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The Bureaucratic Turn in Public Diplomacy: Mapping the Strategic Evolution of South Korean Soft Power from 2011 to 2023

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This thesis studies the bureaucratization of South Korea's public diplomacy and soft power from 2011 to 2023 through qualitative discourse analysis of authoritative policy documents, namely, MOFA White Papers, Korea Foundation annual reports and Master Plans.
Referring to discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008) and rhetorical public diplomacy (Mor, 2007), the research investigates how institutional narratives formalize Hallyu as a diplomatic asset amid the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016 and presidential shifts.
Major findings reveal strategic evolution from *ad hoc* cultural promotion to "Global Pivotal State" governance, with language changing from facilitative ("support Hallyu") to managerial ("coordinate", "evaluate"), regional diversification starting from the US, Japan stretching to ASEAN, Africa, Europe, and COVID-19 digital pivot.
Korea Foundation data, gathered as quantitative trends, present program growth (i.e., Korean Studies courses) despite pandemic downturn. Compared to China's Confucius Institutes and Japan's Cool Japan, South Korea's model distinctively counterparts cultural appeal with bureaucratic measurement. Repercussions underline middle power anxieties between authenticity and state control, delivering insights for soft power institutionalization in East Asia.

Key words: public diplomacy, South Korea, MOFA, policy, soft power, bureaucratization, Korean wave, Master Plans, Korea Foundation.

No AI applications have been used for this work.

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1 Introduction

In the evolving landscape of international relations, soft power has emerged as a central concept shaping how nations influence others through attraction in lieu of coercion. Conceptualized by Joseph Nye (1990, p.166), soft power focuses on the persuasive capacity of culture (in places where it is attractive to others), political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and foreign policy (when it is seen as legitimate and having moral authority) to shape global preferences (Nye, Jr, 2018, p.8).
Public diplomacy is a set of practices through which states deploy these resources in direct engagement with foreign audiences. It broadens the arena of diplomacy to include foreign societies, whilst traditional diplomacy, by contrast, centers on official negotiations between governments.
Often times soft power and public diplomacy are used interchangeably (Wrighton, 2022, p.9, footnote 5), however they present different meaning, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

South Korea offers a fascinating case for examining its public diplomacy's administrational procedure.
In the last decade, the unprecedented rise of the Korean wave (Hallyu), referring to "made in Korea" popular music, television dramas, cinema, fashion, and lifestyle, has shifted from an organic cultural export into a strategically organized instrument of foreign policy. The transition mirrors how the South Korean government has integrated public diplomacy within bureaucratic structures, adopting formalized strategies, specialized agencies, and systematic resource allocation to strengthen its international standing.
Unlike Western models of public diplomacy, which accentuate ideational exchanges and civil society engagement (Cull, 2009, pp.12-15), East Asian countries tend to drive this statecraft through centralized, government-led bureaucracies (Otmazgin, 2021, p.622).
South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Korea Foundation (KF), and Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS) stand as examples of this state-centric approach, converting the abstract power of culture into measurable diplomatic programs articulated through White Papers, Master Plans, and annual reports.

This thesis investigates the bureaucratization of South Korea's public diplomacy from 2011 to 2023 through qualitative content analysis of policy documents, decoded through a discursive institutionalist lens (i.e., focusing on how institutions use language to legitimize and structure public diplomacy).

Drawing on the theoretical lenses of discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008, p.303) and rhetorical public diplomacy (Mor, 2007, p.667), the study explores how institutional narratives construct, legitimize, and operationalize cultural diplomacy as a strategic foreign policy tool.

While localizing South Korea's experience within the broader East Asian context, the research contradistinguishes its bureaucratic public diplomacy model with similar efforts in China and Japan. This comparative perspective weights on the distinctive features and challenges of South Korea's institutional approach to cultural diplomacy and emphasizes broader regional dynamics in soft power's management.

This study further helps unpacking the complexities of public diplomacy, it exposes the tensions inherent in formalizing cultural attraction within state-directed programs and offers insights into the diplomatic strategies of middle powers in a globalized world.

More specifically, Istad (2016, p.49) explained how public diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy on three distinct characteristics. Firstly, it has shifted beyond inter-governmental negotiations to include international audiences. As a matter of fact, from the 1960s, legislation began realizing the value of persuading foreign *people* rather than home *governments* (Suh, 2013).

Secondly, there had been a tendency to integrate hard power tools with soft power ones, which complement the attractiveness of a nation and role in the global landscape. Furthermore, scholars[1] reasoned how soft power instruments are fundamental for middle powers as they represent alternative means for exerting influence abroad (Istad, 2016, p.50).

The last difference relies on the involvement of governments and other stakeholders viz. NGOs and civilians, evolving into what is indicated by "new public diplomacy" (Istad, 2016, p.50). Therefore, due to the fourth industrial revolution, the socio-political landscape does not contain only governmental parties.

[1] Lee 2009, 123; Lee and Melissen, 2011, 5; Lee, 2012, 2; Elfving-Hwang 2013, 2.

Yet, this new mechanism does not imply that higher institutions are regarded any less fundamental (Istad, 2016, p.50), since effective diplomacy would not be possible without their coordination (Lee & Ayhan, 2015, p.59).

1.1 Research questions

This research addresses a gap in public diplomacy scholarship, which has largely examined cultural outcomes, while providing less focus to institutional processes and policy discourse[2].

The thesis focuses on how public diplomacy policy becomes formalized, procedural, and rulebound with specific attention to documents, hierarchy and technocracy; that is analyzing strategic logic and policy discourse.

The main research problem tackled in this study is the limited understanding of how South Korea's public diplomacy has evolved into a bureaucratized and institutionalized soft power, evaluated through qualitative content analysis with focuses on discursive and institutional narratives traced through key terms and frames in official documents.

Though I acknowledge the extensive research on Hallyu's global impact and cultural reception, academic literature has insufficiently navigated the procedural and discursive mechanisms through which South Korea's governmental agencies construct, frame, and manage public diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument (Schmidt, 2008, pp.303-326; Otmazgin, 2021, pp.621-622). Similarly, Istad (2020, p.115) recognizes that existing literature does not offer appropriate framework and mainly lists diplomatic events compared to the description of procedural strategies.

The primary research question leading this thesis is:

- How do South Korea's public diplomacy policy documents articulate and evolve the country's soft power strategy between 2011 and 2023? (RQ1).

This is supported by three additional sub-questions:

- What strategic priorities emerge across MOFA and Korea Foundation documents? (RQ2).

[2] Kim Hwajung (2014) furtherly addressed the issue in her work "Bridging the Theoretical Gap between Public Diplomacy and Cultural Diplomacy".

- How has the Korean Wave (Hallyu) been framed and used as a diplomatic asset within these documents? (RQ3).
- How do language, target regions, objectives change over time, and what does this reveal about bureaucratization of public diplomacy? (RQ4).

The leading objective of this work is, thereupon, to investigate how the data dictate South Korea's soft power plan. To understand the overarching shift in strategy (RQ1), it is first crucial to identify the specific priorities (RQ2) and linguistic frames (RQ3) used by the nation. Following satisfying these inquiries and analyzing White papers and governmental files, the study deepens the analysis of how public diplomacy functions as bureaucratized statecraft in preference to unstructured cultural export via the engagement's institutionalization with international publics to achieve specific national interests.

1.2 Expected results

This research aims to reveal that South Korea's public diplomacy has undertaken substantial bureaucratization, shifting from a reactive cultural promotion to proactive, while strategically overseeing public diplomacy use.
Selected anticipated findings are firstly the institutional maturation as the concretization of sophisticated policy frameworks and coordination mechanisms. Secondly, the evolution of how the Korean wave and public diplomacy are portrayed within policy documents is evidenced by the planned geographical expansion from traditional partners, such as the US and Japan, to emerging regions like Europe and Latin America.
Lastly, this research's objective is to prove the link between presidential administrations and changes in policy discourse and priorities.
I strongly believe the study will positively contribute to the broad public diplomacy scholarship, suggesting insights important to other middle powers seeking to organize public diplomacy as foreign policy strategy.

1.3 Thesis outline

This academic research will be divided in nine chapters.
Chapter 1 delivers the rationale on why I opted to discuss South Korean public diplomacy, whilst making explicit the research questions.

Next, I provide the literature review and public diplomacy's comparison within a broader East Asian context in chapter 2, while chapter 3 lays the foundation of concepts such as soft power, public diplomacy, nation branding and others. In chapter 4, I provide a brief background overview on East Asian and South Korean public diplomacy.
Following, chapter 5 features the methodology and justification to the data's analysis processes and chapter 6 describes the findings, together with a deeper explanation surrounding the COVID-19's pivot.
The latter is succeeded by chapter 7, a segment designed to denoting the different features of South Korea's public diplomacy through quantitative trends. To conclude, chapter 8 and 9 respectively discuss the interpretations and implication via discursive institutionalism and conclusively provide an answer to the thesis' questions.

1.4 Translation note

This thesis integrates, in both contents and references, data originally written in Korean and Italian, whose translations were provided by the author.
Moreover, for the sake of this research, the term Korea is referred to South Korea.

2 Literature review

2.1 Theoretical foundations and critiques of soft power

Joseph Nye (1990) poses as the pioneer of cultural influence, who theorized states exert global influence by leveraging resources to attract compared to coerce other nations.
While Nye's 1990s scholarship established the core principles of soft power, this research integrates more recent literature that has amplified the concept, particularly in the context of non-Western powers like South Korea.
Such notions laid the groundwork for the core principles in the international field, though they did not come with no opposition.
Scholars critique soft power for the concept's vagueness, its tendency to treat attraction as an individual in place of a socially constructed phenomenon, and its limited engagement with institutions and power structures (Zahran & Ramos, 2010, pp.12-31; Chitty, Ji, Rawnsley & Hayden, 2017, p.1).
Correspondingly, there have been disapprovals over its reliance on simplistic assumptions concerning how influence and attraction work and for being too theoretically "soft".
Indeed, Nye did not investigate whether attraction is an individually or socially constructed phenomenon (Zahran & Ramos, 2010, p. 12; Gillespie & McAvoy, 2017, p. 204). Additionally, oppositions were raised on Nye's lack of appreciation for the complementarity of institutions (Gillespie & McAvoy, 2017, p. 204).

A recent study by Sage Business describes how there have been persistent efforts to measure the nations' use of soft power: the first being the Soft Power 30. Via six categories and 75 measures, this model is able to assign one score and, accordingly, list the countries' soft power assets (Howard-Spink, 2024, p.8).
Due to this notion being mostly subjective and not strictly measurable (Cevik & Padilha, 2024, p.2), some scholars have also advanced composite soft power indices as the International Monetary Fund's Global Soft Power Index (GSPI). Based on 29 indicators along six dimensions for a broad set of countries over the period 1990–2021, this index implements a standard three-step approach to condense the multidimensional data into a single composite directory (Cevik & Padilha, 2024, p.3).

The process involves standardizing variables, grouping them in sub-indices that mirror targeted functional dimension and ultimately aggregating them into the single final index (Cevik & Padilha, 2024, p.6). The mentioned six dimensions are “commerce”, “culture”, “digital”, “education”, “global reach” and lastly “institutions” (Cevik & Padilha, 2024, p.4).

2.2 Global and regional applications of public diplomacy

The practical role of soft power and public diplomacy was developed by Otmazgin (2021, p.621), who discussed the importance of the latter as a multidisciplinary concept, whose prime goal is to incentivize influence towards other governments by appointing specific figures, who might be able to change the passive country’s opinions.
Despite its effectiveness being debated, soft power is embraced in East Asia, where policymakers and officials are enthusiastic about using their cultural assets for diplomacy in a non-coercive manner (Otmazgin, 2021, p.624). From the accomplishment of this dynamic, a country is capable to participate more actively in global affairs (Otmazgin, 2021, p.621).
This approach has been institutionalized as a strategic diplomatic tool, most notably through the cultural reach of Hollywood and Japan’s “Cool Japan” initiative.
As shown by Otmazgin (2013, p.1) in the comparison between Japan’s use of the “Cool Japan” phenomenon (which promotes anime, fashion and Japanese pop music) and South Korea’s Hallyu, both are seen investing into government backed programs to influence global perceptions.

Regardless, as Cull (2012, p.12) evidences, no nation has entirely mastered public diplomacy since technology evolves faster than domestic governments can adapt; consequently, despite substantial investment, public diplomacy is often reduced to creating a favorable context for hard power[3] decisions (Otmazgin, 2021, p.624).
The rise of new public diplomacy in Asia (Otmazgin, 2021, p.626) and the explicit framing of the Korean wave as a branding tool and diplomatic asset (Lee, 2007, p.57; Snow, 2020, pp.3-12) proves that cultural export now occupies a central contribution in strategic planning.

[3] Hard power represents opting for military force or economic incentives and sanctions to compel compliance from other nations (Kivak, 2025)

Correspondingly, similar strategies are developed by European countries like France and Germany, which have respectively adopted the Alliance Française and Goethe-Institut to promote language and cultural understanding, aiming to reach regions where they lacked a shared historical background (Cull, 2009, p.33; Snow, 2019, p.3).
The United States took a similar stance, in terms of sound diplomacy during the Cold War, when jazz acted as the main instrument to promote American culture in heavily communism-influenced countries (Dunkel, 2014, p.147).
In Eastern Asian nations, public diplomacy is increasingly perceived by politicians as a valuable tool for enhancing a country's international standing and achieving soft power. Specifically, the governments of Japan, South Korea, and China recognize the growing influence of public diplomacy and its capacity to establish their brand internationally and foster favorable public opinion (Otmazgin, 2021, pp.621-622).

2.3 The evolution of South Korea's soft power narrative

Post Korean war, South Korea reappeared on the international stage as "the miracle on the Han" (in Korean: 한강의 기적), hosting the 1988 Olympic games in its capital, and joining Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan as the Four Asian Dragons (Cho, 2012, p.283).
Throughout the twenty-first century, scholars have emphasized the importance of international recognition and the nations' ability to consolidate their global influence. According to Yun (2012, pp.286-287), Korea's Hallyu, which is able to attract a large and diverse audience, presents some challenges due to being mostly related to the private-sector profitability. Yun (2012, pp.286-287) believes the Korean wave will achieve its full protentional once the commercial accomplishments are leveraged to analytically construct and project South Korea's national image.

In this regard, Seoul faces particular constraints, due to its geopolitical position between China and Japan (Cho, 2012, pp.284-285).
While meanings of power still largely stem from a country's military capabilities (that is, hard power), which are difficult to disregard, soft power comes as an alternative for middle powers, that in this way can efficiently bias other nations fitting to their strategies (Cho, 2012, p.284). This growing ambition has been matched by presidential plans affirming Korea's

cultural and diplomatic outreach as critical to its national identity and foreign policy. Indeed, on the 99th March First Independence Movement Day Ceremony held on March 1st, 2018, former President Moon Jae-in proclaimed

> […] The thick root will cultivate the strong tree of peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. The Republic of Korea will be one of the greatest and most beautiful countries in the world […]

Such statements categorize soft power as a foundational element of the country's global aspirations (Moon, 2018, p.121).

Likewise, in other international cultural forums, Moon described the Korean wave as *"a core diplomatic asset and a bridge to the world's hearts and minds"* (Moon, 2018); narrative once again reaffirmed by President Yoon Suk-Yeol in 2023, who declared that

> South Korea will advance as a Global Pivotal State committed to value diplomacy, digital innovation, and strategic partnerships across continents […]

portraying a steady evolution of soft power towards digital and technological domains (Yoon, 2023). In the same manner, the framing of soft power objectives has evolved.

Conventionally, government-led initiatives in South Korea, Japan, and China are designed to institutionalize and measure soft power, marking a clear bureaucratic turn that responds to and shapes global perceptions (Otmazgin, 2021, p.621). This evolution mirrors a sophisticated bureaucratic awareness of soft power's multidimensional nature and the demand for integration across cultural, educational, and technological spheres (Otmazgin, 2021, p.622).

On the one hand, earlier efforts focused mainly on nation branding and image enhancement; while on the other, recent policy discourse shows more complex goals as facilitating academic exchange, fostering brand collaborations, and supporting the development of technology-driven cultural content (KOCIS, 2019; MOFA, 2020).

I acknowledge this debate on attraction, persuasion and empathy should be further explored in more focused studies and for the sake of my thesis I cannot provide such explanation. Still, I anticipate such concepts to showcase how in the following chapters the policies on public diplomacy will be polarizing.

2.4 Public Diplomacy in East Asia (Chinese dream vs Cool Japan vs Korean wave)

South Korea's public diplomacy strategy, marked by a unique combination of institutionalized soft power and the global phenomenon of the Korean wave, holds a distinguished place in the East Asian cultural diplomacy discourse.
To contextualize Seoul's evolution, in this section I briefly compare its approach with those of China and Japan: influential neighbors with their own strong and contrasting public diplomacy traditions.

2.4.1 Institutionalization and bureaucratic structures

After the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016, South Korea's public diplomacy became remarkably institutionalized, exemplifying discursive institutionalism, where policy language reflects and actively shapes institutional practice (Schmidt, 2008, p.303).
Korea's diplomacy emphasizes cross-ministry coordination, outcome-based objectives, and long-term planning embedded within its foreign policy framework (KF, 2018).

On a similar setting, China's public diplomacy is also structured, though on a larger scale, with parties like the State Council Information Office and the Confucius Institute program orchestrating a top-down soft power push. Official narratives frame these efforts within the framework of China's "peaceful rise", employing Confucius Institutes to disseminate language and culture while sparking debate about political influence and academic freedom (Brady, 2008, pp.8, 10, 92; Zaharna, R. S., Hubbert, J. & Hartig, F., 2014, pp.7, 56). Accordingly, concerns over governmental control have led to controversies and institute closures in some nations (Hubbert, 2019, p. 8; Otmazgin, 2021, p. 638).

Japan's public diplomacy usually balances governmental leadership with private sector contributions (Otmazgin, 2021, p.623), including cultural festivals and the Japan Foundation's language programs (Iwabuchi, 2015, pp.419-432). Moreover, its "Cool Japan" campaign marks a contemporary effort to brand cultural assets strategically, although has faced challenges into consistently appealing globally (Iwabuchi, 2015, p.420).
As a result, when compared with Korea's formally integrated system, Tokyo's approach has often been less centralized, frequently remaining limited to a one-way projection of Japanese

culture rather than promoting genuine cross-border dialogue (Iwabuchi, 2015, p. 420; Otmazgin, 2021, p. 630).

South Korea's global diplomatic prominence is mostly tied to the Korean wave, evolved from spontaneous popular culture into a state-managed diplomatic asset (Jin, 2016). The Korea Foundation's increased funding, programmatic growth, and academic outreach closely reflect Hallyu's rise. This intentional nurturing of cultural capital distinguishes Korea from its two neighbors.

Firstly, Chinese Confucius Institutes rely on language and academic diplomacy to enhance familiarity with its culture and political narratives; nonetheless, political concerns about influence operations complicate their reception and sustainability (R. S., Hubbert, J. & Hartig, F., 2014, p.9,23,33; Hubbert, 2019, pp. 2, 18). Secondly, Tokyo's Cool Japan initiative aims at capitalizing on pop culture exports, however it has encountered criticism for uneven results and government-industry tensions (Iwabuchi, 2015, p.420; Cicchelli & Octobre, 2021, p.118).

