

## Contemporary cultural diplomacy in South Korea: explicit and implicit approaches

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This paper argues that in the case of Korea, cultural diplomacy (CD) has been explicitly implemented in a top-down and unilateral approach by government to enhance national prestige abroad, underpinned by the institutional legacy of a 'developmental state' model of governance. Yet, an implicit approach has also emerged, associated with capacity building of the domestic cultural industries through promoting 'international cultural exchange'. Whilst the top-down unilateral approach has persisted, a disarray of policy rhetoric and institutional fragmentation surrounding CD, as well as the blurring of cultural industries development policy with the CD agenda has led to gradual convergence of both explicit and implicit approaches.

**Keywords:** cultural diplomacy; cultural policy; implicit cultural policy; Korean Wave

### Introduction

As pointed out in the introductory article of this special issue, cultural diplomacy (CD) is inevitably underpinned by an instrumental application of culture by governmental actors for the advancement of various national interests. In other words, culture here is being used as a resource (Yúdice 2003): as a source of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) and soft power (Nye 2004). In this sense, Isar provided an apt starting point to approaching CD as a process of 'state actors engaging in accrual of symbolic capital in the international economy of cultural prestige through exercising cultural policy as display' (Isar 2010). As such, CD as a form of contemporary diplomacy involving the process of construction and representation of national identity (Pigman 2010), requires a more nuanced examination of its instrumentality (Nisbett 2013).

While the field has attracted a great deal of attention in the recent decade, particularly in North America and Western Europe, critical inquiry into the role of regional and governmental contexts in shaping contemporary CD is lacking, particularly in Asia. The dominant post-industrial countries have been at the forefront of deploying their national culture and values in support of their economic and foreign policy objectives, a practice which has intensified as a result of proliferation of 'soft power' discourses, and of the development of information and communication technology (Feigenbaum 2001, Schneider 2003, Nye 2010). However, the

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rising economic might of East Asia and the transition to value-added production have made CD increasingly important for Asian countries in expanding their spheres of geopolitical and global influence. This paper examines the development of contemporary CD in South Korea (hereafter Korea). The ways in which this has occurred may well indicate relevant pathways for other 'emerging' nations.

Over the past thirty years, Korea has traversed a steep ascent to its current position as one of the world's largest economies through rapid export-oriented industrialization, coupled with a peaceful transition to a liberal democracy. Yet, while undoubtedly having become a global player in the international economy, Korea's standing in the global economy of prestige has remained vague and overlooked. Foreign publics in the West, generally indifferent, continue to associate Korea with images of poverty, instability, and the nuclear provocations of North Korea (Kim 2011b, Kinsey and Chung 2013). At the same time, since the late 1990s, neighbouring countries began to recognize Korea with the success of its pop-culture, known as the 'Korean Wave' (*Hallyu*) (Korea Culture and Information Service [KOCIS] 2011). These opposing perceptions have posed both a challenge and opportunity for the Korean government, and have reinforced the notion that CD is integral to narrowing the 'gap between reality and image' (Kinsey and Chung 2013).

The recent salience of CD in Korea is reflected in a report titled *Cultural Diplomacy Manual*, published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) in 2010. Despite the view of CD as a peripheral activity of government even until 10 years ago, Foreign Affairs Minister Yoo Myung-hwan stated in the report that, 'along with diplomatic efforts focused on national defense in the 1980s and the economy and trade in the 1990s, culture will be the third pillar of diplomatic power in the twenty-first century' (MOFAT 2010, p. 3). Although CD has garnered significant attention in Korea over the past decade, both in terms of policy rhetoric and the allocation of resources directly and indirectly, the conceptual and pragmatic framework continues to be fragmented and ambiguous (Korea Culture and Tourism Institute [KCTI] 2004, Arts Council Korea [ARKO] 2007, 2010, Hong 2011, Kim 2012).

The evolution of CD in Korea can also be captured in the light of Ahearne's distinction between explicit, or nominal cultural policies, and implicit, or effective cultural policies, that 'work to prescribe or shape cultural attitudes and habits over given territories' (Ahearne 2009, p. 141). Ahearne notes that his distinction is not intended to simply stand in for existing oppositions such as governmental/commercial, private/public etc. but should be more dynamic in its use. In this case the explicit/implicit distinction is suggestive in examining a complicated layering of discontinuous policy strands associated with CD in Korea. These strands will be taken up below.

