

The Growth of South Korean Soft Power and Its Geopolitical Implications

DR. MINSUNG KIM

Abstract

Over the past few decades, South Korean culture has gained popularity worldwide. Since the 1990s, government-led cultural policies have transitioned from focusing on economic strategy to national branding and soft power and have had a positive impact on the domestic ecosystem of cultural industry and contributed to promoting South Korea abroad. There are three aspects contributing to the development of South Korean soft power—the successful history with economic development and democratization, the development of creative content that led to global competitiveness due to the compressed growth experience and the limited domestic market, and the development of digital technology, especially the change in the media environment. However, this increased soft power is still limited as a tool to handle problems facing South Korea, mainly because of the nation's geopolitical situation. South Korea should pay more attention to active participation in specific global agendas—especially in development and cooperation, emerging technology, and human rights issues. As a beneficiary of the existing liberal international order, South Korea achieved a prosperous economy and democracy. This aspect provides a cornerstone upon which to build South Korean cultural resources and promote them beyond its borders. South Korea should contribute creating public goods through its active engagement and leadership on various global agendas. This dedication to the international community ultimately benefits South Korea in the long run.

How has South Korean soft power captivated the world, and what does this emerging global phenomenon mean for South Korea? South Korean culture has become popular worldwide, from pop culture to cuisine, and this phenomenon creates a ripple effect that generates not merely South Ko-

rea's economic benefits but also the enhances the country's image abroad. In addition, the South Korean government invests in the nation's soft power as an effective means for Seoul's public diplomacy: "The country was once largely known for cars and smartphones, but a global audience has become mesmerized by its entertainment, and creators say success didn't happen overnight."¹ This is a quote from a November 2021 *New York Times* article that explores the development of South Korean soft power and the high status of the country's current global reputation. South Korean culture, especially television dramas and music, has been popular among fan groups in certain countries and regions, mainly Asia, since the late 1990s. When the smash hit *Gangnam Style* by South Korean singer Psy became a worldwide phenomenon, including in Europe and the United States, and reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in 2012, many assessed the song's success as a one-time event rather than a harbinger of the genre's global impact. However, this opened the door for more opportunities of recognition of South Korean culture beyond Asia.

In recent years, South Korean culture has garnered more global attention thanks to the success of K-pop groups such as BTS and Blackpink, the movie *Parasite*, and the Netflix series *Squid Game*. According to *Guinness World Records*, published in September 2021, BTS has achieved 23 titles in terms of music and social media. As of the date the article was released, BTS was ranked as "the most streamed group on Spotify, the most followed music group on Instagram, and the most Twitter engagements for a music group."² BTS reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 chart several times. Meanwhile, Blackpink's music video, *How You Like That*, released in June 2020, received 86.4 million views in 24 hours, marking it the most anticipated music video debut ever. This group also became the first artist on YouTube to hit 75 million subscribers, setting the record of the most subscribers as of June 2022.³ According to Spotify, one of the largest music streaming websites, K-pop music streams on Spotify has increased in audience by 107 percent in the United States and 230 percent globally since 2018.⁴

Recent successes of South Korean movies and television dramas are sensational as well. *Parasite*, a dark comedy thriller released in 2019, was the first South Korean film to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and to win four awards in the 92nd Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film. The South Korean television show, *Squid Game*, released in September 2021, was Netflix's most-watched show of all time, with a total of 1.65 billion hours of streaming in the first four weeks of release alone. It ranked as the number-one show in at least 90 countries, including South Korea and the United States.⁵ A cycle of interest in South Korean culture has taken place, while listening to K-pop music and watching movies

and dramas have created additional attention toward Korean cuisine, fashion, beauty, and so forth.

How does this growth in interest in South Korean culture translate to soft power in the international arena? It is useful to understand the concept of *soft power*, which has been widely discussed in international relations as well as foreign policy debates. Joseph Nye introduced the term to explain US global leadership and the means for sustaining its position in the post–Cold War era,⁶ and reintroduced its role for the period in the post–September 11 era.⁷ Nye defines *soft power* as the ability to persuade others to do what one wishes them to without force or coercion.⁸ It attracts people or countries outside the country of origin without coercive measures or threats. It is different from *hard power*—military and economic power—which can be described as the ability to *force* others to act in ways contrary to what they want.⁹ Nye also raised the concept of *smart power*, encompassing a blending of soft and hard power in such a manner as to create a more holistic and balanced strategy. From the US perspective, “smart power means developing an integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve American objectives, drawing on both hard and soft power.”¹⁰ Therefore, the concept of soft power has been widely accepted, especially for advanced countries, including the United States, as a useful means of securing and maintaining their status and roles through more attractive means of influence rather than coercive measures.