Focusing on the COVID-19 timeframe, we have assisted to all three nations expanding their digital diplomacy, yet with different adaptations.

South Korea's swift pivot to virtual platforms and digital learning through the Korea Foundation's Global e-School proved the country's promptness and global digital engagement (KF, 2020). On the other hand, China's efforts focused on state media and controlled messaging (Hubbert, 2019, pp.11-12, 81), while Japan has progressed more prudently and incrementally in digital public diplomacy (Otmazgin, 2021, pp. 636-638). Despite these distinctions in methods, a shared challenge is balancing governmental direction with authentic cultural appeal. Specifically, Korea faced skepticism over state interventions in Hallyu (Akhand, 2023), China struggled with Confucius Institutes' apparent political agendas (Zaharna, R. S., Hubbert, J. & Hartig, F., 2014, pp.7, 56), and Japan contended with public diplomacy programs' inconsistent impact (Iwabuchi, 2015, p.420).

2.5 Research gap and transition to method

Existing scholarships have mapped soft power's conceptual debates, East Asian cultural diplomacy strategies, and Hallyu's global reception. Yet, few studies systematically analyze

how South Korean policy documents articulate the bureaucratic evolution of public diplomacy from 2011 to 2023, especially through discursive institutionalism.

While Yun (2012) and Otmazgin (2021) describe institutional frameworks, they do not trace longitudinal shifts in policy language, strategic priorities, or Hallyu's framing across MOFA White Papers and Korea Foundation reports.

This thesis addresses this gap by conducting qualitative content analysis of 20 key documents, operationalizing the bureaucratic turn through coding for strategic priorities, discourse shifts, regional targeting, and administrative formalization. The following chapter provides the conceptual framework and operational definitions employed for this work.

3 Conceptual framework

3.1 Operational definitions

The thesis intends soft power as a nation's ability to influence others through attraction drawing on culture, political values and foreign policy (Nye, 2004, p.11).

Specifically, soft power is described as (Nye, Jr, 2018, pp.8, 14):

> This soft power — getting others to want the outcomes that you want — co-opts people rather than coerces them […] Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others […] soft power depends on what is happening in the minds of the beholders […]

It is operationalized to refer to the *potential* resources of attraction Korea seeks to mobilize internationally, despite recognizing that such are contested and not automatically effective.

In line with Nye (1990), there are three main categories that create soft power: culture (music, cinema, cuisine and such), political values (predominantly democratic beliefs) and lastly foreign policies (Howard-Spink, 2024, p.8).

Nye (1990, p.167) assessed that states can exert global influence by leveraging the mentioned categories to attract rather than coerce other nations.

Public diplomacy, conversely, involves specific actions that use a nation's soft power resources to expand its global standing by engaging directly with citizens of other countries, beyond just their governments (Otmazgin, 2021, p.624). Yet, as public diplomacy relies on one's attraction to others, if this ability were weak, it would proportionally diminish the diplomacy's objective (Jeon, 2020, p.2).

Gilboa (2016, Introduction) described such tool as:

> There is not one widely accepted definition of PD, but most refer to a communication process states, nonstate actors, and organizations employ to influence the policies of a foreign government by influencing its citizens. This formulation suggests a two- step influence process: first, an actor employs direct communication to create supportive public opinion in another state, and, second, the informed foreign public influences its government to adopt a friendly policy towards that actor.

Additionally, reported by Nye Jr. (2009, p.11) as:

> […] as Eytan Gilboa points out, public diplomacy is not new, and its essence is 'the good impression that a country seeks to make on the public of another country'.
> It is an effort to appear attractive and to create soft power.

Likewise, the work follows Cull (2009, p.64), and Otmazgin (2021, p.624) in defining public diplomacy as state-led, or state-supported, activities engaging foreign *publics* directly to improve a country's image, explain its policies and shape preferences.
Within this thesis, I employ public diplomacy to address organized efforts, primarily by the South Korean government and the Korea Foundation, to communicate with and influence foreign publics using cultural, educational and policy-related tools (MOFA, 2011; KF, 2014). Therefore, to provide a neat distinction, while soft power is the desired *effect*, public diplomacy is its *practice*.

In correspondence to the above, the research recognizes the emergence of new public diplomacy, describing the integration of new media with traditional diplomatic practices (Otmazgin, 2021, p.623). This connotation, reflecting an idealistic perspective on international relations, has also come to substitute formerly used concepts like foreign cultural relations, cultural diplomacy, international cultural exchange, and cultural cooperation (Snow, 2020, p.3; Otmazgin, 2021, p.623).
New public diplomacy stresses the increase of actors (i.e., NGOs, cities, private companies) and the integration of digital media and networked communication into the described practices (Snow, 2020, p.3; Otmazgin, 2021, pp.623-624).

3.2 Distinguishing cultural diplomacy and nation branding

Although concepts of soft power, public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy may be used interchangeably, their respective definitions slightly differ.
I have previously focused on the first two, and in this section, I will move on cultural diplomacy and on nation branding, both valuable to fully grasp the content of this work.
Cultural diplomacy is not equivalent of public diplomacy and aims to create beneficial relationships with the respective receiver (Chitty, 2017, p.19):

> Cultural diplomacy, a subset of public diplomacy, is a set of practices through which state or non- state actors draw on their heritage or contemporary culture, using media (including social media), mobility or cultural production (including presumption), for purposes of building sustainable mutually beneficial relationships and generating mutual goodwill in groups with which they wish to partner.

Hence, cultural diplomacy refers here to the public diplomacy initiatives through cultural products and practices such as music, film and language education to promote mutual understanding and long-term relationships (Cull, 2009, pp.32-33; Snow, 2019, pp.3-12).

Kim You-Kyung (2022), identified the concept of nation branding within the South Korea context, grounded on the creation of the "Council for National Image Enhancement", developed by the government to enhance the (positive) image of the country internationally (pp.49-50):

> The Nation Brand Council defined the nation brand as the generic concept of desirability and reliability, which includes the political, economic, and cultural competence, and also the vision and values of a nation and established Korea's nation brand vision as being reliable and having dignity. The objective was to reinforce soft power, such as culture and image […]

In practical terms, Korean policy documents frequently blur distinctions among national branding and cultural diplomacy when presenting Hallyu, K-culture and "Global Korea" both as cultural exchange and as branding strategy (Lee, 2007, p.52; Otmazgin, 2013, p.1). Therefore, if one the one hand cultural diplomacy is an established exchange of *social* products, on the other nation branding prioritizes *economic* enhancement via intentional efforts.

3.3 Theoretical lenses

Attraction, as discussed earlier, is highly subjective and it is a process of appealing both heart and mind. Therefore, public diplomacy's starting point is to recognize which attractions are replicable to foreign audiences (Jeon, 2020, p.11).
In Jeon's work (2020, pp.4-5), is indicated how referring to Lyotard, persuasion is achieved by argumentation, which also proceeds with reasoning based on empirical evidence. Regardless, as reality is constructed, the involved parties most times do not agree on the evidence itself, framing the reasoning's process more challenging to grasp (Jeon, 2020, p.18). Following Lyotard's notion, actors try to build and reconstruct reality on their own experiences and, when the protagonist is a nation, the struggles significantly increase (Jeon, 2020, p.4). South Korea, sometimes mistakenly, disregards foreign audiences' views to prioritize its own, while attraction should be a process of empathy via communication and exchange among others and itself (Jeon, 2020, p.18).

Furthermore, this thesis borrows the concept of institutionalization as:

> […] institutional context refers first and foremost to the structure, construction, and communication of meaning. But it can also be understood as the background information provided by the other three neo-institutionalisms in political science with which discursive institutionalists may engage and from which they often emerge (Berg-Schlosser, Badie, & Morlino, 2011, p.3)

Generally, institutionalism does not stop at simply building formal structures, and it pinpoints the means through which administrations develop identity and validity (Eberlein, 2011, p.1).

Equally, this thesis mentions discursive institutionalism, elaborated by Schmidt (2008), referencing to the shift from ideas and discourse into political science (p.304) and denoted as "a distinctive neo-institutionalist analytic framework" (Schmidt, 2024, p.10).
Schmidt (2024, pp.3-4) advanced a distinction of such ideas based on generality into policy (normative ideas on solving problem, thus subject to a rapid changes), program (concepts sustaining policy framework; consisting of general programmatic ideas), and philosophy (the least incline to change, consisting of foundational beliefs).
While discourse aims to exchange theories through interactive developments of

> (a) coordination among policy actors in policy and program construction and (b) communication between political actors and the public in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of those ideas, against a back- ground of overarching philosophies. (Schmidt, 2008, p.322)

Considering this, it is possible to reaffirm that such concept contributes to the public's understanding of political engagements and approach fields not previously discussed as "how ideas shape politics", "power of persuasion" and "cultural and historical norms and paths" (Berg-Schlosser, Badie, & Morlino, 2011, p.3).

The second concept implemented to interpret the findings of this research is Mor's rhetoric public diplomacy. Stemming from the unsatisfactory academic scholarship of public diplomacy in international relations, Mor proposes a social-psychological theory of personal branding (Mor, 2007, p.661). He presents how public diplomacy is a configuration of self-portrait for social empowerment, mirroring how South Korea is managing foreign impressions.
In correspondence to Cho (2012, pp. 287)

> […] if and when South Korea's images are constructed through them, the image of South Korea will change based on whether such contents are good and not bad […]

> South Korea has been able to publicize its image through K-pop idol singers, TV dramas, and Korean movies. […] Interest is increasing because of the Korean Wave; hence, it is necessary for South Korea to provide a field for transforming that interest into practical knowledge.

For this reason, predicated by Mor's rhetoric, in leveraging a fresh and innovative image through Hallyu, Seoul tackles an image predicament that is the old perception of the Korean peninsula as a dangerous area due to the ongoing conflict (Cho, 2012, p.283).

Such positive rhetorical defense, like this, frames the country's actual foreign policy goals more appealing to foreign audiences.

4 Background on South Korea's public diplomacy

4.1 Historical evolution and institutional set-up

In the present discussion, I will provide background on how Korea's soft power and public diplomacy have been institutionalized since the 2000s and describe the process in which the Korean wave was able to guarantee South Korea the status of middle power in Asia (Otmazgin, 2021, pp.630-631).

Seoul's public diplomacy was increasingly ambitious and reached out to a wider audience compared to the initial efforts that mainly portrayed the country as a successful and advanced economy. At present, the policy has evolved into projecting favorable images of Korea through cultural means, highlighting traditional and contemporary culture (Otmazgin, 2021, p.631). Moreover, it currently communicates the country's stance on historical issues, territorial disputes, and conflict with its neighbors, and promotes the Korean language in regions with previously limited knowledge about the country (Otmazgin, 2021, p.631).
Only from the mid 2000s, Seoul started pursuing its public diplomacy by foreign policies portraying aspiration to be globally recognized (Lie, 2014).
Hence, from 2011, Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and affiliated cultural agencies have increasingly verbalized their public diplomacy aims via White Papers, annual statements, and project budgets reflecting shifts in method and vision.
The Public Diplomacy Act (Act No. 13951, 3 February 2016) lays the legal foundation for South Korea's bureaucratization of public diplomacy, directly addressing this research main inquiry by articulating how public diplomacy efforts become formalized and rule-bound (Public Diplomacy Act, 2016, Arts. 4–6). Article 4 imposes the State to "*establish and pursue comprehensive and systematic strategies and policies to strengthen public diplomacy*", including "*administrative and financial support plans*" and platforms for inter-agency cooperation (see Appendix 1).
An equally important channel is Article 8's Public Diplomacy Committee, mandating "matters concerning the formulation, alteration, and pursuit of a Master Plan" and "cooperation and coordination in public diplomatic affairs among government departments" (Public Diplomacy Act, 2016, Art. 8(2)). Furthermore, Article 13 enforces yearly reports to the National Assembly on Master Plan implementation, embedding accountability and evaluation into the

bureaucratic turn (Public Diplomacy Act, 2016, Art. 13). Thus, the state should produce comprehensive strategies guaranteeing comprehensive and systematized planning and evaluation.

Nonetheless, the central power must report on Master Plan and Action Plan enactment to the National Assembly every year, while MOFA creates systems and conducts data-driven surveys for constant improvement and transparency in public diplomacy policy.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs must refer to all stakeholders and verbalize a Master Plan for Public Diplomacy every five years to provide frameworks like directions, goals and funding among others (Public Diplomacy Act, 2016).

Ultimately, the Act's main purpose is providing a robust foundation for South Korea's public diplomacy, while addressing how the efforts must foster foreigners' knowledge of the country, regardless of which institution carries it out.

As mentioned, per showed by the Ministry of Foreign Affair in the Public Diplomacy Act (2016), the two Master Plans consist in five-year national strategic frameworks, officially called "Public Diplomacy Basic Plans". These are legally bound under Article 5 of the Act and thus must be coordinated across all relevant government agencies and stakeholders.

These documents mark the growth of public diplomacy programs, describe objectives (image-building, brand Korea, regional outreach), and track investment.

In the words of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website, South Korea has implemented the First (2017–2022) and Second Master Plans for Public Diplomacy (2023–2027), to highlight the country's goal in becoming a "Global Pivotal State" via public diplomacy.

The papers outline objectives as strategic policy advocacy, promoting the Korea as a scientific and cultural powerhouse, digital innovation in engagement, and strengthening relations with focus regions and countries (MOFA, 2023).

In addition to the above-described strategies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also integrates yearly plans to 19 administrative agencies and 17 local governments, to assure the proper implementation of public diplomacy according to the Master Plans (MOFA, 2023).

Despite some shared features as the multifaced dimension of public diplomacy in policy, culture and digital tools, prioritizing systematic and coordinated governmental plans beyond ministries and regions and the diaspora outreach; the two differ on other aspects.

Evidence of the annual White Papers evolving priorities can be perceived in the specific reporting of financial allocations. The more than threefold increase in funding between 2011 and 2018 (see Chapter 6.1.2 and Appendix 2) parallels the diversification of programs towards both traditional and new media domains (Otmazgin, 2021, p.631).
Such budget increase targets to develop effective public diplomacy frameworks targeting nations like the United States, Japan, and China, which are crucial in resolving tensions in the peninsula. At the same time, it seeks to emphasize its assistance to other countries by involving with international organizations (Otmazgin, 2021, p.631).
Furthermore, the Korea Foundation's annual reports reveal an upward trend in bilateral cultural exchanges, academic fellowship programs, and support for Korean studies, mostly with year-on-year comparative metrics.

These documents present an increased global coverage, more detailed segmentation by region, and the evolution from "broad-based" cultural outreach toward tailored countries, or even city-level programming.
The Korea Foundation is tasked with executing core initiatives (the Korean Festival, support for academic conferences, exchange programs) along with gathering data to inform future strategy, noting, for instance, stronger demand in Southern Europe and changing perceptions over time (Kang, 2021, pp.76-78).
Similarly, other agencies like KOCIS (Korean Culture and Information Service), KOCCA (Korean Creative Content Agency) support the bureaucratic organization with emphasis on digital content, social media diplomacy, and the expansion of cultural exports "made in Korea" namely webtoons, gaming, and new formats for K-pop promotion (KOCCA, 2023).
However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, agencies had adjusted strategies through digital ambassador programs, online cultural expos, and targeted influencer collaborations to achieve engagement with global audiences despite physical barriers (Yoon, 2020).

The 2016 Public Diplomacy Act transcribes a breakpoint moment, legally formalizing the scope of MOFA's authority, creating a coordinated policy apparatus embedding public, local, and private sector actors, and mandating outcomes measurement and evaluation (Public Diplomacy Act, 2016). According to MOFA, this approach allowed the public diplomacy's shift

from the scope of action of embassies or Korea Foundation, into a pillar of national branding, with designated staff, action plans, and reporting obligations.
Thus, Hallyu's role in this framework is not accidental.
Starting with reactive support for the spontaneously popular Korean wave, the government has moved to active management, institutional branding, and leveraging of Hallyu's cultural capital precisely for its diplomatic dividends (Otmazgin, 2021, pp.631-632).
MOFA, KOCCA, and KOCIS manage a cross-agency process that aligns export goals with reputation-building, using policy language that frames the cultural phenomenon as both a diplomatic asset and a tool of national development (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024).

4.2 Hallyu and cultural diplomacy in East Asia

This paragraph locates South Korea's public diplomacy within the broader East Asian context and summarizes key debates on Hallyu, Chinese and Japanese cultural diplomacy.
The popularity of contemporary Korean culture has been significantly reshaping South Korea's public diplomacy, as Hallyu has become the primary factor driving global interest in Korea.

Over the last two decades, Korean pop music, TV dramas, movies, fashion, cosmetics, and idol culture have gained worldwide popularity, establishing Korea as a major non-Western center for transnational popular culture production and distribution (Otmazgin, 2021, p.632).
Jeon (2020, p.6) addressed how, even if Koreans used to view their own unique traditional culture translated into economic development, they positively accepted foreign audiences becoming interested into their popular culture.
According to the deputy director-general of the Bureau of Public Diplomacy in Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Korean wave has prompted the government to initiate relevant policies, reversing the traditional approach, and Hallyu's success has simplified Korea's public diplomacy efforts (Otmazgin, 2021, p. 632). Therefore, its success is not a result of state policies aimed at exploiting soft power for diplomacy, but rather, policy is a consequence of the "made in Korea" phenomena (Otmazgin, 2021, p.632).
Lee Geun's (2007, pp.59, 62, 65) explained how South Korea was able to adopt Hallyu by promoting its music, dramas and fashion, enabling the country to enhance its global

perception and leveraging this cultural phenomenon to foster stronger international relations. Lee (2007, p.60) proceeded to analyze how some scholars believe Korea's popular culture was able to replace China's one, leveraging from the lack of Chinese popular culture that fits its economic power.

Last but not least, Lee (2007, pp. 58, 64, 65) advanced the need to disseminate Korean language and high-quality discourses taking advantage of the Korean wave boom.

In his views, when someone grows an interest to South Korea, they consequently search for other materials; therefore, the administrations have the national interest to use literature, among other tools, as one way to promote public diplomacy.

Additionally, through the analysis between South Korea and its neighboring country Japan, Kim (2013) discusses that Hallyu has been instrumental in their cultural exchange, with K-dramas and K-pop concerts drawing great audiences in Japan despite "comfort women" and other historical tensions between the two nations. Likewise, Lee's scholarship (2009) suggested that South Korea's partnerships with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) synthesized joint film productions and music collaborations supporting diplomatic goals, due to the surge of Hallyu in the area.

Lee (2007, p.57) noted that the Korean government did not originally design Hallyu as a tool for diplomacy; rather, the cultural phenomenon reacted to its spontaneous global success by formalizing cultural export as a leader of foreign policy. This new redirection is evident in the language of reports, strategic plans, and program calls, where the Korean wave is diversely framed as a brand, a diplomatic asset, and a development engine, especially where the government seeks new markets or stronger ties to benefit the country.

Yang (2022, p.78) further mentioned how Watson (2012, p.304) had described how Seoul's state-led soft power has been the key to the country's nationalism paired with an official brand renewal.