CD may also be framed as 'cultural policy as display' (Williams 1984 cited in Isar 2010), but this is not without some ambiguity regarding its location along the explicit-implicit spectrum. McGuigan (2004) aligns the understanding of 'display' functions with the 'implicit' pole of cultural policy, as it does not always pertain to cultural policy explicitly. On the other hand, Throsby (2009) notes that CD can be viewed as an explicit cultural policy that is administered through the ministry of foreign affairs, while Singh (2010, p. 12) has viewed it as 'an explicit cultural policy instrument'. This paper argues that in the case of Korea, CD as an explicit practice has been implemented as a top-down and unilateral approach by government to

enhance national prestige abroad, underpinned by the institutional legacy of a ‘developmental state’ model of governance. Yet, in conjunction, an implicit approach has also emerged, associated with the capacity building of domestic cultural industries. Whilst a top-down unilateral approach has persisted, a disarray of policy rhetoric surrounding CD, and the blurring of cultural industries development policy with CD has reflected the gradual convergence of explicit and implicit approaches.

### **Institutionalization of CD: from state-led modernization to globalization**

Broadly speaking, CD has been institutionalized by the government as a top-down, unilateral approach at enhancing national prestige. This was rooted in the institutional legacy of Korea’s adoption of the ‘developmental state model’ to drive rapid industrialization. Following the Korean War (1950–1953), Korea went through a period of authoritarian military dictatorship under President Park Chung-hee (1961–1979). Park prioritized economic development through state-led, export-oriented industrialization under the banner of ‘Modernization of the Motherland’ (Minns 2001, Chu 2009, Lee and Han 2000). The developmental state model, based on strong state intervention led by extensive regulation and macroeconomic planning, affected all policy fields, including the arts and culture, as the ‘state became its biggest resource provider, planner and coordinator’ (Chu 2009, Lee 2013).

The adoption of culture as an object of strict government control within an explicit cultural policy framework meant that CD became a form of public relations and propaganda both domestically and abroad. It served the broad political agenda of ‘national modernization’, legitimizing the regime and redressing the impact on the national sense of self after the Japanese colonial occupation (1910–1945), fostering domestic cultural nationalism, and pursuing ideological warfare against North Korea (Oh 1998, Chun 2000). Explicit cultural policy under Park adopted a deliberate strategy of aligning national culture with traditional culture and fostering ethnic and cultural nationalism as means to enhance national cohesion and unity (Oh 1998, Chun 2000, Yim 2002, Lee 2013). This dual agenda was reflected in two prominent overseas manifestations sponsored by the government during this period: ‘5000 Years of Korean Art’ (1976, 1978) showcasing traditional cultural artifacts from the collections of the National Museum of Korea, and robust promotion of Korea *Gugak* Center (Traditional Performing Arts Group) tours across Asia, US and Europe (totaling 20 tours from 1964 to 1979) (Cho 2008).

The state-led construction of national cultural identity domestically and its representation abroad through unilateral PR initiatives were mutually reinforced through institutional restructuring as well. In 1968, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Public Information were officially merged to establish the Ministry of Culture and Public Information (MCPI), combining external public information and domestic cultural development functions. This dual institutional framework provided a basis for the government’s interventionist approach throughout the subsequent period. Through MCPI, Park’s government exercised tight control over the construction of national culture domestically and abroad through a unilateral public information (*gongbo*) policy; it also exercised heavy regulation of information and media flows through censorship. The scope of this censorship and regulation included culture, arts, public opinion, media and broadcasting. In this context, the term CD was first explicitly introduced in the Executive White Paper (*Hangjeongbaekseo*) in 1964 as a subset of foreign propaganda (MOFAT 2009).

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Korea went through a historic democratic transition, with the election of President Roh Tae-woo in 1987 and the first civilian President Kim Young-sam in 1993. This transition signified a critical juncture for cultural policy discourses as well; notably neo-liberalization of public policies and deregulation of the cultural sector. The government's conception of culture shifted from an object of state control underpinned by ideological and political propaganda to an autonomous sector in dire need of capacity development. In turn, the MCPI was separated into two agencies, the Ministry of Culture and the Bureau of Public Information in 1990.

