

[Rotary] From “Watching K” to “Wearing K”

I recently went to the cinema to see the much-talked-about film *The Odyssey*. Although the story draws on ancient mythology, what stayed with me most was the deeply human struggle at its heart. Adrift on a vast sea, the protagonist is constantly forced to make difficult choices, some of them weighty enough to determine the fate of those around him. Watching him wrestle with how to stay true to his convictions while leading others prompted me to reflect on my own experiences. A good film meets each viewer where they are and leaves them with new questions.

I believe this is also where the power of content lies. It transcends language and borders to move people, and the emotions inspired by a work can grow into curiosity about the culture and products of the country that created it. The global enthusiasm for K-content is a case in point. People who first fall in love with Korean films, dramas, or music may eventually visit Korea and become curious about what Koreans wear and how they live. Cultural affinity, in other words, can translate into consumer demand and industrial opportunity.

I see this potential particularly clearly in K-pop fandoms. When artists openly share their struggles and experiences, their messages of comfort and encouragement become part of their fans' everyday lives. For young people who have withdrawn amid the pressures of school, career choices, and relationships with their peers, lyrics that say, “Love yourself” or “It’s okay not to be perfect” can sometimes offer more powerful reassurance than advice from their parents. To parents who witness this, these artists can also become something more than celebrities.

This is where I see the potential of the fandom economy. Unlike conventional markets, where consumers are persuaded primarily by function and price, fandoms are built on empathy, trust, and shared narratives. Those who become emotionally invested do not remain one-time buyers. They voluntarily share the values of what they love with others, effectively becoming ambassadors. For companies, this can be a valuable asset in reaching new markets.

Nor is this power confined to music and video. As fans follow the artists and content they love, they naturally become interested in the styles and products associated with them. Cultural affinity can thus translate into consumption, and fashion is one of the industries where this transition is most visible.

The Korea Fashion Industry Association is also working to connect K-content with

materials, manufacturing, and distribution as part of a single ecosystem. Through **K-Fashion Connect**, the association is strengthening opportunities for Korean fashion companies to expand globally and connect with investors. Initiatives such as the **All in Korea** project and the **K-Fashion Goods Manufacturing Support Group** are helping create a structure in which styles featured in content can be produced domestically and developed into marketable products. The **2027 S/S Seoul Fashion Week**, to be held in early September, will likewise serve as a business platform where Korean brands and international buyers can meet to discuss partnerships and orders. Beyond the glamour of the runway, its significance lies in turning global attention into tangible opportunities for Korean fashion and its market.

This is worth noting because the competitiveness of K-fashion cannot be built by any one sector alone. Planning, manufacturing, content, and distribution must work together and connect with demand in global markets for the entire industry to become more competitive. This is precisely why the association is placing such emphasis on collaboration across the industry: to create a virtuous cycle in which each part of the ecosystem reinforces the others.

The resonance of *The Odyssey* stayed with me longer than I expected. Encountering on screen a classic I had first read in the original language as a child made even a familiar story feel new after so many years. Just as a Korean classic such as *The Tale of Sim Cheong* could be reimaged in a new form and introduced to audiences around the world, fashion too can create new markets when it meets K-content.

I hope to see more of the sensibility and craftsmanship of Korean fashion woven naturally into the stories and images that captivate global audiences—and ultimately translated into consumption and exports. When K evolves from something the world **watches** into something the world **wears**, it will represent not only a cultural achievement, but also a source of industrial competitiveness.