De facto, the drama "Descendants of the Sun" (in Korean: 태양의 후예) aired in 2016, denoted a mix of typical drama features such as romance and hardships, along with political trademarks (Yang, 2022, p.75). In the ending subtitles the Ministry of National Defense (MND, in Korean: 국방부) was recognized as a sponsor, providing helicopters, military equipment

and allowing filming on Camp Greaves[4]. This partnership is clear evidence on how the government aimed to enhance the portrayal of the Korean Army, considering several scenes in the drama were scripted to promote patriotism and nationalism (Yang, 2022, p.83).
Public diplomacy is particularly important to Korea considering its position between Beijing and Tokyo (Istad, 2016, p.53).
In the early 2010s, Seoul ranked 27th in the Anholt/GfK Roper Nation Brands Index[5], emphasizing that South Korea is one of the fastest climbers in such brand indicators (Istad, 2016, p.53).
The Chinese People Daily discussed how Korean dramas are characterized by sincere depictions of life, deep affection and simple expressions of emotion (Jeon, 2020, p.6) and thus resonated with the Chinese audience, who is attracted to Hallyu's in lifestyle and human relationships, yet upholding Confucian values (Jeon, 2020, pp.6-7).
Equally charmed are the Japanese, who experience their country's past prosperity in Korean shows (Jeon, 2020, p.7).
Domestically, South Korea feels prideful in finally being acknowledged on the international level thanks to the Korean wave's success and seeing developed regions like Europe and the U.S enjoying their culture (Jeon, 2020, p.18).
The country is now moving from the periphery of the world to its center (Jeon, 2020, p.18).

China, and Japan alongside South Korea managed to institutionalize cultural diplomacy within their foreign policy strategies, yet they uphold implementing it through different bureaucratic and rhetorical mechanisms (Hubbert, 2019, pp.11-13).
According to Hubbert (2019, pp.2-3), cultural diplomacy in East Asia is systematically produced and communicated through state-led programs, official documents, and a technocratic policy language designed for international consumption. Hubbert (2019, p.13) advanced to demonstrate how China employs organizations like the Confucius Institutes, Japan adopts The Japan Foundation, while South Korea uses K-pop and Korean language education through dedicated institutions.

[4] Used during the Korean War by the US military, although returned to ROK in 2007
[5] The Index measures the power and appeal of a state's brand image and informs how global consumers see the character and personality of the brand.

These state-led plans mostly identify themselves with highly codified slogans (respectively, “Chinese Dream”, “Cool Japan” and “Dynamic Korea”), to translate the abstract notion of soft power into manageable and measurable diplomatic objectives.

Seoul came into the scene with its public diplomacy at the perfect timing, when the U.S imperialism and the “Cool Japan” phenomena were at their lowest (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2021, p.123).

Notably, Mor (2007, p.667) pointed out that state rhetoric is essential for translating public diplomacy into a palatable and actionable phenomenon. Similarly, foreign policy is redirected as a series of digestible goals, slogans, and budget limits within bureaucratic communications, simplifying both internal management and external understanding.

In East Asia, this trend is noticeable through annual White Papers and project-oriented budgets, in which cultural assets are counted, goals are quantified, and outcomes are synthesized for policymakers and citizens.Such bureaucratic recast aids both the internal logic of public management along with translating soft power concepts into concrete deliverables.

Taken together, cultural exchange programs, language institutes, media festivals have specific financial and human resources allocated, as seen in South Korea’s public diplomacy documentation (MOFA, 2017) and China’s global roll-out of cultural centers (Hubbert, 2019, pp.14-15).

Film, pop music, and online content might circulate independently in other center-based nations, while East Asian governments have increasingly sought to institutionalize, and strategically direct these flows. Yet, as Hubbert (2019, pp. 1-2, 17-18) analyzed, this state-led model may encounter resistance abroad, where suspicions about propaganda persist.

Thus, bureaucratic documentation is essential as it legitimizes these efforts within the national apparatus and plays as an interface to foreign publics, through promotional rhetoric and branding exercises (Hubbert, 2019, p.3).

The key takeaway is that East Asia’s comparative cultural diplomacy landscape reveals a highly bureaucratic and rhetorical framing of soft power, whose process allows for effective national strategy and measurable outcomes. Nonetheless, it might generate tension between authentic interpersonal/cultural exchange and state-managed objectives **(**Schmidt, 2008).

Political discourse plays a central role in shaping East Asia’s cultural diplomacy policies as highlighted in this thesis and in Mor’s work (2007, pp.661-662). In the region, political

discourse is deeply intertwined with cultural diplomacy, where there is a tendency to frame foreign policy as both a source of national identity and a tool for directing soft power. Cull's analysis (2009) of the American public diplomacy during the Cold War showed how nations largely repackage soft power into digestible, reportable elements using managed slogans and policy documents.

Some fundamental ways in which the political discourse shapes East Asia's cultural diplomacy are:

- Framing national identity: cultural diplomacy in East Asia is often presented as a tool of constructing or reinforcing a nation's story, who it is, what its values are, and why it matters internationally. Policy documents are complete with references to historical achievement, cultural assets, and national strengths, positioning such components as a core to the nation's identity and as instruments for foreign engagement (Schmidt, 2008, pp.303-326).
- Sloganeering and strategic branding: as Hubbert (2019, pp.15, 151) highlighted, governments use catchphrases ("Chinese Dream," "Cool Japan," "Hallyu") to render public diplomacy initiatives actionable and measurable. These further encode policy objectives and aligns them to both domestic and international audiences (Schmidt, 2008, pp. 310–311).

Nevertheless, Cicchelli and Octobre (2021, p.133) explored how the Korean wave focuses on transmitting values, as opposed to "Cool Japan", who lacks accent on such morals (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2021, p.133). This is what led to Tokyo's downfall on dominating the global market, despite its undeniable success (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2021, p.133).

Political discourse in East Asian cultural diplomacy policies ("what" of government action), therefore, provides the rhetorical and bureaucratic framework (the "how"[6]) through which public diplomacy is organized, executed, and evaluated.

The voice of the administrations turns abstract ideas (namely attraction and influence) into narratives, agenda items, and measurable policy deliverables, shaping the objectives and determining, to a significant extent, how East Asian states pursue and define cultural diplomacy (Mor, 2007, p.667).

[6] For more insights on the relationship between the political and operational world consult Rabkin A. J. (2024) "Competency in Administration: James Q. Wilson and American Bureaucracy", *Law & Liberty*.

5 Methods and data

5.1 Methodology

The focal topic of this study is the bureaucratization of South Korea's public diplomacy through related documents from 2011 to 2023.
This is set into the investigation on how institutions like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the Korea Foundation (KF), have framed, prioritized, and operationalized public diplomacy across White Papers and strategic plans. Additionally, the research highlights how policy language, strategic priorities, and regional targeting have changed over these decades, paralleling broader changes in Seoul's diplomatic ambitions and bureaucratic sophistication.
The entirety of this work is conducted by qualitative discourse analysis identifying *how* policy is framed, while quantitative data from the Korea Foundation provides tangible *evidence* of those shifts to validate the bureaucratic turn.

5.2 Original contribution

This study's originality relies in its systematic analysis of policy discourse and bureaucratic processes in contrast with cultural reception or simply reporting economic outcomes.
Across the analysis of how South Korea's main governmental and semi-governmental institutions locate public diplomacy through official texts, the thesis satisfies a central gap in the related discourse.
I believe the study newly contributes by:

- Providing a comprehensive study of Korea's public diplomacy documents across a 12-year period (2011-2023), broadening the analysis to the last decade.
- Outlining the evolution of strategic priorities, regional targeting, and institutional language change.
- Determining how public diplomacy becomes bureaucratically constructed over different South Korean presidential agendas.

The work focuses on addressing the period between 2011 to 2023 for multiple motives.
To start, 2011 marked the appointment of South Korea's first public diplomacy ambassador, thus officially embracing public diplomacy as a policy field (MOFA, 2012). As a result, I reckon the timeframe 2011–2023 concretely captures the institutionalization chapter of Korean public diplomacy, from its formal adoption through the Act and its implementation.

Next, these years cover the first Master Plan cycle and the promotion of the second, allowing a constant study and change across two defined strategy periods.
To conclude, the 2010s are recognized as the decade in which Hallyu became the focus of Korea's public diplomacy including branding initiatives and K-pop–linked diplomacy (Ayhan, 2017, p.13).

5.3 Data sources and analytical framework

This thesis employs qualitative document analysis combining content analysis trough a discursive institutionalism lens. The layout is exploratory and interpretive, intended to trace how public diplomacy and soft power are framed and institutionalized, instead of measuring causal effects.
Documents were selected if they (1) were issued by a central government figure or the Korea Foundation, (2) clearly addressed public diplomacy, soft power or Hallyu, and (3) fell within the 2011–2023 timeframe. Nonetheless, deliberately omitted from this thesis were local government initiatives and non-official promotional materials.
Wherever multiple versions existed, the most comprehensive full text was selected.

Overall, data representativeness consists of 13 annual reports and 2 Master Plans, covering core documents of public diplomacy policy evolution.
Specifically, the final dataset consists of 27 primary documents categorized by their role in the longitudinal analysis:

Table 5.1. Specific data

Category	*Specific Documents*	*Quantity*	*Role in Analysis*
MOFA White Papers	2011, 2014, 2017, 2020, 2023	5	Longitudinal tracking of official state narratives.
Master Plans	1st (2017–2022) 2nd (2023–2027)	2	Identifying formal policy goals and legal shifts.
KF Annual Reports	Every year from 2011 to 2023	13	Tracking budget allocation and program expansion.
Legislation	PD Act (2016) & Enforcement Decree	2	Analyzing the "Bureaucratic Turn" via legal text.

Speeches	Select speeches (Lee, Park, Moon, Yoon)	5	Identifying top-down discursive framing.
TOTAL		27	

Additionally, secondary sources rely on:

- Academic literature on soft power, public diplomacy, and bureaucratization
- Comparative studies of East Asian cultural diplomacy, mostly compared to China and/ or Japan

As the primary sources consists of official government (or quasi-government) data, the study reflects state perspectives and may under-report failures or alternative interpretations. Accordingly, the analysis captures how Korea represents and manages its public diplomacy and not how foreign audiences perceive it.

Because the study relies on English language versions and directly made translations from Korean and Italian, the results could suffer from a loss of nuance. In the event only Korean versions were available, I translated key passages myself.

Hence, coding was based on these translations.

Finally, as a qualitative, single-researcher study, coding decisions reflect interpretive judgement, although they were conducted with a transparent coding frame linked to the research questions.

Said content analysis is conducted with discursive institutionalist lens coding for:

1. Strategic priorities (i.e., branding vs. GPS)
2. Language/discourse shifts (i.e., “support” → “mandate”)
3. Regional targeting
4. Administrative differences

More specifically, coding has been carried out via manual thematic analysis.

5.4 Analytical procedure

To establish and implement familiarization, all documents were initially read once to gain an overview of recurring themes and terminology related to public diplomacy, soft power and Hallyu.

Followed by an initial coding scheme derived from the research questions with four main categories: (1) strategic priorities, (2) language and discourse, (3) regional targeting, and (4) administrative arrangements (institutions, laws, budgets). The latter is the main evidence to explain the bureaucratic turn.

Priorities, language and discourse thus provide the discursive evidence.

In so doing, the longitudinal analysis of all data remained coherent across presidential administrations.

Table 5.2. Coding scheme

Coding Category	*Focus and Indicators*	*Sample Keywords and Search Terms*
Strategic Priorities	High-level national goals and the shifting "commitment" of public diplomacy	Global Pivotal State (GPS), National Brand, Soft Power Asset, Reciprocal Diplomacy
Language and Discourse	Shifts in how the state talks about its role and Hallyu	Facilitate → Mandate, Support → Govern, Cultural Promotion → Strategic Asset, Synergy, Governance
Regional Targeting	The geographical focus of diplomatic resources and outreach	New Southern Policy, Indo-Pacific, Global South, Eurasia, Regional Cooperation, Middle East
Administrative Arrangements	The bureaucratic turn: formal rules, money, and organization	Public Diplomacy Act, Master Plan, Budget, Inter-ministerial Committee, KF

Note: The coding was applied at the paragraph level. Therefore, if one addressed budget increases and regional focus in Southeast Asia, it was coded in both Categories 3 and 4.

The primary unit of analysis was either the sentence or thematic paragraph, and in instances where the documents described "coordination", it was analyzed via administrative arrangements (4).

Sub-codes captured references to Hallyu, values diplomacy, digital tools and evaluation metrics. All data was coded manually by marking relevant passages for each category; the coding frame was refined as new patterns appeared, and earlier documents were reassessed to warrant consistency.

Quantitative indicators from KF annual reports (i.e. numbers of guests, youth exchanges, Korean Studies courses, e-School universities...) were summarized to counterpart the qualitative findings.

Ultimately, the coded material was interpreted using discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008), emphasizing how key terms and narratives legitimize specific institutional arrangements and policy guidelines.

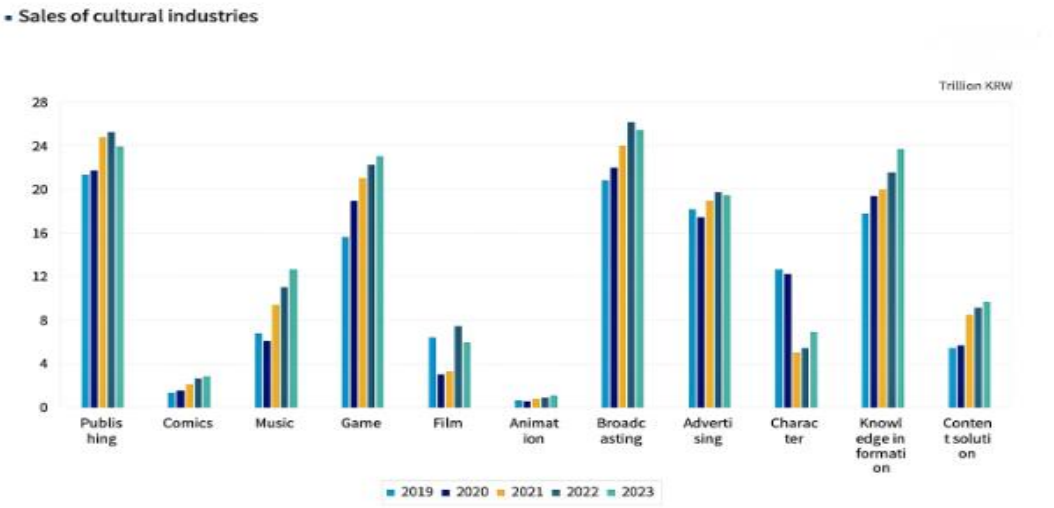
5.5 MOFA, MCST and Korea Foundation

Before proceeding into tangible policies carried out by the South Korean government, I ought to give a broader explanation of the three different administrative parties observed for this thesis: MOFA, MCST and KF.

MOFA is the acronym for Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Korean 외교부, and it got enacted on July 17th, 1948. *Post hoc*, it has taken care of South Korea's foreign policy, protecting nationals overseas and supervising international relations and overseas public relations.
As per 2025, from the Ministry's website, the institution carries out overseas diplomatic relations in 194 countries, partitioned in Europe (54), Africa (48), America (35), Asia (38) and Middle East (19).
Concerning public diplomacy, MOFA vows to align its activities under the vision of Korea becoming a Global Pivotal State, which contributes to the freedom, peace and prosperity in the world (Master Plan, 2017-2022; Master Plan, 2023-2027). Moreover, the Ministry enacts an Annual Comprehensive Action plan, merging similar framework from 19 central administrative agencies and 17 mayors and governors (Master Plan, 2017-2022; Master Plan, 2023-2027).
On November 4th, 1948, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) was established as the Office of Public Information (Presidential Decree Number 15), with 1 main office and 4 bureaus (Secretarial Office, Public Relations Bureau, Publication Bureau, The Bureau of Statistics).
Generally, this Ministry is the lead agency working on South Korea's public diplomacy, adopting culture, sports, and tourisms primary soft power tools to promote and enhance the country's image internationally (Melissen & Kim, 2018, p.2). Yet, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs manages government-wide public diplomacy initiatives under the Public Diplomacy Act, the MCST fulfils culture-focused activities, mostly in collaboration with MOFA and other

institutes (Melissen & Kim, 2018, p.2, 5). Among these activities, we identify the promotion of the Korean Language, the spread of K-Content and Hallyu and Cultural Exchange Programs. According to the Ministry's official website the sales of cultural industries' trend from 2019 to 2023 showcases how these businesses increased from 126.71 to 151.05 trillion KRW in total sales (Figure 1), with growth particularly driven by games, music, broadcasting, knowledge information, and content solution services. Such stable rise, especially in digitally distributed and worldwide circulated sectors, highlights how cultural-industry policy reinforces Korea's public diplomacy by enlarging the economic base and international reach of its soft-power assets.

At the same time, more volatile segments such as film and character goods reveal extents where targeted support may be needed to sustain their contribution to the country's external cultural influence.



Classification	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Publishing	21.30	21.65	24.70	25.20	23.90
Comics	1.30	1.53	2.13	2.60	2.80
Music	6.80	6.06	9.37	11.00	12.60
Game	15.60	18.89	20.99	22.20	23.00
Film	6.40	2.99	3.25	7.40	5.90
Animation	0.6	0.55	0.76	0.90	1.10
Broadcasting	20.80	21.96	23.97	26.10	25.40
Advertising	18.10	17.42	18.92	19.70	19.40
Character	12.60	12.22	5.00	5.40	6.90
Knowledge information	17.70	19.37	19.95	21.50	23.60
Content solution	5.40	5.64	8.47	9.10	9.60
Total	126.71	128.28	137.50	151.07	151.05

Figure 1. Cultural trends from 2019 to 2023

The last governmental body to mention is the most fundamental one for this entire thesis, the Korean Foundation. The Foundation began on December 14th, 1991, with The Korea Foundation Act (No. 4414)[7], under the leadership of the former South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo. Its objectives are to promote awareness and insight of South Korea, and to enhance friendship throughout the global community via a diverse range of international exchange activities, in pursuant to Article 1 of the Korea Foundation Act.
Nonetheless, it is important to observe that the Korea Foundation is an independent body affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[7]Amended by Act No. 5639, Jan. 21, 1999.

6 Findings

This chapter showcases the qualitative patterns identified through coding addressed in the previous section 5.4. However, I will provide a starting paragraph on the two Master Plans.

6.1 Master Plans

As stated in the sub-chapter 4.1, the two official documents differ on some aspects, despite sharing the final goal of positioning Korea as a Global Pivotal State.
Both are, additionally, operationalized through a whole of government approach.
To start, the former 2017-2022 program heavily stressed the branding accent and cultural assets of public diplomacy, identifying the online interaction among parties primarily as a supporting tool. At the same time, it emphasized a developing international understanding and local partnerships.
In the plan there was, to conclude, a systematic differentiation by sector and regions, balancing the funds among these.
On the other hand, the current 2023-2027 Plan spreads its focus to policy leadership on global issues like technology, security and health, moving its branches into a digital engagement and implementing a digital ecosystem as the central pillar.
Its priorities align with external influence on technological, scientific and environmental leadership and human rights promotion. Moreover, it also selects a further detailed regional mapping to, for instance, ASEAN and Indo-Pacific.
Ultimately, the Plan's budget got extended to reach for at least 15% of the MOFA budget by 2027, enhanced sectoral balance, and convergence diplomacy.
There is a distinct change from "awareness building" (First Plan) to "global leadership and impact" (Second Plan), aiming to enforce Korea as an agenda-setter.

