BTS and the Globalization of Talent

Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems Theory (1974), a key concept in AP Human Geography, posits there is one global market within which almost all economic activity takes place. Goods, services, and people tend to flow from the economic periphery (places with low levels of development) to the economic core (places with high levels of technology and consumption). Core countries tend to be those with a history of exploiting others while periphery countries have a history of being colonized.

BTS and the Globalization of Talent was designed to be an engaging way for AP Human Geography students to practice using World Systems Theory by applying it to the globally popular South Korean K-pop group, BTS. Depicting the movement of talent commodified on a global scale, this Place Collection tracks the professional careers of BTS members, from their childhood to the current, 2023. More specifically, it focuses on members' place of birth versus their current homes and the location of the music and fashion companies they've worked with in East Asia, North America and Europe. An accompanying lesson plan can be found here. A word of caution, this Collection is limited in scope so it can easily be explored in a single class period.

Débuting in 2013, BTS was created by K-pop label, Big Hit Entertainment. According to the New Yorker's E. Tammy Kim, "during the Asian financial crisis of the late nineties, President Kim Dae-jung, whose inauguration was attended by Michael Jackson, had taken a cue from Hollywood and J-pop (Japan's popular-music industry) to invest heavily in culture." Today, thanks in large part to the government's efforts, K-pop, South Korean films, and Korean cuisine are enjoyed globally. BTS is arguably the best example of the increased prominence of South Korean culture in the US. Their 2020 song "Dynamite," released through Sony Music Entertainment, was the first song by an all-South Korean act to reach No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.