



Korea's Public Diplomacy: A New Initiative for the Future

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Abstract

The 21st Century has shown that public diplomacy is an important part of a country's international strategy. The traditional hard powers of military and economic might are no longer sufficient for a nation to further its national interests. By combining public diplomacy, which is based on soft power assets, with traditional diplomacy, a nation can achieve its goal of enhancing its national image and increase its influence in a manner favorable to the global stage.

Public diplomacy is a new concept in Korea that was officially launched in 2010. Although public diplomacy programs in Korea have limited resources and redundant programs across different sectors of government, legislators and policy makers are

beginning to understand their importance. Tools that Korea has to implement public policy include a growing popularity of Korean music, dramas and film, and its reputation of being the most wired country in the world.

Effective public policy requires partnerships with civil society and crafting an effective national image. Korea is now forming these partnerships and has developed some significant programs over a relatively short period of time. As the public becomes more aware of the importance of public diplomacy, these partnerships and programs will develop an effective strategy for Korea to move forward as a more important player on the world stage as it seeks to win the hearts and minds of foreigners.

In order to further strengthen Korea's public diplomacy, better coordination across all functions and levels of government is needed to project a clear unified vision of Korea's future is needed. Also, it is essential to lay a strong and healthy foundation with the requisite budget, manpower and organization. Furthermore, Korea needs to enhance its public awareness campaigns to boost civil society's participation in public diplomacy.

1. The Rise of Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century

September 11, 2001 marked the true beginning of the twenty-first century. The 9/11 incident showed that the type of diplomacy engaged in up until that time was no longer sufficient, and also set the stage for a drastically different diplomatic environment from

that experienced during the Cold War. Not only did 9/11 expose the limits of traditional diplomacy; but globalization, the rapid advance of information technology (IT), and the international stage's constantly changing political situation continue to thrust the world into a new environment where traditional diplomacy is no longer sufficient.

Traditional diplomacy was largely based on interaction between government officials and hard power that sought objectives based on military and economic might. The 9/11 incident compelled the United States to understand the limitations of hard power and revisit public diplomacy. Despite being the world's superpower, it did not effectively win a sense of affection and friendship from much of the world, and also failed in conveying an understanding of the attractiveness of its values and institutions.

Public diplomacy is aimed towards winning the hearts and minds of foreigners. Governments are not alone in enacting public diplomacy, but enterprises, non-government organizations (NGOs), and even private citizens can play a large role. Unlike major actors in traditional diplomacy, these new actors utilize the soft power tools of culture, values, media, technology, sports, and economic cooperation. Hard power techniques involved the exporting of one's goods and services abroad. Soft power techniques involve the introduction of one's culture and values, which promotes understanding and friendly relations.

Within the last several years, information technology innovation has taken public diplomacy to a new level by making it easier for citizens to access information and express opinions across borders. With this change, ordinary citizens are playing a greater role in influencing foreign policy. Public diplomacy involves not only winning the hearts and minds of foreign citizens, but also promoting understanding and support from a country's own citizens regarding its foreign policy. Although democratic societies have always been mindful of public opinion in crafting international policy, this has become much more important as rapid technology improvements have made citizens more politically interested.

Another focus of public diplomacy is global enterprises and NGOs. Governments must build relationships of trust with these organizations as they continue to play an increasingly influential role in formulating international norms regarding climate change, human rights, and national security. As nations work to move the hearts and minds of foreigners, they must also take into consideration the perspectives of international organizations when crafting a national vision for use in the international community. Municipal governments are also essential partners in advocating public diplomacy. The interaction of these actors with counterparts around the world is a valuable asset for governments in pursuing public diplomacy.

