

Bridge(s) Over Troubled Water: ASEAN between Japan and the Republic of Korea?

Lam Peng Er

Association of Asian Studies and APISA (Asian Political and International Studies) Conference

Chiangmai, 10 December 2022

Burden of History and Domestic Politics

Though the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan share common civilisational roots, are liberal democracies and staunch allies of the United States (amid China's rise and North Korea's relentless nuclearisation), the ROK and Japan are emotively "distant neighbours". Indeed, Tokyo and Seoul are separated by conflicting views of history (colonialisation by Imperial Japan, comfort women and forced labour). While South Korea has effective control over a group of islets (Dokdo in Korean), its sovereignty over them is contested by Japan.

Certainly, political change in ROK domestic politics (from Moon to Yoon administrations) has improved bilateral Japan-ROK relations. However it is not inconceivable that the political pendulum may swing from right-of-centre to left-of centre in Korean domestic politics in the future leading to tense Japanese-ROK relations again. Both sides of the ideological divide in South Korean domestic politics had disputes with Japan but the left-of-centre Moon administration's relations with Japan were especially acrimonious.

However, the earlier left-of-centre Kim Dae Jung administration had sought future-oriented relations with Japan. While emotive historical issues may be temporarily swept under the carpet given the trend of intensifying geopolitical competition (China's rise and growing assertiveness, US pushback [AUKUS and QUAD] and

decoupling from Beijing [over trade, technology, finance and human talent] and North Korean nuclearisation), emotive historical issues may re-emerge to bedevil bilateral Japanese and Korean ties.

ASEAN as Bridge?

The two Northeast Asian countries are integral members of Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) and ASEAN-centric multilateralism like ASEAN+3, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus. Bilateral tensions between Japan and the ROK may be mitigated and eased if they are anchored within a broader multilateral setting with ASEAN states. Indeed, emotive bilateral issues between Tokyo and Seoul like territorial sovereignty and historical grievances would not take centre stage in the presence of ASEAN-10.

Seoul and Tokyo may also participate in US-led frameworks like the Indo-Pacific Concept, Chip 4 Alliance and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. However Japanese and South Korean participation primarily in US-led frameworks will lead to rising tension with China, the most important economic partner of Japan and Korea. Japanese and Korean cooperation with ASEAN states in non-military pursuits can crosscut the emerging superpower geostrategic competition between the United States and China.

Arguably, closer ties with Southeast Asia for both Tokyo

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The **Korea Bulletin** is a quarterly publication of the Korea Centre of the East Asian Institute (EAI), an autonomous research organisation set up in April 1997 under a statute of the National University of Singapore.

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and Seoul would *diversify* their foreign policies and *hedge* beyond the crossfire of superpower competition. Tokyo has its Fukuda Doctrine and Seoul has its New Southern Policy (NSP) and Korea ASEAN Strategic Initiative (KASI: “reincarnation” of NSP) towards Southeast Asia. Even if an intellectual construct such as JASK (Japan, ASEAN and South Korea) can be birthed, generating mutual benefits for all three parties, the Japan-South Korea side of this triangle is the weakest link.

Meanwhile, alternative triangular relations are potentially more difficult than JASK.

1. Nascent regional integration of TCS (China, Japan and South Korea): an uncertain scenario as all three sides of the triangle are still carrying their burden of history. Moreover, Tokyo and Seoul are strategically tied to the US hegemon seeking to check a more assertive Beijing.

2. Interlocking system of alliances: the alliance between the United States, Japan and South Korea is tightening its strategic ties to constrain China leading to a strong Chinese pushback.

3. Hypothetical scenario: the China, ASEAN and Korea triangle alarmed by an assertive right wing and historical revisionist Japan which has jettisoned Article 9 of post-war pacifist constitution and seeking to build a nuclear arsenal.

Caveats

Envisaging a triangular JASK relationship is not only an intellectual construct but also an exercise in “ghost-hunting” (looking for something which is not there or yet to be there). Nonetheless, cooperation between JASK members is probably less difficult than the Chinese Goliath thrown into the regional mix given the latter’s sense of power, righteousness, hierarchy and entitlement in East Asia led by the Chinese Communist Party. Indeed, the ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and Korea) framework has not borne significant fruits.

JASK: What Is to Be Done?

Some suggestions:

- Joint development in the Mekong sub-region: dovetailing Tokyo’s Fukuda Doctrine and Seoul’s KASI in the region.
- Human security and peacebuilding/ post-conflict consolidation of peace in Southeast Asia (Cambodia, East Timor, Aceh in Indonesia, Muslim Mindanao in Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand and Myanmar).
- HADR (humanitarian and disaster relief) in Southeast and Northeast Asia: natural disasters like earthquake, tsunami and typhoon.
- Support for navigational freedom, UNCLOS and peaceful settlement of maritime disputes.
- JASK to advocate gender equality and freedom from gendered violence in East Asia.
- JASK support each other to lead UN agencies such as on a rotational basis:
 - FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations;
 - ICAO: International Civil Aviation Organisation;
 - IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development;
 - ILO: International Labour Organisation;
 - IMO: International Maritime Organisation;
 - ITU: International Telecommunication Union;
 - UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation;
 - UNIDO: United Nations Industrial Development Organisation;
 - UNWTO: World Tourism Organisation;
 - UPU: Universal Postal Union;

- WHO: World Health Organisation;
- WIPO: World Intellectual Property Organisation;
- WMO: World Meteorological Organisation;
- JASK battalions (with rotating regional commanding officers) to serve with UNPKO; and
- JASK support for US-DPRK Summits in ASEAN capitals.

Epilogue: JASK as a Regional Task

Scepticisms can of course be raised against the practicality and “naivety” of JASK. Can thinkers,

movers and shakers in East Asia have the ambition and courage to advance beyond narrow national interests to embrace JASK? Can the JASK idea be sold to top political leaders, bureaucrats, journalists, civil society and idealistic youngsters? Regrettably, the alternative to JASK cooperation in East Asia is South Korea, Japan and ASEAN tragically sucked into vortex of great power competition and possible war in the international arena. To steer clear of such entanglements, ASEAN, South Korea and Japan would need to exercise their creativity and autonomy to forge JASK as neither a security bloc nor one which discriminates against others, a formidable task.

