporting the emergence of a dream society while we were trying to understand why the Korean Wave (*Hallyu* 한류) of popular Korean music (K-pop) emerged and was swiftly spreading all over the world. Korea had no history of encouraging and exporting popular culture as a strategy for economic development. But that is what Korea began doing with great and continuing success to the present time with considerable government support and commercial finesse. We concluded that Korea was leading a global cultural transformation by becoming the world's first *Dream Society of Icons and Aesthetic Experiences*.

A short while after the books I summarized in the previous chapter appeared, an outstanding graduate student from Korea, SEO Yongseok, asked me what I thought of the Korean Wave. I replied that I didn't know what he was talking about. Even though I had been to Korea several times and had many Korean students and friends, I had never heard of it. Seo said the Korean Wave (*Hallyu* 한류) designated the phenomenal and sudden trendiness around the world of Korean popular culture—especially TV soap operas, music groups, electronic games, *aeni* and *manhwa*. Korean popular culture was eagerly consumed worldwide? I couldn't imagine it. Japanese pop culture—yes! Truly a leader in these areas—as the Japanese words *anime* and *manga* themselves indicate. But Korea? Absolutely not. In fact, until very recently, as a legacy of the brutal period of Japanese imperialism in Korea (1910–1945), it had been illegal for Koreans to possess Japanese popular culture products, and Koreans had no tradition of producing these kinds of pop culture items, as Japan had for centuries.

And yet, when Seo showed me the numbers, and the products, I was indeed stunned, though it looked, at my naïve first glance, that they were imitations of Japanese popular culture products. And yet the Hallyu was far more in vogue globally and certainly had an edge that was both cutting and cuddling that Japanese versions did not. The Wave also included not just the hardware of computer games but most definitely the software and orgware also—as well as Korean soap operas on television. Korean movies came a bit later, along with cosmetics, fashion, and

plastic surgery (fans worldwide altered their features so as to look like the fabulous Korean pop stars themselves). Korea's government eventually even shared in the global limelight: *Time* magazine presented first President Moon Jae-In, and later his successor, Yoon Suk-yeol, as varieties of Hallyu stars, while spicy Korean food (long ignored worldwide) was being eagerly devoured—everything Korean became “Kim Chic”. More recently, *Axios What's Next* reports that “with Korean culture taking the U.S. by storm, expect to hear more about ‘K-Food.’ The popularity of K-pop and K-drama is ratcheting up interest in Korean cuisine. ‘Bulgogi, bibimbap and the beloved Korean fried chicken are becoming increasingly popular,’ according to Food By Design, a culinary consultancy. ‘In the coming years, we expect their popularity to soar, with new Korean classics like tteokbokki (rice cakes) and japchae (sweet potato noodles) becoming more mainstream” (Kingson et al. 2023).

Moreover, while enrollment in foreign language college courses from 2016 to 2021 were sharply down in the US (German down 33%, French 23%, Spanish 18%), enrollments in Korean were up 38% (Fischer 2023).

What's going on? Seo and I began digging deeper and wider, and soon realized that unlike popular culture in Japan—or that of the US, Hong Kong, India, France, Italy, or anywhere else in the world—some Korean popular culture products were identified, sponsored, funded, created, advertised and sold as a consequence of official Korean governmental policy that began as a trickle and then surged as a flood as newly-commissioned governmental offices embraced the soft power of pop culture rather than the hard power of military and conventional economic might and threats.

And finally we saw the light: before any other nation, members of Korea's government came to understand that popular cultural products could rival soy beans, fertilizer, oil tankers, automobiles, television sets, computers, and electronic game consoles as major drivers of economic development. It was the games themselves and not just the machines on which the games were played that had the higher value. And Korea made it so. A bevy of dreamweavers nimbly surfed a series of economic, technological, cultural, strategic, psychological, global, planned and fortuitous waves that soon became that mighty and expansive flood. Flowing swiftly forward beyond an information society, Korea was leading a global transformation by becoming the world's first *Dream Society of Icons and Aesthetic Experiences*, we said.