2. Korea's Abundant Soft Power Resources

Despite its rapid rise as the “Miracle of the Han River,” Korea has limited hard power assets. Korea spent approximately 40 years at the beginning of the twentieth century under colonial rule, and then underwent a peninsular division that spawned a devastating war and continued separation of nearly 70 years. The continuing threat from the North also severely limits Korea’s hard power. The international perception of Korea is that there is an ever-present sense of instability, and this impression is frequently referred to as the “Korea discount” because of its negative effect on global business. Korea’s limited natural resources and heavy reliance on trade further limits its hard power. For example, Korea’s foreign trade amounted to 110 percent of its GDP this year.¹

As it begins to focus on public diplomacy, however, Korea is rich in soft power resources. First of all, Korea’s rapid growth is serving as a model for developing countries as it has the distinction of thus far being the only country to move from being an aid recipient country to an aid donor country. Not only did its economic growth occur over the short span of just several decades, during this time it also progressed to become a model of democratic stability.

Korean companies are becoming major global players. Thirteen of the companies listed in the latest *Fortune* Global 500 are Korean companies.² Just a little over twenty years ago, Korean electronics companies were selling lower grade products, but are now competing with the world’s top companies. Likewise, the quality of Korean

manufactured vehicles has expanded its share in world markets. The brand imaging of Korean companies has been remarkably enhanced to now match that of any other world class brands.

Another of Korea's soft power assets is *hallyu*, which literally means the Korean wave. Currently, there are 830 *hallyu* fan clubs in over 80 countries totaling over 6.7 million members.³ The most notable sources of *hallyu* are K-pop, television dramas, and movies. As of the publication date of this article, Psy's song *Gangnam Style* is poised to enter the top 10 of *Billboard's* Hot 100 (currently ranking 11th)⁴ and Korean director Kim Ki-duk just claimed the top prize at the Venice Film Festival for his movie *Pieta*.

Hallyu is much more, however, than just music, movies, and television dramas. Sports is another important aspect, and Koreans have many noteworthy achievements in this area. Most recently, Korea ranked fifth in the London Olympics. Its soccer team won the bronze at the London Olympics. Its baseball team claimed the gold in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and has consistently done well in international competitions. Figure-skater Yuna Kim won the hearts of people around the world with her world-record beautiful skating performance during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics and has propelled herself to world stardom. Soccer star Ji-Sung Park also became a household name through much of the world after stellar performances in multiple World Cup tournaments and playing in the English Premier League.

Korea has also demonstrated its capability as a host for major sporting events since it hosted the 1988 Summer Olympics. Since that time it has co-hosted the 2002 World Cup with Japan and in 2011 had the privilege of being the first Asian country to host the IAAF World Championships in Athletics. Korea is also very much looking forward to hosting the XXIII Olympic Winter Games in Pyeongchang in 2018. In addition to hosting major sporting events, its indigenous sport of *Taekwondo* is increasing in popularity with over 70 million practitioners across 190 different countries, and is now an official Olympic event.⁵

Another important aspect of *hallyu* is Korean food, as Korea is home to one of the world's internationally renowned cuisines. Korean restaurants are located in cities across the world as Korean food continues to grow in popularity. Pre-eminent restaurant food consulting company, Baum + Whiteman, named kimchi as “The food ingredient of 2012” while stating that Korean food is poised to become an important international food trend.⁶

For those learning foreign languages, Korean used to be considered a boutique language, but over 640 universities and 2100 schools around the world now offer courses in the Korean language.⁷ In addition, there are 90 King Sejong Institutes around the world where people can study Korean, and 14 more institutes are under planning. Korea has been sending Korean language specialists abroad to meet the demand for Korean language learning, and this past year saw the opening of a Korean language school in

Bau-Bau, Indonesia for a local tribe that decided to use Hangul, the Korean writing system, as the alphabet for its language.⁸

The Korean traditional style of dress called *hanbok* is also becoming an influence in some fashion circles, as demonstrated by celebrities such as Britney Spears and Nikky Hilton appearing in *hanbok* style dresses.⁹ The *hanbok*'s colorful style and extravagant design in both its blouse and dress are unique to Korea and adds elegance to the Korean holidays when the *hanbok* is traditionally worn. As other countries, especially those in Asia, look to Korea for fashion trends, the *hanbok*'s influence is becoming more prominent.