All things considered, the 2023–2027 Master Plan is a sharp evolution from the previous as it directly builds on the former's outline, tackling global disruptions by incorporating public diplomacy more deeply with national security, digital power, and value-based issues. Furthermore, both represent separate core objectives, areas of continuity, and new directions reflecting the changing domestic and international settings.

To give a visual understanding of the shifts among these two procedures, I provide a summarized table.

Table 6.1. Summarized table on the First and Second Master Plan

	First Master Plan 2017–2022	*Second Master Plan 2023–2027*
General vision	"Global Korea" through cultural branding and image-building	Korea as a "Global Pivotal State" and agenda-setter
Emphasis	Awareness-building, cultural promotion, nation branding	Global leadership, policy advocacy, value-based diplomacy
Function of digital tools	Online interaction as supporting tool	Digital ecosystem as central pillar of public diplomacy
Main thematic priorities	Culture, Hallyu, mutual understanding, local partnerships	Technology, security, health, human rights, scientific leadership
Implementation approach	Whole-of-government, sector and regional differentiation	Whole-of-government, stronger inter-ministerial coordination
Regional targeting	Broad regions, traditional partners (US, Japan, China)	More thorough mapping (i.e., ASEAN, Indo-Pacific, new regions)
Budget	Expansion and diversification of programs	Public diplomacy budget to reach ≥15% of MOFA budget by 2027, enhanced balance
Policy means	Cultural events, exchanges, language programs	Policy advocacy, digital campaigns, convergence diplomacy
Strategy	From reactive support to planned branding	From branding to structured soft power governance and agenda-setting
Relation to bureaucratization	Initial consolidation of public diplomacy under the Act	Deepening bureaucratic management, indicators and evaluation

6.2 Strategic priorities

This section reports to RQ1 by tracing how governmental documents evolve from early public diplomacy framed as promoting and enhancing the national image (MOFA, 2011, p. 23) to an additional coordinated branding approach that aims to build a positive Global Pivotal State and align programs with national strategic objectives (MOFA, 2017).

6.2.1 Background

The public diplomacy approach, how it is envisioned in this work, gradually took shape after democratization despite gaining clearer institutional form only in the 2010s (Cho, 2012,

pp.276-277; Choi, 2019, p.3), with reports describing more independent and *ad hoc* programs.

As a matter of fact, early data from this period accentuate long-standing partners like the United States and Japan for security and economic reasons, notwithstanding Seoul–Tokyo relations being historically contentious and shaped by unresolved historical issues (Cho, 2012, p.285; Choi, 2019, p.3). Regardless, 2016, with the enactment of the Public Diplomacy Act (2016, Arts. 4–6) marked by the Master Plans, symbolizes a new bureaucratized approach (Otmazgin, 2021, p. 631).

6.2.2 Findings: shifts in strategic priorities (2011–2023)

My analysis exposes three major shifts in South Korea's public diplomacy priorities between 2011 and 2023. Such changes reveal noteworthy evolutions in regional targeting, strategic objectives and resource allocation, indicating increasing bureaucratization and complexity in Korea's public diplomacy.

Starting from 2016, White Papers and the first Master Plan discussed public diplomacy as a planned branding tool (MOFA, 2017), leading to the aspiration to become a "powerhouse in science & technology and culture" and align cultural programs with national strategic objectives in the Second Master Plan (MOFA, 2023[8]).

A second shift concerns the overall framing of South Korea's international role.

The first Master Plan (2017–2022) linked public diplomacy to the slogan "Korea's charm of communicating with the world and with the people" and emphasized culture-centered branding and image-building (MOFA, 2017, p.11). Accordingly, the Korean original version of the 2017 Master Plan elaborated this objective by

> […] production of video content that can reveal Korea's unique development process, national identity and values (peace love, cross-border role between developed and developing countries, etc.) ※ Composition of an advisory group consisting of experts such as public diplomacy, communication, humanities, and international politics related to the main content of video content)" (MOFA, 2017, p.39)

The second (2023–2027) reframes public diplomacy highlighting policy leadership on technology, security and health and stressing contributions to global norms (MOFA, 2023).

[8] https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_26885/contents.do

Governmental files from this period underline an expansion of public diplomacy programs, clear objectives for image-building and strategic regional outreach, alongside tracking of investment. This evolution mirrors a new bureaucratic awareness of public diplomacy's multifaced nature together with its application.

Consequently, public diplomacy experiences an increase in investments from US$6million in 2011 to US$20 million in 2018, paralleling the expansion and diversification of programs. The 2020 budget proposal additionally included great increases for Culture, Sports, and Tourism, and for Diplomacy and Unification.

A third shift is the growing emphasis on scientific and technological leadership and value-based diplomacy: particularly, the second Master Plan indicated a new shift into Korea becoming a scientific powerhouse. This encompasses aims like expanding international support for sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula, strengthening policy communication with key partners, and contributing to global values to boost the national image.

Moreover, while early documents prioritized traditional culture and Hallyu, contemporary plans add themes such as science diplomacy (MOFA, 2023, pp. 33-37), digital innovation (MOFA, 2023, pp. 33-35) and value diplomacy centered on democracy and human rights (MOFA, 2023, pp. 14-18). Hence portraying a broadening of public diplomacy from cultural promotion to multi-sectoral policy advocacy.

Efforts on international sharing of technologies and innovations are endorsed as areas of Korean leadership and expertise to export internationally. These allow South Korea to expand its studies with proposals like "smart cities" (i.e., Busan and Sejong projects) and eco-diplomacy, targeting carbon neutrality. All things considered, Seoul aspires to diversify its cultural exports, adding its technological capabilities to the already recognized cultural products. To achieve so, it is clear how Korea plans to strategically direct such efforts in broader and emerging regions as ASEAN, Africa and Europe.

These shifts leave the floor to the subsequent analysis of language/discourse, regional targeting and presidential eras, and directly address the question concerning the institutional evolution of South Korea's public diplomacy.

6.3 Language and discourse shifts

This section addresses RQ3 (changes in language and objectives) and demonstrates discursive institutionalism in action (Schmidt, 2008, pp. 303, 314–315): policy language

evolves from facilitative to managerial, constructing a bureaucratic soft power framework (Schmidt, 2008, p.306). These changes mostly mirror presidential ideologies.

Moon Jae-in (liberal) framed diplomacy as peaceful cooperation and inter-Korean reconciliation and calling South Korea "one of the greatest and most beautiful countries", exemplified by joint Olympic teams[9].

Yoon Suk-yeol, a conservative, emphasized value diplomacy, rules-based order, and outreach to Europe, Africa and South America.

A further distinction, owing to the evolution of technology usage in diplomatic efforts, became the extensive adaptation of terms like "digital diplomacy" and "public diplomacy 2.0". Social media platforms (X, YouTube, Instagram...) along with similar engagements concretized the possibility to reach foreign audiences and sponsoring national interests, especially during the Fourth Industrial Revolution[10].

Pre-2016 documents used collaborative verbs such as "facilitating", "encouraging", "supporting": for instance, the Foundation's 2013 annual report (p. 26) framed activities as "cultural exchange for friendship".

The Korea Foundation's role was to

> provide program support to prominent universities abroad […] to help enhance understanding about Korea and to promote Korean Studies abroad" (KF, 2014, p.5)

Moreover, it described its support on the country's academic associations in their operations and resources to elevate the global standing of Korean studies and language education (KF, 2014, p.6).

On the other hand, following the 2016 Public Diplomacy Act, language employed a managerial stance with "mandating", "coordinating", "performance indicators". Concretely

> The Public Diplomacy Committee, a pan-governmental control tower for public diplomacy, has been launched, and the Korea Foundation has been designated as a public diplomacy promotion organization (MOFA, 2023, p.3)

The 2023-2027 Master Plan calls for joint action by multiple ministries and agencies to promote Hallyu's cultural contents and links these efforts to annual reviews and evaluation

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[9] In occasion of the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics, South Korea and Democratic People's Republic of Korea mutually organized one unified team for the female ice hockey competition (BBC, 2018).

[10] Term addressed by the economist Klaus Schwab in 2016, indicates the quick technological development of the 21st century.

criteria for public diplomacy implementation (MOFA, 2017; MOFA, 2023). Still, this Plan requires departments involved in cultural diplomacy to establish concrete objectives and report on their enactment (MOFA, 2017), turning public diplomacy into measurable governance.

This linguistic evolution signifies a bureaucratic institutionalization, where cultural diplomacy became a planned state strategy, going beyond reinforcement toward measurable results and inter-agency governance.

6.4 Regional target

Complementary supporting evidence on RQ3 addresses how South Korea plans to systematize budget allocation by target region (MOFA, 2023).

The regional focus of Seoul's public diplomacy has shifted from traditional dominant powers with the US, Japan and China, that nonetheless remain fundamental for security and economic reasons, to broader locations such as the European Union. In practice, White Papers and Master Plans have expanded attention to ASEAN, Africa and Southern Europe, with Italy explicitly highlighted in connection with the 140th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

In MOFA files, Italy is particularly cited due to the anniversary of diplomatic relations and outlines plans for joint cultural events, exhibitions and policy dialogues; as well as in Korea Foundation reports that list Italy among priority partners for Korean Studies and cultural programs (KF, 2018). Kim and Marchetti (2024, pp.30-33), similarly, highlight how the commemoration was used to intensify cultural and diplomatic exchanges between the two countries.

A new player in Seoul plans is Africa, with a growing interest led by its natural resources and large market potential: this commitment is reflected in Korea's humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and health diplomacy initiatives (Cho, 2012, p.293).

Especially, it openly assists Ethiopia (KF, 2019, pp.39, 53), Madagascar (KF, 2019, pp.25, 39, 45), South Sudan (KF, 2019, p.23), and Kenya (KF, 2019, pp. 15, 17, 19, 23, 30, 45, 41).

Nigeria[11] is a specific focus for Official Development Assistance (ODA), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), technology transfer, and Global Korea Scholarships (Shenyoka, 2020, p.443).

Additionally, ASEAN entered South Korea's strategies in 2017 with Moon Jae-In and his "New Southern Policy". This echoed an example of the nation diversification, aspiring to elevate relations with ASEAN countries to new levels, all-embracing economic, socio-cultural, and strategic spheres. The policy meant to create a "community of people, a community of prosperity and a community of peace": respectively including increased mutual tourists, trade targets and a united response to cyber and terrorist threats.

For instance, the Korean Foundation 2020 annual report (p.55) cited

> opened in September 2017, the ASEAN Culture House... [serves as] a platform designed to allow Korea and the countries of ASEAN to interact and share common ground [...] thereby deepening Koreans' understanding of ASEAN

Latin America is also experiencing an increase in diplomatic ties and development aid; nonetheless the 2023 Master Plan proposes the need to systematize budget allocation by target region to avoid concentration and ensure balanced public diplomacy efforts.

6.5 Korean wave as a diplomatic asset

The surge of "made in Korea" goods has shaped South Korea's public diplomacy, spanning from an originally popular cultural phenomenon into a highly strategic diplomatic asset. Early 2011–2013 Korea Foundation data stressed a mainly organic rise of Korean popular culture, whose governmental policies focused on assisting and encouraging the fame of Korean music, TV dramas, and films abroad (KF, 2012). Notably,

> to heighten awareness [...] in conjunction with Hallyu, the Foundation supports the distribution of Korean TV dramas and movies (KF, 2012, p.5)

Therefore, framing the industry as an external phenomenon to be supported and not state managed.

Notwithstanding, the route improved substantially in the following years, especially after 2016, which officialized the government's role in coordinating public diplomacy efforts nationally. By 2018, policy discourse positioned Hallyu as a vital diplomatic resource and

[11] The Korean cultural centre in the Nigerian capital is one of 32 similar institutions in 27 countries presided by Korean culture and Information Service (KOCIS). Additionally, it is the only one open in sub-Saharan Africa (Kim, 2021, p.10).

economic driver for Korea (KF, 2018), as well as converting such soft power assets into measurable policies “standardization of data on public diplomacy projects” (KF, 2021, p.64). This discursive reframing not only legitimized more government investment but officially linked popular culture to the country’s broader diplomatic strategy and economic goals. Namely, the Korea Foundation’s budget more than tripled within this period, hence portraying the institutional belief in Hallyu’s transformative soft power potential and its centrality to Korea’s image internationally (KF, 2020).

The managerial language opted in the 2020 report evidence bureaucratization through the quantification of cultural data:

> […] to be utilized for international audience, Global Hallyu Status, annual survey and analysis, reports the current status of Hallyu in 109 countries including information on Hallyu fan clubs in 98 countries. The number of Hallyu fans club members reached 104,780,000 in 2020 the highest ever recorded by the survey since its inception survey (KF, 2020, p.47).

Yet the strategic appropriation of the Korean Wave is troubled by inherent tensions.

6.6 Covid-19, a digital Pivot

The impact Covid-19 had greatly changed the evolution of South Korean public diplomacy, as the country had to adapt a new method to pursue its engagement with foreign countries in a time when everything has stopped.

The pandemic accelerated the transformation into virtual cultural engagement, with most of the events being scheduled online: KOCIS, for instance, had to readapt its programs into digital ambassador plans and online occasions to promote Kpop and gaming, portraying a new prominence in digital media. The South Korean embassy in Antananarivo, Madagascar, launched a short film series "Ndao hitsidika an’i Korea" (Let’s Visit Korea) on Facebook, appealing viewers during the crisis (Tahira, 2020, p.285). This evolution was central for keeping international attraction when travels and gatherings were prohibited.

Similarly, Seoul’s effective response to the pandemic was getting praised abroad thanks to the “K-quarantine model”, which became an important public diplomacy tool.

This ideal consisted of the 3T approach (testing- verification, tracking-epidemiology and treatment/ quarantine) paired with the ability to use smart city infrastructure (Schwak, 2021, pp.203-205, 209). Through this stereotype and the comparable TRUST Campaign (MOFA, 2020), the South Korean government aimed to strengthen its status as a pioneer nation

upholding the global order of cooperation and simultaneously prioritizing human life and safety.
Therefore, COVID-19 promoted health diplomacy to a key soft power tool, allowing the country to enhance international relations and elevate its image globally. Besides, Korea planned to influence a positive image and represent an honest intermediary nation, by supplying quarantine medical kits to the US, Indonesia and sharing its experience via webinars.
Such quick adaptations and objectives had been listed and incorporated into MOFA White Papers and similar strategic plans: the “Post COVID-19 Public Diplomacy Policy” (MOFA, 2020) showcased interactive digital public diplomacy by portraying how crisis may allow for accelerated bureaucratic institutionalization of new diplomatic programs.

Despite these evidenced contrasts in the documents, South Korea’s core mission had never distanced from the promotion of a deeper understanding of its traditions and cultures, fostering friendships and paving the path for international cooperation. Mottos like “Connecting People, Bridging the world” for the Korea Foundation, “Global Korea” in MOFA’s public diplomacy materials, and later “Global Pivotal State” in the second Master Plan (2023-2027) have been a constant in the country’s public diplomacy.
Similarly consistent is the aid for Korean Studies and Korean language courses at universities overseas, together with the economic assistance for faculty, visiting professors, e-School programs, fellowships (graduate, postdoctoral, field research) and language training for diplomats and non-Koreans.
The Korea Foundation has put efforts into planning festivals, performances, exhibitions and film screening to introduce foreigners to “made in Korea” products. Furthermore, it has organized bilateral and multilateral forum and supports policy-oriented research to engage global opinion leaders and foster intellectual networks.
Journals like “Koreana” published in several languages, allow insights into the country’s arts and current affairs.

6.7 Presidential eras

As already revealed earlier, governments play a central role in administrating the country’s public diplomacy.

This following administrative analysis stems from the frameworks of discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008, pp.303,306) and rhetorical public diplomacy (Mor, 2007, pp.661-662), assessing how language, planning, and institutional practice co-produce legitimacy for South Korea's soft power system (Schmidt, 2008, p.310).
On this, a clear distinction between conservative and liberal executives can be drawn. These leadership align with the bureaucratic evolution of public diplomacy in South Korea, as further evinced by both Master Plans.
Such programs describe a vision of the country as a middle power leveraging cultural diplomacy through multi-sectoral programs and newly established evaluation metrics (MOFA, 2017; MOFA, 2023). This shift from an *ad hoc* cultural promotion to a formalized, multi-dimensional policy structure highlights the increasing institutionalization of public diplomacy, characterized by substantial government intervention and enhanced inter-ministerial coordination (Otmazgin, 2021, pp. 623, 631). At the same time, such developments point toward a degree of bureaucratization in soft power deployment, as the expansion of state oversight risks constraining flexibility and communication (Otmazgin, 2021, p. 638).

Given that the documents considered start from 2011, the first president to be discussed is Lee Myung-Bak, who governed from 2008 to 2013, and thus include the last two years of his presidency.
During the 2008 presidential elections the Korean governments aspired to strengthen the country's perception mainly through culture. In 2010 it institutionalized the Cultural Diplomacy Manual, officially recognizing public diplomacy as the "third pillar of the diplomatic power" (Istad, 2016, p.58) and later in 2012 launched the K-Culture Promotion Task Force (Istad, 2016, p.59).
Representing the conservative party of South Korea, during his term public diplomacy was still in its earlier stage, having been officially launched in 2010 and Hallyu had been mostly portrayed as a *burgeoning* cultural phenomenon instead of a planned branding tool (Istad, 2016, p.57). During this period, the Korea Foundation's main objective was to simply introduce foreign audiences to Korean culture through cultural and academic exchanges and from 2011 to 2013 it relied heavily from publications like *Koreana*.

The “Global Hallyu” reports (published from 2012) initially were to survey and analyze the global popularity of Korean culture, documenting its organic spread instead of explicitly directing it.

Lee’s administration additionally fostered the evolution of creative industries, whilst simultaneously promoting cultural technology (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.428); moreover, he managed the creation of a favorable business environment for a vertical growth.

The president elevated the status of the Ministry of Culture and implemented the Cultural Product Trade Division to help the internationalization of Korean movies: this new body also allowed for the domestic cultural industry to counter international deals (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.430). Lee’s direction amplified the funds to strengthen copyright protection and provide governmental support fundamental to protect domestic producers’ commercial rights (MCST, 2012; Kwon & Kim, 2014).

In 2011, Lee Myung-Bak established the Mobile Game Center, which consequently admitted many mobile game procurers, additionally prompting the convergence among the film industry and new-developed media technologies (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.432). Another achievement this presidency made possible emerged in the increase of the annual budget for cultural industries, which amounted to KRW321.9 billion[12], showcasing the political support provided to cultural industries (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.431).

Mirroring this decision was also the intention to add Korea among the five global markets, to provide for 5% of the country’s GDP, 7% of the total export revenue and to increase employment with 100,000 new job positions by 2015 (MCST, 2011; Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.431).

Therefore, his legacy regarding the cultural diplomacy has shifted from censorship (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.425) to recognizing the benefits of such industries into the South Korean’s economic evolution.

Stated censorship involved the tight control over film, music and the press, during authoritarian governments in the 1970s and 1980s (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.425).

