

The Application of the “Korean Wave” in South Korea’s Cultural Diplomacy

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Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy; Korean Wave; Soft Power

Abstract: In today's era of globalization, cultural diplomacy is not just the supplement of traditional diplomacy, but can play a role alone, and culture, as an invisible force, is exerting its great impact. At the beginning of the 21st century, the successful practice of South Korea's cultural soft power diplomacy is a remarkable event on the international stage. "Korean Wave" is a typical feature of the development of Korean culture today. South Korea is a good example of applying cultural diplomacy effectively to spread the country's culture, enhance national image, and improve its economy. Meanwhile, it's also significant to recognize the successful experiences and existing problems of South Korea's cultural diplomacy.

1. Definitions

1.1 Cultural Diplomacy

Culture can exert an important impact on diplomacy and international relations. The concept about cultural diplomacy does not have a clear definition or a distinct stage of development, and the details of its elaboration vary slightly from scholar to scholar, and the definition of the term changes with context and time. Cummings mentioned that cultural diplomacy can be viewed one form of public diplomacy, meaning "Promote cultural exchanges and mutual understanding among countries and peoples in the fields of ideology, information, art, etc "[1]. Lenczowski described that cultural diplomacy can use a variety of cultural elements to impress foreign general public, opinion shapers, and even foreign leaders^[2]. Specifically, cultural diplomacy can be used to support the objectives of foreign policy, combat stereotypes, enhance national image and cross-border relations. Cultural diplomacy is regarded as an explicit cultural policy administered by Foreign Affairs Ministry. Singh argues that it is "an explicit cultural policy tool"[3].

Nye (2008) and Wang (2007) pointed out the impact of cultural diplomacy, its help in shaping the environment in which a country operates is conducive to creating conditions that fuel the country's long-lasting strategy and economy interests and exert an impact on the overall goals the country seeks. Thus, in terms of the concept of cultural diplomacy in this research paper, sovereign states use various forms of cultural exchange activities to spread their own culture to the people of the target country,

to influence the perception and cognition of the people of the target country, so as to build a good impression of their own country, in order to achieve the country's specific political intentions and establish an international image, which fundamentally serves the long-term consideration of the national interests of the country.

1.2 Korean Wave or “Hallyu”

Korean wave refers to the phenomenon that South Korea entertainment and popular culture sweep globally with TV dramas, movies and popular music. In the late 1990s, this term was first coined by the Chinese media to depict the growing popularity of Korean pop culture in China^[4]. The term "Hallyu", also known as Korean Wave or “Hallyu” in Korea, has evolved from simple popular culture to Korean representative cultural brand and government’s culture strategy for foreign exchange. This is widely valued and respected by every walk of life in Korea. Korean Wave is one of the products that emerged from this cultural industry development that the government constantly promotes. From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, Korean dramas, variety shows, and pop music received tremendous popularity in China, Japan, Thailand, and other Asian countries. "Korean Wave" specifically refers to the global enthusiasm for Korean culture, which includes, but is not limited to, the love of Korean pop music, dramas, movies, variety shows, etc. “Before the emergence of the Korean Wave, people always associated Korea with the 6.25 War and poverty, etc.,” said by Professor Park Gil-sung of Koryo University, president of the World Association for Korean Wave Studies. But after the Korean Wave, people gradually realized that Korea is a vibrant country with wonderful pop culture, food, products, etc. More and more people want to learn Korean, which is the essence of a cultural diplomacy[5].

2. The Overview of Korean Cultural Diplomacy

2.1 Background

Since the end of the Cold War, successive South Korea governments have been committed to cultural development and have gradually established the policy of cultural nationhood. On the one hand, the Korean government has tried to convert cultural strength into diplomatic power, considering cultural diplomacy as one of the three main diplomatic axes along with economy and politics. On the other hand, cultural diplomacy has been used to promote cultural power building and to improve the overall image of the country, with good results. According to its history, Korea has experienced a steep ascent over the past 30 years to become one of the largest economies in the world by a rapid triumvirate of export-oriented industries with a peaceful transformation to freedom and democracy. However, despite its emergence as a global participant in international economy, Korea's prestigious position in the global economy remains obscure and overlooked. The public in Western countries continues to associate South Korea with images of poverty, instability^[6]. After being struck by the financial turmoil in 1997, South Korea adjusted economic development strategy by identifying culture industries as the new core of economy growth while also strategically integrating cultural diplomacy into the country's foreign development strategy. Since the late 1990s, considering the success of the popular culture known as the "Korean Wave," the Korean government has strengthened the concept of cultural diplomacy for bridging the "gap between reality and image"[7]. Thus, in regard to South Korea, cultural diplomacy as an explicit practice was implemented by the government as a top-down unilateral approach to raise the country's reputation abroad and was based on the

institutional legacy of the "developing country" model of governance^[8]. As for the development of cultural diplomacy, Korea has undergone a process from state-led modernization to globalization.

