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ESB Professional, "Gyeongbokgung Palace Grounds in Seoul, South Korea," via SHUTTERSTOCK

## Beginnings

The K-Pop Culture Research Group is a new research group established by staff and students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. The group was initiated in 2021 by Dr Siti Mazidah Haji Mohamad, and group activities have been coordinated together with co-convener Khairunnisa Ibrahim. This research group stemmed from our personal and academic interests in Korean popular culture, as well as recent publications with Korean Studies scholars in the region. Group activities and discussions are further developed with active contribution and involvement of fellow FASS academics Dr Rommel Curaming, Dr Sarah Ghazali, and MA student Muhammad Nur Alif Akmal bin Abdul Majid.

As part of research activities conducted by the group, co-convener Khairunnisa has been leading a fortnightly K-Culture Reading Group. Beginning with these discussions, we hope to grow into a working group that conducts and publishes research on, related to, and involving Korean popular culture's reception in Brunei and the wider region of Southeast Asia.

Presently, we continue to explore broad research areas, and intend to develop this nascent group organically, following our discussions on K-Culture developed from the fortnightly reading group meetings. We welcome participation from interested colleagues and invite contributions to help expand the scope of our research group.

This inaugural issue of the FASS K-Pop Culture Research Group Newsletter introduces the group, briefly covering our discussions during fortnightly reading group meetings, as well as our future projects and research directions.

For more information, please contact the group conveners:

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## Contact





## Join Us!

To find out more about future reading group sessions, please contact Khairunnisa Ibrahim (khairunnisa.ibrahim@ubd.edu.bn)

## Members

Khairunnisa Haji Ibrahim  
 Dr Siti Mazidah Hj Mohamad  
 Dr Rommel Curaming  
 Dr Sarah Hanaa Haji Ahmad Ghazali  
 Muhammad Nur Alif Akmal bin Abdul Majid

## Viewing Project Timeline

- Pre-watch reflection writeup
- SKY Castle Viewing Project
- Post-watch reflection writeup
- Introspection on themes and writeup
- Discussion meeting

## Reading the Korean Wave

Why study K-Culture, and for whom do these knowledges matter? These are the preliminary questions that spur our fortnightly discussions in the FASS K-Culture Reading Group.

Meetings are structured around set readings on specific topics (although we love going on tangents!). We began by verifying our stake in the project, as well as clarifying our research questions: (1) what do we know of K-Culture as it exists today, and how did it come to be?; (2) why study K-Culture; and (3) checking in on our own positionality as researchers outside of East Asia but within Southeast Asia - one of the earliest and most important destinations for Hallyu (Korean Wave) exports.

Brunei's position also offers interesting perspectives with regards to the rise of Korean popular culture. A running inquiry in our meetings is Southeast Asia's position as the market and consumers of K-Culture. But whither Brunei, as a small nation with seemingly little cultural pull?

## SKY Castle Viewing Project

*Watching objectively, waxing academically*

Following our preliminary interests in investigating Korean popular culture through music trends, fandoms, and television dramas, we decided to begin with a research project entitled "SKY Castle Viewing Project." This project considers our response to Korean television dramas both as individuals and as scholars, and was proposed by Dr Rommel Curaming.

Our project began in July 2021 with individual viewing projects of the Korean drama *SKY Castle* - the second-highest-rated drama in Korean cable television history. This is then followed by individual viewing and writeup activities, as well as comparative exercises of our own initial prejudices, reflections, and observations upon completing the viewing project. This is an ongoing project, and will enter the discussion stages in due course.