One of Korea's most important soft powers is its advance in cutting edge IT. Korea is frequently referred to as being the most wired country in the world, having a penetration rate greater than 100 percent for wireless broadband access.¹⁰ Last year, the *Economist* Intelligence Unit ranked Korea number one on its Government Broad Band Index (gBBi).¹¹ The number of operating mobile phones also outnumber the population, and it is nearly unheard of in Korea to lose cellular phone reception.¹² Frequent usage of social networking sites has further empowered Internet users, and this wide access to information that crosses borders gives Korea a preeminent soft power tool with its advanced information technology.

This cutting edge technology has made social networking an extremely important public diplomacy tool. Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) recently launched a podcast and also utilizes Facebook and Twitter to connect to the public. Social networking sites are especially powerful in Korea and are even used to spread information to the elderly. Messages delivered via this medium reach both citizens and the press. It is of utmost important that Korea remains united on issues regarding its history and maritime territory, and social networking sites are an excellent venue by which to achieve this.

Despite the rapid growth of Korea's high tech industry and the increasing popularity of Korean music and movies, it still retains the vital soft power asset of its scenery, traditional culture, and values. These remain a firm cornerstone of Korean society, and a major reason tourists visit Korea is to see its historical sites. Korea has 23 sites either designated by or under review by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) as World Heritage Sites. These sites include the incredible Changdeokgung Palace Complex, which is especially noted for its beautiful garden scenery and serenity that makes people forget they are in the middle of Seoul. Other popular sites include the Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple located in Gyeongju. This sitting Buddha and nearby temple are nearly 1400 years old and display extraordinary and unique handiwork.

Korea's emphasis on education is another important soft power tool, which is rooted in its Confucianist values. Not only does Korea have the world's highest education enrollment rate and lowest education dropout rate, but both the Korean government and Korean families devote a huge portion of their resources to education. A major portion of Korea's overseas cooperation programs are dedicated to schools, research laboratories, and vocational centers. People around the world come to Korea for education and training, and Korean specialists share their expertise with developing countries. President Barack Obama on multiple occasions has pointed to Korea as an example the U.S. should look to when considering educational reform.¹³ PhD statistics are nearly impossible to track, but the frequent statement that Korea has the highest per capita of PhDs in the world is another evidence of the great value it places on education.¹⁴ An educated populace gives Korea a firm advantage in implementing public diplomacy.

Another value rooted in Confucianism is filial piety. This value refers to the respect one has for parents and ancestors. Confucius taught that having harmony in each home would bring peace to the nation. A desire to revere one's ancestors brings about a sense of duty to live a moral life, which also encompasses the traits of loyalty, trust, propriety, and integrity. These principles helped Korea achieve industrialization at a rapid pace, and its future will depend on how effectively these values are passed down to future generations. These are tools that can help develop trust and cooperation between nations as these values are exported abroad.

Korea's unique style of oriental medicine is another traditional aspect of its culture gaining ground overseas. Although largely based on Chinese traditional medicine, Korean oriental medicine has developed many traits unique from Chinese traditional methods that are being noticed by the rest of the world. Acupuncture, especially, is increasing in popularity as a method of treatment and has caused the medical community to take note.¹⁵

So why is it that Korea should now implement public policy? As it begins to play an increasingly important role on the world stage, a firm commitment to public diplomacy will help Korea gain more respect on the international stage. Although public diplomacy uses soft power tools, a coordinated strategy will help Korea gain ground economically as it lays a foundation from which to expand its business interests overseas. A well founded policy will also expand Korea's economy by promoting trade and attracting investment and tourism.

The division of the Korean peninsula further stresses the importance of public diplomacy. An effective public diplomacy policy can contribute to a stabilized Korean peninsula by reaching out to the international community. As Korea presents its national vision through public diplomacy outreach efforts, it can increase its soft power influence to become a more renowned global actor. An increase in exchanges with the citizens of the global community will not only enrich Korea's soft power assets, but

help the world better understand Korea's geopolitical situation and seek for a stable and peaceful Northeast Asia.

3. Implementing Public Diplomacy by Engaging Domestic Actors

Public Diplomacy is not limited to central governments, but is also shaped in large part by non-government and municipal level actors. The private activities of citizens, corporations, NGOs, and media are an important outlet for Korea's public diplomacy. As these sectors use their own initiative to spread information about Korea and leave a positive impression on the people they meet, their message can penetrate the hearts and minds of foreigners without being misperceived as propaganda, and foreigners can better understand Korea.