Furthermore, following on from the previous imperative of 'Modernizing the Motherland', the government responded to the new challenge of increasing national competitiveness in a rapidly interconnected and global market economy under the banner of globalization (*seggyehwa*). Gi-wook Shin (2003) aptly contextualizes the emergence of the official *seggyehwa* agenda under President Kim Young-sam (1993–1998) as a 'product of policy makers' growing recognition of globalization as a major source of external pressure in the post-Cold War era, and as means to obtaining a competitive edge for the nation' (Shin 2003, p. 10). The term *seggyehwa* came to be loosely deployed over the following two decades to identify broader governmental efforts in enhancing Korea's global competitiveness in general, ranging from the promotion of cities to traditional Korean food.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this rapidly evolving domestic and external context, the government's institutional approach to CD generally retained some consistency. CD as an explicit practice persisted throughout the subsequent period as a state-led means of raising the profile of cultural representations of Korea abroad and enhancing Korea's status as a 'cultural state'<sup>2</sup>: the explicit yet broad objectives framed under the *seggyehwa* agenda served as a general paradigm for Korean CD. But eventually the proliferation of new cultural policy initiatives would lead to CD becoming increasingly elusive.

### Explicit CD and the globalization agenda

The advancement of the *seggyehwa* agenda was coupled with an increasing emphasis on the evolving implications of foreign perceptions of Korea. Thus CD as an explicit practice has continued as a means to enhance the national image (Chung 1994). In 1997, the Ministry of Culture and Sports (MCS) established the 'Top Ten Symbols of Korean Culture', based on a report commissioned in 1996 entitled the 'Korean Cultural Identity Selection and Utilization Strategy' (MCS 1996). The report was based on a survey targeting foreigners residing in Korea in order to identify prominent cultural representations of Korea's national image based on the following criteria: 'Representable and Distinguishable'; 'Simplicity and Visibility'; 'Popularity and Recognition'; 'Friendliness'; 'Usability for Public Relation'; 'Familiarity' (MCS 1996). The top ten symbols of Korean national culture proposed by the MCS were the following:

- Hanbok* (traditional Korean outfit);
- Hangul* (Korean characters);
- Kimchi* and *Bulgogi* (traditional food);
- Bulguksa* and *Sukgulam* (Buddhist temples);
- Taekwondo;

*Koryeo Insam* (Ginseng);  
*Tal Choom* (Traditional Mask Dance);  
*Jongmyo* (Royal Ancestral Shrine);  
*Seollak* Mountain;  
Korean Artists of international calibre.

These ‘Top 10 National Cultural Symbols’ were then robustly promoted through unilateral PR activities through official overseas governmental channels: Korean Culture and Information Service, Government Information Agency, and embassies. Thousands of pictorial image books, publications, audio visual CDs, DVDs, and postcards were distributed abroad through these channels to raise the profile of Korea through these cultural symbols (MCT 2005a). Evidently, this unilateral approach did not deviate in messaging or outcome from the previous era.

The early 2000s marked another critical juncture in explicit CD, shifting the language surrounding self-perceptions of national cultural identity and its associated foreign perceptions amongst policy makers. By 2001, Korea had successfully recovered from the 1997 Asian financial crisis by paying off its debt to the International Monetary Fund ahead of schedule. Moreover, Korea successfully co-hosted the 2002 World Cup, and demonstrated perhaps the highest degree of national cohesion in its modern history. In turn, policy makers determined yet again that Korea’s national image would require a substantial update to better reflect the recent achievements, specifically identifying the 2002 World Cup as an opportunity to ‘upgrade the national image’ (Yoo 2008, p. 162).

In turn, a wide array of governmental agencies was established for ‘enhancing the national image’. Most notably, a centralized agency called the National Image Committee was established in 2002 with the Prime Minister as the chair. While private sector advisory members were included, they were appointed by the governmental members: the initiative was clearly driven by government. However, there was no marked improvement of Korea’s inadequate national image abroad despite robust institutional rhetoric.

Rather than abandoning the unilateral approach altogether, the blame was instead placed on the ‘Top ten cultural symbols’: these were said to be outdated and ineffective in enhancing the national image (Ministry of Culture and Tourism [MCT] 2005a). In turn, during President Roh Moo-hyun’s administration (2003–2008), the ministry attempted to remedy the situation by broadening the national culture symbols. As a result, a total of 100 national (*minjok*) culture symbols encompassing both traditional and modern culture were established to represent the ‘national cultural DNA’ (KCTI 2006). The aim was to ‘drive modern succession of traditional culture and establish a foundation for it to produce added value’ (MCT 2005b).

