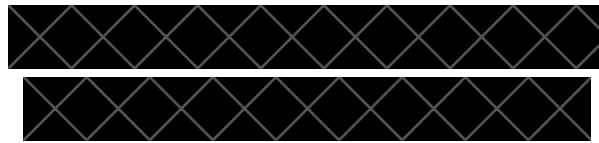




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**Decolonising Korean Collections  
Through Conservation and K-pop:**

**An investigation into current trends and opportunities available  
to conserve and decolonise overseas Korean collections in light of  
the Korean Wave**

**Jessica van Dam**



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**Primary Supervisor: Dr. Cathy Daly**

**Secondary Supervisor: Leah Warriner-Wood**

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## ABSTRACT

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Korea is a nation built on a more than two thousand year history, which has developed a keen sense of national identity and pride. Because of Japanese colonisation, war and economic turmoil of the twentieth century, much of their cultural heritage was destroyed, looted and lost. In the last several decades, the Korean Government and associated agencies and foundations have made it a priority to preserve, reclaim and study their cultural heritage, both nationally and internationally. Despite this, Korean cultural heritage held outside of Korea has been marginalised by western museums compared to other East Asian cultural heritage, such as Chinese and Japanese collections. This marginalization is being mitigated by collaborative efforts between western museums, Korean experts and stakeholders, and conservators. These collaborations offer opportunities for western museums to decolonise their Korean collections by engaging and working with Korean stakeholders. In addition, South Korea has been synonymous with top tier media production and a booming economy as the Korean Wave, aka. Hallyu, has spread across the globe. K-pop and K-dramas have brought Korean culture into mainstream western popular culture as globalisation makes access faster and easier. This Hallyu industry and an ever growing interest in all things Korean has increased revenue across Korean industries and companies. This has provided opportunities for large Korean companies and celebrities to contribute to cultural heritage initiatives and projects. This research aims to highlight the connections between decolonising overseas Korean collections through collaborations, conservation and the Korean Wave. Through this research it was discovered that the connections between conservation, overseas Korean Collection and Hallyu are only growing stronger as the Korean wave further envelopes the globe. Key figures and groups, such as Kim Nam Joon (RM) of BTS, were identified as leaders in the effort to care for and highlight the rich history of Korea through cultural heritage objects. It is inferred that the future care and display of overseas Korean cultural heritage will be heavily influenced by the power of the Korean Wave and that this collaboration and dialogue between industries and nations will aid in the decolonisation of overseas Korean collections.

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# DECOLONISING KOREAN COLLECTIONS THROUGH CONSERVATION AND K-POP: AN INVESTIGATION INTO CURRENT TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO CONSERVE AND DECOLONIZE OVERSEAS KOREAN COLLECTIONS IN LIGHT OF THE KOREAN WAVE

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By Jessica van Dam 2022

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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The idea that K-pop (Korean pop music) is at all linked to art conservation and the decolonization of museums may seem illogical, however they are far more intertwined than one would imagine. K-pop has been an ever-growing industry since the 1990s originating from South Korea. Korean Media production has put Korea at the forefront popularity, producing music, TV and films which have reached critical acclaim in and outside of Korea (Gibson, 2021). Korea's economy is booming with technology, automotives, and cosmetics industries, making Korea an incredibly successful soft world power (Park, 2022). But how is this linked with art conservation?

Art conservation is the care and preservation of historic objects and art through careful storage, research and interventive measures (Insall, et al., 2021). Conservation requires significant funding, often from the museums where the objects are kept or from private collectors (Art Business News, Unknown). In some cases, if an object is to remain in storage and will not go on display, it is left without conservation attention which can be detrimental to the object (Koller, Unknown). While some larger museums have the funding to care for their collections regardless of display or storage plans, many smaller museums must find alternative funding options for the conservation of their collections (Eichman, et al., 2017). Here is where we can link conservation with K-pop and the larger Korean media and technology industries, and the large revenues they bring to the country. It is important to note that the Korean Government has several ministry lead initiatives which organize the preservation of their cultural heritage, such as the Cultural Heritage Administration, Overseas Korean Cultural Administration and the Korea Foundation (Cultural Heritage Administration, 2006; Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, 2019; Korea Foundation, 2022). The establishment of these entities can be traced back to a reclaiming of their heritage following the chaos in Korea of the twentieth century which will be further discussed in chapter 2 (Park, 2022). Because of this, great importance is given to the conservation of Korean cultural heritage especially outside of Korea by South Koreans. Funding for these projects is often generated by large corporations and even individual celebrities within Korea. A perfect example is RM (Kim Nam Joon) of BTS, arguably the most famous K-pop group, who recently donated 100 million won (about £64,760.00) to the preservation

of Korean cultural heritage specifically held outside of Korea (Lim, 2022). This is the second time this idol (industry term for a K-pop artist) has donated to the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation and he is frequently active in the art world. But then how does this tie into decolonisation?

Decolonisation, in simple terms, refers to the independence gained by a country following colonial rule. However, in the museum sector decolonisation has come to mean a movement which aims to elevate the voices of those who have been oppressed rather than perpetuate the voices of colonial powers (Museums Association, 2020). In the United States this is often seen in regards to Native American objects in museums where historically interpretation has been done at the discretion of white curators. With efforts towards decolonising collections, these objects are now being interpreted as a collaborative effort between the museum and the native American community(ies) from which they originate (Huff, 2022).

Korea has had a long history spanning millennia, however due to political and social events of the past century Korea has become marginalised in western museums compared to their other east Asian neighbours (Panero, 2014). In 1910, Korea was colonised by the Japanese, this period ended with the end of WWII but was quickly followed by war and economic crisis (Park, 2022). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, decolonisation within museum collections refers to more than just the victims of white/western colonisation. Many Korean objects which are held outside of Korea got there through unknown avenues or as a result of the political and social turmoil of the twentieth century, and many were likely taken from the country illegally. Due to often unexplored origins and marginalisation many Korean objects have been treated in ways that are disrespectful to their history. An example of this is at the British museum where a Korean painting had been mounted in a Japanese style, and given Korea's tenuous relationship with Japan (the aforementioned Japanese Imperial occupation), it was disrespectful to the object (Lee, 2012). This example is excellent to tie back into conservation and Korean soft power industries, as this specific painting was eventually treated by Korean conservators who were able to re-mount and treat it using Korean techniques and materials with funding from a large Korean cosmetic company, AmorePacific. It also highlighted an empty niche within the museums staff, which provided an opportunity for an AmorePacific funded Conservator of Korean Paintings position at the British Museum held currently by a Korean conservator. This funding by a large Korean company is helping the British Museum decolonise its Korean painting collection by employing Koreans who are privy to, familiar with, and trained in Korean styles, and provides an insight into Korean culture, while also providing communication channels between the British Museum and Korean museum professionals in Korea.

A further example, which will be explored further in chapter 3, is that of the Honolulu Museum of Art which embarked on a conservation survey of a recently acquired Korean painting collection with funding from the Korean Foundation and at the suggestion of the South Korean Government. Through the survey they discovered several rare paintings which were sent to Korea for conservation. As will be discussed later in chapter 3, the Korea Foundation is funded by many of Korea's largest companies including Samsung and AmorePacific, and its main purpose is to provide funding for the research and treatment of Korean cultural heritage held internationally (Korea Foundation, 2022).

These two examples illustrate that the distribution of Korean cultural heritage objects in collections across the world are heavily influenced by its history of occupation. It also highlights methods the museums used to decolonise their collection by communicating with Korean experts and encouraging the treatment of their rare items by Korean conservators. They are also prime examples of the efforts of the Korean Government and companies to gain better understanding of their overseas cultural heritage and provide funding to support the care of these objects and collections.

This research explores how Korean collections held outside of Korea can be decolonised through conservation, with funding opportunities from the Korean Government, Korean companies and K-pop. This research is structured around the following aims and objectives.

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#### AIMS

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- ◆ Identify the challenges Korean heritage outside of Korea faces in terms of colonial provenances, marginalisation, accessibility and care.
- ◆ Identify steps that could overcome these challenges and improve the condition and accessibility of Korean cultural heritage in non-Korean museum collections.

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#### OBJECTIVES

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1. Explore how Korean objects have been acquired by non-Korean Museums and how they have been treated since.
2. Define Hallyu and assess its current role in funding opportunities for Korean cultural heritage.
3. Draw connections between Korea's historic cultural heritage and Korea's modern culture and media—Hallyu.
4. Discuss decolonisation in a museum context and how conservation and treatment of objects can help aid in decolonisation efforts.

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## RESEARCH METHODS

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To pursue this research the author will use secondary sources, including academic literature, articles, and other online sources, along with case studies to develop and explore the material.

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## POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER

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The author acknowledges that as a white American female, which is to say, not Korean or Korean diasporic, she cannot represent a Korean perspective. The positioning of the research from a non-Korean perspective will nonetheless enable discussion and provision of insights into the issues surrounding decolonisation and Korean cultural heritage outside of the Korean peninsula. This is because the author can approach these objects with a more objective or scientific method-oriented stance because her personal history does not intersect with the history of the object. The author acknowledges that through this objectivity she cannot make any claims regarding the wishes or opinions of Koreans regarding their cultural heritage unless they can be verified by a direct quote. In addition, the author does not speak or read Korean, which means all sources used are translated or already written in English. The author hopes this research will increase the dialogue between Korean and non-Korean museum professionals who have the privilege to work with Korean objects.