2.2 The Development History

First, the cultural awakening of the Korean government and people laid the foundation for cultural diplomacy. After the end of the Korean War, based on the need to rebuild its homeland and strengthen its people, Korea actively developed cultural industries internally and formulated a series of policies to support cultural industries, and vigorously carried out cultural exchanges externally to break away from American cultural suppression and maintain its cultural sovereignty. Korea's cultural industry policy formulation began in the 1960s with an attempt to seek modernization power from traditional culture. At this stage, the Korean government's willingness to engage in foreign cultural exchange had not yet been fully put into practice. For a long time, the United States has been controlling and influencing all aspects of Korean development with its dominant Western culture. Since the 1980s, the Korean people gradually regained their national self-esteem, broke away from American cultural hegemony, valued the important role of culture in foreign policy, and actively engaged in foreign cultural exchanges.

Second, the "fire of sports" has helped shape Korea's cultural diplomacy. Under the Chun Doo-hwan administration, Korea demonstrated its national strength and new national image to the world by hosting the Asian Games and the Olympic Games, and made efforts to develop international relations with Asian and African countries. In 1993, the government issued the Five-Year Plan for Cultural Prosperity to develop culture industries step by step, and in 1994, the Cultural Industry Policy Bureau was established and various comprehensive cultural policy programs were launched to actively emphasize the significance of cultural industries to economic development, and the cultural diplomacy was gradually formed. In the same year, the Korean government adjusted its foreign policy and specified its diplomatic goals to adapt to the new international environment. Since then, Korea's cultural diplomacy went beyond the simple sports exchanges of the past and began to focus on promoting Korean culture and supporting expatriates abroad, adding a new dimension to cultural diplomacy.

Third, the process of cultural industry has contributed to the further development of Korean cultural diplomacy. In the 1990s, Korean TV dramas, movies, and songs swept across Asia, and the "Korean Wave" became an important form of Korean cultural diplomacy, greatly enhancing the country's national influence. Korean culture produced a substantial impact not only in Asia but also around the world. In 1998, President Kim Dae-jung officially proposed the "Culture as a Nation" policy. In the past four years, the government has formulated the "Five-Year Plan in Cultural Industry Development" and the "Cultural Industry Development Promotion Scheme" to clarify the medium and long time development plan of culture industry. And it also launched a series of major initiatives to encourage the development of culture industry. In 2001, the Cultural Industries Promotion Institute was established. Korea's cultural diplomacy has continued to develop. In 2008, the Lee Myung-bak administration launched the "Cultural Blueprint" with the goal of establishing Korea as a "cultural nation of taste" and combining traditional Korean culture with modern, cutting-edge technology to better present Korea to the world. In her inaugural speech, President Park Geun-hye mentioned that "Korean Wave" culture is a major driving force for Korea's economic development. Korea would use its global spread to promote culture industries and improve Korea's cultural soft power.

3. The application of "Korean Wave" in cultural diplomacy

In recent years, Korean popular culture has been rapidly emerging and spreading to other regions in addition to Asia, creating a certain sensation and taking over the world market. Korean Wave has been incorporated into Korea's cultural diplomacy system, becoming a new form of cultural diplomacy unique to Korea. The "Korean Wave" has expanded beyond popular culture to include the development of electrical appliances, automobiles, food, and publishing, accelerating the integration of traditional Korean culture with popular culture, and enriching the connotation of the Korean Wave. Nowadays, "Hallyu" has become a government-led, private-sector project which encompassed many areas of Korean culture and life, incorporated into the country's cultural diplomacy strategy.