Additionally, soft power is recognized in middle-power countries, including South Korea, as useful leverage that can broaden diplomatic horizons by filling inherent gaps in hard power. However, if a state does not have enough bases for hard power, it is difficult to exert its influence only with its soft power. In this regard, South Korea can be considered a noteworthy case, pursuing both hard and soft power and integrating them as a middle-power country. South Korea has a history of achieving democratization and economic development within a relatively short time after the Korean War (1950–1953). South Korean hard power is also emphasized. The IMF World Economic Outlook announced that the South Korean economy was the tenth-largest in the world based on nominal gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021.¹¹ The Lowy Institute’s Asia Power Index ranked South Korean military capability and defense spending fifth out of 26 countries analyzed,¹² and Global Fire Power ranked South Korea sixth out of 142 countries for 2022 military strength.¹³

Along with its hard power, can South Korea’s soft power contribute to moving beyond the country’s political and security difficulties and toward exerting its diplomatic capabilities within the region and beyond? This article aims to analyze the development of South Korean soft power and its possible role in handling Seoul’s geopolitical limitations by answering the following questions: How did South

Korea develop its soft power; what are critical elements that South Korea possesses that establish its global reputation as a cultural powerhouse? Will South Korean soft power be able to contribute to Seoul's efforts in the geopolitical realm?

Driving Forces in South Korean Soft Power

Government-led Soft-Power Policies: Economic Strategy to Public Diplomacy

What are the essential factors leading to the expansion of South Korean cultural popularity? Some experts assess the success of the Korean wave—the rapid growth of South Korean cultural industries and their exports since the late 1990s—as a result of the South Korean government's organizational support.¹⁴ It is a fact that South Korean governments have established various cultural policies as economic strategy. Such policies have later transformed into public diplomatic tools. Seoul started utilizing the cultural industry to stimulate economic growth and began to establish an active cultural policy in the 1990s. There was a famous story regarding an instance when the Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology made a presentation to President Kim Young-sam regarding the potential export of the cultural industry in which the board pointed to the fact that the Hollywood movie *Jurassic Park* generated as much revenue as the export of 1.5 million Hyundai cars overseas.¹⁵ Since then, South Korean governments have introduced and provided diverse policies to support cultural industries, mainly focusing on export-centered economic strategies. For instance, the Kim Dae-jung administration, beginning in 1998, announced the Hallyu Industry Support Development Plan, aiming to increase the value of the South Korean cultural industry. At the time, the Kim administration expanded its budget for cultural industry from USD 14 million in 1998 to USD 84 million in 2001. Likewise, the Roh Moo-hyun administration increased subsidies for cultural startups.¹⁶ Governments also invested in such initiatives to improve the atmosphere of the cultural industry and enacted laws to protect domestic cultural markets. For instance, there was the Basic Law for Culture Industry in 1999, the establishment of the Culture and Content Agency in 2001, and the Online Digital Contents Industry Development Act in 2002. In addition, the 1995 Motion Picture Promotion Law aimed to protect South Korea's domestic film industry through the implementation of securing screen quotas.¹⁷

However, the Lee Myung-bak government changed the direction of cultural policies from economic-focused strategy to a national branding and competitiveness strategy. In particular, the concept of "Global Korea" under the Lee administration embraced economic, political, ideological, and cultural initiatives to build