A good example of this is Korean global companies showing their generosity through various corporate social responsibility programs. Samsung Electronics has established engineering academies in South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya intended to help local citizens develop better skills that will enable them to earn higher wages.¹⁶ Hyundai Motor has worked to reduce the number of traffic fatalities in India by making improvements to traffic infrastructure.¹⁷ POSCO has developed a broad network of corporate social responsibility programs that includes building homes for the homeless in Vietnam and operating free clinics in remote villages in Mongolia.¹⁸ Korea Life Insurance has improved the image of Korea in Vietnam by providing service and

support to hospitals and orphanage.¹⁹ As STX established a major factory in Dalian, China, it donated computers to local schools and has supported a children's orchestra by providing music instructors and musical instruments.²⁰ Daewoo helped support education in Chanchamayo, Peru and made a big difference in the lives of underprivileged children.²¹

Another sector that can implement public diplomacy is the media. The television stations KBS World and Arirang TV are broadcast throughout the world and have a global audience. KBS World, a television station that internationally broadcasts programs originally aired on KBS, Korea's largest television station, is also growing in popularity. Although its original audience was intended to be Koreans living overseas, those of non-Korean descent have also began tuning in to its English subtitled programming.²² Arirang TV viewership has now surpassed 100 million households in 188 countries with more than 100 million viewers around the world and is committed to helping foreigners better understand Korea.²³

Municipal governments also play an active role in Korea's public diplomacy as they host various festivals and sporting events. Incheon is slated to host the Asian Games in 2014, and Pyeongchang will host the 2018 Winter Olympics. The Busan International Film Festival has become renowned internationally, and the Hampyeong Butterfly Festival is gaining recognition as a very unique event. These municipal venues are excellent venues to promote a national brand and image abroad. In addition, these

venues have their own unique traits and make visitors aware of the differing cultural heritages within Korea that bring a deeper understanding of Korea's cultural diversity and harmony.

NGO roles are expanding in public diplomacy as they communicate directly with citizens around the world. As of September 2012, more than 750 NGOs are registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. They are actively promoting Korea by providing information and correcting foreign misconceptions of Korea. They interact with counterparts overseas via global networks and advocate Korea's foreign policy and position on important matters. As part of its effort to build NGO partnerships, MOFAT holds an annual forum with NGO representatives where they share their experiences and activities around the world. MOFAT is also establishing a cyber community of these NGOs which will allow all registered NGOs to exchange information.

MOFAT partnered last year with Lotte Group to distribute Korean movies overseas through its Lotte Cinema and Lotte Entertainment subsidiaries. This year MOFAT partnered with KBS and municipal government Gyeongsangbuk-do for "Quiz on Korea," where preliminary quiz rounds were held by Korean Embassies in 23 different countries. The winners from these rounds then came to Korea to participate in a final round at the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) studios, which also featured performances by some of today's top K-pop stars, visit historical sites in Gyeongsangbuk-do, and be designated as "Friends of Korea." It was broadcast during Korea's celebration of the harvest called

Chuseok, when many extended families watch TV together. It will also be broadcast overseas on KBS world.

Government partnerships with private actors are integral to public diplomacy because government organizations typically have insufficient infrastructure and specialization. This requires government organizations to partner with NGOs, enterprises, the media, and schools to effectively spread their message. These types of partnerships with private organizations help supplement the insufficient resources, manpower, and capability of government organizations. However, in building partnerships with the private sector, governments should bear in mind that they should not violate the independence of private sectors. A public diplomacy partnership can best succeed when the government forms a trusted relationship with the autonomous private sector to reach a coordinated vision of a country's national image.

4. The Current Status of Korea's Public Diplomacy

Having been implemented in 2010, Korea's public diplomacy is only in its infant stage. In an ambitious move, MOFAT set out to make public diplomacy the third pillar of its diplomatic strategy in addition to political and economic diplomacy. After establishing the Korea Public Diplomacy Forum in 2010, Korea nominated its first Ambassador for Public Diplomacy in September 2011 while establishing the Public Diplomacy Policy Division in its Cultural Diplomacy Bureau.