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Partnering Southeast Asia: South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative

Gordon Kang

With the inauguration of the Yoon administration, of concern has been whether they will rebrand, change and ‘upgrade’ the preceding Moon administration’s signature ‘New Southern Policy’ (NSP) towards ASEAN and India. Arguably, the NSP demonstrated South Korea’s aspirations as a middle power to diversify its foreign policy beyond great power politics centred on the divided Korean peninsula and its vicinity, and elevate its comprehensive ties with ASEAN and India to the same strategic importance of the United States, China, Japan and Russia.

The ASEAN states had welcomed the NSP and its succeeding NSP Plus (updated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in November 2020), given the concept’s focus on economic, sociocultural and developmental cooperation. This framework boosted the efforts of the ASEAN states to diversify and stabilise regional supply chains, strengthen their strategic autonomy, and hedge amid increasingly tense US-China competition. However, there were initial concerns within ASEAN that the new Yoon administration’s shift from strategic ambiguity to ‘[strategic clarity](#)’ will mean a priority shift to its relations with the United States at the expense of its ties with Southeast Asia, leading to the jettisoning of the NSP.

Several instances reinforced the perception of the Yoon administration tilting further towards its US ally. These include then-presidential nominee Yoon’s [Foreign Affairs article](#) criticising ex-President Moon’s ‘submissive’ stance towards Beijing; his later statement of ‘positively reviewing’ [joining](#) the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad); potential participation in the [semiconductor](#) ‘Chip 4 alliance’ and joining the region-wide economic [rule-setting](#) Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), both of which ostensibly exclude China; [resuming](#) Exercise Ulchi Freedom Shield, the largest joint ROK-US military training drill last held in 2018;

and [restarting](#) the high-level Extended Deterrence Strategy Consultative Group meeting, aimed at strengthening the ROK-US alliance and extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula in response to North Korea.

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On 11 November 2022, President Yoon [announced](#) South Korea’s new Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and the ASEAN-specific component, the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI), at the 23rd ASEAN-ROK Summit in Phnom Penh. The IPS was then presented in greater [detail](#) as the ‘Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region’ on 28 December 2022. In the briefing, Foreign Minister Park Jin [noted that](#) IPS is in effect ‘the foreign policy doctrine of the Yoon Suk Yeol administration’. It comprises an overarching ‘vision’, three ‘principles of cooperation’ and a

broad 'regional scope' to be cohesively applied across nine 'core lines of effort'.¹

South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy

The IPS clearly has a larger regional footprint than the NSP and integrates security and political foci beyond the previous emphasis on socio-economic cooperation. It pursues several objectives:

1. ROK seeks to be a more active regional and global leader

South Korea aspires to become a 'global pivotal state' which 'actively seeks out agenda for cooperation and shapes discussion in the region and wider world'. As part of the 110 national tasks [released](#) before President Yoon's inauguration, 18 specifically emphasised advancing South Korea as a 'global pivotal state' in defence, diplomacy and inter-Korean relations. However, it is unclear how Seoul can be pivotal in Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent where superpowers and regional great powers are already present.

2. ROK will act within the Indo-Pacific framework underpinned by shared democratic values and a rule-based order

The IPS evidently [aligns](#) with Washington's own 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' approach. President Yoon has been [consistent](#) that the ROK will coordinate its foreign policy more closely with the US-led Indo-Pacific frame in his administration. Indeed, the Yoon-Biden summit in May 2022 was the earliest ever [visit](#) of a sitting US president to a ROK president, which took place just 10 days after President Yoon's inauguration and concluded with the upgrading of ties to a 'global comprehensive strategic alliance'.

By doing so, Seoul's IPS has embraced Washington's values and rules-based order in the region as its own. On the campaign trail, then presidential candidate Yoon [stated](#) that foreign policy engagement must be based on 'liberal democratic values and substantial cooperation'. Though the 'vision' component of the IPS includes 'Prosperity' and 'Peace' [like](#) the NSP, Yoon's grand strategy replaces the idea of 'People' with 'Freedom', emphasising shared values such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. However, some ASEAN states may be [wary](#) of cooperating with the ROK within the US-led Indo-Pacific framework because the former has no desire to be sucked into the vortex of superpower competition in East Asia.

3. ROK seeks partnerships based on principles of 'inclusiveness', 'trust' and 'reciprocity'

In the IPS, the principles of cooperation are 'inclusiveness', 'trust' and 'reciprocity'.²

Notwithstanding Seoul's commitment to the broad regional scope of IPS, it entails an openness to partnerships with other actors including China based on the aforementioned principles. In the IPS, China is described as 'a key partner for achieving prosperity and peace in the Indo-Pacific region'. Seoul seeks to resume the ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Summit and strengthening the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) simultaneously and 'harmoniously' alongside ROK-US-Japan relations. This openness to China is positive for ASEAN which does not take sides in the geostrategic competition between China and the United States and its allies.

The Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative

As a subset of the IPS, KASI is framed as a regional policy 'tailored' to ASEAN. It affirms ASEAN Centrality, supports the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and seeks to upgrade multilateral ties with ASEAN to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' as well as bilateral ties with each member state. KASI is expected to deepen cooperation with ASEAN in areas such as digitalisation, climate change and public health. For example, the ROK's annual contribution to the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund will [double](#) over the next five years to support its activities and projects, as well as the establishment of an ASEAN Korea Cooperation Centre for Carbon Neutrality and Energy Security. It also includes closer strategic partnerships with ASEAN for traditional and non-traditional security issues, such as counter-terrorism, maritime and cyber security.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of KASI is its emphasis on the pursuit of common objectives, mutually beneficial and substantive cooperation, as well as its vision for a shared regional prosperity. Importantly, along with ROK's principles of cooperation in the IPS, these are closely aligned with ASEAN's interests in advancing relations with the ROK. Mutual trust, respect and benefit are [key](#) priorities. Insofar as KASI does not pressure ASEAN member states to take sides with either the United States or China, any 'upgrading' of ROK's foreign policy in Southeast Asia will be welcomed.

