World-Systems Theory: Movement and Place in the Global Economy

Description: Where do the most famous people from your hometown live? Most likely, unless you are from New York or Los Angeles, they've moved away. This lesson is designed to examine the movement of talent, viewed here as an economic commodity, as an engaging way to assist AP Human Geography students in understanding the concept of *World-systems Theory*. Tracking the location of Korean K-pop band BTS members' place of birth versus their current homes and the location of the recording companies they've worked with across their careers, students will be able to visualize commodity flows, gaining a spatial understanding of the interconnectedness of the globalized economy. There are three parts. First, students will use the World Historical Gazetteer's Place Collection Function to examine the movement of the band's members' physical location and their fame/careers. Second, using the Gazetteer and outside resources, students will examine both the current economic status and history of one of the BTS member's birthplace, analyzing how the location's name (and the history found in it) impacted its current relationship to the other locations. The lesson concludes with a wrap-up discussion and reflection. The lesson can be extended by having students research the movement of another famous person or group and comparing/contrasting their findings to BTS.

Subjects: AP Human Geography, Economics, Sociology

Grade Level: 12

Key Words: *World-systems theory, commodification, core, periphery, movement, globalization, toponym, colonialism, capitalism*

Essential Questions: At the conclusion of this lesson, students should be able to answer the following questions -

- What is a *gazetteer*? What is a *toponym*?
- What explains the *movement* of people and *commodities* across space?
- How does a place's geography and history impact its role in the *global economy*?

Region: East Asia

Rationale/Objectives: This lesson is designed to help students understand World-systems Theory and globalization. A key concept in Human Geography, Immanuel Wallerstein's World-systems Theory posits there is one global market and that almost all economic activity takes place within it. 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.

Through this lesson, students will visualize the movement of talent as a commodity in the global economy and examine how the history of colonialism impacts where people live and work at a global scale. It is desired that students will understand four things. First, and most simply, that a gazetteer can be used to understand more about the world. Second, that a place's history can be uncovered through its name and that this history impacts its current role in the world economy. Third, that humans, goods, and services tend to move from the global periphery to the global core. And fourth, that this movement applies to almost any imaginable commodity.

Despite South Korea/BTS being the example used in this lesson, many other places and cultural phenomena could easily be substituted without dramatically altering the lesson's structure.

State Standards: Applicable Pennsylvania standards for Economics (Subject Area 6) and Geography (Subject Area 7) for 12th grade students
-Standard - 6.2.12.A - Evaluate the flow of goods and services in an international economy.
-Standard - 6.4.12.A - Evaluate the comparative advantage of nations in the production of goods and services.
-Standard - 6.5.12.E - Compare distribution of wealth across nations.
-Standard - 7.1.12.A - Use geographic tools to analyze information about the interaction between people, places, and the environment.
-Standard - 7.3.12.A - Analyze the human characteristics of places and regions using the following criteria:

- *Population*
- *Culture*
- *Settlement*
- *Economic activities*
- *Political activities*

Prerequisite Knowledge: Before this lesson, students should complete a prereading on World-systems Theory. Also important to note, while many schools teach Human Geography in 9th grade, this lesson was designed for students who have already taken multiple years of World History. It assumes students have some knowledge of the history of colonialism and imperialism in Asia and are familiar with the processes of globalization and capitalism.

Procedures: The lesson is divided into three parts.

PART I – Warm-up and introduction to activity

- Warm-Up – Teacher will ask students to answer the following questions:
  - *Who are the most famous people from our town?* making a list on the board of 5 – 10 names
  - *Where do these people live / where did they live for most of their adult lives?* make a list of these too, if students are unsure, assign someone to look up each person quickly
  - *What patterns do we see? Why?* It is expected that students will be able to understand that most of these famous people moved to bigger places/regions more associated with the industry they are a part of (movies, music, art, etc.) like NYC or LA.
  - *How might World Systems Theory (what you read about last night) explain the pattern we see? Do we see core vs. periphery places here?* Students might not be able to answer this yet, this is ok, explain to the students that today's activity is all about applying the reading.
- Teacher will explain the objectives for today's class (listed above in essential questions)
- Introduction to activity – The teacher will explain to students that they will use the World Historical Gazetteer's Place Collection Function to examine the movement of South Korean K-pop band BTS, in terms of both their physical location and their fame. The teacher should direct students to the BTS Place Collection and quickly show them how to use it - https://whgazetteer.org/collections/96/browse_pl (note: this is a collection I made myself and is rudimentary)

PART II – Students will be assigned to a small group and provided a sheet with all 10 questions. The questions are divided up in this plan to help explain what is being examined in each.

- Using the BTS Place Collection, will click through all six locations (tracking BTS from birth to 2021) looking for spatial patterns. Students should focus on the map, and for each place the *Annotation* box, with *relation*, *notes* and *start/end* information. In groups, students will answer:
  1. *As you click through places, from birth to 2021, what do you notice happening?*
  2. *What explains how the members, and their careers, moved over time?*
  3. *What are the core places on this map? Why?*
  4. *Periphery places? Why?*
- Next, each group should select one birth place in the place collection. Now students should do some quick research to answer:
  5. *Look up one of the birth cities for BTS members. What is it known for?*
  6. *How does this knowledge help to explain if the member(s) of BTS moved or remained in this place?*
- Now, students should focus on the *Place Record* box, examining the information provided in *name variants*. Students will answer:

7. *In geography, a place name is called a toponym. Look at the name variants section on the place collection for the city you chose - what do you notice about this place's toponyms? Why might this be the case?*

- Lastly, students should go to this site and read the Korea section, then answer the questions below – http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main_pop/kpct/kp_1900-1950.htm

8. *In the Korean history (1910 – 1945) name a periphery country and explain why it was periphery. Then, name a core country.*
9. *How does this information relate to the map you looked at of BTS's career? Is the same core-periphery relationship still intact?*
10. *How does this reading help to explain some of the toponyms you found?*

PART III – The class will regroup and share-out their findings. The teacher should call on each group to either provide the class with an observation they made or a question that developed as they were doing this activity. This could also be done as a reflection/exit ticket if preferable. Make sure to address the following:

- *Wallerstein theorizes that goods, services, and people tend to flow from the economic periphery to the economic core – did you see this on display? How so?*
- *Wallerstein also posits that core countries tend to be those with a history of exploiting others while periphery countries have a history of being colonized – was this applicable?*
- *How does our hometown's history and place in the economy impact our actions?*

Extended Activities: This lesson can be extended by having students research and map the movement of another famous person or group, comparing/contrasting their findings to BTS. If the teacher wishes to have the students examine a more tangible product than talent, having the students research the commodity chain associated with a product like a banana or a t-shirt would prove effective (links to two helpful websites below). Students should be expected to map the steps in the commodity chain and also be able to identify how and why each step is core, periphery or semi-periphery. If you have a few class periods to spare or want to make a long-term project, you could even have the students use the World Historical Gazetteer to make their own place collection.

Planet Money (2013). *Planet Money Makes a T-Shirt – The world behind a simple shirt, in five chapters*. NPR. https://apps.npr.org/tshirt/#/title

National Geographic (2017). *The Surprising Science Behind the World's Most Popular Fruit.* https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/food-journeys-graphic