This expansion of the spectrum of representations of national culture persisted through President Lee Myung-bak’s administration (2008–2013), largely through recourse to the notion of ‘nation brand’. In 2008, Korea ranked 33rd in the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brand Index, despite having become the 15th largest economy in the world: government officials were concerned that such a low ranking could diminish not only the value of Korean products abroad, but the national competitiveness of Korea in general (Joo 2011, Kinsey and Chung 2013). In response to the persisting problem of South Korea’s image, Lee disbanded the National Image Committee and established the Presidential Council on Nation

Branding in 2008, reflecting a deeper appreciation for the economic implications of foreign perceptions. While the explicit practice of CD continued as a unilateral, top-down government initiative with a questionable track record of success, an implicit approach to CD emerged through capacity building initiatives of the Korean cultural sector.

### **Cultural industries development as implicit CD**

In conjunction with top-down explicit approaches, an implicit approach to CD has also emerged over the last two decades. Accrual of symbolic capital in the international economy of cultural prestige has been implicitly sought through capacity building of the domestic cultural sector and through promoting ‘international cultural exchange’. Various institutional actors appropriated and reframed the policy space of international cultural exchange. This occurred both within and outside of governmental remit, and resulted in CD becoming more implicit.

This development was initially shaped in conjunction with the promotion of international exchange through Korean artists and cultural organizations abroad as an aspect of domestic cultural sector capacity building noted in the first *Arts and Culture Development Five Year Plan* (1974–1978). Subsequently, in major cultural policy plans and documents published by the government the term ‘international cultural exchange’ has consistently appeared as an integral aspect of domestic cultural capacity building. Annual *Cultural Policy White Papers* published by the Ministry of Culture between 1993 and 2012 all contained a chapter on ‘international exchange’. Yet the implementation and scope of ‘international exchange’ were left open to flexible interpretation by subsequent administrations. Also, in its initial institutionalization process, the distinction between ‘international cultural exchange’ and ‘CD’ was minimal, as both were situated under the domain of MCPI under the Park regime. However, a divergence between ‘international cultural exchange’ and ‘CD’ agendas began to gradually take shape through significant shifts in cultural policy discourses underpinned by the transition to liberal democracy in the early 1990s.

The neo-liberal turn in cultural policy in particular has shaped increasingly instrumental framing of CD’s economic purposes. The increasing recognition of the economic gain realized by private actors in the cultural sector led to a shift from the government’s view on culture as a vehicle for legitimization towards culture as a source of untapped economic potential (Cho 2005, KCTI 2005, Shim 2008, Kim 2011a, Lee 2013). As Hong (2014) suggests, the ‘cultural’ and ‘market’ agendas have been continuously reconciled and fused within the cultural policy framework to shape the notion of CD.

Since the mid-1990s, a ‘cultural industries’ discourse has been robustly adopted within the cultural policy agenda (Shim 2006, 2008, Kim 2011a, Lee 2013). Korean usage of the term ‘cultural industries’ emerged with a recommendation of the 1994 report by the Presidential Advisory board on Science and Technology under president Kim Young-sam (1993–1998), noting that the Hollywood movie *Jurassic Park* had generated an income equivalent to exporting 1.5 million Hyundai cars (Shim 2006, p. 32). Such a drastic comparison highlighted the importance of developing the nascent domestic cultural sector. In turn, beginning with the immediate establishment of the Bureau of Cultural Industries under the Ministry of Culture in 1994, the economic potential of the cultural industries began to gain

attention and capture the imagination of policy makers. They have tended to read Korea's global cultural prestige through a quantitative lens, namely by means of cultural export figures and shares in the global cultural contents market. Understandably, for looking at market penetration figures, Korean films had only 15.9% of the domestic film market in the mid-1990s and the combined export figure of three major terrestrial broadcasters KBS, MBC and SBS was only US\$19.7 million. In comparison, the country imported foreign cultural contents worth approximately US\$99.5 million (Joo 2011).

