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Panel 1.5: Glimpse of Asia

K-Pop: Not Just Catchy Music but Driver of Political Change

With the meteoric and glitzy globalization of modern Korean pop (“K-pop”) culture, it’s hard to imagine that South Korea, not even four decades ago, had suffered through a military coup d’état that stripped many of its citizens from their democratic rights. It’s hard to imagine that a country that once did everything in its political arsenal, including the use of torture and military force to subjugate its citizens, is now the same country whose citizens, through their collective discipline and exercise of their democratic rights, ousted an active president caught in an unprecedented political and financial scandal. While many equate K-pop to the catchy songs and critically-acclaimed films it has produced recently, to others, K-pop has been the driving force rallying its citizens. This paper will explore the various avenues in which the Korean entertainment industry uses media to politically empower and engage its audience, especially in today’s turbulent climate.