South Korea's national identity as "future-orientated, multicultural and visionary."¹⁸ The *Diplomatic White Paper* published in 2010 described *soft power* as "becoming increasingly important; culture has surfaced as an indispensable element of a nation's competitiveness and economic resource that produces added value. To keep in pace with this changing global environment, Korea has adopted cultural diplomacy as a new pillar of the country's diplomatic make up."¹⁹ Additionally, the Lee administration operated the Presidential Council on National Branding for public diplomacy and shifted its focus of cultural policy into an approach based on the concept of soft power. Many considered this approach a useful way to engage in economic development and diplomacy. The government viewed the Korean wave as a new source of income via enhanced exports and tourism. This became increasingly relevant as the Korean wave expanded to include other exports such as on-line games, beauty products, and fashion. The Korean wave became an important component of soft power.²⁰

President Park Geun-hye also pledged to strengthen South Korea's cultural policy as one of her administration's main objectives. Riding the success of Psy's *Gangnam Style*, the Park administration increased the budget of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism for various projects, including building a series of giant auditoriums and cultural centers worldwide.²¹ This emphasis on cultural policy continued under the Moon Jae-in administration. For instance, in 2020, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism announced the establishment of a new *Hallyu* department— *Hallyu* being the Korean term for the Korean wave— within the ministry and new strategies aimed at "diversifying *Hallyu* content, fostering other industries through *Hallyu* content, and creating a sustainable environment for the growth of *Hallyu*." The ministry also declared the current period a "new *Hallyu* era," following the *Hallyu* 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0,²² and announced various government-led projects aimed at developing and exporting South Korean culture.

With the government's support, South Korean culture's popularity and its expansion beyond the domestic audience and diaspora grew. Dal Yong Jin and Tae-Jin Yoon define this *Hallyu* phenomenon as the rapid growth of South Korean cultural industries and their exports of products to Asian markets mainly since 1997.²³ They include several advanced cultural forms as components of the Korean wave, "including popular music (K-pop), animation, and digital games, which have gradually penetrated global markets."²⁴ Yeonhee Yoon suggests including additional sectors within the Korean wave and describes *Hallyu* as "the phenomenal popularity of South Korean popular cultural products and industries ranging from television dramas, movies, popular music (K-pop) and dance, and tourism to food, gaming and technology, and fashion which began in East Asia."²⁵

Table 1. Development of the Korean Wave by period

Classification	Korean Wave 1.0	Korean Wave 2.0	Korean Wave 3.0
Period	• From 1997 to mid-2000s	• From the mid-2000s to the early 2010s	• From the early 2010s to present
Characteristics	• Advent of the Korean wave • Focused on visual content	• Diffusion of the Korean wave • Focused on K-pop groups	• Diversity of the Korean wave including online games, cuisine, fashion, and beauty products
Main Genre	• TV Drama	• K-pop	• K-culture
Genres	• Drama, movie, K-pop	• Public culture, some parts of art, and culture	• Traditional culture, art and culture, popular culture, and lifestyle
Region	• Asia	• Asia and some parts of Europe, Africa, Central and South America, and the United States	• Worldwide
Major Media	• Cable TV, satellite TV, and Internet	• Video websites (YouTube), SNS (Facebook, Twitter)	• All media types including OTT (Netflix)

Source: Revised and added by Author based on Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism [2013], quoted by Ministry of Land Infrastructure and Transport, *The National Atlas of Korea I*, 2019, <http://nationalatlas.ngii.go.kr/>.

Scholars usually categorized three periods from the emergence to the present in explaining the Korean wave.²⁶ The initial period started with the popularity of a few television dramas such as *What is Love*, *Dae-jang-guem*, and *Winter Sonata*, which were especially popular in China, Taiwan, and Japan, with varying degrees of interest elsewhere in Asia as well. For example, when China Central Television (CCTV) broadcasted the TV drama *What is Love* in 1997, it ranked second place among imported content. This helped set in motion the Korean wave in China including the emergence of the term, *Hallyu*. In the case of Japan, *Winter Sonata*, aired by NHK in 2003, became a “megahit” and increased Japanese tourism to South Korea in the early 2000s.²⁷ This period is the first generation of the Korean wave (*Hallyu 1.0*). In this period, the popularity of South Korean culture was geographically limited to Asia, including Southeast Asian countries. Mary Ainslie describes the characteristic of *Hallyu 1.0* as “inter-Asian affinity.”²⁸ During

this period from 1997 to mid-2000s, the main content focused on TV dramas, which were popular especially among certain fan groups.