An updated cultural policy plan called the *New Cultural Policy* was published by President Kim Dae-jung's administration (1998–2003) in 1997, proposing to take an 'industrial and scientific' approach to culture, and its importance in 'internationalizing' the national cultural image by expanding exports of cultural products (MCS 1997). Yet early on, the notion of 'internationalization of national culture' was deemed vague, while the foundation for implicit CD was reflected in the newly passed *Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion* (1999). The law stipulated the government's responsibility to support and promote cultural industries development. Furthermore, the interventionist approach was reinforced through combining *segzehwa* and cultural industries development rhetoric. 'International cultural exchange' was applied as *segzehwa* in practice, and was adopted as an aspect of the strategic development of the sector to be facilitated and catalyzed by the government. Article 20 (International exchange and foreign market entrance support section) of the above legislation contained the following clause: '1 Government may support co-production with foreign entities, marketing and public relations abroad through broadcast and internet, foreign investment, international film market participation, etc. to promote export competitiveness and increase share in the international market of cultural industries.' Furthermore, Article 31 noted that the government would support 'entering overseas market, distribution vitality and marketing for the development of cultural industries'. 'International Exchange' became a term that implicitly sought support for fostering cultural industries' economic interests abroad, as an inherent capacity building mechanism.

Subsequently, further legislation and institutions were established for developing specific segments of the cultural sector, including film, music, publishing, broadcasting, and more, all including 'international exchange' to be promoted by the government. The KCTI's 2007 Report, *Research for Institutional Establishment for International Cultural Exchange Promotion*, noted 22 different laws under the remit of the MCT that were passed by the government up to the mid-2000s. These all supported sector and content specific development, incorporating articles or clauses broadly promoting 'international exchange' and 'international cooperation' as part of the sector development strategy (KCTI 2007).

The governmental approach shifted to more decentralized CD activity in recognition of the increasingly private sector driven exchange of cultural contents (MCT 2001). During the administration of President Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008), whose campaign platform emphasized principles of 'participation', 'autonomy' and 'decentralization', an attempt was made to move towards the democratization of culture (Lee 2012). Roh's administration proposed a revised and updated cultural policy framework titled *Creative Korea* (2004), emphasizing the need for a long-term plan to foster the creative capacity of the *entire* society (MCT 2004b). The 'new cultural policy vision' proposed by the Ministry of Culture under Roh noted that while the governmental budget for culture had reached 1% of the total

expenditure during the previous administration, the overt focus had been on the ‘cultural industries’ rather than on the welfare of citizens (MCT 2004a). Despite the rhetoric however, this did not diminish the role of the cultural contents industries development agenda.

Roh noted in his inaugural speech in 2003 that the contents industry would become one of the core driving engines of Korea’s economy (MCT 2004a). In 2005, MCT published *Culture Strong Nation (C-Korea) 2010* (MCT 2005a), proposing the goal of becoming a ‘top 5 cultural content nation’ by 2010 along with US, Japan, UK and France by developing a domestic cultural market size of 90 trillion KRW (approximately 85 billion USD), and reaching six billion USD in cultural export revenue (MCT 2005a, p. 19). The means included ‘fostering global cultural industries market; innovating cultural contents distribution structure; copyright industry establishment; and internationalization of Korean Wave to enhance the national brand’ (MCT 2005a). By this point, not only had the term cultural industries shifted to contents industries, the framework of international exchange had also shifted to broader capacity building of the domestic environment to provide robust support of production, distribution and marketing of creative contents abroad.

The adoption of cultural industries development as a national agenda blurred the line between economically oriented international exchange capacity building of the domestic cultural sector and more explicit modes of CD. The government’s explicit agenda to establish Korea as a ‘Contents Strong Nation’ reflected a robust neo-liberal adaptation of a ‘cultural state’. However, this delineation was not clear, since the government took an ambivalent position towards the Korean Wave.

### **The Korean Wave and the convergence of explicit and implicit CD**

Since the mid-2000s, the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) has been explicitly adopted by the government as a national success story, reinforcing both the government’s neoliberal economic agenda and domestic cultural nationalism (Shim 2006, Chua and Iwabuchi 2008, Kim 2011a, Lee 2013). As a fortuitous extension of the *seggyehwa* and cultural industries development agendas, the Korean Wave has become a point of convergence for explicit and implicit CD. While economic returns and the unprecedented exposure of Korean cultural contents abroad were robustly propagated by the government,<sup>3</sup> the symbolic underpinnings of the cultural ‘texts’ (Hesmondhalgh 2013) that proliferated were not critically examined. This is unsurprising, as the government has consistently perpetuated a one-dimensional enhancement of the national image through mere exposure abroad, yet has relied on cultural export figures as a tangible indicator of national prestige. The proliferation of popular cultural contents under the remit of *Hallyu* fulfilled both of these objectives, although the position of the government became increasingly more ambiguous.