It is crucial that the ROK finds the optimum balance between rhetoric and substance with both the IPS and KASI. Inevitably, South Korea's aspirations to become a 'global pivotal state' will continue to be checked by regional great power politics and economic interdependencies that they must carefully navigate. Despite being a 'tailored' component towards ASEAN, KASI will not be immune to broader priorities in the IPS. ASEAN member states should closely observe changes across the Indo-Pacific frame to interpret potential shifts for its implementation in Southeast Asia.

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¹ These are 1. build regional order based on norms and rules; 2. cooperate to promote rule of law and human rights; 3. strengthen non-proliferation and counter-terrorism efforts across the region; 4. expand comprehensive security cooperation; 5. build economic security networks; 6. strengthen cooperation in critical domains of science and technology and close digital gap; 7. lead regional cooperation on climate change and energy security; 8. engage in 'Contributive Diplomacy' through tailored development cooperation partnerships; and 9. promote mutual understanding and exchanges.

² (i) 'Inclusiveness' entails that no country is either targeted or excluded, assuming shared vision and principles; (ii) 'trust' emphasises the maintenance of creating reliable, sustainable partnerships; and (iii) 'reciprocity' ensures that mutually beneficial engagement forms the basis of effective cooperation.

The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Singapore and the East Asian Institute,
National University of Singapore Seminar on
South Korea's Soft Power and its Foreign Policies in the ASEAN Region

Attractive and (Could be More) Persuasive: A Thai Perspective on Korea's Soft Power

Seksan Anantasirikiat



Mr Seksan Anantasirikiat

Soft power is a compelling academic concept. It has evolved and localised into different recipient's context. However, each interpretation has shared two keywords: attraction and persuasion. Building on American experiences, Joseph Nye contends that there are three main "attractive" sources of soft power: culture, values and foreign policy. It matters not only how much resources a country possesses but also the way it projects those resources. Soft power may derive from "non-coercive" measures or actions, without exercising either military or payment. Gaining "global recognition" could possibly be the underlying fundamental why a country seeks to acquire its soft power.

Following Nye's conception of soft power resources, Korea possesses many "attractive resources", particularly its culture and values. Korean cultural products, such as K-dramas and K-pop, have gained momentum in becoming a global phenomenon with worldwide audiences. South Korea's national development success within a short span of time also captivates developing countries' attention. Thailand is no exception. Nonetheless, the promotion of K-culture worldwide seems to be aimed mainly at serving economic objectives. Still, there seems to be a missing link between popularity gained for prosperity and national power to achieve security and foreign policy goals.

I argue in this article that South Korea could do more to translate its cultural popularity into political clout through "persuasion". I shall first explain the context behind the

projection of Korea's soft power in Thailand, and then analyse several traits of Korean soft power in Thailand. The concluding paragraph proposes several recommendations.

Context and Continuity Matter in Projecting Soft Power

Power does not take place in a vacuum. It emerges in social relations. Like many other ASEAN countries, there exists no territorial and historical conflict between Thailand and South Korea. Instead, both countries made impressive historical footprints in their relations at the dawn of the post-World War II. Thailand was the first Asian country to dispatch troops in the Korean War. It has become a tradition for every Republic of Korea's military attaché to take care of the living Thai veterans as well as their families. Besides, the highway no. 42 (Pattani-Narathiwat province) in the southern part of Thailand was Hyundai's first construction project outside Korea and it was also where former President Lee Myung-bak worked for in 1965.

Since the adoption of the New Southern Policy in 2017 to boost relationship with ASEAN, the number of economic and sociocultural interactions between the ROK and Thailand have been surging. For example, the

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Gyeonggi Business Centre Bangkok, under the supervision of Gyeonggi province, was set up in 2020 to enhance bilateral trade and investment through business matching and showcase of events. Furthermore, the Korean Cultural Centre hosted various activities to improve Thai perception of South Korea. Among them, there was one such event, attended by social media influencers and celebrities, that involved the dubbing of a popular K-drama *The Squid Game* in Thai language by changing the characters' names to make them more familiar with Thai audience.

Moreover, the two countries have also established strong people-to-people ties. There are many Thai-born

K-pop singers in the Korean entertainment industry, e.g. Lisa of Blackpink, Nichkhun of 2PM, Bambam of Got7, Minnie of (G)I-DLE, Sorn of CLC, etc. According to Kim Yeon-Jeong, head of global K-Pop and K-Content partnerships at Twitter, Thailand ranked second globally in tweeting about K-content in 2022.

Besides context, continuity also matters in projecting soft power. Under South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol's administration, South Korea reaffirms its continuous engagements with ASEAN. It is heartening to learn that Foreign Minister Park Jin, as the first diplomatic corps after taking his official position in May 2022, opened his workplace to welcome ASEAN ambassadors from 10 countries to exchange views on future relationship. It is also worth noting that South Korea has played a proactive role in the Mekong Subregion by providing annual financial support continually since 2013. Such continuity has laid the groundwork for sustainable projection of soft power.

Shades of Korea's Soft Power in Thailand

There are various styles of Korea's soft power in Thailand. Interestingly, all of them are "unintended". Korea did not intend to project "soft power" at the first stage of implementation but its "consequences" in the form of positive image and popularity indeed count as "soft power". The first example is the mushrooming of Korean restaurants as well as local marts selling Korean products nationwide. From my personal observation, the prevalence of these places had accelerated post COVID-19. The popularity of K-dramas presented new business opportunity in Thailand by creating demands for Korean products, especially K-drama fans who want to try the taste of Korean food. Such is the trend that may be similar in many ASEAN countries.

The second is at the policy level. Soft power has become a buzzword in Thai society since the release of *Lalisa*, a music video performed by Blackpink's Lisa, on 10 September 2021. The music video featured Thailand's cultural attributes, including traditional accessories as well as Phanom Rung Stone Castle, a famous tourist attraction in her hometown, Buriram province. Few days later, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha praised her success at the global level as a role model for the young generation in Thailand. That was the inception of promoting "soft power" zealously as a national policy agenda in addition to Thailand 4.0 and bio-circular-green economy.

Third, South Korea is an inspiration for developing countries. The country's success in promoting creative economy to global audiences was acknowledged as a case study, together with other giants in cultural industry such as France, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and so on. Thailand translated Korean way of creative economy into its own ways by focusing on five "Fs": food, film, fashion, fighting and festivals. From my personal conversation with Thai policymakers and nongovernmental organisations, South Korea is always mentioned for its rapid national development, economically and democratically, within a short period of time.