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## RESEARCH STRUCTURE

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This research will begin with a brief exploration of Korean history in Chapter 2, which will provide context for subsequent topics. Chapter 3 will provide a summary of Korean collections held outside of Korea, focussing on how they got there, what is happening to them and the current status of many overseas Korean collections. Chapter 3 will also provide a space to show the case studies mentioned above in Chapter 1's Introduction. This will lead into Chapter 4 where decolonisation will be defined and the role of conservation in this effort will be highlighted. The information provided in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will then be summarily discussed in Chapter 5. The research will then conclude with Chapter 6 and include recommendations for future research.



## CHAPTER 2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF KOREA

South Korea, or the Republic of Korea, which is shortened to just Korea in this work, is a small peninsular country in East Asia. It is bordered by the East Sea, East China Sea and the Yellow Sea with North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) to the north connecting the Korean Peninsula to the mainland (China)(map shown below in figure 1). Because of the early reclusive nature of Korea during the Choson period, the west knew very little about it (Panero, 2014). From a western perspective Korea seemed to just appear in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when trade began with the west and the Japanese invasion and colonisation, however the origins of the country go back several millennia (Park, 2022; Panero, 2014). Therefore it is important that the history of Korea be summarised in its entirety so that the reader can appreciate the scope and complexity of this nation's cultural history. Each detail of history given, and element described, relate to how the objects in museum hands today are unique and must be treated with personalised care.



FIGURE 1. MAP OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA. THE CAPITALS OF NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA ARE NAMED AND MARKED WITH RED SQUARES. THE PENINSULA'S POSITION RELETAVE TO THE LARGER GLOBE IS SHOWN IN THE BOTTOM LEFT CORNER (GEO AWESOME, UNKNOWN).

As will become clear in this chapter, one resource was used for the majority of the information; *Korea a History* by Eugene Y. Park published in 2022. While it is understood that more sources would

provide a more comprehensive view of Korean history, this work is the most up to date work on Korean history and uses historic primary and secondary sources in the native languages of Korea. Because this book was also written specifically for western audiences by framing Korean history in both a national and international context, it provided a blended lens through which to view Korean history and isolate key elements of Korean culture. While material cultural heritage is the focus of this research it is important to understand the history and culture which created these physical objects and how these objects have travelled through time and space. Therefore, most of this chapter will detail broad historic and cultural trends while highlighting certain events that will help provide context for later chapters. Ultimately, the aim is to provide the reader with an understanding of where Korea came from, where it has stood in the world, and how it is seen today.

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### PRE-HISTORY

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Archaeological evidence from the peninsula goes as far back as the palaeolithic when Homo erectus was the dominant human species ( (Park, 2022, p. 6). Homo sapiens began migrating into East Asia around 50,000 BCE where they soon became the dominant and then only human species (6). However, it was not until the bronze age, about 2,000 BCE, that there was enough societal frameworks and technological developments to lay the foundations for a larger civilisation (19).

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### THREE KINGDOMS AND UNITED SILLA

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The precise dates and rulers which could be considered the beginning of the Korea have been lost and/or assigned to legend in many cases ( (Park, 2022, pp. 23-24) However, by about 400 BCE, Kojonson, the name given to what can be considered the first Korean state, was noteworthy enough to their Chinese neighbours to be mentioned in their historic records (25). Across the peninsula, different groups formed and fought and reformed, developing different social systems and hierarchies. The three most dominant kingdoms were Koguryo, Silla, and Paekche (alternatively romanized as Goguryo, Shilla, and Baekche), and each operated with different societal systems and often fought or aligned with each other depending on the motives or threats of the day. By about 391 CE this would come to be known as the Three Kingdoms Period.

Due to the proximity of China and the influence of its high court, Confucianism was adopted by the Three Kingdoms around 350 CE (Park, 2022; Kuhn, 2021). This would have a huge impact on Korean culture throughout its history, as the philosophical teachings of Confucius impact so much of daily life in modern Korea (Kuhn, 2021). Confucianism, while not generally considered a religion, teaches ethics and beliefs which are based on the principal of 'cosmic harmony,' whereby it is believed that good moral character brings peace and straying from good moral practices can bring bad luck and even

natural disasters (National Geographic Society, 2022). Good moral character is maintained with education, so education is highly valued in Korean society, then and now (Park, 2022). It also teaches the importance of 'filial piety' or loyalty and devotion to family and elders, which can include the worship of ancestors. Confucianism, especially in the Three Kingdoms era, was able to influence society alongside indigenous shamanistic practices and the more recently adopted Buddhism, as the two religions helped ground the people and offer explanations to questions Confucianism could not answer (Park, 2022).

While the Chinese had an influence on the early Korean states, these states were hugely influential to the neighbouring Japanese islands (Park, 2022). Until about the fourth century (CE) these islands were inhabited by an indigenous hunter population but following 400 CE an influx of Koreans with their cultures, technologies and agriculture came to the islands. This is why today, the average Japanese genome share 80% commonality with the average Korean while maintaining only 20% from the indigenous population ( (Park, 2022, p. 38).

At end of the Three Kingdoms period there was political unrest between each other and with neighbouring Chinese rulers (Park, 2022). Koguryo joined with nearby tribes and moved north creating a new Kingdom called Parhae in 698 CE. Paekche became part of Silla, which ruled the southern end of the Korean peninsula until the end of the ninth century, a period often referred to as United Silla. By early 900 CE two rebel leaders had taken land from Silla and created Later Koguryo and Later Paekche. This commenced the Later Three Kingdoms Period which lasted only until 918 CE. Most of the cultural heritage objects which survive from the Three Kingdoms periods ceramics and objects which have been excavated from tombs, essentially anything which survived well in the archaeological record.

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## KORYO

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In 918 CE King T'aejo became the ruling monarch of Koguryo, however upon his ascension to the throne he renamed the state Koryo (sometimes written as Goryo) which is where the modern name Korea comes from (Park, 2022) 87. Due to long standing tensions to the North between Parhae and the Khitan, Parhae began to dissolve and Koryo took in Parhae refugees, offering military support to the failing state and securing the northern borders. Silla, though an ancient state by this time, was struggling and peacefully surrendered to Koryo in 935 CE. By 938 CE King T'aejo had united the Kingdoms of the Korean Peninsula and the nearby island of T'amna.

The Kingdom of Koryo established, changed, and evolved their social hierarchies and government organisations as new threats, both within country borders and outside them, developed (Park, 2022).

Garrisons kept the northern and eastern borders safe while a government official would be in charge of a county or province. Following Confucian teachings, government positions were no longer simply held by the aristocracy. These positions were held by those who had passed the government service examinations, which sought to increase Confucian influence in court over Buddhism. While these examinations were reserved mostly for high-ranking males it did curtail some of the power of the aristocracy. While Confucianism was the reigning philosophy in court and daily practice, it operated in tandem with Buddhism, Daoism (Taoism), and shamanism. These three religions agreed in many ways so could be easily embraced by all levels of society. They also formed a basis for the various festivals which would be celebrated throughout a calendar year, many of which are still celebrated such as Chusok, the autumn harvest festival.

Koryo also began keeping careful records of Kings and historical events called 'veritable records' (Park, 2022). While most did not survive, the oldest surviving record is The History of the Three Kingdoms (1031-34 CE) which was based on an earlier Koryo text but was updated to fit with Chinese Confucian style historic records. In this vein paper production in Koryo increased and improved, using mulberry trees as the cellulose fibre. This smoother more durable paper, called Hanji, increased the development of calligraphy as an art form as well as painting which often followed Chinese styles of the time. Paper production also aided in the development, improvement, and dissemination of different subjects. Many consider the Islamic world the most advanced in astronomy by the twelfth century, but remaining Koryo records of astronomical observations would indicate Koryo Astronomers were just as advanced as their Islamic counterparts. Similarly, ship building technologies allowed the construction of large vessels capable of ocean travel in order to maintain trade routes with the Song (China). Records of these ships show that they were much larger than many future European ships such as the Santa Maria made famous by Christopher Columbus who sailed her centuries after the Koryo trade vessels were constructed. Medicine was advancing and became regulated by the court who taught and employed many physicians. While many records and objects from Koryo have been lost to time, Koryo Celadon, which developed during this period, has many surviving examples. Celadon is a pale jade-green ceramic which began with simple elegant designs but advancements in coloured glazing led to beautiful designs within the pale green base colour and peaked in design and popularity in the twelfth century, an example of which can be seen in figure 2.



FIGURE 2. CELADON PLUM BLOSSOM VASE DECORATED WITH CRANES AND CLOUDS. KORYO, BUAN YUCHEON-RI IN NORTH JEOLLA PROVINCE, LATE 13TH CENTURY (METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, 2022).