By another of life's strange twists and coincidences, I was invited to give a lecture for a study day on “Korea in the New Millennium: Technology and Science” of the British Association for Korean Studies in the British Library in London, April 3, 2004. The futurist Dr. Wendy Schultz knew that Dr. Seo and myself were doing research about the Korean Wave, and recommended to Dr. James Lewis (her husband) of the Department of Korean Studies of Oxford University that we be invited to speak on “Korea as the wave of a future: The emerging Dream Society of icons and aesthetic experience”. The paper was subsequently published with that title in three places (Dator and Seo 2004, 2005, 2008).

It happened that the Korean Ambassador to the UK was in the audience, in a front row seat. After my talk, he came up to me and asked questions about my

presentation. By the time I left London and returned to Honolulu, I had already received several emails from governmental officials in Korea, including a request by one agency to send one of their officers to the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies to learn more about our work. In fact, Kim Jae-Cheol, of the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, stayed with us from 2004–2006.

While I had visited Korea (including North Korea) many times over many years, and given talks and workshops on many futures-oriented topics, there is no doubt that the work Seo and I presented provoked more interest within Korea than anything else I had ever done so that I had the opportunity to talk about Korea as a Dream Society with many people in Korea and elsewhere from 2004 through 2021.

It turns out that during this time, I was merely surfing the backwash of a gigantic, globally expanding, ongoing Hallyu that continued to roll inexorably forward. Every time observers prophesized its demise, the Wave picked up speed and strength by turning what were declared to be obstacles and setbacks into new motors of invention and markets to exploit, reinforcing our original contention that Korea was leading the world into a cosmic dream society.

The Korean Wave transformed every place and process it touched. Internally, it gained formal support by the conventionally cautious and conservative Korean government and bureaucracy with amazing speed. New agencies were created and old ones modified, aimed at encouraging and guiding the production and distribution of ever more attractive cultural products, traditional as well as popular. Inventors, artists, performers, designers, entrepreneurs, teachers, managers, manufacturers, distributors, marketers mobilized to adapt old and established procedures and products as well as envision and create new ones.

Korea's presidents, regardless of political party or ideology, boosted the Hallyu during their tenure, though in ways that were fit for their political perspective:

Kim Dae-Jung (1998–2003) was the first president officially to mention *Hallyu*, in 2001, though he referred to it (more timidly) as a knowledge-based society and a knowledge economy.

Roh Myoo-Hyun (2003–2008) spoke lavishly of a Creative Korea and the importance of Korean cultural diversity. At one point, during a time of Chinese/Korean amnity, he tied the Hallyu to *Hangfen* (Chinese culture) rather than emphasizing its Korean uniqueness only.

Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013) was the first to proclaim Hallyu as a feature of Soft Power diplomacy. He encouraged more production from the creative content industries while stressing the importance of nation branding. He sought to globalize kim chi and other Korean food.

Park Geun-Hye (2013–2017) repeatedly emphasized, domestically and throughout the world, that Korea was a Creative Society. She significantly increased government funding for the production and distribution of Hallyu.

Moon Jae-in (2017–2022) identified the K-wave as a key policy-driver, and declared in 2020 that the phenomenon was now *Hallyu* 4.0, actively promoting a positive image of Korea and his administration's support on the international stage. Though some public dissent about overemphasis on the Hallyu was heard during the Covid-19 pandemic, in fact, Korea's cultural products prospered during the global scourge, apparently providing relief and comfort during the dark days.

Yoon Suk Yeol (2022—) facilitated a huge agreement with Netflix in 2023 that bankrolled the production of a flood of movies.

So the Hallyu had exceptional political support for more than 20 years. But how was it able to turn the trick economically? It is one thing for government to declare major policy goals for the Wave. It is another to get the world to buy the products and make it so.