Hence, Lee’s legacy on public diplomacy marked a clear parting from this earlier controlled model towards one that treats cultural industries as strategic assets to be supported through funding, export promotion and institutional reforms.

[12] In 2025, this amount corresponds to ~US$213,283,343.

Nonetheless, regulatory debates and content restrictions did not disappear entirely (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.424).

Under Lee's presidency the Korean Wave was classified in three stages: Hallyu 1.0 (from 1997 to mid 2000s) identifying the beginning of Korean dramas' popularity in China and Japan, Hallyu 2.0 (mid 2000s until 2010s) incorporating the growth of Korean pop music in Asia, Middle East and Latin America and lastly Hallyu 3.0, which from 2010s started including more cultural contents (Yoon & Zamorano, 2023, p.572).

Nonetheless, the Korean government attributed distortions within several cultural industries, especially since cartoons and traditional arts were not considered as fundamental as other areas and were, thus, in comparison neglected (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p.434). Lee's stress on cultural industries was evident in MCST documents (MCST, 2011), which considered Hallyu contents new growth engines for the country's creative economy.

Equally, the Korea Foundation's 2012 report framed Korean Studies and cultural events as means to foster Korea's profile and support national interests abroad (KF, 2012).

These deliveries showed how public diplomacy was originally tied to economic competitiveness and image-building before formalized evaluation.

Following Lee Myung-Bak political path, from 2013 until 2017 the government was led by Park Geun-Hye. Shortly after getting nominated, Park discussed her idea of "Creative Economy" aimed at enhancing new industries while promoting innovation: she directed KRW 33.5 billion[13] to the Ministry of Culture to promote K-culture (Istad, 2016, p.59).

In her Presidential Inauguration speech Park states:

> The convergence of science and technology with industry, the fusion of culture with industry and the blossoming of creativity [...] together define a creative economy. It is about creating new markets and new jobs by building on the bedrock of convergence (Park, 2013; Cruz, 2020, p.323).

Yoon and Zamorano (2023, p.572) argued that Park viewed Hallyu as the pillar of both national branding and soft power. Moreover, as per officially declared by the president, the main object of the administration was fostering creative industries and cultural enrichment, identifying these as two of the four primary administrative priorities (Kim & Jin, 2016, p. 5526; Istad, 2016, p. 59).

[13] In 2025 the estimated USD equivalent is 22,802,930.75.

In the occasion of the 2014 annual music festival for Korean Music in Hong Kong, the newly elected president sent a video massage (Park, 2014d):

> Having started out with Korea's K-pop, MAMA today has become cosmopolitan in its content, available to 2.4 billion people around the world. It also represents the success of the creative economy on the global top where culture has stimulated a burgeoning creative industry.

This congratulatory speech represented the ostentation of her administration and the nation's cultural industries paired with the country's influence on regional communities (Kim & Jin, 2016, p. 5515).

Apart from her campaign "visit Korea 2016-2018" offering bus tours to foreigners around the country, a major policy was Park Geun-Hye's vision of "the culture and creativity fusion belt", meant to be a social eco-system (Istad, 2016, pp.59-60). Yet, this conservative administration also focused on investing into already-established programs namely the Korean Culture and Tourism Institute (KCTI) and the KCISA (Korea Culture Information Service Agency) (Istad, 2016, p.60).

The validation of the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016 and the introduction of the First Master Plan (2017-2022) marks a non-indifferent turning point towards the Korean wave being regarded as a "planned branding tool" and a "soft power resource" (MOFA 2017; Otmazgin 2021, p.632; MOFA 2023; Howard-Spink, 2024, p.8). The Public Diplomacy Act defines public diplomacy as a responsibility of the entire government, calls for systematic strategies and regular reporting to the National Assembly (Public Diplomacy Act, 2016, Arts. 4, 13).

MOFA (2017) and similar agencies, thus, began to openly articulate their soft power aims via White Papers, annual statements, and project budgets.

As a case in point, the idea of "Charming Korea, communicating with the World" (MOFA, 2017) led efforts to take advantage of cultural assets for national prestige. The KF Annual Report 2017 continued traditional support, still, within this new formalized framework, Hallyu was seen as integral to improving the country's reputation overseas.

According to Yun (2012, p.285), considering that Park viewed Seoul as a successful front-runner in development, she promised to spread the hopeful "can-do spirit" and provide a tailored development cooperation program for the recipient, while strengthening the cooperation mechanism with other middle powers for the materialization of global values.

Covering the field of climate importance, shortly after her presidency announcement, Park disclosed how the country would oblige to reducing emissions and become a pioneer in

climate change cooperation, thus admitting that alternative energy sources must be indicated (Lee, 2016, p.107).

Succeeding Park's impeachment in 2016-2017, Korea was led by the democratic Moon Jae-In, under whom the creation of the Public Diplomacy Committee (2017) under the Public Diplomacy Act (2016) took place (Ayhan, 2017, p.16).

While Park's administration consolidated top-down initiatives through MOFA and MCST and relied more on content exports (Yoon & Zamorano, 2023, p.572), Moon's governance institutionalized inter-agency coordination via the Public Diplomacy Committee, enhancing flexibility in targeting emerging regions such as ASEAN and Europe under the New Southern Policy (Yoon & Zamorano, 2023, pp.572-573).

Moon's "2022 K-culture Promotion Plan" served as a threefold strategy: first, the audience had to enjoy the contents in their daily routines, second, Hallyu-related industries should have their economic synergy via collaboration and thirdly the Korean wave had to enhance its appeal with persistent cultural exchange (Yoon & Zamorano, 2023, p.573).

Furthermore, one of the administration's main points was the extension of society's contribution in diplomacy, the combination of cultural, intellectual, and educational diplomacy, moving beyond Hallyu's reliance and sought to connect intellectual exchange and scholarship programs (i.e., Global Korea Scholarship) to long-term soft power and Korean Studies goals (Istad, 2016, pp.58-62).

Ultimately, Moon viewed public diplomacy as a coordination among ministries (Education, Justice, Culture) to allow more foreign policy objectives (Ayhan, 2017, p.19). As mentioned, a clear aspect of industrial evolution was the integration of Public Diplomacy Committee and the First Basic Plan on Public Diplomacy: by ensuring collaboration between different ministries with non-state actors, Moon aimed for a whole-of-government approach, shifting to a functional consolidation (Ayhan, 2017, p.17).

Besides, as Ayhan (2017, pp.19-20) specified, what South Korea needed was to employ incorporation of intellectual and educational diplomacy as long-term soft power investments, thus portraying Moon presidency prone to a dialogue-based public diplomacy.

The government's participation was additionally showcased in the inclusion of civic voices in public diplomacy design under Moon Jae-In. Consequently, it symbolized a shift into a

bottom-up legitimacy and broadens ownership of South Korea's international image (Ayhan, 2017, p.23).

The president actively participated in the country's diplomacy.

In the occasion of 2017 UN General Assembly, Moon Jae-in linked this vision to peace and prosperity on the peninsula through dialogue and PyeongChang Olympics invitation (Moon, 2018).

Two years later in 2019, Moon's presentation of Three Strategies for Innovative Content Industry delivered a concise explanation of how his administration assumed the correlation among economy, Hallyu and Korea's global standing (Moon, 2019).

He opened with "the content we create makes the world happier" and stressed that during his appointments abroad he encountered young people consuming Korean songs, webtoons, dramas and films (Moon, 2019). Moon further stated that exports of Hallyu related consumer goods and tourism had surpassed US$5 billion supporting that, with this power of content added to industrialization and democratization "the pride of the Republic of Korea has grown even greater" (Moon, 2019):

> Fellow Koreans,
>
> The content we create makes the world happier.
>
> The topic of K-pop and K-dramas invariably surface when I meet with foreign leaders. In each and every country I've visited, I encountered young people who sing Korean songs and enjoy Korean webtoons, characters, dramas and movies. […] Also, exports of consumer goods and tourism connected to Hallyu content surpassed US$5 billion. Hallyu-linked food, cosmetics, automobiles, mobile phones and appliances have become appealing as well, finding their way into the everyday lives of people around the world.
>
> Last year, more than 1.4 million Hallyu fans visited Korea to attend e-sports competitions or to see for themselves the hometowns of K-pop celebrities. Even a "culture without borders" community has appeared, revolving around Hallyu" […] The content industry has become a crucial industry for reviving the Korean economy, far beyond the scope of culture.
> Fellow citizens,
> Korea could become a content powerhouse rising from cultural underdevelopment thanks to efforts made by countless creators who took on challenges with ingenuity, innovative technology and entrepreneurship. […] With the power of content and culture being added to our country's industrialization and democratization, the pride of the Republic of Korea has grown even greater. Content will help further enrich our lives and become a crucial future income source. We have time-honoured cultural heritage and many ambitious young people, and Koreans are also well known for mirth, talent, and creativity.
> I hope you all dream and heartily take on challenges. The content that we imagine and

> create together will lead the world. Let's start right here to establish the world's leading content powerhouse.
>
> The Government will open the door to opportunities.
> Thank you.

This remark illustrated how the president directly framed cultural industries as both an economic growth engine and a source of national prestige, linking their exports to soft power and to South Korea's identity as a successful democracy. Besides, the speech confirms the pattern in policy documents of viewing Hallyu as a strategic asset, whose benefits reach beyond the cultural sector into trade, tourism and diplomacy.

In 2021, the president appointed recognition of the global sensation BTS as "Special Presidential Envoys for Future Generations and Culture" to attend the 76th UN General Assembly, where they gave a joint speech and performed (Kim, 2021). Such decision came as Moon expressed how the group had "raised the dignity of the Republic of Korea" and frequently addressed them in other diplomatic conversations to humanize policy discussions with world leaders (Kim, 2021). These choices strengthen the evolution toward participatory, dialogue-based public diplomacy through globally recognizable cultural figures within a state-managed framework. In this way, artists were transforming into instruments of national branding.

The USC's Center on Public Diplomacy (Nguyen, 2021) described the move as a gamechanger in Korea's public diplomacy discourse, evolving from state-driven communication to networked, transnational engagement built around shared global values like youth, inclusivity, and sustainability (Nguyen, 2021).

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea managed to set a model of its pandemic transparency and tech-driven governance, setting the blueprint for the Asian soft power during those years and establishing Korea as a pioneer during a Western democracies' legitimacy crisis (Shay, 2020).

Such new "health diplomacy" became a following of South Korea's soft power, with Moon officially stating that the recent diplomacy became a diplomatic asset (Yonhap, 2020).

All things considered, Moon Jae-In's diplomacy may be framed as part of a "restorative phase of soft power" following the 2016–2017 corruption crisis (Ayhan, 2017, pp.13–14) with Park's impeachment's global opinion, as a peaceful civic protest, opened a reputational rebound via democratic legitimacy and renewed civil participation (Ayhan, 2017, pp.22-23).

With the inauguration of President Yoon Suk-Yeol in May 2022, South Korea entered a new phase of public diplomacy with the newly elected president aimed to regard the country as a global pivotal stage (Yeo, 2023, “Executive summary” section).

Yet, it was not a new concept due to its remnants of former president Lee Myung-Bak’s “Global Korea” (Yeo, 2023, “Executive summary” section).

Nonetheless, an innovative idea was Yoon’s focus on value-based diplomacy, portraying a leader for international community and designated the Cultural Ministry top agenda’s spreading Hallyu products globally (MCTS, 2022b; Yoon & Zamorano, 2023, p.573). The *vision* section (p.8) of the original Korean version of the 2023 Master Plan affirmed

> the Republic of Korea, a Global Pivotal State Contributing to Global Freedom, Peace, and Prosperity […] promoting public diplomacy to establish Korea's status as a global pivotal state that fulfils its responsibilities and roles in the post-COVID-19 era (p.7).

As a matter of fact, in his inaugural speech and in September 2022 at the National General Assembly, Yoon mentioned “freedom” almost thirty and eighteen times (Yeo, 2023, “Deepening values-based diplomacy” section).

Yoon’s project of Global Pivotal Stage consisted into enhancing cooperation with the United States, strengthening trilateral ties among Washington, Seoul and Tokyo while opting for a harsher stance for China (Nilsson-Wright, 2023, para.1). To add, in 2022, he officialized the “Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region”, marking Korea’s goal in future-oriented partnerships based on regional and international inclusivity.

The three main pillars of the administration’s foreign policy were inclusivity, reciprocity and trust (Nilsson-Wright, 2023, para.3). This agreement expressed that the Yoon administration would “work with every partner that is aligned with our vision and principles of co-operation.” (Yoon, 2022, p.11; Nilsson-Wright, 2023, para.3).

Yoon, thus, had shifted the focus of the country’s public diplomacy from the “made in Korea” goods into a strategical partnership diplomacy.

On this, the 2023 Public Diplomacy Master Plan emphasized “freedom alliance networks” and collaborations with countries that share democratic values, openly aligning public diplomacy with the Global Pivotal State vision (MOFA, 2023).

In addition, his administration had designated “disseminating Hallyu’s goods worldwide” as the Ministry of Culture’s main agenda (MCST, 2022b) and four core points were highlighted (MCST, 2022b):

- Establishing Hallyu's content infrastructures
- Investing into core content sectors
- International stress and dissemination of the Korean Wave's appeal
- New diverse Hallyu markets

Under his administration South Korea also got more active in promoting human values on the international level. For instance, Seoul joined other nations into the U.N. Human Rights Council supporting a discussion regarding People's Republic of China hostilities against the Uyghur population in Xinjiang (Yeo, 2023, "Deepening values-based diplomacy" section). Similarly to his predecessors, Yoon has proudly addressed South Korea's achievement as one of the few countries to transition from an aid-recipient to an aid-giving development partner (Yeo, 2023, "Boosting global public goods" section).

At the U.N. General Assembly meeting back in October 2022, the president announced his objective to raise South Korea's ODA budget in 2024 by 43% to US$5.2 billion (Yeo, 2023, "Boosting global public goods" section).

Regardless, according to Akhand (2023), the Yoon administration had to guarantee the transparency of the line between soft power and propaganda. The former is perceived as a legitimate way of attracting and persuading foreign audiences on a government's foreign policy objectives, on the other hand the latter lacks legitimacy as it is based on coercion and one-way massaging.

6.7.1 Comparative conclusive overview

Through all four presidencies, South Korea's public diplomacy has followed an unbroken path of institutional and state-led solidification with Master Plans, committees and budgetary mechanisms. Yet, each administration has adopted its own distinctive rhetoric and policy emphases.

Continuity is an evident element in the use of the Korean Wave as a diplomatic tool and in the ongoing bureaucratization of soft power through the different parties MOFA, the Korea Foundation, and MCST (MOFA 2017; Otmazgin 2021, pp. 621, 631-633, 637; MOFA 2023).

All administrations upheld the premise that culture, reputation, and communication were central instruments of statecraft, progressively embedding them into the legal and

institutional structure after the enactment of the Public Diplomacy Act of 2016 and Master Plans.

Furthermore, divergence largely stemmed from political philosophy: the conservative administrations viewed Hallyu for the country's economic leverage, image branding, and alliance-based foreign policy. Lee stressed export-driven "creative industries" and linking culture to trade (Kwon & Kim, 2014, pp.428-430), Park elevated this into a national "creative-economy" system, positioning Korean culture as a branding platform for development cooperation (Park 2014d; Istad 2016, p.59) and Yoon projected soft power toward "values diplomacy" within the Global Pivotal state framework (MOFA 2023; Yeo, 2023, "Deepening values-based diplomacy" section).

In comparison, the liberal Moon portrayed public diplomacy through discursive institutionalism and participatory inclusivity, combining education, culture, and social dialogue under the Public Diplomacy Committee (Yoon & Zamorano, 2023, p.573). His New Southern Policy and inter-ministerial coordination introduced bottom-up legitimacy and inter-agency cooperation that distinguished his government's approach (Yoon & Zamorano, 2023, p.573).

Crises also influenced each era's strategy as seen in the Park's impeachment, which set the ground for a reputational challenge, though at the same time it reaffirmed South Korea's democratic legitimacy and renewed civic participation in diplomacy (Ayhan, 2017, pp.13-14, 22-23).

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic, stimulated an unprecedented transformation toward digital and health diplomacy, exposing Seoul's model of pandemic transparency and technological coordination (Yonhap, 2020). Both circumstances highlighted institutional adaptability as they demonstrated how bureaucratic arrangements were used to innovate new diplomatic paths and expand South Korea's global credibility.

Taken together, these advances testimony how public diplomacy has become an institutionalized element of the country's foreign policy as a middle power, rooted in laws, long-term plans, dedicated agencies and regular budget lines.

Hence, over the past decade, public diplomacy has evolved from *ad hoc* cultural promotion into a layered governance system integrating rhetoric, planning, and policy formulation. Consequently, regardless of their ideology, administrations have translated soft power from a

cultural by product into a strategic national asset. This progression confidently situates South Korea within the global community of nations that analytically deal attraction, legitimacy, and branding as essential dimensions of diplomacy (Cevik & Padilha 2024, pp.4, 9; Howard-Spink 2024, p.8).

To conclude, the summarizing table below facilitates the understanding on how central dimensions of South Korea's public diplomacy evolved across the four administrations.

Table 6.2. South Korea's public diplomacy across the four administrations

Aspect	*Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013)*	*Park Geun-hye (2013–2017)*	*Moon Jae-in (2017–2022)*	*Yoon Suk-yeol (2022–2025)*
Overall approach	Builds basic public diplomacy structures, links culture and creative industries to export-led growth and "Global Korea" messaging.	Consolidates public diplomacy through the Public Diplomacy Act and the first Master Plan; embeds PD in the "creative economy" agenda.	Emphasises participatory, dialogue-based public diplomacy and whole-of-government coordination via the Public Diplomacy Committee.	Frames public diplomacy within the "Global Pivotal State" vision and value-based diplomacy centred on freedom and alliances.
Use of Hallyu/ culture	Recognises Hallyu as an emerging asset and supports initial promotion of K-dramas, K-pop and games abroad.	Treats Hallyu as a pillar of national branding and soft power, scales up K-culture festivals and content promotion, especially in Asia.	Integrates Hallyu with education, youth and global agendas (i.e., BTS as Special Presidential Envoys and K-culture Promotion Plan).	Uses Hallyu and K-content as strategic tools within Indo-Pacific and values driven partnerships, linked to democracy and human rights.
Institutionalisation	Raises the profile of MCST and KF; issues early manuals and policies on cultural diplomacy as a "third pillar" of diplomacy.	Enacts the Public Diplomacy Act and adopts the first Master Plan, creating a legal and planning framework for public diplomacy.	Activates and uses the Public Diplomacy Committee, deepens inter-ministerial coordination and multi-sectoral PD programmes.	Updates the Master Plan, stresses evaluation, digital innovation, alliance networks and PD budget expansion as part of GPS strategy.