Despite ongoing advancements in arts and technologies, the end of the Koryo period was fraught with instability (Park, 2022). Military forces controlled much of Koryo due to rebellions by slaves and poor farmers in conjunction with the Koryo-Mongol War which lasted from 1231-1259 CE. Following defeat, the Mongol Yuan controlled the country until 1356, and Koryo would continue to suffer raids from different groups and face demands from the Chinese Ming after this. Despite this unrest, Koryo was the first to develop a moveable metal type print system at the turn of the thirteenth century, predating the West by more than two centuries (130). They were also the first to mount cannons on ships which were soon adapted to withstand the powerful cannon blasts at sea.

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## CHOSON

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In 1392, Yi Songgye took the throne with the help of high officials, despite being of no relation to the Koryo royal family (Park, 2022). These officials feared the Koryo royal Wang family would eventually try to reclaim the throne and the Wang family was persecuted to protect the new ruling family from 1394-1413. King Yi Songgye, who would later be called T'aejo, moved the capital from the Koryo capital of Kaeyong to Hangsong (modern day Seoul). This move marked the start of a new dynasty, Choson (Joseon).

Choson was socially and politically based in Confucianism, as Buddhism was now considered detrimental to the good morality needed to align with Confucian teachings (Park, 2022). This was a clear departure from their Koryo predecessors. The new capital produced a new palace for the ruling monarch and government officials (Kyongbok Palace), as well as government education centres, royal ancestral shrines, altars for offerings, roads and marketplaces. Choson's third king, T'aejong

restructured the government organisation ensuring that the king was at the centre of decision making and placed all military power under royal command, thus increasing the strength of the throne. Due to the Confucian high regard for education, a writing system for the common people was created. In 1443 King Sejong created a phonetic writing system, Hangul, designed to be easy to learn and correspond with spoken Korean language, unlike the Chinese characters used by the elite.

Choson also saw an increase in technological, medicinal and astronomical advancement (Park, 2022). A white slipped porcelain ceramic called Punchong (figure 3) became popular over earlier celadon or silver and gold table ware, though stoneware ceramics were still popular for food storage, fermentation and the lower classes (Lee, 2000). Paintings in Choson began to develop styles and themes specific to Choson as opposed to earlier works which were heavily influenced by Chinese trends (Park, 2022). These new Choson trends in painting influenced Japanese art between the 1330's-1570's.



FIGURE 3. PUCHEON FLASK-SHAPED BOTTLE DECORATED WITH PEONIES, FIFTEENTH CENTURY, JEOLLA PROVINCE KOREA (LEE, 2000).

Throughout the Choson era (which lasted from 1392-1897) relations with nearby nations varied depending on the strength of Choson at the time (Park, 2022). For much of Choson's history there were mostly civil relations with the Chinese emperors to whom tributes were paid in exchange for military aid in case of raids or attacks from other groups. This meant that trade routes existed between Choson and China as well as beyond to southeast Asia and middle east. Due to their prime location, Choson's port cities were the centres for these trade routes, and frequent raids from Japan in early Choson increased tensions. However, trade agreements with Japan were arranged but were

unfortunately short lived. Heavy trade restrictions imposed by Choson caused the Japanese to riot in the main Choson port cities leading to an end of trade agreements and increasing the already tense relations between the two yet again.

Inevitably these high tensions with Japan lead to the Imjin War (East Asian War 1592-98) (Park, 2022). Japan, which had been newly reunified by the Daimyo (feudal lord) Toyotomi Hideyoshi after years of internal unrest, invaded the southern coasts of Choson. Due to poor outcomes in land-based battles, the Choson King and government fled north away from Hangsong before the capital was reached by the invading Japanese army. At sea, Choson was able to defeat the Japanese's attempts to gain Cholla, a resource rich region in Choson which would have helped them support their troops. However, to stand any chance against the Japanese invasion, the Choson King requested military aid from the Chinese Ming, who sent 50,000 troops. This aid was critical in pushing the Japanese back to the coastal regions and prompted the Japanese to seek a truce with Ming. After three years and no agreements the Japanese escalated and began to push north again by both land and sea. Choson strong navy kept the Japanese at bay and further reinforcements from Ming kept the Japanese armies to the southern coast. The now aged and dying Daimyo saw the futility in continued war against the Ming backed Choson and ordered the retreat of his troops in 1598. It would take another ten years before Choson would fully repair their relationship and trade agreements with Japan.

The Imjin War will be necessary in understanding the importance of the Honolulu Museum of Art Case Study which will be explained in Chapter 3. This is because this war not only led to high death tolls on all sides, but it also led to the destruction of large quantities of Choson material cultural heritage (Park, 2022). The Japanese pillaged towns and cities, often simply burning buildings, royal tombs and artworks and books. However, many Japanese soldiers saw the value in Choson material and cultural goods and stole innumerable paintings and objects, as well as individuals with valuable skills such as scholars and potters. Two years after the end of the war, most Choson captives still held by the Japanese were returned but the art and cultural objects were (likely) never returned. This meant that artwork from before 1592 which was not already part of the archaeological record (which is to say already buried) was destroyed or stolen making any remaining pieces exceedingly rare.

Following the Imjin War, the relations with Choson northern neighbours became tense (Park, 2022). The Later Jin (Chinese dynasty which ruled from 1616-1636, located north of the Ming) chose a new dynastic name to Qing and demanded that Choson pay allegiance to them instead of the Ming. Choson objected because they already paid tribute to the Ming who had been crucial during the war with Japan. However, following attacks on the northern border by the Qing, Choson was forced to pay tribute to both the Ming and the Qing until Ming was defeated by the Qing. Now that Qing was the

biggest power to the north their relationship became more amiable, leading peacefully to a demarcation of their countries shared border in the sixteenth century.

In the seventeenth century, Choson began interacting more frequently with the west and western ideas (Park, 2022). Choson envoys visiting China met Jesuit missionaries who shared western theologies and technological advancements and ideas. From this, map-making became more westernised and astrological knowledge improved with the import of telescopes. Two groups of Dutch sailors shipwrecked off the coast of Choson were the first known westerners to experience this isolated culture. The first group adapted to the new country, shared Dutch cannon technology, fought alongside Choson soldiers and the sole survivor married a Choson woman, living the rest of his life with his family in Choson. The second group was less eager to remain in Choson. One member left descendants there, but the majority escaped to Japan and returned to the Netherlands. Ultimately, one sailor who returned to the Netherlands, Hendrik Hamel, wrote the first known western written account of life in Choson.

With increasing influence from the west and neighbouring countries, Choson's national identity solidified and importance was given to their indigenous culture and beliefs (Park, 2022). This became clearly evident in painting styles, which up until this point had followed the stylised themes of their Chinese neighbours. Choson painters of the sixteenth century began to use realism to depict the Choson scenery, as well as paint realistic daily life scenes which showed the unique characteristics of Choson life. By the seventeenth century, western realism was used in portraiture while more carefree but realistic styles were used in folk paintings of daily life such as two paintings of sparrows and a cats shown in figures 4 and 5 below. Previously, paintings as decoration had been limited to the upper classes but with increasingly available resources, folk paintings became a part of everyday life to all levels of society. Similarly, fictional narrative books became popular in the same century, becoming common entertainment to everyone as they were written in hangul and therefore were available to the lower and upper classes alike. In the late 1700's, King Chongjo funded the creation of Kyujanggak, a Royal library which would serve as an archive to preserve and record historical texts and other books, including records of previous monarchs.





FIGURE 5. PAINTING OF SPARROWS, CATS, BUTTERFLIES AND FLOWERS, CHOSON (UNKNOWN, CHOSON ).



FIGURE 4. PAINTING OF SPARROWS AND CAT BY ARTIST BYEON SANG-BYEOK CHOSON MID 1700'S (BYEON, 1730-?).

As the west made treaties with Qing China and Meiji Japan, Choson resisted encroachment by the west, fuelled by national pride and went so far as to erect steles throughout the country (Park, 2022). These steles referred to westerners as barbarians and to associate with them was to betray Choson. However, by the late 1870's, Choson could no longer hold out against the west and made treaties with Japan who had previously made agreements with western nations decades before. By the 1880's Choson had agreed to trade treaties with most of the major western powers including the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, Russia, France and Austria-Hungry. This led to increased sharing of knowledge, but also created tensions. Choson tried to maintain their independence and autonomy but Japan and China tried to increase control within Choson. In response Choson reached out to Russia for a stronger tie but this made the British anxious, leading to a brief occupation by the British in Komundo Cholla. Choson was further unsettled in 1895 as Japan and China invaded Choson, starting the first Sino-Japanese war and installed a pro-Japanese government in Gyeongbok Palace in what is now modern Seoul. With a pro-Japanese government in place, new edicts were demanded of Choson citizens. Most alarming to the Confucian raised citizen was the command to cut off their topknots, a hair style which had been popular for centuries as cutting ones hair was considered unfilial under Confucian teachings. This particular edict encouraged Confucian scholars and rural farmers to revolt against the pro-Japanese government and encouraged King Kojong to flee into the protection of Russia. From the support gathered from the people against Japanese influence, Kojong elevated Choson's status and crowned himself as the first Korean Emperor in 1897.