The second generation of the Korean wave (*Hallyu 2.0*) bore different characteristics from the previous period: diversity of popular content, geographical expansion, diversity of fan groups, mutual communication between artists and fans through social networking services (SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.), utilizing popular video websites such as YouTube, and a substantial increase in the exports of cultural products and related goods.²⁹ In particular, South Korean pop groups garnered significant attention from global audiences during this period. K-pop was regarded as a distinctive genre, incorporating aspects of hip-hop, rock, pop ballads, rhythm and blues, and electronic music and featuring skillfully crafted choreography that spread beyond Asia to the other continents.³⁰ During this period, K-pop groups held concerts not only in Asia but also in Europe, including the United Kingdom, France, and Turkey. This shows the expansion of sectors and rapid growth of cultural influence beyond Asia, which opened new markets for the South Korean content industry.

The third generation (*Hallyu 3.0*) represents the period starting from the mid-2010s. *Hallyu 3.0* is different from previous generations regarding expansion of markets, content production mechanisms, active utilization of various social media networks, and over-the-top (OTT) media service platforms. In particular, geographical boundaries expanded further, branching into the United States, United Kingdom, and France³¹—the Western Hemisphere in particular. Within the third generation, according to the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE), exports of the South Korean content industry have increased overall, including not only music and movie but also publication, cartoon, animation, and so forth—video games represent the largest portion of this export content over the most recent five years.³² South Korean movies and dramas are now aired through global OTT streaming services such as Netflix, contributing to increased recognition of South Korean content. Simultaneously, new types of producing mechanisms are being deployed, including investing directly in the South Korean content and participating in the production process of dramas. For example, *Squid Game* was a Netflix original series in 2021 and was recently greenlighted for a new season following its phenomenal success. Another aspect of this generation is a global fandom for K-pop groups. BTS' ARMY, a transcultural global fandom, exists as a core factor that grew BTS into the world's top pop group.³³ Utilizing social media for promotion has become commonplace, but BTS members used social media actively to communicate with their fans through sharing their daily lives, which contributes to form a base of loyal fans.

The popularity of *Hallyu* is not only economically beneficial for South Korea and its economy but also increases the international audiences' interest in South Korea overall. Furthermore, the rise in the popularity of South Korean culture leads people to action, namely, visiting Korea for tourism and learning the Korean language. For example, the number of people who are interested in learning Korean has increased around the world, as confirmed by the number of applicants who have taken the Korean Language Proficiency Test (TOPIK) (*see*, fig. 1).

* The number of applicants decreased in 2020. It is known that TOPIK could not be conducted in many countries due to COVID-19.