The overall spread of the Korean Wave is the result of a combination of favorable external environmental conditions and the active guidance of the Korean government. First of all, geographically speaking, the Korean Wave has emerged first in East Asia, and China has provided a stable overseas market for its development to a certain extent. Compared with European, American and Japanese cultures, the culture of Korean is closer to Chinese traditional values and aesthetic taste, making it easier to identify with and accept. The warm and harmonious family relationships, beautiful images of handsome men and beautiful women, and the sense of justice against violence in Korean dramas can meet the psychological needs of the audience. For instance, the classic Korean drama "Blue Bloods", with its sad interpretation of family and love, and the light-hearted and romantic "Full of Romance", adapted to the audience's demand for beautiful love and became very popular in the Chinese market. China and other East Asian countries share the similar cultural roots and values with South Korea. Hence, they have a natural affinity for South Korean culture, which lays a foundation for the diffusion of Korean wave. The South Korea government seized the opportunity to take the East Asian countries as a foothold and push the Korean wave to a broader stage.

Secondly, the rapid development of technology and the prevalence of new online media have enriched the vehicles for the diffusion of Korean Wave. Prior to the wave of media liberalization in Korea in the 1980s, the Korean government restricted the direct distribution of foreign films in Korea, allowing only domestic studios to import and distribute foreign films. This move was opposed by the United States, and under its pressure, the South Korea government agreed to allow Hollywood studios to spread movies directly in Korean theaters. Nevertheless, this shift also resulted in an onslaught on Korean domestic films and TV series, which Koreans saw as a serious challenge to their sovereignty and cultural dignity. In the late 1990s, South Korea prioritized the development of knowledge and technology-based industries. The huge success of the IT industry laid a strong foundation for the Korean economy, putting South Korea at the cutting edge of the Internet information industry. The development of internet media has made it possible to watch TV programs that are not available in some countries, which has facilitated "Korean Wave" fans abroad. Thanks to digital technology and information media, people can watch Korean TV dramas, movies and variety shows translated into English, Indonesian, Thai, Spanish and even Chinese dialects for free or for a small fee via the Internet.

In addition, with the finance support, the South Korea government's investment in culture industries and culture budget has been increasing year by year. The government has also founded various special funds for cultural development by various channels, such as the Culture and Arts Promotion Fund, Broadcasting Development Fund, Information Technology Fund, and Publication Fund. The Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism and the Ministry of Future Creation Science have set up various seed funds to boost the development of cultural and creative enterprises in industry, academia and research. Leading Korean companies such as Samsung and LG have also responded to

the government's call for investment in culture industries and are positively using the appeal of "Korean Wave" stars to show their brands. The popularity of the "Korean Wave" is the result of a combination of factors, including strong domestic promotion, changes in the external world, and the cultural tolerance of the recipient countries. Moreover, Korea's long-term commitment to the national branding strategy is also a factor that cannot be ignored, creating the "Made in Korea" represented by the "Korean Wave". For one thing, this has paved the way for the promotion of the "Korean Wave", for another, it has created a unique style for Korean brands, opening up a path of its own in the cultural market where European and American culture is prevalent.

Based on the combination of Korean Wave and cultural diplomacy, Korean Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism established the "Korean Wave Culture Experience Hall" overseas in 2001. In 2006, the State Assembly discussed the issue of the government's support about the globalization of the "Korean Wave", and adopted a scheme to support the development of the "Korean Wave": to focus on Japan and China, to expand to the surrounding areas and overseas regions, with Asian countries as the main receiving areas and European, American and African countries as potential promotion areas. It also trained specialized personnel and strengthen cultural infrastructure construction and financial investment in cultural projects. In 2013, the World Korean Wave Institute was established and the first international conference on "Korean Wave" was held to discuss the future direction of Korean Wave. In the speech at Tsinghua University during the visit to China, President Roh Moo-hyun mentioned with great pleasure that the "Korean Wave" boom in China has brought the two countries closer to each other. President Park Geun-hye in her inaugural speech said that the diffusion of the Korean Wave culture in the world is one major driving force for Korea's economic development, and that the slogan "Korean Wave culture is national power" ^[9] The government's support and confidence in the Korean Wave culture was very strong. Since then, the Korean Wave has entered the field of cultural diplomacy as a cultural strategy.

Every year, Korea's Foreign Affairs White Paper highlights the necessity of building up cultural diplomacy, and reviews achievements of Korea's cultural diplomacy in the previous year and later vision for next years. As early as 2006, the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade released a White Paper on Foreign Affairs, in which it mentioned the need to support the spread of the Korean Wave overseas, to promote interest and understanding of Korea in the world, and to establish a committee to support the "Korean Wave" in different countries. The Korean Wave Support Committee was established to promote the Korean Wave and support some activities of Korean Wave stars of different countries by respecting local social customs. The combination of "Hallyu" and diplomacy has created a new model of Korean cultural diplomacy. The government's recognition and support of the "Korean Wave" as a representative national brand has not only increased the scope for the expansion of the "Korean Wave" culture, but also provided the country with a backing for its development, while the combined efforts of the government and the private sector have added momentum to its sustainable development.