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## KOREAN EMPIRE

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Despite being acknowledged by the western powers as a new empire, Korea struggled to hold out against nearby warfare and interference (Park, 2022). Korea declared neutrality between Russia and Japan in 1904, but despite this Japan forced Korea into a treaty which allowed Japan to travel through Korea to reach Russia. By 1905 the US had acknowledged Japan's control of Korea, a control which increased until 1910 when Korea was declared a colony of Japan, beginning the Imperial Japanese occupation.

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## JAPANESE COLONIAL RULE

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The Imperial Japanese colonisation of Korea lasted from 1910 to 1945 when Japan was defeated by the Allied forces in World War II (Park, 2022). This 35 year span had three distinct phases, the first consisted of militant control of the Korean people through the suppression of Korean national identity and forced integration into Japanese culture with none of the same rights as native Japanese people. The second phase provided Koreans with more rights in an attempt to win over the Korean people to

comply with Japanese rule. The third phase was forcing Korea and its industries to support the growing war efforts with which Japan was engaging. This wartime support culminated in 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and began the Pacific war. Through this occupation, the Korean people tried to retain their national identity, improve their understanding and knowledge of their history and increase the use and education of their language (hangul). Resistance groups formed and broken apart throughout this time, but were unsuccessful in generating enough power to overthrow their Japanese colonists.

As part of their Korean national identity suppression campaign the Japanese destroyed numerous historic buildings in what is now Seoul and in some of the larger cities (Park, 2022). Gyeongbok Palace in Seoul was one location on which the Japanese focused much of their destructive measures. Originally built in 1395, it was first destroyed during the Imjin War and was abandoned for another palace, Changdeokgung (Seoul Guide, The, 2022). Gyeongbok Palace would be left untouched for several centuries until 1868 when the then regent rebuilt the palace to act as a symbol for national pride. While it differed slightly from its original form it stood as representative of Choson palace design with 330 buildings covering 410,000 square meters, about the size of a small city. However, during the Imperial Japanese occupation, all but 10 buildings of the palace were dismantled or destroyed including Gwanghwamun Gate (the main gate). To add insult to injury, the Japanese constructed their own General Government building as sign of Japanese occupation which remained standing until 1995. Further destruction to the palace occurred later during the Korean War and restoration work continues to this day in an effort to rebuild the entire palace complex as it once stood (Yoo, 2010).

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## AMERICAN AND SOVIET OCCUPATION OF THE PENINSULA

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Liberation from the Imperial Japanese Occupation occurred on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945 when Japan unconditionally surrendered to the allied forces (Park, 2022). This victory would be short lived for Korea as the surrender from Japan had come at the cost of invasion from the Soviets to the north and US invasion to the south. While both invading forces did so to support Korea against their Japanese oppressors, it still meant the fate of Korea was in the hands of two other nations. This was further compounded by the years of suppression by the Japanese, which meant that Korea had no political or social groups large or powerful enough for the Soviets or US to consult with. This led to a divided nation where the communist soviets controlled the north above the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, and the capitalist US aided the southern section of the peninsula. Both foreign nations helped build political parties on each side of the border, effectively creating the South and North Korea we know today. Impacted by

the Cold War and having established their rival Koreas the Soviets and US withdrew from the peninsula in December 1948 and June 1949 respectively.

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### KOREAN WAR

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Both North and South Korea believed themselves the true Korea so skirmishes broke out along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel until North Korea made the first official invasion in June 1950 (Park, 2022). Lasting until the armistice of 1953, the Korean War changed direction many times and encompassed most of the peninsula. Both sides pushed each other across the peninsula several times, leaving destruction and death in the wake of the opposing armies. The North was supported as before by the Soviets and by the Chinese. The South, considered the victim in this war by the west, was supported by the US and 15 other UN member countries all of whom contributed troops and military equipment. After heavy casualties on both sides, the two sides reached a stalemate along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, known as the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). After many debates an armistice was signed by the North and South, and in agreement with the UN, on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953, an agreement which is still in place to this day, meaning the Korea War remains active.

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### MODERN HISTORY

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In the initial years following the armistice, North Korea was faster to recover economically, however that would be short lived (Park, 2022). South Korea on the other hand struggled for many years, both with a poor economy and with turbulent political leaders. Originally, South Korea began as a democracy as influenced by their American supporters, however political corruption was rampant and would lead to an instable country and economy for several decades. However, a return to democracy in the later 1980's gave rise to a country set on developing itself as a unique soft world power. In the North, decades of dictators and military dreams of grandeur have led to a country with nuclear weapons but little to no resources to feed its citizens. However, discussions between the South and North have been generally positive, especially in recent years as both leaders wish to end hostilities at the DMZ and both wish for more opportunities for collaboration in the future. Unfortunately, it remains unclear if unification will be possible between the two nations, though this has been often mentioned since the peninsula was divided in 1945. It should be noted that the author was unable to establish if, or to what extent, North Korea is interested in or taking action towards protecting the cultural heritage. In the Korean drama series, *Crash Landing On You* (2019) ( a fictional story of a South Korean heiress crashlanding in North Korea and the relationships built between the two countries), there is reference to illicit archaeological digging and antique smuggling. However the veracity of this plot point is unknown and to the authors knowledge unexplored, but it should be

noted that one of the show's writers is a North Korean defector so it is possible there is fact between the fiction (Kim & Denyer, 2020).

Despite the ongoing tensions, economic growths and recessions and political turmoil, South Korea has been actively working to reclaim their nationality through several different avenues (Park, 2022). Exposure to the West through WWII, the Korean War and subsequent globalisation made possible by advancements in technology gave Korea a sense of self within the global arena. This has led to pursuits in the global market through technology and media. Often referred to in the media market as 'Hallyu' or 'the Korean Wave', this export of Korean TV, music, and movies, as well as technology and cosmetics, has made South Korea the fourteenth largest economy in the world as of 2020.

With this growing financial stability and desire to secure and support their national identity through the research and preservation of its cultural heritage, South Korea is taking action on many fronts to share their country and culture with the world. The following chapter will identify several major avenues South Korea has and is taking to preserve their cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. It will also address how Korea's media and conglomerate industries contribute to the cultural heritage sector. It will then discuss two case studies which will highlight how Korean objects are treated in the west as well as how they were funded.

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## CHAPTER 3: KOREAN CULTURAL HERITAGE OUTSIDE OF KOREA

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South Korea has been dedicated to exploring their uniqueness as a nation and devoted resources to understand, record, and recover their national identity and cultural heritage. This is in defiance to the Imperial Japanese occupation of recent history, the Korean War, changing ruling structures of the past, and economic struggles of the twentieth century. This effort has taken different forms over their millennia of existence and these will be highlighted in the following chapter. In conjunction this chapter will explore how material cultural heritage has become part of western museum collections and how it is treated there. This will be further illustrated with case studies, one from a small museum in the United States and one from a large museum in the United Kingdom. These examples will help to tie together the impact of Hallyu on Korean Cultural Heritage, two subjects which at first seem very distant.

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### HISTORIC CULTURAL DOCUMENTATION

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Since the Koryo period and the development of paper in Korea (Hanji), historic records beginning with the rulers and events of the Three Kingdoms were documented for future study (Park, 2022; Panero, 2014). Since then, careful records were kept regarding rulers, events, and family lineages. Early on Koreans took pride in their nation and made sure to document their history and culture. From early Choson to the beginning of the Imperial Japanese colonisation, there are records documenting daily life and traditions through both books and art. Despite the suppression of Korean identity during the Japanese colonial period, several groups and individuals worked hard to record, document and preserve Korean history and language. Most notably Im Kyongjae and Chang Chiyoun led the Society for Korean Language Research (founded in 1921) to organise the Korean language and would become the first group to compile and later complete the first Korean hangul dictionary in the 1950's. Continuing with their pattern of preservation and documentation the Korean Government and associated groups have sought to preserve and share their cultural heritage.

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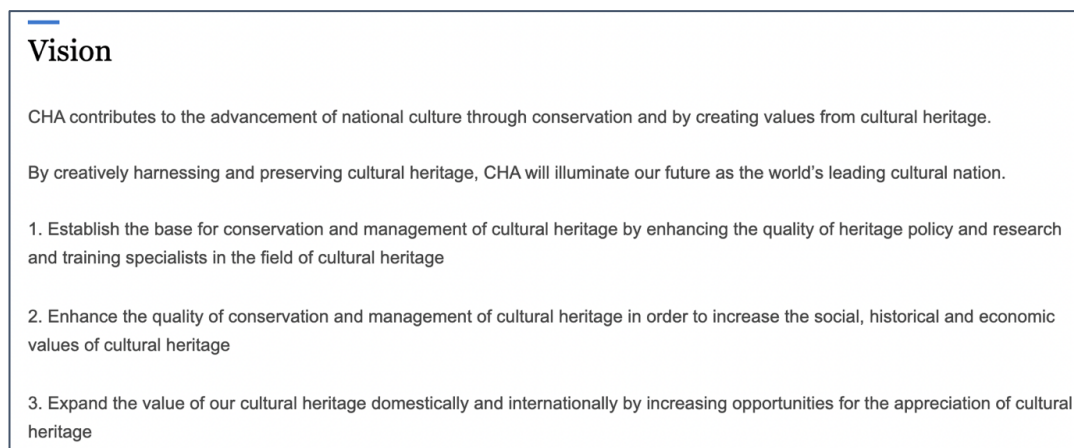
### DEVELOPMENT OF MINISTRIES FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Through the turmoil of the Korean War and despite the economic strife of the twentieth century, Korea has formed government ministries and administrations in charge of their Cultural Heritage and promotion of their culture internationally. Many of these organisations have developed since their liberation from Japanese imperialism and arguably as a response to their loss of cultural identity from colonisation and war.