Strategic focus/ regions	Focuses on traditional partners like the US and Japan, while beginning an outreach to broader regions.	Expands attention to ASEAN and development cooperation partners; promotes Korea as a model for "creative economy" and development.	Pursues the New Southern Policy, prioritising ASEAN, develops health and science diplomacy during COVID-19.	Articulates an Indo-Pacific strategy, strengthens ties with the US and Japan and adopts a firmer stance toward China.
Youth & public engagement	Launches or supports some youth exchanges and next-generation leader programmes linked to Hallyu and Korean Studies.	Scales up youth-oriented Hallyu events and cultural festivals, targets younger foreign audiences.	Expands youth exchanges, policy workshops and civic participation, emphasises "citizens' diplomacy" and societal contribution.	Continues youth and leadership engagement, framing young people and citizens as partners in advancing "freedom" and shared values.
Media & communication style	Promotes K-drama, film and games as export industries and symbols of modern Korea.	Highlights K-pop mega-events and global media coverage as proof of Korea's attractiveness.	Uses digital platforms and social media extensively, relies on online public diplomacy during the pandemic.	Emphasises values-heavy rhetoric ("freedom") and combines traditional media with digital and public diplomacy campaigns.

6.8 Focus on COVID-19

As mentioned earlier in my analysis, due to the Covid pandemic in from 2019 to 2022, institutions like the Korea Foundation and similar organizations had to adapt to the new online guidelines and virtual meetings.

As this situation lasted for multiple years and reshaped the way organizations work, I will list what I believe are the main changes that took place at that time, always based on the KF reports from 2011-2023.

First, the obvious adjustment was the shift from offline to online contents.

As gatherings were prohibited during COVID-19, most of the in-person formats became online programs, including public diplomacy seminars, next-generation leader forums, youth exchange programs, and high-level bilateral and multilateral dialogues. These were replaced by webinars allowing for a continuous knowledge exchange and wider global participation (KF, 2020). To follow this line of work, the Foundation organized the "KF virtual dialogue series: Indonesia" in 2020, a strategic platform to set a public diplomacy agenda and promote cooperation despite pandemic constraints (KF, 2020, p.32).

Secondly, they expanded digital cultural and interactive contents, with digital exhibitions like "The Essence of Aesthetics-Ancient and Modern Buncheong-sagi", along with different versions of cultural classes (i.e. ASEAN Culture House Cooking Class) and similar festivals to sustain international interest (i.e. "Korea Festival at Home: Shaping the Future Together") (KF, 2020, pp. 43, 55-57). The organization also implemented videos and podcasts to reach audience from abroad remotely while portraying the promotion of K-culture (KF, 2021).

Additionally, throughout the pandemic, there had been constant support for Korean Studies via E-learning, which allowed for the KF to quickly improve its Global e-School platform, proposing Korean language and Korean Studies courses online, alleviating the impact of canceled visits and physical classes (KF, 2020, p.11). The Next Generation Policy Experts Network and Global Challengers programs regularly organized virtual meetings ensuring constant leadership development and network building (KF, 2021, p.41). Workshops for non-Korean lecturers were also carried out virtually (KF, 2020, p.26).

One more characteristic improved due to the pandemic was the renowned South Korean health security and humanitarian public diplomacy, which, regarding the KF, meant undertaking specific pandemic-related goodwill measures like supplying COVID-19 Survival Kits to former U.S Peace Corps volunteers associated with Korea, drawing positive media attention (KF, 2020, p.29).

Lastly, in 2021 with gradual reopening, the Foundation resumed some in-person events, yet following strict pandemic measures, complemented by virtual participation to ensure inclusivity and safety (KF, 2021): the 4th Public Diplomacy Week combined on-site exhibitions with online discussions (KF, 2021, p.62).

Therefore, the Korea Foundation revealed resilience and innovative adaptation in South Korea's public diplomacy amidst COVID-19 by leveraging digital technologies, creating virtual cultural content and supporting academic teamwork via e-learning. These efforts not only

preserved the country's public diplomacy presence during the pandemic, but also extended digital diplomacy capacities, which still shape Korea's engagement in the post-pandemic era (KF, 2020; KF, 2021).

Nonetheless, despite strategic advances, Korea's public diplomacy faced complex implementation challenges: mutual collaboration among several government bodies, society actors, and private sector individuals called for constant discussion and adaptation. Monetary fluctuations for budgets sometimes restrained programming; likewise, evaluation mechanisms differed in refinement and enforcement. Geopolitical fluctuations and domestic political changes necessitated agile policy responses and institutional flexibility.

The Korea Foundation's experience proved a growing governance culture pairing bureaucratic structure with the fluidity required for cultural diplomacy. Recognizing such operational dynamics is fundamental for a comprehensive review of South Korea's public diplomacy effectiveness and prospects.

Although the policy documents reveal a qualitative shift toward the strategic management of Hallyu, the following chapter provides the quantitative data from the Korea Foundation to illustrate how this discourse transformed into measurable programmatic growth.

7 Programmatic growth and quantitative validation of the bureaucratic shift

In this chapter I will provide a more detailed quantitative analysis of South Korea's public diplomacy initiatives carried out by the Korea Foundation (KF) between 2011 and 2023, specifically addressing they key differences and similarities drawing on the official KF annual reports and the implications of the diversified governments.

The section mainly observes invited distinguished individuals visiting Korea, next-generation leaders, youth exchange participants, and support for Korean Studies universities and courses. The data is analyzed to identify key trends, similarities and differences offering explanations for observed patterns in the framework of evolving public diplomacy strategies.

7.1 Korea Foundation Quantitative Trends

Tackling RQ2 on strategic priorities, RQ3 over Hallyu framing, and RQ4 addressing language and regional shifts, KF annual reports expose bureaucratization through quantified investments turning cultural attraction into institutional strategy (Schmidt, 2008).

Testified in KF documents (KF, 2012, p.9)

> the KF Global e-School has since increased the number of course subjects [...] and assisted consortium groups to launch full-scale regional operations […]

Key trends representing dramatic growth in academic diplomacy include Korean Studies support growing from 107 courses in 2011 to 1,374 in 2023 (KF, 2011–2023) and frame Hallyu as a diplomatic asset for longstanding networks (KF, 2018).

The growth in scale is addressed from the 2016 Public Diplomacy Act Art.4 as

> […] the State shall formulate and implement policies for public diplomacy for the purpose of improving the Republic of Korea's image and prestige in the international community.

Furthermore, records link the increase to operation expansion, i.e.

> […] assisted consortium groups to launch full-scale regional operations (KF, 2012, p.11)

> […] expanded to include schools and centres outside of the Seoul metropolitan area (KF, 2015, p.45)

> […] systematic support to international students and scholars" (KF, 2023, p.12)

Data provided from budgets and programs from the KF and KOFICE revealed steady regional imbalances within South Korea's public diplomacy stance. This proved being truthful since Northern and Western European countries, especially Germany and France, receive the share of funding and programming, contrasting with Southern Europe, which remains comparatively underfunded (KF, 2022; KOFICE Annual Report, 2023).

These continental inconsistencies indicate structural trials in reconciling broad diplomatic ambitions with practical resource constraints and varying levels of audience receptivity (Otmazgin, 2021, pp.622, 629-630).

This section complements Ch. 6's patterns with Korea Foundation trends such as budgets, participants and region. However, it sheds more light on program trends, e-School expansion, funding imbalances, COVID impacts and supported universities[14] and countries recipients. Hence, 6.1 aims at presenting quantitative institutionalization through Korea Foundation trends.

Invited Distinguished Individuals Visiting Korea

- 2011: 83 distinguished individuals from 46 countries
- 2012: 106 distinguished individuals from 57 countries
- 2013: 106 distinguished individuals from 61 countries
- 2014: 150 distinguished individuals from 63 countries
- 2015: 165 distinguished individuals from 66 countries
- 2016: 104 distinguished individuals
- 2017: 92 distinguished individuals
- 2018: 120 distinguished individuals
- 2019: Not precisely given, yet ~128 guests
- 2020: 7 guests, due to COVID-19
- 2021: 19 distinguished individuals, due to COVID-19
- 2022: 81 guests
- 2023: back to pre-covid numbers with 125 distinguished individuals

The decrease following 2016 aligns with Chapter 4.2's post-Act bureaucratic shift (a more "mandated" reporting).

[14] including those with professorships or Korean language courses

Next-Generation Leaders Invited to Korea

- 2011: 245 next-generation leaders from 60 countries
- 2012: 216 next-generation leaders from 47 countries
- 2013: 133 next-generation leaders from 26 countries
- 2014: 188 next-generation leaders from 33 countries
- 2015: 576 next-generation leaders
- 2016: 413 next-generation leaders
- 2017: 133 next-generation leaders
- 2018: 137 next-generation leaders
- 2019: 114 next-generation leaders
- 2020: 11 by online invitation titled “U.S Congressional Staff”
- 2021: 137 next-generation leaders
- 2022: 26 next-generation leaders
- 2023: 43 next-generation leaders

Youth Exchange Participants

- 2011: 622 youths across Korea-U.S., Korea-Japan, Korea-China networks
- 2012: 613 youths across similar youth networks
- 2013: 93 U.S. youth + 30 Japan + 198 China + 18 Senegal + others (approx. 339)
- 2014: 437 total youth exchange program participants (detailed for China, Japan, Vietnam, Senegal, Caribbean)
- 2015: no statistics
- 2016: no data provided, though the report stressed the focus for Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese individuals
- 2017: 100 youth participants
- 2018: 220 youths
- 2019: 587 youth participants
- 2020: 59, youth participants online
- 2021: 175 youth participants
- 2022: 199 youth participants
- 2023: 112 youth participants, 99 individuals from Asia and 13 from Oceania

Table 7.1. Korea Foundation invitation, youth and academic programs, 2011–2023 (compiled from KF Annual Reports).

Year	*Invited distinguished individuals (no. of guests)*	*Next-generation leaders (no. of participants)*	*Youth exchange participants (approx. no.)*
2011	83 (46 countries)	245 (60 countries)	622
2012	106 (57 countries)	216 (47 countries)	613
2013	106 (61 countries)	133 (26 countries)	≈339 (93 US, 30 Japan, 198 China, 18 Senegal, others)
2014	150 (63 countries)	188 (33 countries)	437
2015	165 (66 countries)	576	n/a (no statistics reported)
2016	104	413	n/a (no aggregate number, but focus noted on China, Japan, Vietnam)
2017	92	133	100
2018	120	137	220
2019	≈128	114	587
2020	7 (COVID-19)	11 (online "U.S. Congressional Staff")	59 (online)
2021	19 (COVID-19)	137	175
2022	81	26	199
2023	125	43	112 (99 from Asia, 13 from Oceania)

Supported Korean Studies Courses and Universities

- 2011: 107 courses at 71 universities in 12 countries
- 2012: 113 courses at 76 universities in 12 countries
- 2013: 115 courses at 78 universities in 12 countries
- 2014: 608 courses in 59 countries
- 2015: 615 courses at148 universities in 61 countries
- 2016: 768 courses at 167 universities in 63 countries
- 2017: 843 courses at 168 universities in 75 countries
- 2018: 856 courses at 177 universities in 66 countries
- 2019: 875 courses at 185 universities in 69 countries
- 2020: 950 courses at 206 universities in 71 countries
- 2021: 1250 courses at 264 universities in 69 countries
- 2022: 1373 courses at 239 universities in 73 countries

- 2023: 1374 courses at 239 universities in 73 countries

KF Global e-School

- 2011: 19 universities in 12 countries: 7 countries in Asia, 2 in Latin America, 1 in Eastern Europe, 1 in North America and 1 in the Middle East
- 2012: 59 universities in 25 countries: 13 in Asia, 8 in Europe, 2 in Latin America, 1in North America and 1 in the Middle East
- 2013: 71 universities in 26 countries
- 2014: 89 universities in 28 countries
- 2015: 88 universities in 30 countries
- 2016: 103 universities in 34 countries
- 2017: 83 universities in 26 countries
- 2018: 89 universities in 29 countries
- 2019: 98 universities in 29 countries
- 2020: 114 universities in 40 countries
- 2021: 154 universities in 45 countries
- 2022: 167 universities in 45 countries
- 2023: 165 universities in 43 countries.

The expansion to 43 countries by 2023 reflects Ch. 4.3's regional diversification in ASEAN and Africa.

Table 7.2. Korea Foundation Korean Studies Courses, Universities, Countries, e-school universities, e-school countries 2011–2023 (compiled from KF Annual Reports).

Year	*Korean Studies courses*	*Universities (Korean Studies support)*	*Countries (Korean Studies support)*	*KF Global e-School universities*	*KF Global e-School countries*
2011	107 courses	71	12	19	12
2012	113 courses	76	12	59	25
2013	115 courses	78	12	71	26
2014	608 courses	–	59	89	28
2015	615 courses	148	61	88	30
2016	768 courses	167	63	103	34
2017	843 courses	168	75	83	26
2018	856 courses	177	66	89	29

2019	875 courses	185	69	98	29
2020	950 courses	206	71	114	40
2021	1250 courses	264	69	154	45
2022	1373 courses	239	73	167	45
2023	1374 courses	239	73	165	43

Before studying the data, it must be addressed the change in reporting layout after 2016. Starting with the following annual reports, the documentation for the main invitation programs typically included firstly the group and numbers with the focus on the “KF Invitation Program for Distinguished Guests” categorized by theme or region (i.e., Culture, Media, Political Affairs, U.S. Congressional Staff Delegation) and listed the period and number of guests.

Yet, the reports generally do not provide individual names and countries of origin within the larger categories; pattern that kept being kept in subsequent years. For instance, the 2022 “Invitation Program for Distinguished Figures” (p.31) lists nonspecific titles such as “Invitation of Distinguished Figures from Central and South America”, “Invitation of Distinguished Figures in Media” or “Invitation of the U.S. State Attorneys General delegation”, along with the date and the total number of guests, however no specific names or country lists for these group visits.
Similarly, the 2023 report adheres to such format.
Furthermore, the reporting for the Next Generation Leaders Program mentions the region, the title of the delegation, the period, and the total number of participants (KF, 2022, p.31).

In comparison with pre-2016 reporting, certain high-level lectures or exchange programs often offered greater detail, which is less consistently seen in the detailed tables in later years. In the 2015 “KF International Exchange Lecture Series” (p.45) the table considered the date, topic, and the specific speaker along with their professional affiliation (i.e. Park Heung-soon, Professor, Sun Moon University). Even in the later period, if the invitation involves a very high-profile delegation, specific identification may still be noted, as demonstrated by the 2019 report.

This addressed the “Invitation of Rahul Gandhi, former President, Indian National Congress” (5 guests) and the “Invitation of the Chairman of the National Assembly, Nepal” (3 guests) (KF, 2019, p.27).

The evolution studied post-2016 portrays a focus on programmatic scale and thematic categorization of invitees, as opposed to comprehensive disclosure of individual names and countries for generalized guest invitations. This hints that the Korea Foundation gradually formulates these programs as factors of larger and thematically organized public diplomacy strategies. At the same time, it regards individual guests less as stand-alone symbolic figures but better as participants in targeted regional or sectoral initiatives.
Moreover, it could reveal growing bureaucratic standardization and privacy or efficiency considerations in reporting, prioritizing aggregate numbers and categories compared to biographical information. It could be speculated that such changes are the tangible proof of the Public Diplomacy Act, as it called for more organizational operations.
Nonetheless, the data does not address this change in reporting.

Specifically, the 2020 and 2021 KF annual report emphasized a major pivot to virtual engagement, remote networking, and online seminars replacing physical invitations of international guests and opinion-makers. On this, there is clear mention that such typical invitation of foreign personalities and groups to South Korea, earlier central to their networking, was restricted or replaced by offline formats.
This shift matches with broader bureaucratic shifts marked by the enactment of the 2016 Public Diplomacy Act, structuring reporting and public diplomacy programs across government and affiliated agencies.
Nevertheless, the KF yearly reports after 2016 simply refer to “distinguished guests”, “leaders from abroad” or “figures in seven fields” without providing country-by-country lists or totals. While the reporting style changed, the documents do not comment on or explain the omission or the logic behind this modification.
Korean Studies scholarly layout represents an essential route through which Seoul establishes its public diplomacy achievements, implanting Korean cultural narratives and knowledge within global academic networks.

The Korea Foundation's annual reports display a remarkable quantitative growth: professorships supported across universities rose from 107 in 71 universities bridging 12 countries in 2011, to 119 professorships at 79 universities in 13 countries in 2015 (KF, 2011, p.6; KF, 2015, p.10). Moreover, the steep increase in Korean Studies and its related courses from approximately 107 courses in 12 countries to roughly 768 courses in 63 nations between 2011 and 2016 mirrors a precise strategic push to transform South Korea's public diplomacy infrastructure into sustainable scholarly engagement (KF, 2016, p.3).
However, this evolution is not simply a matter of quantity but also of method and reach.
The Korea Foundation's original Global e-School initiative embodies the shift from traditional in-person academic diplomacy to digitally supported and internationally accessible education platforms. Its e-School, that grew from engaging 19 academies in 12 countries in 2011 to partnering with 165 in 47 countries by 2023, reveals the country's pragmatic adaptation to globalized education developments and digital diplomacy necessities (KF, 2023, p.24). Like this, Korean language and cultural learning surpass mere geographic and political limitations, showcasing innovation and scalability in South Korea's public diplomacy planning.

Regardless, Korean Studies' institutional growth fosters critical considerations on the correlation between diplomatic objectives and academic autonomy: relying on discursive institutionalism, Schmidt (2008, p.314) debates that policy discourse reflects, while actively constructing, institutional realities. On this matter, Seoul's public diplomacy governmental documents paint Korean Studies as a cultural outreach's tool aimed to enhance favorable perceptions and mutual ties.
Concurrently, such state-centered framing allows for worries about a hypothetical instrumentalization of scholarship for geopolitical objectives.
This dynamic is criticized by Kim and Jin (2016, pp. 5530–5531) stressing the threat of coordinated public diplomacy efforts restricting the spontaneity and freedom traditionally valued in academic exchange.
The Korea Foundation's yearly reports skillfully navigate this ideological tension through nouns stressing "global cooperation", "cultural exchange" and "future-oriented public diplomacy activities" in program explanations (KF, 2020, p.10). This highlights reciprocity and collaborative attitude as precautions against academic instrumentalism critiques.

Still, budget fluctuations and administrative challenges, as cooperation among ministries and sustaining international teamwork amid political changes, portray constant governance challenges that might influence program progression and scholarly participation.
To summarize, Korean Studies groundwork represents a long-term investment in both the cultural and intellectual grounds of South Korea's public diplomacy: its rapid expansion, paired with newly implemented digital platforms, boosts Korea's global cultural presence. This evolution calls for constant debate on the subtle balance between state objectives and the preservation of academic freedom and authenticity. Indeed, a dichotomy necessary for empirical evaluation and theoretical understanding of the nation's soft power projection.

Grounded in this data, four main characteristics arise, which link the programs together, whilst important differences are still visible across time and program type.
On the one hand, all indicators show persistent investment in invitation schemes, youth exchanges and academic support; while on the other, there are evident variations around 2015–2017 and sharp declines during COVID-19. Similarly, there is uneven growth across categories (i.e., Korean Studies courses develop far more steadily than youth exchanges). There is also a strong accent on youth exchanges and next-generation leadership programs across all years along with public diplomacy advancing through forums, cultural programs, and Korean studies academic support. Lastly, a broad global reach expanding annually is evident, including newer countries and regions engaged.
On the other hand, several positive distinctions are characterized by the clear increase in number of distinguished individuals invited, going to 150 individuals compared to 106 in the earlier years; likewise, Korean related courses and professorships expanded continuously, with a significant surge in course offerings by 2014. Additionally, we can point out a slight variation in the number of states represented in diplomatic visits and support, rocketing for Korean studies and cultural programs. Youth Exchange applicants, though decreasing in 2013, slightly stabilized in the following year thanks to the broadening of regional focus.
To conclude, a similar situation occurred in 2013 with the decline in Next-Generation leaders invited, though recovered in 2014.
Such increase in numbers across Korea Foundation's yearly reports in public diplomacy indicators can be discussed and understood mostly by the following correlated features: the institutionalization and bureaucratization of public diplomacy, the rise and strategic use of

the Korean wave, evolution of strategic priorities and regional focus, and political and global contexts.