The fourth example is volunteering activities arranged by K-pop fandoms in Thailand. In 2018, two fandoms of

K-pop group BTS—BTS Thailand and Candyclover—created a one-minute video which was then broadcast in downtown Bangkok to celebrate the fifth anniversary of BTS's debut. The video invited Thai people to respond to a blood donation campaign to meet the 200,000 cc of blood donation target. A representative of the organisers gave an interview to Yonhap News, a Korean media outlet, that they would donate money to *Love Myself*, a joint campaign between BTS and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). According to the organisers, the objective of the event was to pass their love forward to others, as what BTS had done for them. In my opinion, such is the kind of soft power that goes beyond national and personal interests. It is a mobilising power for doing good for the community.

South Korea Could Do More!

Despite South Korea's attractive soft power resources, its role and status in international society has not been recognised. According to *The State of Southeast Asia: 2022 Survey Report* by ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, many elites in ASEAN did not seem to recognise South Korea as an "influential player" in geopolitical competition. South Korea was ranked fifth, behind the European Union, Japan, Australia and the United Kingdom, as an option to hedge against the uncertainties of US-China rivalry. This implies that Korea could do more to take a persuasive approach in attaining security and foreign policy goals, and that may align with President Yoon's aspiration to make Korea a "global pivotal state".

I propose two recommendations. First, South Korea could position itself as a bridge or a middle player, promoting cooperation that deals with global and regional challenges such as climate change, infectious diseases, digital development and so on. Korea and Thailand, as middle power aspiring to play a constructive role in global and regional affairs, could also work together to strengthen partnership in health, future industries and green economy in other countries.

Second, Korea, despite being a latecomer, could share its experiences in devising public diplomacy tools, building on the Second Basic Plan on Public Diplomacy (2023–27) adopted in August 2022. Korea should also invest further in networking with policy and social influencers in each ASEAN country by offering more short- and long-term scholarships to them, as well as by expanding the alumni network. Government scholarships offered for both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees should be reoriented towards talents who can be future leaders and should focus less on solely K-pop fans. To catch up with other key players in ASEAN, the Korea Foundation should plan to establish and open offices in all ASEAN countries. The Foundation's presence in each country would help Korea connect with people in ASEAN countries and also serve as a bridge to the world.

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American Hard and Soft Power Divergence: Simultaneous Acceleration and Degradation, and Implications for Southeast Asia

Ryan Clarke



Dr Ryan Clarke

American Cultural Magnets

While arguably in a waning phase, the United States of America still has several key soft power components that remain salient in Southeast Asia. For one, American higher education still attracts thousands of students from across the region every single year. While subjected to heavy criticism over declining standards at home, the Ivy League and educational institutions like Stanford University still remain household names in Southeast Asia and gaining admission remains the aspiration of many.

American public interest in professional sports, specifically the National Basketball Association (NBA), has also continued to decline. Nevertheless, the NBA remains popular across the Southeast Asian region, especially in the Philippines. Similarly, Hollywood movies and American pop music are both experiencing simultaneous declines in Southeast Asia and the United States on the account of “wokeness” and increasingly family-unfriendly themes.

Perhaps America’s strongest cultural magnet is its signalling on human rights, representative/constitutional governance and the rule of law. While America’s track record at home and abroad have been mixed in recent years in these domains, the principles espoused and the consistency in which they are defended have earned the admiration of many. These principles particularly resonate with those living in Southeast Asian countries that are presently under military/dictatorial rule or have recently emerged from these conditions.

This American image is further augmented by its regional image as a power balancer and maintainer of order

without its own territorial ambitions. This has been, and will continue to be, a unique differentiator of America from the recent European colonial past, Japanese conquests during World War II, and increasing regional concerns over potential Chinese territorial ambitions. America has also served as relatively open and accessible export market and robust destination for real estate investment.

Degradation in Key Components?

While these cultural magnets have proven to be powerful, they do have fragilities that are beginning to emerge. American higher education has begun to be characterised by rapidly escalating tuition rates, “wokeness” on campus, and accelerating violent crime rates in and around elite American universities in urban settings. If these trends continue, it is a real possibility that Southeast Asian students and their parents will be deterred by exorbitant costs, concerns over employability once they return home, and safety concerns. A precipitous decline in the number of Southeast Asian students attending American universities could have diplomatic and strategic consequences over time as new regional leadership may have less (or no) experience with the United States.

There are also growing concerns that the “golden years” of the American export market may be over. Regional entrepreneurs and other exporters are increasingly concerned with American import tariff regimes and what is perceived as a clear domestic political preference to protect domestic industries irrespective of cost considerations. In addition to this, many Southeast Asian countries that maintain a currency peg with the US dollar are experiencing domestic inflationary pressure that has been “exported” from the United States due to lax fiscal policy.

Soft Power Degradation at Home, Hard Power Acceleration in Southeast Asia?

Despite public statements and rhetoric, the Biden team has maintained many of the strategic policies from the Trump era. For example, the American-led freedom of navigation exercises in and around the South China Sea have remained constant with the intent to maintain strategic deterrence against perceived risks of Chinese aggression. In particular, American-led transits of the Taiwan Strait designed to demonstrate that these are international waters have also remained constant.

American-led military exercises, such as Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC), and bilateral exercises remain constant too. American forces have also begun to jointly train in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the US Air Force and Navy aircraft continue to confront China’s People’s Liberation

Army aircraft, specifically in the South China Sea. These American patrols have the effect of signalling that the South China Sea will remain an international waterway and airspace for the free movement of people and goods. Lastly, while Nancy Pelosi's August 2022 visit to Taiwan had an unclear political or diplomatic purpose, it did have the strategic effect of fully mobilising the United States military and demonstrating its massive force.

Movies (And Even Harvard) Are Optional, Food and Energy Imports Are Not

Recent domestic developments in the United States itself and strategic dynamics in Southeast Asia appear to demonstrate that hard and soft power do not necessarily rise and fall together. In 2022, American hard and soft power appear to have actually diverged and moved in opposite directions in the Southeast Asian context. America will continue to secure key sea lanes, international air space, and provide emergency response capability in the region, including for natural disasters. These valuable security provisions will occur while America continues to export food price inflation, but secures food and energy supplies.