*The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism*, as the name suggests, supports and promotes the nation's culture, including but not limited to arts, language and music, sports and tourism.

*The Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA)* works with a number of Korean Museums, research centres, and universities, including the *National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage*, to promote the study and preservation of Korea's cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible) (Cultural Heritage Administration, 2019). According to their vision and mission statement, they facilitate the use of conservation to promote their cultural heritage, both nationally and internationally (Cultural Heritage Administration, 2006). This includes preservation of intangible cultural heritage, including but not limited to: dance, music, embroidery and the wearing of hanbok (historic native Korean dress), and tangible cultural heritage, including reclaiming what was stolen or altered by invading forces. The vision statement is reproduced below in figure 6.



**Vision**

CHA contributes to the advancement of national culture through conservation and by creating values from cultural heritage.

By creatively harnessing and preserving cultural heritage, CHA will illuminate our future as the world's leading cultural nation.

1. Establish the base for conservation and management of cultural heritage by enhancing the quality of heritage policy and research and training specialists in the field of cultural heritage
2. Enhance the quality of conservation and management of cultural heritage in order to increase the social, historical and economic values of cultural heritage
3. Expand the value of our cultural heritage domestically and internationally by increasing opportunities for the appreciation of cultural heritage

FIGURE 6. THE VISION STATEMENT REPRODUCED FROM THE CULTURAL HERITAGE ADMINISTRATIONS WEBSITE (CULTURAL HERITAGE ADMINISTRATION, 2006).

Affiliated to the Cultural Heritage Administration is the *Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation* which:

“Specializes in the systematic survey and research of Korean cultural heritage abroad. We also support projects related to the utilization of Korean cultural heritage. In addition to this, the Foundation has taken a leading role in returning Korean cultural properties transferred illegally or meaningfully. [and] Thus we make efforts to increase awareness of the importance of Korean cultural heritage abroad, and to facilitate the appreciation thereof.” (Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, 2019).

*The Korea Foundation*, founded in 1991, is a non-profit organisation which aims to “promote proper awareness and understanding of Korea, and to enhance goodwill and friendship throughout the international community through a diverse array of international exchange activities...” (Korea

Foundation, 2022). This foundation offers funding through grants, fellowships and education opportunities to both institutions and individual scholars of Korean culture and history. As will be noted later in this chapter, this foundation plays a key role in funding museums who wish to better understand their Korean collections.

While these are by no means the only organisations working towards preserving and promoting Korea's cultural heritage, they provide an example of how much the Korean Government and the Korean people value their heritage and wish to share it with future generations both nationally and internationally.

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### KOREAN CULTURAL HERITAGE OUTSIDE OF KOREA

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Following the Imperial Japanese occupation and Korean War, Korea had lost thousands of cultural heritage objects. Many had been claimed by the Japanese but some had been taken by other forces operating within the peninsula, such as the US. As of 2011, the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage estimated that over 140,000 Korean objects were outside of the country, by 2019 the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation estimated 182,080 objects (Power, 2013; Yim, 2019). This is not to say that more objects are leaving the country, though this is possible, it is more likely this is due to increased surveys on Korean collections leading to more verifiable numbers.

Examples of these objects are Choson Royal and court seals which made their way into American and Japanese collections between the Japanese occupation and the end of the Korean war in 1953 (Yim, 2019). These seals represented the power of the ruling monarch and court of the time, and as such are considered valuable cultural objects. While many of these stamps are still missing, the US has returned a number of them. In 1946, the US tracked down eight of these stamps in Japan and returned them as part of the one year anniversary of independence celebrations, which strengthened the relationship between the two countries. Three of those seals would go missing again and it would not be until 2013 that they would reappear after the soldier who had discovered them and brought them back to the US passed away. They were returned to the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Office along with four other seals which had been in the LACMA (LA County Museum of Art) collection having been donated by a private collector who bought them at auction in Japan. By 2014, nine seals in total were identified as stolen during the Korean War and were personally returned to Korea by President Obama, who said they represented "the respect the



US has for Korea” (Yim, 2019). These nine seals can be seen below in figure 7 where they were photographed together as part of a special temporary exhibition on returned and extant royal seals at the Jeonju National Museum in 2015 (Jeonju National Museum, 2015).



FIGURE 7. POSTER FROM THE 2015 SPECIAL TEMPORARY EXHIBIT AT THE JEONJU NATIONAL MUSEUM WHICH CELEBRATED THE RETURN OF NINE ROYAL SEALS AND BROUGHT TOGETHER ALL OTHER EXTANT ROYAL SEALS (JEONJU NATIONAL MUSEUM, 2015).

To understand further how Korean heritage has arrived and been treated outside of Korea two case studies will be explored. The first is a painting survey and conservation project undertaken at the Honolulu Museum of Art and the second is a painting conservation and museum organisational shift which occurred at the British Museum. These examples will help to highlight how two different sized museums with different resources were able to conserve and promote communication with Korean experts to better understand the Korean cultural heritage in their care.

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#### CASE STUDY 1: HONOLULU MUSEUM OF ART

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In 2013, the Honolulu Museum of Art was contacted by the Korean Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) informing them that a grant application was available to survey their Korean painting collection (Ashby, 2014). Much of this collection had entered the museums holding in 2003 when the painting collection of Richard Lane, a noted ukiyo-e scholar, went to auction. When the paintings arrived in the

museum in 2010, not much was known as they had been bought as a lot of over 3,000 paintings and at least 11,000 volumes of Japanese wood-block-print illustrated books. Already the first US museum with a designated Korea room and a renowned Korean ceramics collection, they were eager to increase its knowledge and the accessibility of its painting collection through conservation and study (Power, 2013; Ashby, 2014).

Following the application and approval of the grant, initial surveys were made by curators at the Honolulu Museum of Art (Griffith, 2013). Specific attention was paid to those painting whose origins were unconfirmed (as many thought to be Korean were unconfirmed), those which needed conservation and those that seemed worthy of further study. By the end of the survey, images and information about 40 paintings were sent to CHA for consultation. These 40 painting prompted CHA to send three Korean painting experts to view and survey the collection in person. Once there however, one painting in particular stood out. 'Scholarly Gathering' would make headlines as the experts identified the piece as a rare example of sixteenth century Choson painting (below is 'Scholarly Gathering' before (left) and after (right) treatment in figure 8).



FIGURE 8. 'SCHOLARLY GATHERING' 1586, BEFORE (LEFT) AND AFTER (RIGHT) CONSERVATION TREATMENT (WHELDEN, 2015).

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, the end of the sixteenth century was when the Imijin War broke out when Japan invaded Choson and stole or destroyed much of the contemporary art and heritage. This particular painting is then very significant as it had survived the war in the sixteenth century, possibly having remained in Japan until it was bought by Richard Lane.

Following this momentous discovery, a similarly rare painting 'Neo-Confucian scholar Zhou Dunyi admiring lotus flowers' was also discovered as part of the Lane collection (Ashby, 2014). By 2017 five paintings (two scrolls, two folding screens and one panel) were conserved as part of the three year collaborative project between the Honolulu Museum of Art and Korean Cultural heritage administration (Eichman, et al., 2017). The report written about the project including a full conservation report and scholarly study by the team was kindly provided by the Honolulu Museum of Art for reference in this research (Eichman, et al., 2017).

'Scholarly gathering' was sent to Korea for conservation and remounting as a hanging scroll by Korean paintings conservator Professor Park Chi-Sun (Ashby, 2014). During its time in Japan the painting had been remounted using Japanese techniques and materials and was in poor condition. Part of its treatment was to return it back to its original state as a Korean object by using Korean materials, such as hanji (the mulberry fibre based paper mentioned in chapter 2) and techniques to repair and remount it. Following its conservation, it was displayed in Korea before returning to the Honolulu Museum of Art as part of its rotating permanent displayed Korean collection (Whelden, 2015).

While conservation is often a subject of controversy due to the interventive and altering nature of the work (see Caple (2000) for more information), Shawn Eichman Curator of Asian Art at the Honolulu Museum of Art was eager to participate in this collaboration which would conserve so many important pieces and provide insight into their Korean painting collection (Ashby, 2014; Caple, 2000). Confident in the powers of conservation to mend and preserve objects for future generations, Eichman said "To my untrained eye, what a conservator can accomplish transcends both science and art, and is elevated to the level of magic" (Ashby, 2014).