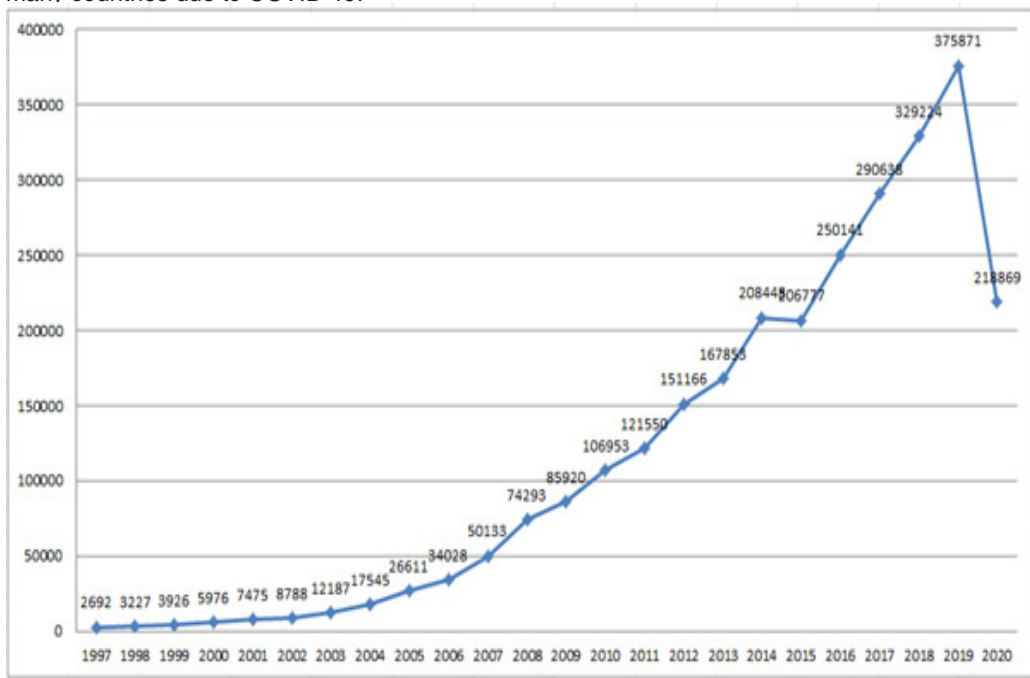


Figure 1. Number of applicants for TOPIK, 1997~ 2020. (Source: Author based on <https://www.data.go.kr/>; <https://www.donga.com/news/>; and <https://www.joongang.co.kr/>.)

However, the government's active cultural policies have not always received positive assessments. There are critiques that the South Korean government takes advantage of the popularity to heighten economic interest and promote the building of national image rather than to support the development of culture itself. Above all, Korea's soft power, which "attracts" people from different cultures, cannot be forced upon others no matter how much the government provides organizational support and physical resources. In this regard, it is more plausible that the Korean wave was unexpected in some ways and not deliberately planned for suc-

cess.³⁴ Nevertheless, government support is meant to raise global awareness regarding the value of the cultural industry and change the domestic ecosystem of the cultural sector through public policy. The role of the Korean government as the main driving force for the current popularity of South Korean soft power is undeniable; however, considering only this factor offers limitations in understanding the overall success of South Korean soft power.

The Competitiveness of South Korea's Soft Power: Convergence of Experience, Creativity, and Digital Technology

Fundamentally, one can view the success of the Korean wave as the result of an historical convergence of politics, economics, and culture. Against this backdrop, there are three considerable aspects contributing to the global attention on South Korean soft power. First, the historical background of South Korea represented as a rapidly developed economy and successful democracy is an essential factor in its culture flourishing and expanding. Despite the ruinous Korean War, South Korea emerged as a middle-power country over the course of a mere half century. It is currently the world's tenth-largest economy, with per capita income reaching more than USD 30,000.³⁵ In 1996, South Korea became the twenty-ninth member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and became the twenty-fourth member of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2010. It also has been a member of the G20 since that grouping's foundation in 2008. Thanks to its economic growth, South Korea has global brands such as Samsung, Hyundai, and Kia and is a leading country in the digital economy and information and communication technology (ICT). Simultaneously, the country's democratization through direct elections and peaceful transition between different political parties is a crucial element in stabilizing its political system and its social environment. South Korea's democratic institutions and rapid economic growth serve to attract other countries—particularly developing nations—as a successful story of achieving hard power as well as establishing middle-power status in the liberal international order.³⁶

Second, the development of creative content leads to the competitiveness of South Korean soft power. This aspect is related to South Korea's historical background and competitive characteristics from limited domestic markets. Historically, South Korea's modernization took place within a short period of time, and globalization has also been rapidly achieved. This compressed experience made South Korean culture a mixture of traditional, modern, and global values and led to creative content appealing to international audiences.³⁷ For example, South Korean TV dramas reflecting the nation's traditional family-centered values in-

spire nostalgia in developed countries such as Japan. At the same time, South Korea's advanced social system and urban culture in dramas could positively influence audiences in developing countries.³⁸

In addition, the competitiveness of domestic cultural markets is a driving force in producing creative content that can be consumed in global markets.³⁹ The situation has improved a bit due to various platforms airing K-dramas, but it is still competitive to secure channels and advertisements because of the limited number available. In the case of K-pop popularity, there is an apparent uniqueness of K-pop style in explaining its creative content such as particular and addictive melodies combining various genres, well-executed choreography, the stylish look of singers, postmodern stages, and storytelling. However, since the number of singers who can debut and succeed is so limited, breaking into this industry is highly competitive as well.⁴⁰ It can be said that the high level of singing and choreography come from this limited market and competitive process; thus, such competitiveness due to the limited domestic market drives the development of creative content aimed at a wider international audience that offers greater opportunities.