Can American Hard and Soft Power Diverge Indefinitely?

As a historical point, the United States has not decisively won a conventional military conflict since WWII, and the withdrawal from Afghanistan was poorly conceived and executed. American military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Vietnam (and even Korea) had almost uniformly been characterised by poorly articulated strategic end states and tactical plans to achieve those ends. This has given rise to the perception that post-WWII American leaders do not have the same vision and wherewithal as their WWII-era predecessors. It would

therefore be expected to see key Southeast Asian countries seeking to diversify their options. However, this does not appear to be happening at scale.

The US Army has undergone structural shifts due to its primary role in military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and counter-terrorism operations across the Middle East and North Africa. This has driven concerns around Army force structure, doctrine, equipment, and training being "right-sized" for contingencies in Southeast Asia. However, both the Air Force and the Navy have remained focused on "peer adversaries" with the requisite force overmatch and firepower capabilities. Given the maritime geographies and geostrategic environment in Southeast Asia, the UUS Air Force and Navy would likely be the primary services that maintain baseline stability. The provision of strategic deterrence is inherently valuable.

American Staying Power Consistent Despite Domestic Troubles

American base structures, investments, expatriates and other tools of both hard and soft power have remained consistent. This is despite riots, violent crime spikes and double-digit inflation at home. America has consistent demonstrated staying power in Southeast Asia, likely because it remains essentially a near-monopoly provider of baseline security in coordination with its allies. Shared concerns over the trajectory of China further solidify this entrenched American hard power position. Hollywood movies could be in the decline, but key Southeast Asian states still want the US Navy on patrol in the South China Sea.

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South Korea's Soft Power and Future Cooperation to Enhance ASEAN–Korea Relations

Shawn Ho



Mr Shawn Ho

In the past two decades, South Korea's soft power had built a remarkable presence across Southeast Asia. Undoubtedly, as their Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Korea–ASEAN Solidarity Initiative strives to deepen socio-economic and strategic commitments in the region, South Korea's soft power would likely see further diversification and growth. However, to achieve the aforementioned, several questions must be addressed. What is soft power in the context of Korea in ASEAN? To what extent is the Korean wave an organic or government-supported movement? What can ASEAN learn from the Korean wave?

While there exists a multitude of interpretations, Korean soft power can be seen as the attraction that draws individuals to act voluntarily upon it. This is analogous to football—fans voluntarily wake up in the middle of the night to watch their favourite team or pay large amounts to travel

to the United Kingdom and Europe to support their favourite teams in live matches. Similarly, such loyalty and passion for one's football team is found in K-pop, as fans vouch their same level of support for their favourite artistes through the stars' ups and downs, scandals and celebratory awards. Joseph Nye had previously talked about how Korea is well endowed with cultural soft power. His narrative leads to a deeper, relevant question: what then is Korea's cultural soft power? Undoubtedly, it is diverse and extremely attractive, and has penetrated into the daily lives of people across ASEAN. Step into a mall in Singapore and one would at least hear some K-pop music; Korean restaurants are increasingly more common; Korean products are also found in supermarkets; and even Korean language education is popular and in great demand. These are undoubtedly indicators of strong and growing soft power today, to the extent that even the term "Koreaboo", referring to a non-Korean person's possibly unhealthy obsession with Korean culture, has become common in social lingo.

The Korean wave has gained astounding popularity out of its generally organic evolution. To the author's knowledge, the Korean wave grew in a rather unexpected and rapid manner, rather than via a concrete policy put forth by government officials to push Korean culture in ASEAN with a 10- or 20-year plan. Whether the popularity of the Korean wave has been the result of the government intervention, however, requires a fuller analysis that is beyond the scope of this article. Generally, minimal government intervention is better for the creative industry, as governments tend to be relatively conservative. Music, movies or dramas alike constantly push the boundaries, bringing exciting and fresh themes from global markets but are adjusted for Asian sensitivities. Like all types of market trends, there are periods when *hallyu* (the Korean wave) naturally does very well, and times when it subsides. Indeed, the Korean wave possesses adaptability that is above excessive scrutinisation and lends it such flexibility. Korean dramas, for example, do not film the entire series at one go; instead, producers film a few episodes, with the ending episodes left open to accommodate possible changes and to gauge public reaction across the series. Depending on the viewer ratings, drama producers could very well change the ending for a more dramatic or controversial effect to attract a larger audience.

In a similar vein, with such adaptability, ASEAN governments should also attempt to leverage on the Korean wave to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties with Korea. The key factor is high-quality cultural products, even when held to a global standard. People are voluntarily drawn to the Korean wave because they perceive its attractiveness in tugging their heartstrings and in communicating something that they can relate to. Netflix, for instance, has been instrumental in accelerating the Korean wave to a different level. Korean films on Netflix are able to reach to a wider international English-speaking audience, demonstrating how Asian content, and ASEAN content for that matter, can be internationalised to leverage some of these platforms and reach audiences that otherwise would not have had the exposure. Improving

Korean soft power through joint productions is a possible way forward, especially between ASEAN member states and Korea. The film *Ajoomma*, which is the first Singapore and South Korean co-production to premiere at the Busan International Film Festival, features a popular Singaporean actress, Hong Hui Fang. To have such movies and dramas being filmed, ASEAN countries would naturally generate a sense of excitement and attraction. Netflix drama series *Little Women*, likewise features a popular Singaporean actor, Adrian Pang, and generated some excitement among audiences that perhaps otherwise would not have watched Korean films. Indeed, somewhat anecdotally, Thailand also witnesses an increasing trend of a Thai wave, to such an extent that Thai celebrities who travel to Korea have generated tremendous interest among fans. The fact that more than 3,000 Thai troops had participated and fought in the Korean War, as did over 7,000 Filipino troops, likewise

GENERALLY, MINIMAL GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IS BETTER FOR THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY, AS GOVERNMENTS TEND TO BE RELATIVELY CONSERVATIVE... INDEED, THE KOREAN WAVE POSSESSES ADAPTABILITY THAT IS ABOVE EXCESSIVE SCRUTINISATION AND LENDS IT SUCH FLEXIBILITY.

shows the potential for, perhaps, a co-production between Korea and Thailand or between Korea and the Philippines to share stories and promote understanding of the history and of the sacrifices their veterans had made. Such films could serve as a medium to promote mutual understanding of historical topics.