Despite the government’s robust strategic intervention in the development of domestic cultural industries, it is difficult to draw a linear correlation between the overseas success of the Korean Wave phenomenon and domestic cultural industries policy. There are other internal and external contextual factors underpinning the Korean Wave, such as the globalizing forces influencing Korea’s deregulation of cultural production throughout the 1990s, the hybridization of Korean popular culture, and the trans-nationalization of the media industries in Asia (Jin 2006, Shim



2006, Chua and Iwabuchi 2008, Kim 2011a, Lee 2013). The bulk of the governmental budget for cultural industries development was allocated for infrastructural establishment in areas such as ‘culture technology’ and associated human resources, rather than on the promotion of the Korean Wave abroad (Hong 2014). Moreover, the Korean Wave was adopted as an explicit cultural policy paradigm only in response to the massive success of dramas such as *Winter Sonata* in Japan and *Daejangeum* in the Middle East in the early 2000s (KOCIS 2011, Lee 2013), despite the earlier popularity of the drama *What is Love*, that actually launched the term (KOCIS 2011).

Given the increasing recognition of private sector driven transnational flows of cultural contents, the governmental approach shifted to more decentralized CD activity. Since the early 2000s, many non-governmental cultural organizations have been established in order to decentralize the cultural sector, in spite of attempts to achieve comprehensive capacity building of the cultural contents sector through an existing centralized body, the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA). In 2003, an agency primarily focused on explicit promotion of the Korean Wave was established, the Korea Foundation for Cultural Industries Exchange (KOFICE). Unlike KOCCA, a centralized governmental agency directly under the remit of the Ministry of Culture, KOFICE is an autonomous non-governmental, non-profit foundation registered under the Ministry of Culture.<sup>4</sup> Its aim as expressed in its mission statement is to foster ‘mutual understanding between Korea and other countries through various international exchange programs of cultural industries, and establishing cooperative foundation through acting as a channel for private sector cooperation’ ([kofice.or.kr](http://kofice.or.kr)). Along with this broader agenda, it has also adopted as an explicit objective the sustainable expansion of internationalization of the Korean Wave. In recognition of the two most popular formats of pop culture content, the two most high profile initiatives of KOFICE were hosting the annual ‘Asia Song Festival’, an Asian pop music festival held in Korea since 2004 featuring artists from Asian countries,<sup>5</sup> and the ‘Asian Drama Conference’, a forum for writers and producers of TV dramas in Asia.

The emergence of agencies such as KOFICE reflected the gradual shift to decentralized approaches to international cultural exchange. There has been a proliferation of governmental and private cultural organizations over the past two decades, underpinned by the increasing dynamism of the cultural sector.<sup>6</sup> Many of them directly and indirectly, as well as explicitly and implicitly, follow interests that overlap with the government’s articulated agenda. Yet, as much of the financial resources remained under governmental control, and the distinction between national, governmental and private interests remained vague, the term ‘International cultural exchange’ begun to be appropriated profusely by the non-governmental sector. Most organizations have adopted the term ‘international exchange’ or *segye-hwa* to articulate their organizational agenda, reinforcing their legitimacy. *Hallyu* discourses became integral to the non-governmental sector in the decentralizing process, mutually reinforcing both organizational interests and the national agenda.

This decentralized effort was also a response to adverse reactions to the government’s explicit promotion of Korean Wave abroad (Jang and Paik 2012). As the Korean Wave was adopted increasingly to support a nationalist agenda within popular media and policy discourses, it began to also be perceived in some of the neighbouring countries as Korean ‘cultural imperialism’. This was especially evidenced through a backlash against the Korean Wave in Japan, as anti-Korean

sentiments – termed *yuk-hallyu* – began to grow. An anti-Korean comic book entitled ‘Hating the Korean Wave’ (*Kenkanryu*) released in 2005 became the number one bestseller on Amazon Japan (Liscutin 2009). The overt success of Korean popular culture in Japan was seen as threatening to Japanese culture, as well as eroding the domestic cultural market share. In response, the MCT began to explore a non-economic framing for the continued proliferation of the Korean Wave externally. In turn, initiatives such as the ‘Cultural Partnership Initiative’ of the MCT aimed at providing opportunities for fellows from Asia, Latin American and African countries were established, with significantly less emphasis on a nationalist agenda.<sup>7</sup>