Lastly, it is difficult to talk about the spread of South Korean soft power without discussing the development of digital technology, especially the change in the media environment and the advancement of networks. For example, the expansion of digital satellite broadcasting contributed to the popularity of South Korean television dramas in China, Japan, and Taiwan during the period of *Hallyu 1.0*. As the number of satellite broadcasts in neighboring countries increased, varied and numerous content was necessary for broadcasting. This changing media environment provided the K-drama market the opportunity to advance to other countries.⁴¹ In the case of K-pop, the SNSs—including YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook—facilitated K-pop global expansion and offered cost-efficient platforms for promotion. Such outlets also provide a global fandom the opportunity for real-time communication with the artists; thus, the fandom could spread further. This significantly contributed to the geographical expansion of South Korean soft power. Even in Europe and the United States, which historically have relatively high cultural barriers, social media provided a means for such expansion of the Korean wave and the resultant soft power.

South Korean Soft Power and Its Geopolitical Implications

Nye explains that a country cannot thrive on soft power alone, but a well-balanced level of hard and soft power can provide a state with significant opportunities for growth and prosperity. The development of such resources requires adept policy making. Nye also explains that soft power has three sources: the

country's culture, its values in the domestic domain, and its legitimate international policies. One can find those present in the case of South Korea. First, South Korean culture—such as K-pop and its spread worldwide—shows the influence of soft power. Secondly, in terms of domestic values, South Korea presents a “remarkable success story,” along with its economic development and great political success in transforming into a vibrant democracy. As the third pillar of soft power, Nye emphasizes, “Korea could be outstanding in demonstrating through its international policies what success means.” In this context, he suggests that South Korea can broaden its foreign policy agenda beyond security to climate change, human rights, and pandemic response. Therefore, South Korea could assume a more significant international role in terms of producing global public goods—a win-win situation for the country and the global community.⁴²

If that is the case, will the growth of soft-power influence provide the impetus to overcome South Korea's inherent and emerging geopolitical problems? Great powers—such as China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea's ally, the United States—geographically and/or geopolitically surround the Korean Peninsula. Their relational dynamics have posed political, economic, and security challenges to South Korea at the regional and global levels. In particular, current events, such as the intensifying US–China strategic competition and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, demand complex calculations from South Korean policy makers and test the country's diplomatic capabilities. Above all, North Korea poses a security threat through its continuous development of nuclear weapons programs, which serves as obstacle to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and as a detriment to the ultimate aim of reunification. Under the strengthening competition among states to protect their national interests, soft power can create opportunities to improve circumstances. For example, cultural exchanges in the private sector can help improve bilateral relations between South Korea and its neighboring countries. Additionally, global interest in South Korean soft power can also affect North Korean public perspectives. There are many news stories about North Koreans being punished for carrying pen drives containing South Korean dramas, films, and music that have been smuggled into the country.⁴³ However, it is still challenging to have a direct influence on a particular country or solve disputes through soft power.

Thus, it is necessary for South Korea to consider creating some niche through soft power that can complement its foreign policy. Soft power may be accommodating to secure national competitiveness and broaden Seoul's diplomatic space through its active influence in the global agenda. South Korea must make efforts to create leadership opportunities on specific global subjects and help in spreading international norms. The influence of South Korean soft power can

help facilitate such processes. South Korea can contribute to global cooperation through its accumulated soft power by providing leadership in the following three areas: development and cooperation, emerging technologies, and human rights.

The first pillar is development and cooperation. As a beneficiary of the liberal international order in terms of its own economic growth and democratic values, South Korea can provide its active and practical lessons learned in this area. Along with its status as a member of the OECD DAC, South Korean experience in development and cooperation can be of particular relevance to developing countries. Seoul has engaged in various development activities through international organizations and the Korea International Cooperation Agency, but there is a need for further expansion of such engagement.