Whether an ASEAN-Korea wave would emerge, and perhaps cultural hybridisation such as ASEAN-Korean culinary fusion, is an interesting future to ponder over. Of course, Korean food is popular throughout the world, but perhaps one day, we may witness Nasi Lemak, a Malay rice cuisine cooked in coconut milk, being mixed with Korean fried chicken, the ice kacang, or "ice beans", mixed in syrup made from Jeju's oranges, or even Korean barbecued beef marinated in sauces, spices and ingredients from various cultures across ASEAN. On this appetising note, we shall perhaps look forward to launching further positive collaborations between ASEAN and South Korea.

Note: Gordon Kang summarised Mr Shawn Ho's presentation of his topic "South Korea's Soft Power and Future Cooperation to Enhance ASEAN-Korea Relations" at the EAI Seminar on "South Korea Soft Power and its Foreign Policies in the ASEAN Region".

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South Korea's Soft Power in Malaysia: Time to Move beyond the Cultural Dimension?

Nur Shahadah Jamil

South Korea's soft power in Malaysia, as in other nations of the region, derives mainly from its burgeoning cultural might. From South Korea's first Oscar-winning movie to the success of K-pop groups on international stage, few, if any, would deny such exceptional development of the "Korean wave" or "*hallyu*". However, in the long term, how should South Korean leaders and policymakers take advantage of Seoul's remarkable portfolio of attractive national features and translate them into more comprehensive achievements? Is it the time now for Seoul to advance to the next phase to push South Korea's soft power approach beyond the cultural dimension?

South Korea's success in its cultural diplomacy did not happen overnight. It started from a series of skilful and well-funded public-private partnerships in the late 1990s that were aimed at "manufacturing and showcasing cultural products" to foreign audiences, as well as enhancing Seoul's image abroad and fostering economic growth.¹ Seoul's entertainment export has played a significant role in contributing to such success. For instance, in 2018, BTS—a South Korean boy band also known as Bangtan Boys—was appointed as Special Presidential Envoy "for future generations and culture" to the United Nations where their speech was watched live by over one million fans worldwide.² South Korean girl group Blackpink, through their latest song "Pink Venom", managed to become the first girl group in history to top both the Global 200 and Global Excl. US Charts in September 2022.³ Not to be overlooked are the touristic and other fronts of Korean cultural appeals such as K-beauty, K-style and K-food that have also gained increasing acceptance and attention globally.

Nevertheless, such similar level of success was not translated into both the economic and political dimensions—at least in the case of Malaysia. In the economic realm, soft



Dr Nur Shahadah Jamil

power could originate from financial aid and investments, etc., that play a role in ensuring the goodwill from these initiatives would foster certain values or ideas that could be embraced by beneficiary countries. In this case, soft power is not about money as financial transactions per se, but rather, the surrounding halo in the form of image or reputational boost.⁴ Politically, South Korean leaders, for some reasons, seem to be reluctant to capitalise on Korea's exceptionally strong cultural clout to promote their worldview and advance their political principles or standards.

It is undeniable that Korean presence in Malaysia can be traced many years back—most visibly in the construction sector with completion of iconic buildings such as the Penang Bridge, Maybank Tower and one of the Petronas Twin Towers. Today, South Korea's role, however, has been eclipsed by China's rising economic influence in the region. China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for 13 consecutive years and the largest foreign investor in the manufacturing sector for six consecutive years. The Malaysian government has shown receptiveness towards the Belt and Road Initiative launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 by participating in a number of mega projects under the cooperation framework. These economic incentives have evidently contributed to Putrajaya's accommodative attitude towards Beijing's soft power activism in Malaysia. For example, despite the

¹ Daniele Carminati, "Is South Korea the New Quintessential Representation of Soft Power?", 18 September 2022, E-International Relations, <<https://www.e-ir.info/2022/09/18/is-south-korea-the-new-quintessential-soft-power/>> (accessed 1 October 2022).

² Sammy Westfall, "K-pop Icons BTS Appointed South Korea Presidential Special Envoys Ahead U.N. General Assembly", 14 September 2021, The Washington Post, <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/09/14/bts-un-assembly/>> (accessed 26 September 2022).

³ "#Showbiz: Blackpink First Girl Group to Top Billboard's Global 200 with 'Pink Venom'", 30 August 2022, New Straits Times, <<https://www.nst.com.my/lifestyle/groove/2022/08/827016/showbiz-blackpink-first-girl-group-top-billboards-global-200-pink>> (accessed 2 October 2022).

⁴ Carminati, "Is South Korea the New Quintessential Representation of Soft Power?".

public's deep concerns about Beijing's influence operations in the country, the Malaysian government continues to allow Beijing to establish new Confucius Institutes across the nation for the sake of preserving economic partnership with China. Similar pattern is also observed in Putrajaya's "low-profile" South China Sea policy that tends to downplay issues arising from Chinese assertive behaviour in the dispute.

The South Korean Embassy in Malaysia engaged a team of Malaysian scholars in 2019 to conduct a research to assess Southeast Asian elites' opinion on how to deepen

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PARTNERSHIP WITH CHINA.**

Korea-ASEAN Connectivity under the New Southern Policy. The report highlighted the absence of signature projects as one of several shortcomings of the New Southern Policy and also identified Seoul's competitive advantages in multiple fields. South Korea's competitive advantages include its strength in smart city projects, which most ASEAN countries (if not all) seek to embark on, as well as in fourth industrial revolution technologies. Southeast Asian countries can leverage on South Korea's high-tech industries like artificial intelligence and auto-robotics to gain an edge on industrial upgrade and economic transformation.