For several years, Kawashima Nobuko, Kim Shin Dong, Kim Yeogeun Yonsue, Moon Hw-y-Chang, Messerlin Patrick, Parc Jimmyn, and Shin Wonkyu cooperated in writing articles explaining the economic factors that enabled the Korean Wave to succeed so well. They provided specific reasons for K-pop music, electronic games, and films. Messerlin and Shin explain the case of music similarly. This analysis applies in principle to the entire phenomenon, I believe. Their paper argues that economic factors explain in two ways the difference between K-pop marginality in the past and its worldwide success today:

First is the decisive role of a few Korean firms operating in the ‘dance and song’ (hereafter DS) segment of the vast entertainment world. [T]hese firms have progressively gathered and mastered all the elements necessary for a world success: first targeting a neglected but very promising segment of the world entertainment demand which suited perfectly the artistic skills existing in Korea; then developing these skills and delivering them to the world by a unique combination of old and new techniques—a technological and business shift in the entertainment sector as dramatic as the one introduced by the Japanese carmakers in the car production thirty years ago.

The second economic factor is the set of market- and price-based incentives which have propelled the K-pop onto the world markets.... Small and very competitive Korean markets, with some elements of innovation-friendly concentration and a very peculiar price structure (buying songs on-line in Korea is much cheaper than in the other industrial countries), have strongly induced Korean DS firms and K-pop stars to go abroad as energetically as possible. However, it should be stressed that these factors alone could not have triggered the K-pop wave without the decisive actions of the Korean DS firms.

*Demand: spotting a niche for K-pop.*

Shift from song-intensive to song-and-dance intensive performances. New technologies made watching K-pop continuously possible via Internet on YouTube and its competitors, on ubiquitous portable screens (smart phones, tablets, etc.) that Korean companies excelled in designing and selling.

*Supply: discovering K-pop comparative advantages.*

Korea’s great dancing advantages compared to its more limited singing advantages (because of the Korean language). Transition to boy- and girl-bands was not difficult because of the tradition of Namsadang troupes of musicians and actors that toured the country, performing in local villages and fairs.

*Developing Korean comparative advantage.*

Combining a very old technique of producing talents with a very new one for delivering those talents/.

The old technique of producing talents consisted of training K-pop bands members in “in-house academies” run by each Korean DS firm that recruited promising talent at a very early age and trained them intensively for years by classes in dancing, singing, and foreign languages, while hosting them in dormitories and related facilities. This is similar to the way classical ballet dancers are trained in Europe.

In-house academies are only one illustration of a key feature of the Korean DS firms: they are ‘vertically integrated’—typical of the Korean economy generally. This is in sharp contrast with the free market-based approach prevailing in the US and EU.

Very traditional in their way of nurturing talents, the Korean DS firms were very innovative in delivering the music. They were the first ones in the world to “go on-line” mas-

sively—that is, to use social media such as Internet providers and YouTube for releasing the new titles of their bands and for marketing these titles and the associated concerts. In sharp contrast, US and EU DS firms shifted reluctantly and slowly to the OL delivery mode. Marketing CDs requires a big budget in advertising and retain services that Korean firms avoided. Moving online meant money could be used for enhanced production values.

The Asian financial crisis in 1997 also hit the Korean economy at the same time that the CDs market faced its first big plunge, making the decline of the CDs market much more dramatic in Korea than elsewhere requiring rapid and drastic measures from the Korean firms. They moved swiftly from expensive, restricted, and nonvisual physical CD albums to super abundant and highly visual single songs bought cheaply electronically online and displayed on handheld telephones often designed and produced by Korean companies (Edited from Messerlin and Shin 2013).

Messerlin, *et al.*, do an excellent job of demonstrating (here and in a series of articles about each aspect of the K-Wave) how a combination of foresight, tradition, innovations in hardware, software, and orgware, and the ability to turn catastrophes into opportunities (and good luck) led to its manifest success. Messerlin *et al.*, downplay the role of government, but I still think that has definitely been a contributing factor regarding Korea's economic success overall as well as with the K-Wave.

Some scholars periodize the Korean Wave into four phases up to the present, each one larger, in terms of money and customers, than the ones that swelled before it.