Specifically, South Korea must focus on Asia, especially Southeast Asia, where the Korean wave began. Based on Southeast Asian interest in the field of development and cooperation, Seoul can aid in proactively and practically implementing the global agenda at the regional level. Through diverse joint projects between South Korea and Southeast Asian countries, confidence building with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its member states can be achieved, and South Korean soft power could contribute to positively stimulating the process. At the same time, the overall process can provide diplomatic opportunities for South Korea to implement its regional strategy in Southeast Asia in a more reliable way. Climate change, energy, health care, and quality education—all of which Southeast Asian countries are intensely interested in—can be considered as possible agendas for joint projects with South Korea. Such collaboration can also contribute to creating a favorable environment for tackling the geopolitical challenges facing South Korea, including building a consensus against the North Korean nuclear program.

The second pillar is cooperation in the development of emerging technologies. The field of digital technology—especially 5G, ICT, and cyber security—in which South Korea has a leading status and that is closely linked to the cultural industry, should be at the forefront of the country's cooperative efforts with other countries. Notably, many synergic effects have evolved in the cultural industry converging with those emerging technologies. Through the development of 5G, IoT (Internet of Things), and ICT cooperation, collaboration with South Korea will be beneficial for countries in building reliable infrastructure. Additionally, South Korea will also be able to spread its technological support through those cooperative works. For example, such cooperation can help address the partner nations' concerns of cyber security, particularly from North Korean attacks. The recent increase of cyberattacks emanating from North Korea, including transactional threats, is serious, and the damage in economic, financial and security sectors is

cumulative.⁴⁴ North Korea has hacked government institutions, especially in South Korea, for Pyongyang's political and security reasons, but recently North Korean state-sponsored cybercriminals are increasingly targeting global financial services, particularly digital currency. This trend raises the international and regional concerns and requested global networked cooperation. In this regard, South Korea's advanced IT sector and Seoul's willingness to tackle this issue can contribute greatly toward mitigating and countering such attacks from Pyongyang and setting international norms to strengthen cybersecurity. In this process, Seoul's active engagement is necessary, and its soft power based on South Korean innovative power will be influential.

Finally, the third pillar is global cooperation on human rights issues. As a liberal democracy, South Korea ascribes to the preservation and promotion of human rights as a core value. South Korea's active stance to promote both domestic and global human rights issues, including in North Korea, can be highlighted and ultimately strengthens Seoul's soft power. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty."⁴⁵ Additionally, Article 10 emphasizes, "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers."⁴⁶ Human rights represent a universal norm, and the values of democracy and human rights are harmonized together. Together these have served to influence the growth of soft power in South Korea. Seoul's active participation in the human rights agenda could build South Korea's national identity as a state committed to protecting the universal value. Thus, by implementing the recommendations outlined above, South Korea can enhance its soft power in the international community.

Conclusion

South Korean soft power has thrived, and the country's global impact could contribute to emphasizing the value of global public goods. Members of BTS delivered a speech on the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN General Assembly, and Blackpink talked about climate change at the UN Climate Change Conference summit. To that extent, these artists' voices are influential in the international community. This reflects the current status of South Korean soft power

as well. In this sense, soft power can be regarded as complementing the limitations of hard power, specifically those related to South Korean diplomatic and foreign policy issues, which are mainly driven by geopolitical factors. Recently, the Yoon Suk-yeol government addressed the aim of being a global pivotal state, with “a focus on promoting freedom, peace, and prosperity based on the South’s liberal democratic values and—crucially—cooperation.”⁴⁷ This has been and should continue to be the direction that South Korea takes, regardless of successive administrations’ placement on the political spectrum, and in this context, soft power should be cultivated and promoted. For the sustainability of the liberal international order, policy makers must make efforts to create public goods by leading international norms in specific for spreading these goods, norms, and values beyond the Korean peninsula. Through its active engagement and leadership on various global agendas, South Korea could contribute to creating public goods. Its dedication for the international community ultimately benefits South Korea in the long run. In this process, South Korea’s soft power will play a positive and important role. ✪

Dr. Minsung Kim

Dr. Kim is a research professor at the Ilmin International Relations Institute (IIRI), Korea University. She received her PhD in international relations from the Graduate School of International Studies (GSIS), Korea University in 2019. Prior to the IIRI, she worked as a researcher in the Department of American Studies at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS), ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Dr. Kim works extensively on nuclear nonproliferation and economic sanctions (cases of Iran and North Korea), the ROK–US alliance, and Indo-Pacific strategies.

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