Taking into consideration these comments and suggestions from the research, Seoul began to actively engage the Malaysian government in various niche areas. In January 2021, SK Nexilis—a leading producer of copper foil for electric vehicle battery cells and a division of South Korean giant conglomerate SK Group—began construction of its first overseas plant in Sabah that is likely to be operational in 2023.⁵ In September 2021, Samsung and Lotte Chemical teamed up with Sarawak Energy and Sarawak Economic Development Corporation to advance a

green hydrogen project known as H2biscus.⁶ More recent collaborations between South Korea and Malaysia include Simmtech Holdings Co. Ltd's announcement to set up its first Southeast Asia facility in Batu Kawan, Penang in May 2022.⁷ Subsequently in July 2022, the East Coast Economic Region Development Council and the Terengganu state government, in collaboration with the Malaysian Investment Development Authority, announced their goal to secure a potential investment worth RM5 billion from South Korea's leading petrochemical firms to construct new manufacturing plants in Terengganu.⁸

In sum, this is the opportune time for Seoul to leverage its remarkable portfolio of attractive national features and translate them into closer bilateral and multilateral collaborations with both Malaysia and ASEAN as a whole, focusing primarily on elevating existing economic cooperation and partnerships. Bilaterally, while Malaysia needs multiple options and platforms to work with different partners to avoid overdependency on any particular country, South Korea, at its end, has the ability to offer Putrajaya with an overall partnership package that guarantees not only the quality and sustainability of technology, designs and products, but also more favourable financing terms and readiness in transferring technology and knowledge. Multilaterally, working closely with like-minded partners in ASEAN would enable South Korea to create a diplomatic space to hedge against pitfalls from the Sino-US rivalry and expand its statecraft beyond the traditional security, economic and diplomatic partnerships. It is also worth highlighting that such cooperation is mutually beneficial, as enhanced partnership between ASEAN and South Korea would also allow ASEAN member states to benefit from greater ASEAN-South Korea connectivity and other forms of collaborations that are laid out in South Korea's new Indo-Pacific Strategy.

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⁵ "SK Nexilis to Build RM2.3bil Copper Foil Facility in Kota Kinabalu", 26 January 2021, The Star, <<https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2021/01/26/sk-nexilis-to-build-rm-23bil-copper-foil-facility-in-kota-kinabalu>> (accessed 28 September 2022).

⁶ "Samsung Engineering Inks MoU to Supply Hydro-based Renewable Power to H2biscus Project in Sarawak", 8 September 2022, New Straits Times, <<https://www.nst.com.my/business/2022/09/829573/samsung-engineering-inks-mou-supply-hydro-based-renewable-power-h2biscus>> (accessed 25 September 2022).

⁷ Opalyn Mok, "South Korea's Simmtech Opens New Facility in Penang, 700 Workers Hired So Far", 9 May 2022, Malay Mail, <<https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/05/09/south-koreas-simmtech-opens-new-facility-in-penang-700-workers-hired-so-far/2057871>> (accessed on 1 October 2022).

⁸ Elizabeth Yee, "ECERDC Aims to Secure RM5 Billion South Korean Investment", 5 July 2022, Business Today, <<https://www.businesstoday.com.my/2022/07/05/ecerdc-aims-to-secure-rm5-billion-south-korean-investments/>> (accessed 30 August 2022).

South Korea's Soft Power in Singapore

Gordon Kang



Mr Gordon Kang

Decades of stable, positive relations between Singapore and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have seen the progressive normalisation of South Korean soft power in Singapore society. Soft power, first conceptualised by Joseph Nye in the neoliberalist school of International Relations, co-opts rather than coerces. It is the ability to entice and attract through culture, politics and economics. The Korean wave, or *hallyu*, has undoubtedly been at the forefront in driving modern consumption of Korean music, TV shows, food, and even the Korean language and Hangeul (Korean alphabets) learning in Singapore. That the "Korea Weeks 2022", organised by the Embassy of the ROK in Singapore, contained such a diverse and comprehensive array of events demonstrates the extent to which South Korea's cultural exchange locally has been welcomed in Singapore society. Conversely, this also reflects South Korea's desire to continue developing its long-term vision and trust in Singapore. In what ways are South Korea's soft power elements observable in Singapore? What makes South Korean soft power so compelling to broader consumption by the local public in Singapore?

Elements of South Korea's soft power are ubiquitous in contemporary Singapore society. Korean foodstuffs have become usual features in hawker centres, food courts and grocery stores; neighbourhoods such as Tanjong Pagar and Bukit Timah have particularly high concentration of Korean restaurants. Just as *hallyu* targets the global market, Singapore's similarly open and globalised economic orientation ensures that South Korea's latest trends are constant features in Singapore's digital media stream. Whether via the deluge of marketing or the accessibility to information consumed through platforms such as Instagram

and TikTok, Singaporeans are increasingly well-acquainted with South Korea's current, and even past, norms. In 2022, wildly popular celebrities such as Park Eun Bin, Song Joong Ki and Hwang In Youp had also visited Singapore to meet their fans. The Korea Tourism Organisation and the Embassy of the ROK in Singapore collaborate frequently with local organisations; in 2021, the former also signed a two-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Singapore Tourism Board to promote tourism in both countries and strengthen ties.¹

The clearest indicator of *hallyu*'s predominance in Singapore is perhaps with K-pop. After Spotify's launch in Singapore in 2013, 1.7 billion listening hours (equivalent to 194,063 years) of K-pop music had been streamed in Singapore as of 2018. In 2021, the most streamed artist in the country was the hugely successful boy band BTS, and three of the top five most streamed music groups also hailed from Korea, namely BTS, Blackpink and Twice. Singapore is also an increasingly popular concert destination in Korean artists' regional and global tours. In 2022 alone, world-famous groups such as Super Junior, (G)-Idle, NCT, Seventeen had already performed in Singapore, with others such as Itzy and Blackpink lining up their acts for 2023. Singapore held the HallyuPopFest—the largest K-pop festival in Southeast Asia with the biggest contingent of Korean acts at the time of its initiation—in 2018 and

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2019 at the Singapore Indoor Stadium and the festival was hugely successful.

Singaporean representation in the *hallyu* wave is also increasingly common. The K-Pop industry has launched the career of several Singaporeans, such as Natasha Low and Ferlin Wong of girl group SKarf, Cheris Lee of GBB and Vegas Ong of Rendezvous. Labels such as YG

¹ See <<https://www.stb.gov.sg/content/stb/en/media-centre/media-releases/Korea-Tourism-Organization-and-the-Singapore-Tourism-Board-Launch-Partnership-to-Promote-and-Enhance-Bilateral-Tourism.html>> (accessed 27 September 2022).

... Singapore's multiculturalism and its deeply ingrained globalised outlook ... led to such fervent enthusiasm to explore alternative means to fulfil one's past or idealised perception of Korea.