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## CASE STUDY 2: BRITISH MUSEUM

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In 2011, the British museum sent two Korean paintings to Korea for conservation and restoration (Lee, 2012). The two paintings, a folding screen featuring 'sun, moon and five peaks' and 'seated buddha and two attendant bodhisattvas', had both undergone previous remounting and additions. Using x-ray, the conservators discovered that the 'seated buddha and two attendant bodhisattvas' painting had once had six bodhisattvas but that four had been painted over. Considering both paintings had been previously repaired using Japanese and Chinese methods, the Korean

conservators were eager to return them to their original form. As suggested by Cheon Ju-hyun, the lead conservator of the project, this was just the beginning of a future several year project by the British Museum to conserve their Korean painting collection. Noting that there were many Korean objects held outside of Korea, Cheon said

“I think this project can be the first step in forming a scholarly interaction between Korea and foreign countries about the Korean relics stored overseas...I don’t think Korea should try to retrieve every single relic that’s housed overseas, but it’s important for Korean scholars to examine and research them, regardless of where they are, and provide accurate information. That way people in foreign countries will gain a correct understanding of Korea’s cultural relics and history.” (Lee, 2012).

Officially starting in 2017 the British Museum prepared for a large scale survey and conservation project for their Korean collection with funding from AmorePacific (one of the largest Korean cosmetic companies) and in conjunction with the Korea Foundation (Sharpe, 2018; Yonhap News Agency, 2017). At the centre of the project is AmorePacific Conservator Meejung Kim-Marandet, a specialist in Korean painting conservation and Korean curator Eleanor Soo-ah Hyun. While Korean conservators and curators are rare within western museums, the British museum was the first to bring both to the museum and provide them with a designated workspace (Sharpe, 2018). The project which should have concluded this year (2022) has, to the authors knowledge, not produced a published report, so details on the scope of the project and the conservation of the objects is unknown. It is expected that such a project would provide treatment and scholarly attention to objects which have been marginalised as was suggested by curator Eleanor Soo-ah Hyun at the beginning of the project (Sharpe, 2018).

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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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While several museums around the world possess Korean art and objects, they are often overshadowed and marginalised by the more ‘shiny’ and elaborate objects of Japan and China (Panero, 2014; Ashby, 2014; Sharpe, 2018).

However, just this year the Victoria and Albert Museum in London launched a temporary exhibition entitled “Hallyu: the Korean Wave” (supported by the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Korean automotive company Genesis) which highlights the global impact of Korea’s popular culture on global creative industries. Despite this, the V&A has relegated its displayed Korean collection to a small hallway, while Japan and China each have designated rooms (The Victoria and Albert Museum, 2022). Although this observation is purely that of the author, it is interesting to note that even in a European museum, which claims to have had the first designated Korean gallery which

opened in 1992, is still seeming to marginalise their Korean collection compared to other East Asian collections (Sharpe, 2018).

This example highlights a question; will or does the Korean Wave have an impact on internationally held Korean collections? As may have become apparent, the connection between hallyu and Korean cultural heritage is much stronger than it may appear at first glance.

As was noted in Chapter 2, the development of the Korean Wave, which is to say the global reach of Korean popular culture, was a deliberate choice by the Korean Government (Chow, 2015). Since the 1990's the Korean Wave industry has promoted not just K-Pop, but also K-Dramas and even cosmetics (Gibson, 2021). One inescapable product of the Korean Wave is the Grammy nominated seven member boy group, BTS, which debuted in 2013 (BigHit Entertainment Company, 2022). While the members and achievements of the group are mostly irrelevant to this research, the recent actions by one particular member are. In September 2022, it was reported that K-pop idol and leader of BTS, Kim Nam Joon (figure 9), known by his stage name RM (Rap Monster), donated 100 million won (about £64,760.00) to the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation (OKCHF) (Movius & Joo, 2022). However, this was in fact the second donation by the artist to OKCHF, the first having been made in 2021. The 2021 donation will go towards the conservation of a royal Choson hwarot robe (bridal robe) owned by the LA County Museum of Art (LACMA) pictured below in figure 10 . The 2022 donation is planned to be used to produce a catalogue of Korean paintings owned by overseas



FIGURE 9. PHOTOGRAPH OF K-POP IDOL KIM NAM JOON (RM) OF BTS WHO HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT DONATIONS TO KOREAN CULTURAL HERITAGE ORGANIZATIONS OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS (BIGHIT ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY, 2022).

museums. In addition to these donations, RM recently provided audio guide recordings for the LACMA exhibition "The Space Between: The Modern in Korean Art" which opened in September 2022. The idol also has donated 100 million won to both the government-owned Museum of Modern and



FIGURE 10. CHOSON HWAROT ROBE WHICH WILL BE CONSERVED IN KOREA WITH FUNDING PROVIDED BY K-POP IDOL KIM NAM JOON (RM) OF BTS (MOVIUS & JOO, 2022).

Contemporary Art (MMCA) in 2020 and Seoul's Samsung Deaf School to support music education in 2019.

While the singular efforts of Kim Nam Joon and the financial support of leading Korean companies and government ministries has been made clear through this chapter, the subject of decolonisation has yet to be mentioned. In the following chapter decolonisation within museums will be explained and explored. Then in chapter 5, the connections between Korean history, overseas Korean cultural heritage, Hallyu, and decolonisation will be highlighted and discussed.

## CHAPTER 4: DECOLONISATION

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Historically 'decolonisation' has simply meant the liberation of a group from colonial rule, such as when Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 (Museums Association, 2020). However, in modern vernacular and especially within the museum community, 'decolonisation' has come to mean something which is much more challenging to define and even more difficult to implement. To many, the simple solution is to return all objects to their original place of origin (repatriation), thereby eliminating the often 'troublesome' history surrounding them. While in some cases this is the appropriate action, especially when the objects in question are human remains, it does not always allow the honest history of the object to be told. The following chapter will explain how there is no simple solution, but rather a practice needs to develop within museums to engage with communities and build relationships with stakeholders.

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### WHAT IS DECOLONISATION?

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Understanding decolonisation (from now on referred to solely in a museum context) requires the understanding that museums are inherently colonial (Museums Association, 2020). Museums officially began as collections of things white colonialists had collected from their explorations of the globe, often highlighting how 'other' these objects were (Huff, 2022). First 'wunder kamer' or wonder rooms were used to display objects, these evolved into 'cabinets of curiosities' and eventually developed into the large scale collections we recognise today in museums (History of Museums, 2022). Up until quite recently there has been little effort on the part of museums to update the narrative around their collections and often highlighting a one sided (read: colonial) version of history (Museums Association, 2020). What this means is that objects in museums which are a physical tie to history can be used to illustrate whatever story the museum decides to tell. This gives museums incredible amounts of power as they get to decide what is important history and what is not. Historically, curators have been the narrators to these stories as it is understood that the curators' job is to be both scholar and interpreter of these objects and stories. What has also been historically true is that the majority of museum professionals have been white (at least in terms of western museums) (Solomon, 2021). What this has continued to mean is that the stories represented are coming from a white (and western) perspective where the objects are frequently from all over the globe (Museums Association, 2020).

This problem of white-washed narratives within museums has recently come into greater discussion as new waves of civil rights movements have emerged across the US in the face of ongoing, systemic racism (Hicks, 2021; Solomon, 2021). The BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Colour) communities

within the US have always been marginalised since Christopher Columbus ‘discovered’ the new world and immigrants from other nations were incorporated (Mineo, 2020). This has been especially true for the native and indigenous communities of the Americas which were killed, colonised, suppressed and marginalised as part of the ‘creation’ of America. In museums the narratives surrounding indigenous art and objects have often painted a picture of the ‘savage’ which the white colonisers ‘educated and saved’ from their ‘primitive’ ways. They have also supported the impression that these indigenous communities are somehow no longer here, which is certainly not the case. In the UK, similar issues arise as much of the collections were acquired through their colonialism across the globe (Hicks, 2021).

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### DECOLONISING THROUGH COLLABORATION

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In response to this growing awareness of how colonisation has impacted the narratives museums tell and the knowledge that museums hold power over those stories, both communities and museums professionals have begun to discuss the ways in which they can decolonise their museums (Museums Association, 2020; Huff, 2022; Hicks, 2021; Mineo, 2020). This has been an on-going, and nonlinear conversation. Part of the difficulty is the decolonisation is ultimately an on-going and active process which needs to become part of museum practice (Museums Association, 2020). To many, this process seems good in theory but it is difficult to imagine the ‘how?’

In 2019, the Empowering Collections Report compiled by the Museum Association (UK) found that UK institutions, while interested in the idea of decolonisation were uncertain how to implement it (Museums Association, 2020). Following this report, they produced “Supporting decolonisation in museums,” a document which provides a frame work and actionable steps for museums to utilise. A large aspect to decolonisation that was recognised both by the museum association and also within American sectors is *collaboration* (Museums Association, 2020; Mineo, 2020). While collaboration is not the ultimate, nor only solution for decolonisation as a practice, it highlights that museum institutionalism has been historically isolated and outdated.

As was previously mentioned, museums hold the key to interpretation and narrative, primarily through their curatorial departments (Hicks, 2021). What this ignores is that (for the most part), the people whose ancestors created and used those objects, still have a voice with regards to those objects (Mineo, 2020). These people, who are considered stakeholders, should have a say in the treatment, display, and narrative of these objects, which is precisely where collaboration should come in. Most museums today often are referred to as “owners of collections,” instead Jane Pickering, William Muriel Seabury Howells Director of the Peabody Museum (at Harvard), has reframed this



stating “We [museums] are stewarding collections rather than owning them” (Mineo, 2020). This simple change of word from owner to steward really emphasises the role that museums should have in relation to their objects, which is to say a space which provides opportunity for conversations and relationships. By collaborating with communities, museums professionals, and scholars, the narrative surrounding objects can become multi-dimensional, honest and relevant (Mineo, 2020; Museums Association, 2020; Hicks, 2021). While it is clear that conversations regarding objects should occur within curatorial departments, this in turn effects the care and treatment of these objects through conservation.