As an important form of Korean cultural diplomacy, Korean Wave has had a remarkable impact in many ways. The worldwide popularity of Korean Wave has advanced the overall development of Korea's cultural industry, and generated enormous economy benefits. According to the statistics of the Korea Culture Industry Promotion Institute, the overseas exports of Korean culture industry in 2019 amounted to USD 10,189.03 million, while the imports were about 1,322.2 million dollars, resulting in a trade surplus of USD 8,986.81 million. It presents a nearly 20-fold increase from 570 million dollars in 2000[10]. According to the report "2021 Korean Wave Effect Study" released by the Korea Institute for International Cultural Exchange, the export value of Korean Wave industry

was \$12.696 billion in 2021, an increase of 1.5% year-on-year. BTS is one of Big Hit Entertainment's most popular male idol groups. In terms of a study by the Asia Scotland Institute, BTS has earned 4.9 billion dollars, or about 5.6 trillion won, for the Korean economy by January 2021. BTS's single "Dynamite" peaked on the Billboard Global Charts as an all-English song and stayed on the charts about 18 weeks. This song alone generated an incredible USD 1.43 billion^[11]. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism of Republic of Korea, during the 2019 coronavirus disease period, the income of this popular song provided 7928 jobs^[12]. South Korea's government appears to have identified the impact of BTS on its economy and is attempting to transfer that impact to the country's political influence around the world. As to the Washington Post in September 2021, South Korea's president Moon Jae-in awarded the title of celebrity diplomat to BTS, asked them to go together to attend the 76th United Nations General Assembly in New York^[13]. As a result, BTS alone can have a tremendous positive impact on the Korean economy and diplomacy.

The prevalence of the Korean Wave raised the influence of Korean culture in this world, shaping an excellent national image, and enhancing Korea's soft power. The "2019 Korea National Image Survey Results" released by the Korea Overseas Culture Promotion Institute shows that 77.7% of foreigners owned a positive attitude toward Korea's national image. Among them, the top factors are popular culture like pop music, movies, and literature (39.2%), followed by economic level (14.5%) and other factors. It shows that the global impact of the Korean Wave has gradually transformed into Korea's culture soft power. As an article "The Economist" points out, Korea's national image fundamentally enhanced as a result of the Korean Wave, transforming it from a poor country ravaged by war to a fashionable and progressive one. The 2020 Soft Power Survey evaluation by "Monocle", a top global journal, noted that Korea ranks second in the world in soft power (after Germany), and in the field of culture, Korea really set a criterion for other countries.

Furthermore, "Korean Wave" exerted a very important role on building relations between South Korea and North Korea. For example, the "Spring is Coming" concert was held in Pyongyang, North Korea, from April, 2018. At this concert, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and his wife Ri So-ju joined the public in Pyongyang to watch performances by various South Korean idol groups, and singers^[14]. The show marked the first time that North Korean leader participated a South Korean performance which held by the North Korean capital, and it significantly eased international tensions between South and North Korea over the North's testing of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles[15]. Similarly, in February 2018, Hyun Song Moon, who was the North Korea's star singer performed at the Seoul concert, which was attended by the North Korean leader's sister Kim Yo Jong and South Korean President Moon Jae-in^[16]. While relations between South and North Korea are often volatile, these performances have greatly increased the opportunities for interaction between the two countries. Cultural diplomacy demonstrates friendly diplomacy between the two countries while exchanging their arts and culture without feeling diplomatically threatened.

4. Successful Experiences and Existing Problems of South Korea's Cultural Diplomacy

4.1 Experiences Summary

Firstly, the government, enterprises and the public are working together and actively promoting it. Since the late 1990s, South Korea government has focused on the progress of culture industries, considering cultural resources with ethnic and regional characteristics as the embodiment of Korea's national soft power and a national image card, as well as a remedy to promote Korea's economic growth and escape from the financial crisis. Therefore, the Korean government has been actively

promoting the cultural industry development strategy in various aspects, such as institutional setting, financial and fiscal policies, and human resource training, with the aim of expanding the broad influence and attractiveness of Korean cultural diplomacy and shaping one new image of Korea as a nation. Under the leadership and promotion of the Korean government, Korean private organizations, social groups, enterprises, and individuals have also actively joined this process and become important participants and implementers of the development of Korean cultural industries and cultural product exports. Certainly, this has also brought ample employment opportunities, improved people's living standards, greatly enhanced national pride and cultural confidence, and stimulated people's willingness and enthusiasm to participate in the practice of cultural soft power diplomacy.

