

Beyond GDP, What Should We Be Growing For?

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For decades, societies have been obsessed with growth, which has mostly been measured by GDP. However, UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that GDP does not fully reflect human well-being or the Earth's sustainability. Despite its authority, GDP has a fatal flaw: It counts environmental destruction and widening inequality as economic progress. Now, the university community should stop focusing only on the GDP growth formula and ask a fundamental question: What new values should our generation prepare for beyond GDP?

GDP Measures Activity, Not Wellbeing

Current GDP-centered growth measures success only by how much societies produce

and consume. People replacing usable smartphones and wasting clothes for the next fashion fad counts as economic growth. This is why many people argue that the current measure is broken.

Degrowth theorist Jason Hickel, professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, finds the cause of this problem in artificial scarcity. This happens when public goods like housing and healthcare are privatized, forcing people to work harder just to survive. This process increases material throughput—the extraction and consumption of natural resources. Hickel argues that this is the main cause of the climate crisis. Making products from these resources requires massive energy, releasing more carbon than our planet can safely handle.

According to Hickel, society needs a move toward degrowth to fix this. He maintains that degrowth does not mean “be-

coming poor.” Instead, it means reducing wasteful production while strengthening public goods so people can live well without endless pressure to earn more. Ultimately Hickel argues for a transition to the Beyond GDP era. In this new era, success will be measured by the quality of lives, not just by numbers.

From Growth Pressure to Reorganizing Values

In the same way that GDP fosters an obsession with increasing numbers, Korean universities are similarly fixated on rankings, scores, and grades. It is time for them to move beyond this numbers-driven mindset. Professor Ko Bong-jun of the Humanitas College says changing how people think about scarcity is essential. He mentions the philosopher Spinoza: Truly noble things are rare, but capitalism makes people believe that anything rare is noble. On campus, this problem is visible in relative evaluation. Even if everyone in a class does their best, only a few are allowed to get an A. This system forces students to see their friends as rivals. To move beyond mere numeric fixation, Prof. Ko encourages students to stop

fighting for rankings. Instead, students should look for values that actually matter.

Professor John R. Eperjesi of the Dept. of English Language and Literature also says “elite education is used to create scarcity.” He notes that university rankings make students feel like a good life is only for a few. To him, the most important goal of degrowth is winning back “free time” from the constant pressure of student debt and job competition. Reclaiming this time is what allows students to escape the artificial scarcity of the résumé race and pursue true self-discovery.

Real Growth vs. Résumé Growth

Universities should be places where students can explore quality of life and social values. However, there is a huge gap between these ideals and the daily life of students. In a system driven by numbers, education is often reduced to a job-training tool. From Hickel's view, employment rates are just tools to keep students trapped in this growth-focused ideology.

Kang Da-hyeon, a student in the Dept. of Architectural Engineering, described this contradiction clearly. “Pursuing activities I enjoy feels like real

growth,” she said, “but I feel forced into irrelevant activities, like getting TOEIC scores, instead.” Students are not competing for knowledge; they are competing to avoid being left behind. Lim Geon-i, a student in the Dept. of English Language and Literature, feels this tension too. “In the job market, I often hear comments like, ‘You won't be able to use your major,’” Lim said. She expressed frustration on having to focus on practical certificates instead of deep academic exploration. Lim hopes that university remains a space for true learning where students can think and ask questions for themselves.

Imagine if universities measured graduates' happiness or social contribution instead of employment rates. Campus life would look very different: more time for reading and discussion, and more support for meaningful study, rather than padding résumés.

Degrowth and Beyond GDP are not just economic theories. They are ethical choices about what people truly value. If endless growth is no longer the answer, then university students should ask a practical campus version of the same question: What kind of “growth” should universities protect?

2026 K-Content: Inside and Outside Perspectives on Hallyu, Redefining K-Culture from Noun to Verb

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On December 30, 2025, *2026 K-Content: Inside and Outside Perspectives on Hallyu* was published by Kyung Hee University (KHU) Communication & Press. Co-authored by the KHU K-Culture · Story Contents Research Institute and international writers, the book analyzes the message Hallyu left on the global cultural scene amid the explosive interest in Korean culture in 2025. It covers six major genres: drama, film, K-Pop, variety shows, games, and webtoons.

The Current Status of Hallyu Through Inside and Outside Eyes

Now that Hallyu has established itself as a mainstream culture enjoyed globally in the 2020s, attempts to systematically record this massive flow

are continuing. In this context, the institute has published this series annually since 2024. Ahn Soong-beum, a director of the institute, explained, “While having pride as producers of Hallyu is positive, excessive nationalism, often called “*gukppong*,” can hinder sustainable expansion.” He added, “The main actors of Hallyu are also the individuals outside our borders who creatively consume it. Therefore, we must include both inside and outside perspectives to grasp the stereoscopic reality of Hallyu.”

Ahn particularly highlighted the changing meaning of “K”. He explained, “In the past, we thought K-Content had to be made by Koreans with Korean capital. However, “K” has now become an “empty canvas” where people participate together and interpret it in their own ways.” This suggests Hallyu has entered a stage of expanding meaning through



2026 K-Content: Inside and Outside Perspectives on Hallyu

Photo: KHU Communication & Press (khu.press.com)

global interaction, rather than functioning as a unilateral export.

Two Perspectives on “K-Pop Demon Hunters”

The book cross-analyzes hit works like “K-Pop Demon

Hunters,” “Squid Game,” and “Culinary Class Wars.” A highlight is the contrasting perspectives regarding “K-Pop Demon Hunters,” which recorded the highest viewership in Netflix animation history.

Baek Tae-hyun, a researcher of the institute, offers the inside view, focusing on the shadow behind the flashy success. He reads this work as a structural paradox where Hallyu is subordinated to global platform capital. His critique argues that companies like Netflix merely utilize K-Pop's fandom culture and emotional labor mechanisms as tools for their own profit generation.

Conversely, Alfred Lo, an Oxford researcher, offers the outside view, focusing on transboundary characteristics. He interprets the blending of Korean and English languages, the landscape of Seoul, and global narratives as a process expanding Korean culture's vitality. He argues that as foreign audiences engage with this work, new symbols for global communication are created rather than reinforcing a fixed “Koreanness.”

“K”: From Identity-noun to Co-evolution-verb

Ultimately, the book reaches a clear conclusion: co-evolution. The preface declares that “K” is no longer limited to a label denoting origin. It argues that

“K” must move beyond being an identity-noun and instead become a co-evolution-verb, where global citizens communicate and change together.

Ahn emphasized, “Co-evolution refers to elements that previously existed independently influencing each other. We must abandon the unilateral view that we produce and sell. Hallyu's potential becomes much greater when we understand the process of outsiders creatively recontextualizing it.”

However, the path to co-evolution does not mean simply reproducing glory. The book suggests “examining the coldness nearby,” implying we must learn from losing the hearts of neighboring countries like China and Japan due to an excessive focus on revenue generation. Ahn advised, “If you approach others only to generate profit, you will inevitably clash.” He urged KHU students to “treat Hallyu as an open space for negotiation, collision, and dialogue with the world.”

2026 K-Content: Inside and Outside Perspectives on Hallyu proposes a direction for Korean culture. It calls for a rational perception that contemplates global expansion while confronting the shadows behind visible success, serving as a practical guide for students aiming to understand Hallyu objectively.