Despite public diplomacy being a new endeavor, Korea has already implemented several programs. This included its first “I love Korea, because...” video contest, in which contestants submitted three minute videos about Korea on YouTube. Not only were the judges surprised to receive over 1400 entries from 110 countries, but they were surprised at the high level quality of the entries. Among the video entries, 769 dealt with the theme of K-pop, 631 promoted Korean nature and scenery, 624 talked about the tastiness of Korean food, 524 extolled the virtues of traditional Korean culture, 498 celebrated Korean film and television, 309 paid tribute to the Korean people, 308 explored Korea’s economic development and advanced technology, 195 were about the Korean language, 108 had Korean historical themes, and 88 were filled with Korean sports related themes.

The televised awards ceremony featured some of today’s up and coming K-pop artists. In addition to the award recipients being designated as “Friends of Korea,” the grand prize award winner from Tokyo demonstrated how public diplomacy wins the hearts and minds of foreigners as she thanked Korea for inviting her despite diplomatic issues that were occurring between Korea and Japan. She expressed her optimism in fluent Korean that cultural exchanges like the one she was participating in would help promote understanding. This was an example of public diplomacy in action.

As an extension of the “Friends of Korea” program, MOFAT is also working to establish a program called “Honorary Ambassadors of Korea.” This involves Korean overseas

missions selecting candidates among celebrities, sports stars, musicians, and artists to represent Korea to its respective local populations. Having a public figure from one's own country promote the positive aspects of Korea seems to be an effective public diplomacy tool.

Korea is also developing various foreign scholarship, educational exchange, and vocational programs. The Global Korea Scholarship program has been in place since 2010 and provides scholarships for students to study in Korea. The Korea Public Diplomacy Scholars Group provides teaching and scholarly resources to overseas professors that have experience with Korea. As professors share these materials, their students develop a positive image of Korea.

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) has established over 60 vocational institutes overseas to help those in developing countries and also brings foreigners to Korea for training programs. This type of cooperation in education and training develops strong networks with other countries, especially developing countries, and should be further developed as Korea develops its public diplomacy strategy.

Another new development is a resource center called the "Korea Corner." This involves selecting already existing libraries to have a section with resources about Korea. The "Korea Corner" is supplied with books, journals, software programs, CDs, and DVDs about Korea. The centers will have Korean brand computers and televisions, and will

not only be places where one can perform research pertaining to Korea, but also enjoy Korean music and movies. Such centers will enable foreigners to feel a connection to Korea, and plans are underway to establish a “Korea Corner” in Iraq, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.

Despite these initiatives, Korea’s public diplomacy is suffering from some limitations. Because it was only initiated two years ago, public awareness of the importance of public diplomacy is low, and some sectors of government fail to understand its importance. Accordingly, there are significant budget and organizational constraints, and a small organization within MOFAT is charged with its implementation.

Another tough challenge is that public diplomacy resources are decentralized. Public diplomacy functions are spread across several different central government ministries in addition to public diplomacy functions inside multiple municipal level governments. The absence of a “control tower” to formulate strategies and allocate resources across these multiple functions leads to waste and inefficiency.

5. The Importance of Developing a National Image

Nations expend much effort in crafting a national image. An example is the United States working to extol the values of democracy, hard work, human rights, and freedom. Japan has tried to establish an image of pacifism after the end the World War II.

Germany has worked to mold itself into a positive model after the horrors of the holocaust. Australia and New Zealand are formulating the image of being clean and green.

Despite efforts to craft a positive national image, however, it is easily tarnished. For example, the misbehavior of soldiers overseas and cartoon depictions in Europe have at times damaged the image of the Western World. Although some of these incidents touch on the importance of freedom of expression, they also deal with respecting religion and the culture of others. Effective public diplomacy requires the understanding and cooperation of citizens, soldiers, journalists, and all elements of society by instilling in them an appreciation of cultural diversity.