7.1.1 The institutionalization and bureaucratization of soft power

Starting from 2010s, South Korea's government changed from a reactive cultural export mode, confirmed with "fostering friendships throughout the world" (KF, 2011, p.3) and "serve as a bridge between Korea and the international community" (KF, 2012, P.3), to a bureaucratically managed soft power. On such matter, from 2015 documents reported "concerted efforts to advance Korea's interests" (KF, 2015, p.31).

In this framework, the Public Diplomacy Act of 2016 legally embedded and formalized the responsibilities and coordination of agencies like MOFA and Korea Foundation.
The latter considered itself as "striving to promote friendship between Korea and the world's countries [...] through Open Global Communication" (KF, 2013, p.32), reflecting an early focus on general relationship building. Moreover, the two Master Plans allowed for a structured, long-term strategic vision for expanding and professionalizing Seoul's public diplomacy efforts with strong targets, cross-ministerial coordination, and outcome measurement.
Likewise, the administration budgets for public diplomacy increased extensively, shifting from US$6M in 2011 (viewing Hallyu mainly as a cultural phenomenon to be "promoted" externally) to US$20M by 2018[15], facilitating increased programming, events, cultural exports, and academic support.
This growth is justified in the 2019 KF report (p.11), expressing the bureaucratic turn

> as the only official Korean public diplomacy organization designated by the Public Diplomacy Act, the KF also made efforts to further promote public diplomacy activities with the participation of the Korean people.

Thus, Hallyu's evolution to a diplomatic asset and engine of national development in policy discourse aligns with these budgetary changes.

[15] For a detailed graph for the growth of public diplomacy's budget see Appendix 2.

In the years, this Korean trend has officially been included in national strategic priorities, referencing to it as a core asset driving Korea's global presence and economic development increase in policymaking literature.

The budgetary increase backs more frequent and structured cultural programs, together with the introduction of vigorous evaluation and coordination mechanisms mandated by the 2016 Public Diplomacy Act.

8 Discussion

8.1 Interpretation, implication, challenges

Here, I discuss the main empirical findings in relation to the first three sub-questions, addressing the institutional evolution (RQ1), the role of presidential administrations (RQ2) and the use of Hallyu as a diplomatic asset (RQ3).
The quantitative data presented in previous chapters offers an important empirical foundation to further grasp the growth and diversification of South Korea's public diplomacy efforts. However, to understand the significance of these developments, it is crucial to get over the presented numbers and analyze the core drivers, meanings, and dilemmas affecting the country's soft power trajectory.
Therefore, I provide an interpretative analysis discussing why and how the studied trends occurred, the broader implications of South Korea's strategic diplomacy, together with the trials this evolving industry faces.

8.1.1 Why and how the growth occurred

At the center of South Korea's public diplomacy evolution situates the deliberate institutionalization of soft power strategy.
The ratification of the 2016 Public Diplomacy Act was a breakthrough moment, redirecting its approach from *ad hoc* cultural promotion to planned governance portrayed by defined responsibilities, cross-agency coordination, and tangible targets. This governmental agenda, supported by heavy increases in fundings, offered all the means for the Foundation plan to expand its scale. Accordingly, this reflects stronger political will to implement Korea's cultural charm as a tool of diplomacy rather than a marginal cultural result.
Enhancing bureaucratic reform is the swift rise and government-endorsed administration of the Korean wave.

Originally viewed as a spontaneously emergent global cultural phenomenon, Hallyu was reframed as a "diplomatic asset" and "engine of national development" in official policy accounts. By actively allocating it into diplomatic strategies (i.e. through cultural export, international invitations, co-productions, and Korean language promotion) South Korea leveraged the global keenness for the country's popular culture to boost its international

influence. The improved visitor numbers, next-generation leader engagement, and academic partnerships exposed in the documents are directly tied to the growing allure of Hallyu as a symbol of South Korea's contemporary identity and appeal.
The polarized political dynamics describe changes in youth exchange numbers, thematic emphases, and geographic diversification observed in Korea Foundation reports.
Therefore, its public diplomacy growth rises from the interplay among institutional reforms, cultural phenomena, and political strategy.

8.1.2 Broader implications for soft power

The expansion of South Korea's public diplomacy programs proves a progress of cultural diplomacy from short-lived events, toward sustained academic engagement: this supports the country's willingness to embed its culture and values in global educational systems.
Online initiatives like the Global e-School further determine the adaptation to current worldwide connectivity inclinations, also due to the global pandemic, pushing soft power into virtual and hybrid realms transcending geographic borders. Regardless, Korea's experience defies simplistic notions of soft power by way of organic attraction as it represents its dual nature culturally and institutionally organized.
The systematical management of Hallyu, together with bureaucratic oversight, portrays the administration's centrality in framing and financing soft power assets. In so doing, it enhances that cultural attractiveness must be balanced with strategic direction and monitored impact.

Seoul's self-image is also apparent in elite institutional discourse.
At the Korea Foundation's Sixth Global Seminar on "Middle Powers and Public Diplomacy" (2013), KF leaders and international experts framed Korea's public diplomacy as a networked effort to provide "global public goods" and build collaborative bridges between states and societies.
Such rhetoric, which resonates with the language of MOFA White Papers and Master Plans, emphasizes how bureaucratized soft power enables Korea to position itself as a norm-advocating leader rather than a mere cultural exporter (KF, 2013).
As cited earlier, public diplomacy's direction to digital platforms during COVID-19, indicates the country's shifting to the evolving forms soft power must take in a virtual age.

The growth of thematic public diplomacy (science, health, climate), additionally, portrays an increase of such diplomacy into multifaceted global challenges, further enriching Korea's relevance. Together, these trends hint the nation's soft power is no longer limited to cultural appeal alone, but is increasingly embedded in diplomatic professionalism and global engagement.

8.1.3 Remaining Challenges

Despite the mentioned accomplishments, important struggles persist: the tension between state control and cultural authenticity remains perhaps the most demanding one.
I previously described that, although bureaucratic institutionalization warrants coordination, it jeopardizes isolating cultural producers and foreign audiences if recognized as propaganda or heavy-handed branding. Situations like the Yoon administration's controversial handling of the Jamboree concert showcase possible pitfalls of state intervention. Thus, to maintain the credibility that underpins soft power legitimacy, open dialogue and reflexivity represent key features.

Institutionally speaking, I acknowledge that coordinating between multiple government bodies, academic institutions, private parties, and society calls for constant negotiation and flexibility. Moreover, funding volatility and geopolitical uncertainties only make program sustainability and strategic planning more challenging.
Ultimately, South Korea's position as a middle power competing in multifaceted global soft power environments stresses continuous innovation in diplomatic approaches.
Future academic research shall address these evolving dynamics, particularly the stability between digital and in-person diplomacy and the part of emerging global struggles in the country's public diplomacy policy.
Closely related is the problem of maintaining cultural authenticity, a critical feature in soft power dynamics, within an increasingly professionalized public diplomacy setting.
Korean public diplomacy's rhetorical accent on "exchange", "partnership" and "mutual benefit" functions to safeguard these tensions, considering diplomacy as reciprocal rather than top-down (Kim & Jin, 2016, pp.5519-5520).

Yet, as Kim and Jin (2016, p.5531) underscore, it remains precarious, since the concurrent goals of expanding influence and preserving authenticity most times cause institutional paradoxes that need constant negotiation.

8.2 Interpretation via discursive institutionalism and rhetorical public diplomacy

The section reads the findings through the dual lenses of discursive institutionalism and rhetorical public diplomacy, thus helping to address RQ4 on the challenges and tensions inherent in Korea's bureaucratized approach to soft power.

As described in the conceptual framework section, discursive institutionalism focuses on how government language, communication, and policy documents reflect and actively construct institutional legitimacy (Schmidt, 2008, pp.303, 310). At the same time, rhetorical public diplomacy stresses the strategic use of narrative, slogans, and measurable objectives to translate culture into practical foreign policy (Mor, 2007, pp.661, 666).

Risks of state intervention in culture are portrayed in public and media reviews, for instance addressing the 2023 controversy surrounding the Jamboree concert, where ill-managed government intervention in scheduling and venue choice generated negative public sentiment including among K-pop fans and cultural commentators (Lee, 2023). This incident exemplifies the delicate balance between governmental soft power aspirations and the organic, decentralized energy of cultural creation. It also reflects broader anxieties about "state overreach" over culture, which can undermine public diplomacy's authenticity and legitimacy if perceived as propaganda.

Drawing on Schmidt's discursive institutionalism (2008) and Mor's rhetorical public diplomacy (2007), this reposition can be seen as a linguistic performance that raises legitimacy and institutionalizes cultural influence. Documents start instructing outcomes measurement, cooperation between ministries, and structured cultural exports, mirroring the concrete indications of bureaucratic rationalization. Also, the managerial supervision dangers alienating the creative industries' foundational authenticity and autonomy, which stemmed at the base of Hallyu's appeal.

In this analysis section, I would also like to address an interesting point that came out in a meeting with Dr. Choe Youngjeen[16] during my exchange semester at Chung-Ang University, Seoul. While discussing the general use of South Korea's public diplomacy he stated something along the line of (Choe, personal communication, 25 November 2025).

> Korean government can take an action by their hands-on policy for the promotion of K-Pop culture in general. But it would not be beneficial if it happens to cause a wide gap between their intention and the ordinary sentiment of the public. Indeed, the wide gap was made when the administration of Yoon Suk Yeol regime rushed to make an *ad hoc* decision to change the schedule and the venue for a big K-Pop concert at the closing ceremony of the 25th World Scout Jamboree in the summer of 2023. The Yoon's government forced all the bands to readjust their schedules only to make up for their dysfunctional management of this Jamboree event. It led to the significantly negative reactions by the public (including the young K-pop fans) and the media. And I think this is a bad case for the public sector's wrong intervention on the private sector (i.e., the K-pop industry). The Yoon government should have been much more careful in handing on this type of the cultural act. K-pop bands are not the puppets that they can control at will.

Although unpacking this dynamic on public diplomacy would require an extensive engagement with separate literature on cultural policy, state-society relations, and media perception, simply acknowledging it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the risks inherent in bureaucratizing culture as a diplomatic asset.

This critique connects straightforwardly with my core research questions on how the South Korean government's bureaucratic path interacts with the cultural power of Hallyu, as in explaining that public diplomacy is not only a projection of power but also subject to negotiation and resistance within civil society itself.

Considering that Seoul's public diplomacy has undergone a precise bureaucratic institutionalization, as Schmidt (2008, p.321) conjectured through discursive institutionalism, policy language creates (Schmidt, 2008, p.310) and constrains (Schmidt, 2008, p.316) institutional practices.

Moreover, Kim and Jin (2016, p.5531) highlighted the fundamental challenge of balancing authentic cultural attraction with the risks of perceived propaganda. Such critique, coupled with what came out in my conversation with Professor Choi, showcases the limits and risks of bureaucratic cultural diplomacy, emphasizing that though the state may codify and harness

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soft power practices, public perception and cultural authenticity remain powerful counterforces.

Furthermore, Kim and Jin (2016, p.5515, 5530) demonstrated this dynamic by illustrating Hallyu's transition from grassroots cultural movement to government-coordinated diplomacy, highlighting the subtle negotiation between expanding influence and maintaining legitimacy. Consequentially, when analyzed together, these perspectives expose public diplomacy in South Korea as a complicated, contested, and strategically rhetorical project, which grows in institutional refinement even as it crosses the challenges of cultural engagement and public trust.

On the same opinion is also Kim Hwa-Jung (2024), who expresses how blatant government branding within Hallyu risks backlash and suspicions of "cultural imperialism" or propaganda, reflecting with Professor Choe's point regarding hypothetical negative public opinion when the state's role becomes too evident.

Additional sites like Reddit (2023) discusses on how the South Korean governments are not sufficiently capable and competent to carry the Korean Wave's popularity on their shoulders and claiming that

> While the government did provide infrastructure and policy support, the real architects behind the international surge of Korean culture are the entertainment companies and the creators themselves. They are the ones deserving of the credit for the global recognition and appeal of Korean culture.

Comparably, Choo (2023) on the Korean blog Naver, analyses the challenges the country deals with in managing its public diplomacy and cultural promotion while keeping authenticity. The post articulates how government involvement in cultural industries may lead to public skepticism or accusations of undue control over artists, consequently damaging the genuine interest that runs South Korea's soft power internationally. Therefore, the blog intimates the need for a fair approach that promotes the country's culture successfully without undermining its organic vibrancy, reflecting Professor Choi's concerns. Nonetheless, as Kim and Jin (2016, p.5531) describe, this negotiation remains unresolved, highlighting that the intersection of culture and statecraft is a dynamic and contested domain.

The recent global rise of Korean pop cultural products (music, dramas, cinema, fashion) developed as a diplomatic asset and brand-building tool; though initially organic, this trend

was increasingly co-opted and actively managed by government policy as a soft power resource, enhancing appeal and legitimacy worldwide, as analyzed in the previous chapters. Additionally, Hallyu's accomplishments facilitated the country into attracting more foreign visitors, scholars, and cultural partnerships, mirrored in the boosted invitation programs and youth exchanges. Content coproduction, promotion of Korean language, along with cultural events increased public diplomacy appeal beyond elite diplomacy to wider audiences.
Further shifts and differences in strategic proprieties and geographical focus are represented by the Korean expansion of its diplomatic and cultural outreach from traditional partners (U.S and Japan) to developing regions such as ASEAN, Africa, Europe, and Latin America.
As a result, Seoul managed to increase the number of nations, universities, and individuals involved in cultural programs. Moreover, digital platforms and new media diplomacy quickened these growths, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person events declined, however online engagement surged.
This evolution was mainly driven and justified by presidential administrations, whose different discourse and priorities shaped the increase in international programs to enhance South Korea's image. As mentioned previously, conservative governments preferred economic leverage and creative economy branding, whereas liberal administrations stressed dialogue, inclusivity, and values-based diplomacy.
All in all, the increasing numbers in Korea Foundation's public diplomacy indicators reflect the mature bureaucratic apparatus, strategic harnessing of the Korean wave, expanded regional networking, growing budgets, and consistent presidential support adapting to shifting global and domestic contexts. This further echoes Seoul's dynamic renovation of cultural attractiveness into a structured diplomatic asset from 2011 through 2023.

8.3 Unresolved questions and prospects for future research

The findings of this study raise important questions calling for deeper investigation and reflection, that should be covered in following academic research.

To start, as South Korea keeps expanding its digital public diplomacy, a key area for further study is the trajectory of digital engagement itself: will online platforms increasingly replace traditional face to face exchanges, or will hybrid models develop as the standard norm?

Additionally, how shall developing interactive technologies rebuild Korean cultural outreach and heighten its global influence in a progressively connected world?

Second, the sustainability of Hallyu's diplomatic value amidst political sensitivities and popular opinion presents a critical challenge. Set the described anxieties surrounding state involvement in cultural industries and sporadic backlash from audiences, potential studies should navigate strategies that set a balance. Therefore, preserving the content's authenticity and vibrant appeal while simultaneously providing for effective governmental support.

Third, effective institutional coordination remains an ongoing challenge in the complex landscape of public diplomacy. Future research could examine organizational models that best promote resilience and adaptability, enabling Korea's public diplomacy apparatus to navigate rapid geopolitical changes and address emerging global issues without sacrificing bureaucratic efficiency.

To conclude, the growth of Korean Studies programs worldwide prompts reflection on the interplay between diplomatic interests and academic freedom. So, how can Korea related programs work through academic autonomy and diplomatic instrumentalization? What safeguards can preserve scholarly freedom while achieving diplomatic objectives?

9 Conclusion

This thesis explored the evolution of South Korea's public diplomacy from 2011 to 2023 relying on governmental data (namely MOFA and KF documents), aiming to understand how it transitioned from reactive cultural promotion to a proactive, institutionalized public diplomacy.

Regardless, in accordance with the provided explanation in section 2.4, South Korea's public diplomacy has some key differences compared to China and Japan. Beijing's Confucius Institutes are rooted in language and academic diplomacy; however, China's efforts get complex by political influenced processes (R. S., Hubbert, J. & Hartig, F., 2014, p.9,23,33; Hubbert, 2019, pp. 2, 18).
Besides, the Japanese Cool Japan targets capitalizing on pop culture exports, though has faced criticism for uneven results, together with remaining limited to a one-way projection of Japanese culture (Iwabuchi, 2015, p. 420).

This work's key finding is the clear institutionalization and bureaucratization of Korea's public diplomacy efforts, which transitioned from organic, cultural exchanges to a highly coordinated, policy-driven enterprise following the enactment of the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016. This legislation formalized the roles and responsibilities of agencies like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Korea Foundation (KF), and the Korea Culture and Information Service (KOCIS).
The implementation of successive Master Plans for Public Diplomacy showcased a long-term vision directed at consolidating earlier gains and expanding the country's cultural footprint with strategic clarity and evaluative rigor.
Clearly, the influence of presidential administrations over these years raised as a significant factor shaping the discourse and operational priorities of Korea's public diplomacy: with President Lee Myung-Bak, initial efforts centered on institutional building and framing culture within the narrative of a creative economy, branding Korean culture as an economic soft power asset.

His approach laid the expansion's backbone observed during the Park Geun-Hye governance, which leveraged Hallyu more openly, promoting the creative economy alongside enriched cultural diplomacy programs that were both ambitious and formalized.

Moon Jae-In presidency channeled the administration's emphasis on participatory diplomacy, prioritizing inclusivity and regional cooperation through initiatives like the New Southern Policy on ASEAN. It also led in increased reliance on digital diplomacy, which proved central amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

To conclude, Yoon Suk-Yeol has emphasized value diplomacy, prioritizing democracy promotion, enhanced alliances within the Indo-Pacific framework, and digital innovation as new frontiers for diplomatic engagement.

The rise of Hallyu as a diplomatic asset merits distinct recognition. Its global popularity has become a diplomatic engine, catalyzing increased foreign interest and legitimizing South Korea's presence on the global stage.

Geographically, Korea's public diplomacy has notably expanded beyond its traditional partners such as the United States, Japan, and Europe, to embrace new regions including ASEAN countries, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This transformation echoes the country's shifting foreign policy priorities and mirrors global geopolitical trends, as investigated already by Cho (2012).

Furthermore, differences in programmatic approaches across these regions showcase Seoul's acknowledgment of diverse audiences and diplomatic contexts.

Digital diplomacy and adaptive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic represent critical evolutions in South Korea's public diplomacy. The rise of online seminars and virtual cultural festivals facilitated connectivity and influence despite pandemic-induced travel restrictions, thus catalyzing Korea's engagement with new thematic domains such as science diplomacy,

Still, despite the successes, South Korea's public diplomacy faced challenges in institutional coordination: fluctuations in budgets along with the diverging priorities of multiple government bodies raveled the delivery of coherent strategies.