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### THE ROLE OF CONSERVATION

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It may come as a surprise to many museum visitors that most objects on display have been touched by a conservator. Conservation, a job often kept behind closed doors, is the cleaning, preservation, stabilisation and restoration of objects (Insall, et al., 2021). It is not limited to paintings or decorative arts and can include statues, clothing and even entire buildings. Conservation envelopes both preventative and interventive measures to treat objects. Preventative conservation involves securing the object in an environment which will limit or reduce the rate at which it degrades and reduces the chances for damage from pest or outside sources (Caple, 2000). Interventive conservation is the physical alterations a conservator makes to the object, be it cleaning, removing from, adding to or at all changing the object. Interventive conservation holds the most controversy as altering the object can alter its story.

As has been referenced at several points in this research, objects are the physical connection to a past which no longer exists and therefore carry both a record of the original time from which they came as well as the record of how they arrived in the current time. This is where much controversy can arise as a conservator must decide how much and to what extent an object should be altered. Current conservation ethics dictates minimal treatment is preferred and reversibility is the ideal, which is to say the alterations are not permanent (Caple, 2000). However, the simple act of cleaning is not reversible but is often necessary for the longevity and display of an object (Koller, Unknown). With these things to be considered, how can conservators help in the decolonisation of collections? The answer to this question will be discussed in chapter 5.

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### DECOLONISING KOREAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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As has been referenced several times in this research, Korea has been a colonised nation, the effects of which are still felt today (Park, 2022). To date, many objects in western museum collections arrived there because of the Japanese colonisation of the twentieth century and even due to other invasions

and, significantly, the Korean War (Yim, 2019). They are underrepresented in major museums, despite the extensive size of the collections, and the scope of these collections are still being ascertained (Eichman, et al., 2017; Sharpe, 2018). Once labeled the, “Hermit Kingdom,” resisting until 1882 to make trade agreements with the west, Korea has knowingly changed their stance becoming a nation whose soft world powers rival that of the United States (Panero, 2014; Park, 2022).

With this in mind, the case study examples in chapter 3 provide a great start in a discussion regarding decolonising overseas Korean cultural heritage. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, repatriation is a ‘simple solution’ suggested by many, and this is no less true of Korean objects as was seen in the example in chapter 3 when the US returned the stolen royal and court seals in 2014. In chapter 5, why overseas Korean collections should be prioritised for decolonisation, conservation and displayed, will be discussed. Actionable solutions for a decolonisation practice will be illustrated using the case studies and examples previously mentioned in this research as a basis for current practice. Conservation will be considered a key element in this discussion as it is at the heart of the case studies presented in chapter 3. All of this will be considered with the understanding that the increasing status of Korean popular culture is increasing the availability of funding opportunities for overseas conservation projects and collaboration opportunities, as well as interest in Korean culture across the globe.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

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It has become clear that overseas Korean cultural heritage has been at a disadvantage compared to other overseas East Asian collections (Panero, 2014). Political and social turmoil has produced a nation with strong national pride and a culture built on the preservation of their history and culture, but with significant cultural heritage objects kept outside its borders (Park, 2022; Power, 2013). With that said, there is a distinct opportunity for western museums with Korean collections to both decolonise their Korean collections by collaborating with Korean museum professionals and Korean communities (both in Korea and diasporic) and reduce their budgeting concerns by taking advantage of the Korean Wave industry via Korean Government organisations.

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### OVERSEAS KOREAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Beginning as a collection of kingdoms, Korea has evolved greatly over the last 2,000 years. The Three Kingdoms period brought unique artistic sensibilities to the archaeological record of all three kingdoms, and introduced Confucian thinking to the peninsula, ultimately leading to a nation with a history of careful record keepers. Koryo saw a unified peninsula and made advancements in technology, medicine and art, particularly Celadon ceramic which has survived well over the centuries. Choson, a five-hundred year period, saw artistic influences move towards an independent national identity and away from the pressures of neighboring nations. Folk paintings which survive from Choson, are bright and lively, showing a true sense of the values of the people who created them. The end of the Choson period saw the birth of the Korean Empire, and its sudden death at the hands of colonising Japanese forces. The twentieth century was fraught with turmoil, beginning with Japanese colonial rule, a fight for independence which led to war, a divided nation, and economic instability. Within the last thirty plus years South Korea has blossomed into a soft world power at the epicenter of a global popular culture phenomena: the Korean Wave. The rich cultural history of the Korean peninsula is something which should be shared with the world as we move into the globalisation age, and at the centre of that cultural history is the material cultural heritage which has survived to tell the stories of Korea.

As has been stated previously, over 182,000 Korean objects currently reside outside of Korea and many of which were removed during colonial and war times (Yim, 2019). The method by which these objects have made it into these overseas museum collections has meant that, in many cases, museums have little idea of the precise nature of these objects. This was made evident in the Honolulu Museum of Art case study, where the initial survey of their Korean painting collection included verifying and identifying their collection as it had been far too extensive to study previously

(Eichman, et al., 2017). In a collaborative effort the museum worked closely with the Korea Cultural Heritage Administration, benefiting considerably from a grant and were able to call in Korean experts to work as a team on the project. By working as a collaborative team, the Honolulu Museum of Art demonstrated a keen willingness to decolonise their collection, even if this was not stated as their initial goal. In fact it says more to their credit as a modern and community orientated museum that the project was motivated simply by a desire to understand their collection and make it suitable to share with the Hawaiian community, of which many are Korean diaspora (Chung, Unknown; Eichman, et al., 2017).

While other projects, such as the US return of the Korean seals in 2014, have emphasised that Korean objects should be returned, the project at the Honolulu Museum of Art was not one of them. In fact, during the project, the Director of the museum, Stephan Jost said:

“Since we are happy to lend to Korea, and Korean museums lend to our museum, the question of ownership is a bit reductive...The reality is Korean museums and American museums hold our collections in the public trust. I think there has been a huge shift in thinking over the last decade with globalization. Many countries want to make sure that great art from their culture is on view at all the major museums in major cities.” (Power, 2013).

In support of this notion is conservator Choen Ju-Hyun who led the conservation team which worked on the paintings from the British Museum in 2011-2013 (Lee, 2012). Choen in an interview said:

“Well, there are a lot of Korean relics that are housed overseas...I think this project can be the first step in forming a scholarly interaction between Korea and foreign countries about the Korean relics stored overseas...I don't think Korea should try to retrieve every single relic that's housed overseas, but it's important for Korean scholars to examine and research them, regardless of where they are, and provide accurate information. That way people in foreign countries will gain a correct understanding of Korea's cultural relics and history.”

It is not presumed that all Koreans agree with these two museum professionals. Indeed historian and director of the Korean Cultural Heritage Policy Research Institute, Hwang Pyung-Woo “can't sleep” due to the number of missing Korean national treasures he knows are residing outside of South Korea (Glionna, 2010). He points out that even given the 1970 UNESCO convention which legally requires the return of looted cultural heritage, is not effective retroactively, which means anything taken before 1970 does not fall within its legal power (Power, 2013). This means that any cultural heritage taken from Korea during the Japanese occupation and the Korean War are not protected by legal actions. This leaves the fate of Korean objects held overseas in the hands of (sometimes) the country who took them.

As was demonstrated by the returns of the seals and the Honolulu Museum of Art project, the US seems eager to work with Korea to preserve, research and return objects to Korea. As an ally to South Korea in both their liberation from Japan and their war with Soviet backed North Korea, it seems evident that there is already a precedent in place for American museums to develop collaborative teams with Korean heritage professionals and Korean communities. Additionally, in the UK where the AmorPacific project has brought together a Korean curator and conservator to work together at the British Museum to promote and conserve the Korean collection.

What seems unclear is whether this will be a trend of collaborations seen across the globe. Japan in particular has kept many Korean objects, even since the Imijin War in the sixteenth century (Eichman, et al., 2017). While some have been returned, the overall sentiment from the Japanese government is that they were not at fault for colonising Korea in the twentieth century and therefore are reluctant to give back many of the objects in their possession (Glionna, 2010). Specifically, Japan and France agreed to return collections of books, including royal Choson texts, however, while Japan was willing to return the books outright, France agreed to lend the books back to Korea but insist they still own them. In another event, a Korean Buddhist statue (the Gwaneum Bosal Buddhist Statue pictured in figure 11) which had been in Japanese possession for centuries was stolen by a group of Koreans in 2012.



FIGURE 11. THE GWANEUM BOSAL BUDDHIST STATUE WHICH WAS ORIGINALLY STOLEN FROM KOREA BY JAPANESE PIRATES AND WAS RECENTLY STOLEN BACK BY SEVERAL KOREANS. IT IS NOW LEGALLY OWNED BY KOREA ACORDING TO A KOREAN COURT RULING.