The first generation, Hallyu 1.0, 1997 to mid-2000s;  
 the second generation, Hallyu 2.0, mid-2000s to mid-2010s;  
 the third generation, Hallyu 3.0, mid-2010s to 2020.  
 Hallyu 4.0 began 2020.

Each generation is distinguished by governmental policies (restrictive or lax), major export genres (TV and film dramas, digital games, K-pop music, and webtoons), geographical reach (from east and southeast Asia out to the broader world), and distribution platforms (traditional television channels, theaters, CDs, and VCDs to social media and streaming platforms). Netflix's investment in Korean content in 2023 is seen as the beginning of the fourth generation in Hallyu's global expansion. As the end of each phase approaches there are many voices prophesying the end of the Hallyu, only to see Koreans take advantage of the end of existing technologies and products and to invent, produce, and sell new cultural products based on new technologies to existing and new customers.

For example, since demographically and arguably culturally the future belongs to Africa, it is not surprising that "Africa has the world's fastest-growing music market..." Moreover, "South Korean companies are also trying to get into the market, and K-pop bands have recreated Afrobeats and Nigerian languages within their music which has been a divisive issue among Nigerian artists..." (Gbadamos 2024).

Surely the end to K-pop's wave will come. But when? Will it still be thriving when you read these words?

Most of the components of the Korean Wave are found in popular culture everywhere—singing and dancing, television dramas, plays, movies, and in live, broadcast, recorded, streaming formats that have changed rapidly as the enabling technologies have evolved.

There is one component, while not unique to Korea (and Japan), that nonetheless has a history and popularity in east Asia that typically exceeds its presence elsewhere. I refer to what are called “manga” in Japanese and “manwha” in Korean, and is similar to but distinctly different from American “comic books”. Each medium has a checkered history wherever it exists. It has been forbidden or severely frowned upon as a corruptor of morals of youth and a trivializer of great literature some times, while recognized as high art and an encourager of literacy at other times. While comic books were typically read only by boys and young men in the US in the 1930s and 40s, they were consumed openly by men of all ages in Japan (and secretly in Korea when they were forbidden). Unlike the thin magazines of the US, they were often thick and bulky in Japan and Korea. When the Hallyu began in Korea, manwha were a part, but a relatively small part because they were inert, big books.

Both countries of course had moving pictures, called cartoons in English, and anime/aeni (Japanese/Korean), and various methods were used to turn manga/manwha into handheld anime/aeni that could be watched conveniently on subways while commuting—or anywhere else. The first attempts were functional but highly unsatisfactory. The first major step towards success was achieved by Korea Daum Comics World in 2004 followed by Naver—a major content provider in Korea—in 2005. Sometimes, small chunks of images—seldom longer than five to ten minutes each—were shown on electronic pads for quick viewing on the move. Advertising was displayed during pauses in the stories that were played. The term “webtoon” was coined. The development and rapid distribution of 3G iPhones in 2009 vastly improved the viewing experience.

The fact that these webtoons were designed to provide casual, brief entertainment on the go soon led to a “snack culture” of webtoon consumption—in contrast to the hours-long binge viewing of recorded television series. By 2013, pay-to-read systems were established, and readers could purchase manga chapters by paying for them one by one—perhaps as they were being composed and published. However, while snack culture continued, webtoons soon became so influential that by 2013 full length movies and television series were being produced and distributed as webtoons. At the same time, full fledged movies were being made based on webtoons, and not just the other way around. Korean webtoons were distributed worldwide by 2014. In 2020, full length webtoons were available on Netflix. Webtoons were fully integrated with all aspects of the Hallyu (Lee 2022).

The story of the webtoons is the story of the Korean Wave overall: what started out locally in Korea quickly diversified, spreading from east and southeast Asian countries that shared an historical cultural affinity to virtually every spot on the globe—and outer space. Scholarly and popular books and articles document the spread, showing also in every instance that the phenomenon is dependent on Korean government policy and funding as well as well-educated, motivated, hard-working, innovative administrators, managers, technicians, and artists who produced high quality but comparatively inexpensive cultural products that attracted customers from all cultures and classes, none of whom had ever eaten kim chi, much less