This thesis strongly suggests that Korea's public diplomacy has matured into a sophisticated, multi-dimensional enterprise. It is characterized by strategic institutionalization, cultural leverage through Hallyu, regional diversification, academic investment, digital innovation, and resilient adaptation to global crises. These elements, therefore, converge to position

South Korea as an influential middle power capable of shaping global perceptions and fostering transnational cultural connections.

To end, I would like to address which implications, and future directions arise from the present study. The findings insinuate that any effective soft power for South Korea must consider heavy domestic coordination with room for cultural autonomy and genuine exchange.
As public diplomacy becomes more bureaucratized by laws, Master Plans and budgets, there is a risk that blunt governmental lead undermines Hallyu's authenticity and credibility that make it attractive in the first place. This becomes particularly visible when state interventions diverge with industry practices or public sentiment.
Hence, future public diplomacy shall need to (1) improve coordination mechanisms across ministries and with private and civil actors, (2) address regional and sectoral imbalances in funding, and lastly (3) invest thoroughly in understanding foreign audiences' perceptions and digital engagement, perhaps via comparative research with other middle powers.
In this last segment, I reaffirm each research question and condense how the findings of Chapters 5 and 7 answer them.

9.1 The Strategic Re-framing of Hallyu

How do South Korea's public diplomacy policy documents articulate and evolve the country's soft power strategy between 2011 and 2023?
South Korea's public diplomacy has advanced to a structured and bureaucratized soft power anchored in Master Plans, laws and inter-ministerial coordination.
The 2016 Public Diplomacy Act and the two Master Plans formalize responsibilities, introduce performance, report requirements and tie public diplomacy to broader national ambitions such as "Global Korea" and "Global Pivotal State".
Such methodical redesign is crucial because, for a middle power like South Korea, soft power serves as a vital alternative for exerting influence in a region dominated by bigger powers.
In accordance with the legal anchor of public diplomacy, the government warrants a coordinated approach which amplifies its international standing and assurances Korea's geopolitical survival through institutionalized attraction rather than unstructured cultural export.

Additionally, Korea Foundation and MOFA documents indicate increasing budgets, expanding program portfolios and more systematic regional planning, showcasing altogether, institutional consolidation over the years.

9.2 The Strategic Transition from “Global Korea” to “Global Pivotal State”

What strategic priorities emerge across MOFA and Korea Foundation documents?

The strategic priorities analyzed are characterized by a fundamental transition from *ad hoc* cultural promotion, toward a bureaucratized soft power.

This implicates moving from simple image enhancement to a planned branding approach, where cultural programs are systematically aligned with national strategic objectives.

The evolution to the GPS vision matters because it allows South Korea to progress into a norm-shaper and agenda-setter. In line with areas such as digital innovation and health security (demonstrated by the 'K-quarantine model'), Seoul moves beyond being a consumer of global rules to being a creator of them. This transition assures becoming a globally indispensable partner, leveraging cultural demand to gain influence in domains like security and technology.

A key priority is the evolution of South Korea’s global vision from the culture centered “Global Korea” slogan of the first Master Plan to the “Global Pivotal State” (GPS) vision established in the second one.

The latest vision prioritizes global leadership and impact in distinct sectors such as technology, security, and health, whilst stressing the country’s role as a norm-shaper and agenda-setter in the international landscape. Furthermore, there is a clear urgency to broaden public diplomacy beyond traditional culture and Hallyu to include multi-sectoral policy advocacy focusing on science diplomacy, digital innovation, and “value diplomacy” centered on democracy and human rights.

Ultimately, these documents underline a strategic shift in regional targeting, moving from a reliance on traditional partners to a more diversified global outreach that prioritizes engagement with Africa, ASEAN, and Europe.

9.3 The Institutionalization of Hallyu: from spontaneous success to strategic resource

How has the Korean Wave (Hallyu) been framed and used as a diplomatic asset within these documents?

Through the years, governmental documents progressively indicate Hallyu as a strategic diplomatic asset rather than a cultural and commercial trend. Earlier documents indicated administrations supporting and promoting this industry to improve Korea's image.

By contrast, more recent White Papers, Master Plans and presidential speeches explicitly present Hallyu as a key tool of national branding and economic diplomacy (Kim & Jin, 2016). At once, debates and sporadic public backlash expose tensions between such state-led instrumentalization and the need to uphold the Korean Wave's creative autonomy and credibility as a source of soft power (Lee, 2023). The effectiveness of soft power is fundamentally embedded in authenticity and creative autonomy.

In case the administration excessively controls Hallyu, it jeopardies transforming a source of attraction into a perceived tool of propaganda, that would correspondingly reduce the diplomacy's goal. The 2023 Jamboree controversy embodies the consequence of politics treating artists as puppets. It creates a breach between government intentions and public sentiment, eventually wrecking the national brand and the authentic interest that drives South Korea's soft power.

9.4 Linguistic rationalization and the professionalization of soft power

How do language, target regions, objectives change over time, and what does this reveal about bureaucratization of public diplomacy?

Between 2011 and 2023, South Korea's public diplomacy underwent a profound transformation, moving from a reactive model of cultural promotion to a proactive and institutionalized soft power. Language shifts from facilitative pre-2016 ("support Hallyu", "encourage exchange"), to managerial terminology ("coordinate", "evaluate", "implement") following the Public Diplomacy Act and evidencing discursive formalization (Schmidt, 2008). The emergence of terms like "K-content" further document this trend by reframing organic cultural products as quantifiable diplomatic assets and branding tools managed within a

formal state framework. Later documents stress “systematic implementation” and “performance evaluation” (MOFA, 2011 vs. 2023).

Regional targeting expands from a US and Japan focus to ASEAN, Africa and Europe, replicating the Master Plan diversification from traditional to global outreach. This geographical extension was most times tied to specific strategic initiatives, like the New Southern Policy or diplomatic milestones like the 140th anniversary of Korea-Italy relations.

Public diplomacy goals evolve from image-building (“Global Korea” branding) to practical leadership (“Global Pivotal State”), switching vague cultural exchange with quantifiable policy advocacy.

Collectively, these changes expose the bureaucratic turn through: (1) linguistic rationalization, (2) quantitative expansion, (3) institutional embedding.

The evolution from spontaneous Hallyu support to rule-bound soft power governance implies a systematic transition toward a bureaucratized model of South Korea’s public diplomacy.

To complete this thesis, once again reassess, by the mixed approach used as method, how South Korea highlights a central evolution in its foreign policy structure by bureaucratizing public diplomacy.

Through the enactment of the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016, the government has included cultural appeal into a managed governance apparatus, which is also portrayed in the 27 official documents analyzed (13 annual reports and 2 Master Plans).

This, alongside Seoul’s health diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic, stressed the country’s technological implementation, allowing for a development of its global legitimacy.

Notwithstanding, such achievements bring a difficulty over the State’s managerial supervision, compromising the Korean wave’s artistic autonomy. Moreover, South Korea’s model offers a unique East Asian public diplomacy outline, strengthening the country’s middle power owing to its non-threatening image and refraining of imperialistic heritage that Japan and China share.

In closing, I once again tackle my work’s consequent limitations such as the governmental centric perspective, the loss of linguistic nuances due to the translation procedure and not providing any data on the analyzed programs’ effectiveness in changing foreign audiences feelings.

Future studies should further explore the causes of regional funding disparities (for instance comparing with heavy efforts on Northen Europe compared to the South), investigating whether hybrid/online types of activities will permanently replace face-to-face engagement, even after the pandemic.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Public Diplomacy Act (Act No. 13951, 3 February 2016)

Article 1 (Purpose)

The purpose of this Act is to contribute to improving the Republic of Korea's image and prestige in the international community by forming foundations to strengthen public diplomacy and enhance the efficiency thereof by providing for matters necessary for public diplomatic activities.

Article 2 (Definition)

"Public diplomacy" in this Act means diplomatic activities through which the State promotes foreign nationals' understanding of and enhance confidence in the Republic of Korea directly or in cooperation with local governments or the private sector based on culture, knowledge, policies, etc.

Article 3 (Basic Principle of Public Diplomacy)

(1) Public diplomacy shall be pursued by harmoniously reflecting the universal values of mankind and characteristics peculiar to the Republic of Korea.

(2) Public diplomatic policy shall focus on the promotion of sustainable cooperation for amicable relations with the international community.

(3) No public diplomatic activities shall be disproportionately concentrated on any specific region or country.

Article 4 (Responsibility of State)

(1) The State shall establish and pursue comprehensive and systematic strategies and policies to strengthen public diplomacy and enhance the efficiency thereof.

(2) The State shall formulate an administrative and financial support plan necessary for establishing and executing strategies and policies under paragraph (1).

(3) The State shall make necessary endeavors, such as in establishing a platform for cooperation with local governments and the public sector, in order to efficiently conduct public diplomacy.

(4) The State shall make necessary endeavors, such as in education and public relations, in order to form social consensus on the importance of public diplomacy and promote the people's participation in public diplomacy.

Article 5 (Relationship to other Acts)

(1) Except as otherwise expressly provided for in other Acts, this Act shall apply to public diplomacy.

(2) Where any other Act is enacted or amended concerning public diplomacy, such Act shall be enacted or amended in compliance with this Act.

Article 6 (Formulation of Master Plan for Public Diplomacy)

(1) The Minister of Foreign Affairs shall formulate a master plan for public diplomacy (hereinafter referred to as "master plan") every five years in consultation with the heads of related central administrative agencies, the Special Metropolitan City Mayor, Metropolitan City Mayors, Metropolitan Autonomous City Mayors, Do Governors and Special Self-governing Province Governor (hereinafter referred to as "Mayor/Do Governor").

(2) Each master plan shall include the following:

1. Policy direction and objectives in pursuit of public diplomatic activities.
2. Matters concerning the establishment and coordination of major policies for public diplomacy.
3. Matters concerning raising and operating funds for public diplomacy.
4. Matters concerning laying a foundation, improving systems and evaluations relating to public diplomacy.
5. A plan to support local governments in public diplomacy.
6. A plan to support the private sector in public diplomacy.
7. Other matters necessary for public diplomatic activities.

(3) A master plan shall be finalized following deliberation by the Public Diplomacy Committee under Article 8. In such cases, the Minister of Foreign Affairs shall notify the heads of related central administrative agencies and Mayors/Do Governors of the finalized master plan.

Article 7 (Formulation of Action Plan, etc. for Public Diplomacy)

(1) The heads of related central administrative agencies and Mayors/Do Governors shall formulate and implement an annual action plan for public diplomatic activities (hereinafter referred to as "action plan") in conformity with a master plan and submit such action plan and the performance results of each agency and City/Do to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

(2) The Minister of Foreign Affairs shall formulate and implement a comprehensive action plan (hereinafter referred to as "comprehensive action plan") every year by integrating action plans referred to paragraph (1) and an action plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(3) The head of each overseas diplomatic mission shall annually formulate and implement a plan for public diplomatic activities, including activities of the overseas diplomatic mission and public institutions under the Act on the Management of Public Institutions (hereinafter referred to as "public institution") within its jurisdiction, according to a master plan.
(4) In the formulation and implementation of plans under paragraphs (1) through (3), the similarity and duplication of activities shall be avoided. In particular, related agencies shall closely cooperate with one another so that the plans may be formulated and implemented based upon the local characteristics of each region and each country.
(5) The Minister of Foreign Affairs shall notify the heads of related central administrative agencies and Mayors/Do Governors of the details and results of each comprehensive action plan and plan for activities on the area over which an overseas diplomatic mission has jurisdiction under paragraph (3).
(6) Other matters necessary for the formulation and implementation of action plans and comprehensive action plans shall be prescribed by Presidential Decree.

Article 8 (Public Diplomacy Committee)

(1) The Public Diplomacy Committee (hereinafter referred to as the "Committee") shall be established under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in order to deliberate on and coordinate the principal matters for the comprehensive and systematic pursuit of public diplomatic policy.
(2) The Committee shall deliberate on and coordinate the following:
1. Matters concerning the formulation, alteration and pursuit of a master plan.
2. Matters concerning the formulation and evaluation of a comprehensive action plan.
3. Matters concerning cooperation and coordination in public diplomatic affairs among government departments.
4. Matters concerning the civic participation, public-private cooperation, etc. in relation to public diplomacy.
5. Other matters tabled at meetings by the chairperson of the Committee in relation to public diplomacy.
(3) The Committee shall be composed of not more than 20 members including the chairperson; the Minister of Foreign Affairs shall serve as the chairperson, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs shall appoint or commission members from among Vice Ministers or Vice Minister-level public officials of related central administrative agencies, and those who have

extensive professional knowledge and experience in public diplomacy, as prescribed by Presidential Decree.

(4) Other matters necessary for the composition, operation, etc. of the Committee shall be prescribed by Presidential Decree.

Article 9 (Support to Local Governments and Private Sector)

(1) Where a local government requests the State to cooperate in public diplomatic activities, the State may provide necessary support.

(2) Where necessary to strengthen the private sector's participation in public diplomacy, the State may subsidize expenses fully or partially within budgetary limits or provide administrative support necessary to conduct affairs.

(3) Matters necessary for support under paragraphs (1) and (2) shall be prescribed by Presidential Decree.

Article 10 (Fact-Finding Research)

(1) The Minister of Foreign Affairs may conduct fact-finding research on the status of public diplomacy for establishing and implementing public diplomatic policy.

(2) Necessary matters concerning public diplomatic matters subject to and methods of fact-finding research pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be prescribed by Presidential Decree.

Article 11 (Establishment and Operation of Comprehensive Public Diplomacy Information System)

(1) The Minister of Foreign Affairs may establish and operate a comprehensive public diplomacy information system in order to conduct public diplomacy in a systematic and efficient manner and provide useful information to related agencies, etc.

(2) Where necessary to establish and operate a comprehensive public diplomacy information system, the Minister of Foreign Affairs may request the heads of related central administrative agencies, Mayors/Do Governors, the heads of public institutions, etc. to provide necessary data. In such cases, the heads of related central administrative agencies, etc. requested to provide data shall comply with such request unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Article 12 (Designation, etc. of Institution That Pursues Public Diplomacy)

(1) The Minister of Foreign Affairs may designate an institution that pursues public diplomacy (hereinafter referred to as "institution that pursues public diplomacy") in order to efficiently conduct activities necessary to pursue public diplomacy.

(2) An institution that pursues public diplomacy shall conduct the following activities:

1. Support for the formulation of a comprehensive action plan and an action plan.

2. Establishment of a platform for cooperation with institutions, organizations, etc. related to the pursuit of public diplomacy at home and abroad.

3. Establishment and operation of a comprehensive public diplomacy information system.

4. Conducting support projects of education, consultation, public relations, and other areas for public diplomatic activities.

5. Training of professional manpower for public diplomatic activities.

6. Fact-finding research and compiling statistics on public diplomacy.

7. Other activities necessary to achieve the objectives for designating the institution that pursues public diplomacy.

(3) The Minister of Foreign Affairs may subsidize expenses incurred in the operation, etc. of an institution that pursues public diplomacy.

(4) Matters necessary for the designation, operation, etc. of an institution that pursues public diplomacy shall be prescribed by Presidential Decree.

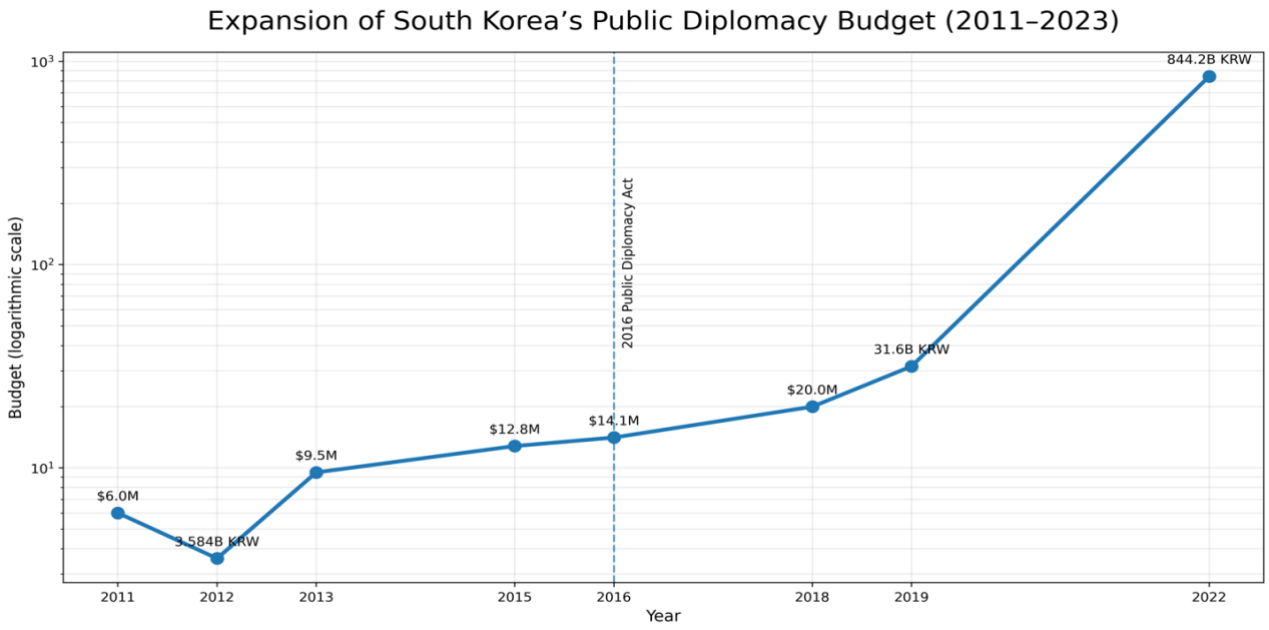
Article 13 (Report to National Assembly)

The Government shall prepare a report on the current status, etc. of the pursuit of a master plan and a comprehensive action plan and submit such report to the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea before its regular annual session.

ADDENDUM

This Act shall enter into force six months after the date of its promulgation.

Appendix 2: South Korea's Public Diplomacy Budget Growth from 2011 to 2023



Note: inaccuracy of the yearly amount is possible, as no difference among MOFA and MCST budgeting was indicated in the sources.

- 2011: $6.0M (Otmazgin, 2021, p.631)
- 2012: $3.2M KRW[17] (Cho, 2012, p.290)
- 2013-2015: $9.5M - $12.8M The Korea Herald (2012, September 25)
- 2016: $14.1M[18] (Lim, 2016)
- 2018: $20.0M (Otmazgin, 2021, p.631)
- 2019-2020: $27.1M[19] (Cho, Claus-Kim, Lee, Lee, 2021)
- 2021-2023: $675.4M[20] (MCST, 2023)

As evident from the graph, 2012 presents the only decline in budget with "1.9% of the whole budget for diplomacy" (Cho, 2012, p.290).

While there are no clear statements directly from the government, we can assume it was, probably, due the Presidential Council on Nation Branding's (PCNB) dismissal created by former president Lee MyungBak. Therefore, once the administration terminated, all the PCNB tasks were re-directed back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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[17] KRW 3.584M
[18] KRW 16.0B
[19] KRW 31.6B
[20] KRW 844.2B