However, explicit promotion of the Korean Wave began to be also adopted in the non-cultural realm as well. The previous section argued that from a cultural policy perspective, CD was an implicit practice within the broader international cultural exchange policy that sought more holistic capacity building of the domestic cultural sector. As efforts to depoliticize culture persisted during the transition to liberal democracy, the term CD was not used within the cultural policy framework. Up until the mid-2000s, CD was an implicit function of international cultural exchange promoted by the Ministry of Culture, even though the Ministry of Culture deliberately avoided using the term CD because of its perceived political undertone. In contrast, the term had been widely used within the foreign policy framework, albeit loosely associated with other terms such as cultural public relations or cultural cooperation. Foreign Policy White Papers from 1992 to 2008 have used the term CD and cultural public relations interchangeably, but their combined scope was narrowly limited to bilateral cultural treaties or to activities of the non-governmental Korea Foundation, (funded however through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Thus there was no clear institutional differentiation between CD and international cultural exchange, although the two would begin to diverge in the mid-2000s with Korea’s adoption of the soft power discourse.

### Rise of the soft power discourse

In the mid-2000s, the concept of soft power emerged as a keyword within foreign policy circles, leading to a reconfiguration of the scope of CD. The Foreign Policy White Paper of 2010 noted that ‘with the increasing importance of soft power, and culture as a key element of national competitiveness, CD has become a new pillar of diplomatic power’ (MOFAT 2011, p. 204). This explicit adoption of the soft power discourse was reinforced in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ first designated CD document in 2010, entitled *Cultural Diplomacy Manual*, as already mentioned, which noted that in the twenty-first century, soft power has become equally important, and ‘culture’ has become a third pillar of diplomatic power (MOFAT 2010). Yet the practical framework adopted by MOFAT did not become any clearer.

This was partly because Korea had to reimagine the applications and pursuit of soft power relevant to its own context. As Lee (2009) argues, Nye’s concept of soft power was more relevant to the hegemonic leadership oriented approach of the US, but did not give practical insights to lesser powers like Korea. Lee further explains that

the enthusiasm for Korea’s popular culture produced by the Korean Wave naturally led to a mass consumption of symbols and ideas relating to Korea, thereby leading to

the formation of specific images, perceptions, and opinions about Korea; thus Korean wave can be a crucial soft resource that can potentially develop Korea's soft power. (Lee 2009, p. 130)

Jang and Paik (2012) argued that 'Korean wave has positive impact and potential that would promote Korea's CD as a part of soft power approach'. An anecdotal illustration further suggested that negative impressions of South Korea by Taiwan after the break-up of diplomatic relations in 1992 have been transformed positively through increased cross-cultural ties created by the Korean Wave (Jang and Paik 2012).

Furthermore, the perceived effectiveness of the Korean Wave as a soft power resource has reinforced the role of the MOFAT. A fundamental shift of the conceptual framework within the MOFAT began to take shape under Lee Myung-bak's administration. In 2010, MOFAT and its arm's length agency, the Korea Foundation, co-hosted the 'Korean Public Diplomacy Forum'. 'Public Diplomacy' was proposed as the 'third pillar of diplomacy along with the political and economic'. This shift in terminology occurred in the context of transferring much of the public relations and international cultural exchange capacity to the Ministry of Culture. Moreover, public relations rhetoric was minimized and 'two-way communication', 'soft power', and 'nation brand' became the dominant terms.

Since the *Korean Public Diplomacy Forum* in 2010, there have been significant conceptual shifts regarding CD within the foreign policy framework. CD has become a sub-category of public diplomacy. The notion of 'culture' based public diplomacy has been framed as (1) bilateral diplomatic relations celebration and cultural event promotion, (2) two-way cultural exchange support, (3) conferences hosted by the Culture Ministry, (4) NE Asia Cultural Cooperation (Korea-China-Japan Culture Shuttle Initiative), and (5) the expansion of *Hallyu*. MOFAT indicated that they would continually make efforts in developing new discourses of public diplomacy, meaning that the term is constantly evolving (or left flexible for interpretation and appropriation by the government). Moreover, this forum announced that the Korea Foundation had become the official organization in charge of public diplomacy (MOFAT 2011), perpetuating an explicit CD policy.

