

Gangnam Style only the beginning, says researcher

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Hit single *Gangnam Style* by South Korean rapper Psy—the most viewed clip in YouTube's history—may mark the start of a global shift in which the Asia/Pacific region's cultural influence catches up to its economic and political importance, says researcher Dr Stephen Epstein.

Dr Epstein, Programme Director of Asian Studies in the School of Languages and Cultures at Victoria University of Wellington, is researching how information and [communication technologies](#) (such as YouTube), travel and migration are reshaping national identity in [South Korea](#).

He says new technologies allow culture to be spread rapidly not only within the country, but worldwide, and it has a significant impact on

identity.

"Korea's success on the world stage is a major source of pride and *Gangnam Style* is one example of that.

"It is visual and catchy and made by an artist who typifies an aspect of modern identity. He's strongly Korean but studied in the US, speaks English well and can take advantage of media opportunities with style and flair.

"It's the first time an Asian video has captured the world and may well become, in cultural terms, the point where the Asia/Pacific century started."

Dr Epstein, who has received Marsden funding for his research, describes Korea as a "laboratory for studying social change".

He says South Korea has experienced turbo-charged modernisation in the last few decades, moving from being one of the world's poorest nations in the 1960s to having one of the most powerful economies in the 2000s.

Demographic changes are another focus of his research. There are now 1.4 million foreign residents in South Korea, a big shift for a country that has traditionally seen itself as ethnically homogenous.

Among them are around 400,000 ethnic Koreans from China as well as 25,000 North Korean refugees, says Dr Epstein, who have made South Koreans more aware of a distinctive [national identity](#).

"Here are people who speak virtually the same language, eat the same food and have the same traditional customs, but they are not South Korean.

"It strengthens the view of South Korea as a distinct nation and has also changed attitudes to their northern neighbours. North Korea is increasingly viewed as another country rather than the 'evil half' of the Korean self."

Provided by Victoria University

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