Secondly, Based on the traditional excellent culture and technological innovation, expanding the scope of audience. Korea is actively exploring the cultural resources with different national characteristics. Korea and China belong to the same Confucian cultural circle, and many intangible cultural heritages have similarities. Hence, in the process of creating cultural resources, Korea analyzes and grasps the characteristics of cultural resource objects and amplifies them into special marks. And, Korea focuses on keeping up with the times in its cultural products. In the process of creating Korean cultural products, cultural resources are packaged and designed in a form that fits the characteristics of the times, or combined with trendsetting movies and technological products, and thus a large number of cultural resources are implanted in them, the dissemination of foreign cultural resources is achieved in a subtle way. Take the classic Korean drama "Dae Jang Geum" as an example, the wonderful pictures, gorgeous costumes, elegant speech and mannerisms, exquisite food, and magnificent traditional architecture have left a deep impression on the audience, and have aroused a lot of interest from all over the world, especially from Asian audiences.

Furthermore, Korea has increased investment and financing support for small and medium-sized cultural and creative enterprises and small-scale practitioners in order to cultivate high value-added cultural industries as the core driving force of the "creation economy", focusing on the enhancement of imagination and the cultivation of creativity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea has selected five major cultural and creative industries: games, music, animation, characters and movies to focus on and nurture, interacting with the "Korean Wave" and spreading it around the world to promote Korea's cultural diplomacy with high global competitiveness.

4.2 Existing Problems

First, there is a certain amount of inequality in the diplomacy way it operates. The Korean wave has produced great economic benefits to South Korea and improved its popularity and attractiveness, but there exist two sides to everything. Korea has a self-protective policy towards its local culture, which restricts the dissemination of other cultures, and there is a lack of reciprocity in cultural exchange. This lack of reciprocity may even be considered as "cultural aggression". Although the Korean government is aware of this problem and has said that it imports movies from Asian countries to be screened in Korea every year to avoid making other countries suspicious of Korea. However, this unequal and one-sided cultural exportation is bound to cause complaints from other countries and, in serious cases, expand the "Anti-Korean" crowd, which is not beneficial to Korea's hard-earned national image.

Second, Over-appealing to other countries' mentality and serious commercialization. When exporting Korean culture and products overseas, Korea adapts them to local characteristics and preferences. This practice has indeed broadened the acceptance of Korean culture and attracted more

followers, but it has also caused Korea to abandon its fresh style of film and drama and peaceful cultural characteristics, and pursue elements of violence and conflict, placing more and more emphasis on market share and commercial interests. The excessive commercialization and superficial packaging of "Korean Wave" has added to the internationalization. Meanwhile, this also lost the real Korean characteristics. In a long run, the audience's enthusiasm for "Korean Wave" may gradually fade. It will have a negative influence on the "Korean Wave" as an important element in Korean cultural diplomacy.

5. Conclusion

Successive South Korea governments entering the new millennium have attached great importance to the strategy of cultural nationhood, striving to create an advanced and first-class Korea, and cultural diplomacy is an important means of achieving its strategic goal. The Korean Wave builds a meaningful platform for government to use the rising cultural diplomacy to promote Korea's cultural advantages in the globalized world. It definitely created one favorable national image, promoted Korean culture industries, generated huge economic benefits, and enhanced Korea's cultural soft power. Nevertheless, based on the experiences and shortcomings of Korean cultural diplomacy, it is important to keep it up-to-date and adapt to the new developments and requirements of the times. Therefore, Korean cultural diplomacy can take a more cautious and diversified approach, and the Korean government promotes the healthy development of "Hallyu" in a balanced manner, and needs to find a balance between the non-excessive commercialization of "Hallyu", commercialization and the construction of its identity in an authentic way. In the future, it will be meaningful to see how South Korea can continue to innovate and show the huge potential, and achieve a high level of cultural diplomacy. This will further strengthen Korea's national brand and profound social, economic and cultural success.

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