Korea has used the slogans of “Global Korea” and “Dynamic Korea” to create positive images of Korea in international society. These national brands were also part of national campaigns to lead citizens to come forward and remedy failures Korea has had in the past regarding its national image.

Unfortunately, there is a criticism that some Koreans have a negative perception of foreigners residing in Korea. In some cases, the actions of Korean citizens do not match that of a “Global Korea.” For example, there have been wage dispute cases in factories that hire foreigners. In other instances, some foreign women marrying Korean men are not treated properly. These issues are not just domestic ones affecting Korean society,

but can escalate into international issues. In formulating a national brand, having the participation of civil society is of utmost importance. As governments craft strategies for public diplomacy, the future will see a greater need to cooperate with a civil society wishing for greater participation in policy implementation. This is the reason Korea has already begun to form partnerships with private organizations and use social media to spread its message.

6. A Roadmap for the Future of Korea's Public Diplomacy

Korea's strategy will be to restructure its public diplomacy policy with a guiding vision coordinated across all functions in each level of government. This vision will then product policy goals of public diplomacy to improve Korea's national image. Korea will then adapt a customized version of this master plan that takes local customs and culture into account when constructing outreach programs in each individual country.

The legislative front is demonstrating a growing support for public diplomacy in the National Assembly. Currently, there are legislative bills proposed and discussed in the National Assembly aimed at expanding Korea's public diplomacy by establishing a consultative commission to coordinate a master plan among all levels of government while increasing fiscal support for public diplomacy. The passage of this legislation is expected to make a contribution to Korea's public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy strategy should not only focus on winning the hearts and minds of foreigners, but also understanding the importance of domestic public opinion and their support for foreign policies. An improved public diplomacy strategy will make sure the Korean government understands the sentiments of its citizens while helping them see the background of its foreign policies. Citizens already use social networking sites as an effective sounding board, and Korea is working to be more responsive by listening to its citizens and utilizing campaigns to spread accurate information. As citizens partner with the government in pursuing public diplomacy, it becomes even more vital for the government to use social networking channels and the Internet to keep informed of public opinion. Ensuring that messages are accurate and properly timed is key to building an effective national image.

Citizens are not only partners with the government in crafting public diplomacy policy, but also in implementing it. Korea is working to make citizens aware of their importance as “citizen diplomats,” because a foreigner’s attitude towards Korea is largely shaped by the individual Koreans he or she meets. Helping citizens understand this concept can help overcome the negative perception of Koreans. Social networking sites also allow governments to equip citizens with the necessary tools to implement public diplomacy. Making available applications on social networking sites related to government policies, tourism, and cultural interests allows citizens to share them with interested people they know around the world. Citizens will be able to download these applications and materials from MOFAT’s website and use them how they wish. This

allows citizens to spread the message without the risk of having the message be misconstrued as propaganda.

7. Conclusion

Although only two years have passed since its official implementation, Korea has initiated several signature programs of public diplomacy. This year saw the successful completion of the “Quiz on Korea” and “I Love Korea, because...” contests. The continued *hallyu* boom has given the government a launching point from where to start from. The National Assembly has recognized the importance of public diplomacy by proposing related legislation.

There are, however, serious challenges ahead. Resources in manpower and budget are still quite small, and many programs are not well coordinated amongst multiple government organizations. Inter-ministerial coordination and public awareness campaigns can hopefully correct these deficiencies, and a growing awareness of public diplomacy in the government and National Assembly can lead the way to expand its infrastructure.

Korea has already taken its first step and is now beginning its own public diplomacy programs. Although there will be bumps and hurdles, its rich supply of soft power assets will equip it for a successful journey. Citizens now have greater expectations and are

playing a greater role in modern society. Public Diplomacy is no exception and is most effective when citizens, NGOs, corporations, academics, and the media have greater opportunities to communicate and interact with their foreign counterparts. Accordingly, an effective strategy will utilize public campaigns to instill awareness and understanding of public diplomacy's importance and allow private actors to play a role. As citizens gain a more direct voice in crafting of public policy, cooperation between governments and civil society is vital, and the success of modern diplomacy will largely depend on how well civil society is integrated into its formulation.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views
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