The relationship between pop culture success and national image is not necessarily rooted in empirical evidence. However, with the increasing recognition of soft power as a key foreign policy paradigm, with culture perceived as its fundamental resource, the Korean Wave has gone from being an economic to a diplomatic resource linked explicitly to CD. This had led to tensions between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, with both attempting to bring CD under its domain. In 2011, the congressional Culture Sports and Tourism committee submitted a newly revised 'International Cultural Exchange Promotion Law', and the Foreign Affairs and Trade committee submitted the 'Cultural Diplomacy Promotion Special Law' (Kim 2012, p. 228). This inter-ministry tension shows the extent to which the institutional fragmentation and conceptual ambiguity surrounding CD in its explicit and implicit approaches have reached a tipping point. It is necessary to renegotiate a coherent policy paradigm.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that since South Korea's transition to liberal democracy in the early 1990s, the deregulation and liberalization of the cultural sector and its

growing transnational dynamism throughout the following two decades have shaped the institutional development surrounding CD in both explicit and implicit ways. CD as an explicit practice has persisted largely as a top-down and unilateral approach by governmental actors to enhancing national prestige abroad, underpinned by the institutional legacy of a 'developmental state' model of governance. CD has also been shaped implicitly, associated with capacity building of the domestic cultural industries through promoting 'international cultural exchange'. Economically oriented cultural industries development policy that measured national prestige through a quantitative approach of market figures was absorbed into the broader CD paradigm. Thus while a top-down unilateral approach has persisted in general, a disarray of policy rhetoric surrounding CD has also led to greater institutional fragmentation and has highlighted the government's ambivalent role. There has thus been a gradual convergence of both explicit and implicit approaches.

The Korean Wave has been appropriated domestically to boost cultural nationalism as well as legitimize governmental efforts in developing the domestic cultural industries. Yet in response to some of the negative ramifications of the dominance of the Korean Wave in neighbouring countries, less emphasis has been placed on an explicit cultural export agenda, leading to a depoliticized and decentralized approach to facilitating international cultural exchange. The Korean Wave's domestic appropriation as a national success story has allowed CD to come into its own as an explicit foreign policy orientation. In particular, as the Korean Wave has been folded into the soft power foreign policy agenda, a further gap between foreign policy and cultural policy has been perpetuated.

Despite this fragmented institutional approach to explicit CD, the government policy will most likely remain primarily unilateral, aimed at the enhancement of national prestige underpinned by the institutional legacy of the 'developmental state' model. However, the rapidly evolving geopolitical and economic implications of this unilateral approach, as exemplified by the success of the Korean Wave, will most likely lead to a further proliferation of decentralised initiatives carried out by a multitude of actors, drawing on expanding government and private sector resources.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Notes

1. See 'Hansik Segyehwa' campaign ([www.hansik.org](http://www.hansik.org)).
2. Kim (1994) suggests Korea's constitutional adoption of 'culture state' is adopted from the German notion of *Kulturstaat* doctrine, but appropriated as an instrumental rhetoric of cultural policy in Korea.
3. The Korean Economic Research Center noted 3 billion US dollars as the profit generated from the value-added businesses deriving from Yon-sama (the male actor in *Winter Sonata*), and tourism revenue alone reaching 84 million KRW resulting from popularity of locations that appeared in the drama, such as *Nami-seom* Island and *Yongpyeong* Ski resort, 3 trillion KRW in DVD sales in Japan, and running royalties for KBS reaching more than 100 million dollars (Cho 2005, KOCIS 2011).

4. While it received part of its funding for its programs from the Ministry of Culture as it sought public interests in the cultural realm, it was not under direct control of the Ministry.
5. Asia Song Festival have featured pop artists from Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Singapore to date ([www.asiasongfestival.com](http://www.asiasongfestival.com)).
6. A list of non-governmental organizations registered under MCST can be found at [http://www.mcst.go.kr/web/s\\_data/corporation/corpList.jsp](http://www.mcst.go.kr/web/s_data/corporation/corpList.jsp).
7. Cultural Partnership Initiative ([www.culturefriends.or.kr](http://www.culturefriends.or.kr)).

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