The Koreans have long believed the statue had originally been looted in the fourteenth century and therefore their recent theft was simply the return of stolen property (Power, 2013). Japan, on the other hand, saw this statue as part of their own heritage as it had been in their possession for so long. In 2017, the Korean courts officially ruled that South Korea was entitled to keep the statue as they had found enough evidence that the statue had been taken by Japanese pirates in the Koryo dynasty (Choe, 2017). Continued disagreements between Korea and Japan over Korean cultural heritage have continued to raise concerns about the tense relationship between the two nations which has persisted for centuries. In the US it has become legal practice to return objects of cultural significance to indigenous communities through the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and other federal laws which protect the rights and cultural heritage of indigenous Americans (Indians, 2022). These laws are only relevant within the US and are difficult to enforce, however it is hopeful that they have created a moral compass by which the US treats the cultural heritage of different cultures and nations (Ray, 2016).

As was brought up in chapter 4, there is no right answer when it comes to decolonising any collection. What has become evident from the examples where a collaborative team of Koreans and westerners have worked together, the result has been objects which reflect the Korean history of the object as told by Koreans, not by any other voice. And at the heart of several of these examples were conservators.

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### HOW CAN CONSERVATION HELP?

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As was mentioned in the British Museum case study in Chapter 3, Korean conservators are difficult to find outside of Korea. This highlights how western museums often do not have conservators with specialities in objects from one specific country or region. However, what museums and indeed most of the globe has, is technology. Conservators therefore have every resource to create dialogue between other museum professionals both in an outside of their institutions but also with local and international communities (Museums Association, 2020). By engaging in discussion with the stakeholders of the object they can be better informed about what aspects of the object need to be preserved and what would help tell the story of the object the best. This is illustrated by both case studies discussed in Chapter 3 where the Choson paintings had been mounted by the Japanese following their theft from Korea (Eichman, et al., 2017; Lee, 2012). The conservators job was to clean, stabilise and repair these paintings so that they would regain their aesthetic appeal and be strong/stable enough to go on display so that they could be enjoyed by the community. But what they also needed to do was remove the Japanese alterations which were considered inappropriate for a

Korean object as it was a physical reminder of Japanese colonisation. This constant balance of decisions made by a conservator in conversation with stakeholders can be perilous. However, by preserving and caring for these objects, future generations can be better connected with their history.

Another aspect of conservators is that even if, for example an American conservator, were to survey a Korean collection with the purpose of conservation, this conservator would be providing a record of the objects and their condition. This type of survey could provide a basis from which an international team could be assembled to treat and care for these objects, as the Honolulu Museum of Art case study illustrated. Part of conservation education today is the idea that there is an intangible element to objects, stemming from the values given to them by the stakeholders (Narkiss, 2022).

Conservators, despite what may be assumed, interact on the closest level with museum objects. They are responsible for physically interacting with the object so that they can help give voice to its story. With that responsibly and with the understanding that an object may have intangible values unknown to the conservator, it is therefore up to the conservator to reach out and build bridges between the object, stakeholders and scholars so that appropriate treatment can be determined. This leads us to the question, how can these types of surveys and projects be funded, and can Hallyu help?

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### CAN HALLYU HELP WITH FUNDING?

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The truth is that Hallyu already is funding the majority of work on overseas Korean collections. The Korea foundation, the Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation and others are funded directly by the government and large corporations benefitting from the Korean wave (The Korea Foundation , 2021). This does not even include donations from Hallyu idols such as RM which were mentioned previously. The projects and case studies mentioned in this research highlight how the role of Korea's popular culture and the large income it generates is already connected to the overseas Korean cultural heritage. Further, these examples offer different frameworks to follow for other museums and institutions with Korean collections which may have been neglected. Such frameworks could be instrumental to museums, like the Peabody Essex and others who currently lack the resources to undertake such projects.

Hallyu has also increased interest in all things Korean (Panero, 2014). The V&A Hallyu: Korean Wave exhibition is a clear example of this. The show, which opened in September of 2022 combines aspects from Korea's history and culture, K-Drama, and K-Pop, arguably the first show of its kind in the UK. This type of museum exhibit may generate more conversations with local communities, fans of K-

media, and thereby increase visitor traffic, however the impact of this particular show is currently unknown given its recent opening and no recent reported visitor data.

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## SUGGESTED ACTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

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From this research, patterns were identified within the projects which were discussed. These can be considered actionable steps which museums and conservators can take in the pursuit of decolonising overseas Korean cultural heritage collections. These will be listed below as bullet points to increase usability but they are not considered an ordered list nor is this list considered exhaustive.

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### SUGGESTED ACTIONABLE STEPS

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- Identify museums, institutions and/or private collectors with Korean objects.
- Begin communication with Korean Cultural Heritage Administration or other Korean cultural heritage foundation, to inform them of the collection, detailing staffing and monetary needs as necessary.
- Define the scope of the project, i.e., survey, conservation, display, repatriation, etc.
- Identify a network of people who will be involved in the project including the stakeholders, conservators, scholars, museum staff, etc.
- Apply for grants and funding from relevant sources to the project, such as the Korea Foundation, who should require an expansive application.
- Work directly with the stakeholders, Korean scholars and experts to identify treatment plans and assess if the objects will need specialised care in Korea.

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### FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

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In several instances, gaps were noticed within this area of research (i.e. decolonising Korean collections using conservation and Hallyu funding). These will be listed below and will include suggested solutions and avenues for research and development.

- Few or no conferences regarding overseas Korean cultural heritage conservation.
  - Create Conferences/Workshops/Conversations between Korean and non-Korean conservators on the treatment of Korean objects. This would provide a networking and collaboration opportunity between conservators and create a precedent which may be emulated by other conservators of other nations, groups and specialties.
- The English side of Korean Government websites relating to conservation and heritage as regard exchange programmes facilitated by the government bodies are out of date with few recent updates.



- Increase demand for exchange programmes between museum professionals. This may mean inquiring about a programme which does not exist yet. This will increase the dialogue between professionals and nations and supply both with increased knowledge and opportunities for cultural exchange.
- Lack of representation in museums of modern Korea and how it ties into the modern world.
  - Increase opportunities for 'less conventional' curators to create exhibitions based on the voices of modern generations. Shows like the V&A's Hallyu: Korean Wave is an excellent start, but more 'traditional' museums should see the value in amplifying the voices of contemporary, living communities within the context of cultural history and art museums.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

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This research investigated the connections between overseas Korean cultural heritage, conservation and the Korean Wave. The national identity and pride held by Korea and its people has created a nation eagerly pursuing the preservation, reclamation and understanding of its cultural heritage. Because of colonisation, war and economic struggles of the twentieth century, many cultural heritage objects were looted, destroyed or lost. However, recent economic growth through the government devised phenomena known as the Korean Wave/Hallyu has provided the resources to fund the conservation of Korea's cultural heritage. While significant numbers of Korean cultural heritage objects exist overseas, they have been marginalised in museums compared to other East Asian collections. Even so, recent projects illustrate a growing desire to understand and preserve these overseas collections and work directly with Korean experts and stakeholders. By creating collaborative teams of Korean experts and stakeholders, and western museum professionals, and creating a system of communication and exchange, these collections can be decolonised. And as emphasised, these projects likely would not be possible without the financial support of the Korean Cultural Heritage Association, the Korea Fund and donations by Korea's corporations and Hallyu celebrities.

Through an exploration of Korea's history, some of the challenges Korean cultural heritage has faced overseas have been identified. Much of this relates to the economic weakness of the country caused by a colonial and war torn twentieth century, which reduced the country's importance in the eyes of western powers. Further, the means by which western museums acquired their Korean collections and how they are being treated have been explored. In this vein, decolonisation was explained in the context of museum collections and key steps were discussed as part of finding a practice for decolonisation. The lack of funding within museums was established as a barrier for both conservation and decolonisation of museum collections. Steps were identified to overcome this barrier and the challenges relating to colonised collections. Hallyu was observed as the reason Korean culture has gained popularity across the globe in recent years and its importance for funding opportunities within the museum and cultural heritage sector were demonstrated. Insight was given on the importance of conservation in the process of decolonisation and the value of conservation for overseas Korean collections. Connections were drawn between history and cultural trends of the past to today's modern Korean culture, and highlighted objects which link them through time. From this research several areas of future study are suggested.

- Drawing from the V&A Hallyu: Korean Wave exhibition, analysis of visitor numbers, demographics and interest from the show will be valuable in understanding how Korean

culture is perceived today and how that will effect interest in future exhibitions featuring Korean cultural heritage.

- Extensive surveys are suggest for any Korean collection held outside of Korea. This will increase documentation of these objects, and provide a framework for future collaborative conservation projects.
- Promoting international opportunities for conservators to exchange knowledge, ideas and techniques will provide museums and institutions with conservators more broadly educated in their line of work. These types of opportunities could include, but should not be limited to, conferences, workshops and exchange programmes.

It has been shown through this research that K-pop and indeed, the entire Korean Wave, is deeply intertwined with overseas cultural heritage and the conservation projects surrounding them. One can only imagine the positive future of overseas Korean cultural heritage conservation with the tsunami like power of the Korean Wave behind it.

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