Entertainment, one of South Korea's largest entertainment agencies, are in search of talents in Singapore; in November 2022, YG Entertainment held auditions at Orchard Gateway Mall. *Ajoomma*, the first official Singapore–South Korea film co-production, features Singaporean actress Hong Hui Fang, with her performance clinching her a nomination for the Best Leading Actress at the 59th Golden Horse Awards. K-drama *Little Women* was also filmed partly in Singapore, casting local actors such as Adrian Pang and Joshua Tan in cameo roles. Studio Dragon, a well-known K-drama production house, had even signed a three-year MOU with the Singapore Tourism Board in 2020 to feature Singapore more frequently to drive post-COVID-19 recovery efforts.² Popular online communities, such as Hallyusg.com, likewise play a key role in bringing Singaporeans closer to contemporary Korean lifestyle trends and events.

Yet, such local attraction to South Korea's soft power elements run deeper than simply the high standards of quality of *hallyu*'s drive. Perhaps, this is attributable to Singapore's multiculturalism and its deeply ingrained globalised outlook, which led to such fervent enthusiasm to explore alternative means to fulfil one's past or idealised perception of Korea. *Hallyu* offers the accessibility and relatability to immerse in the aesthetics of such vivid environments, cultural heritage, climates and storied geographies, and these ephemeral experiences compel Singaporeans to pursue Korean lifestyle and content. Notable K-dramas from the 2000s, such as *Winter Sonata*, *Jewel in the Palace*, *Boys Over Flowers*, and even variety shows such as *Running Man* and *Infinite Challenge*, broadened viewers' palate for unfamiliar but attractive and ultimately relatable cultural traits. Indeed, Dalkomm Café was extremely popular when it first opened in Singapore in 2016, partly because it was featured in *Descendants of the Sun*, a massively popular K-drama.

The popularity of K-dramas is clearly observable in the numbers. Singapore's Infocomm Media Development Authority Over-the-Top Video Consumer Study in 2015 has shown that in terms of dramas watched, those of South Korea origin were the most popular and had the highest percentage of viewership among adults in Singapore (40%). In the second-most popular category on entertainment/variety (8%), South Korean content also topped the list.³ Indeed, based on data from the Korean Statistical Information Service, the number of Singaporean visitors in

² See <<https://www.straitstimes.com/life/entertainment/singapore-backdrop-for-k-dramas-in-the-future>> (accessed 27 September 2022)

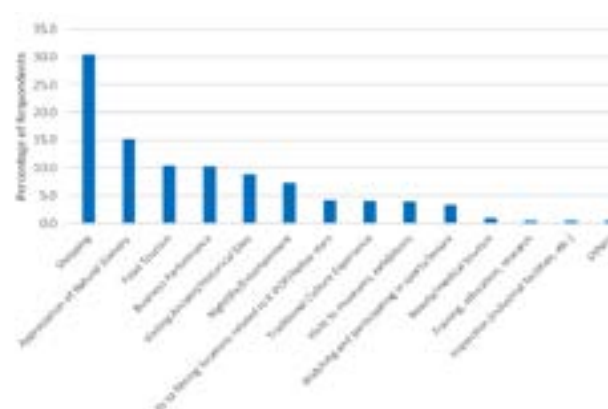
³ See <<https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/Imda/Files/Industry-Development/Fact-and-Figures/OTT-Video-Consumer-Study-2015.pdf>> (accessed 28 September 2022).

Figure 1. Number of Singaporean Visitors to South Korea by Purpose of Visit, January 2012–June 2022



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Korean Statistical Information Service (KSIS), 2022.

Figure 2. Most Satisfying Activities Surveyed among Singaporean Tourists to South Korea in 2019



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from KSIS, 2021.

South Korea by purpose of visit has largely been dominated by tourists, with a noticeable increase in visitorship over the last decade, up until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Figure 1). In a survey on Singaporean tourists' most satisfying activities in South Korea in 2019, appreciating the natural scenery, food tourism, sightseeing of filming locations related to K-pop and *hallyu* culture, and experiencing traditional cultures were among the top 10 in the list. These are strong factors that drive South Korea's success in exerting soft power influence in Singapore.

These trends are undoubtedly fuelled by strong bilateral economic ties between Singapore and the ROK. In 2021, the ROK was Singapore's seventh-largest trading partner, with merchandise trade amounting to S\$56.2 billion.⁴ Singapore's import of services from the ROK had

⁴ See <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/modules/infographics/-/media/Files/visualising_data/infographics/trade_and_investment/singapore-international-trade.pdf> (accessed 27 September 2022)

progressively increased in the past two decades, hitting nearly S\$6 billion in 2020, compared to just S\$600 million in 2001 (Figure 3). Singapore's direct investment into the ROK escalated significantly in 2015; by end-2020, Singapore recorded S\$9.95 billion worth of investments in the ROK, which is Singapore's eighth-largest investment destination. The Korea–Singapore free trade agreement, which was the ROK's second such agreement at the time, entered into force in March 2006 with a subsequent review agreed upon in 2018 to account for the technological advancement and economic conditions. In the past decade, Enterprise Singapore and the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency signed an MOU with relation to joint Smart City and Infrastructure Development projects in “third country” markets outside of Singapore and the ROK. Most recently, the Korea Singapore Digital Partnership Agreement—the fourth Digital Economy Agreement that Singapore holds—was signed in November 2022 after negotiations concluded in December 2021.⁵

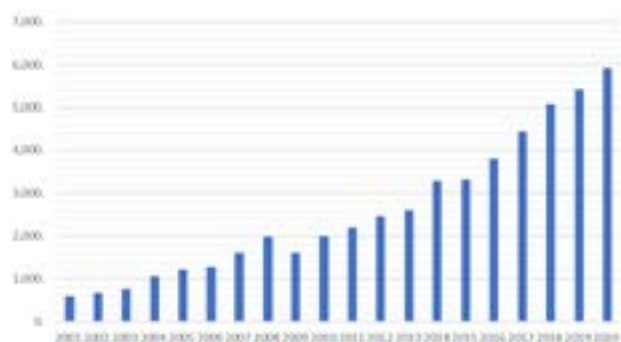
The unique relatability of South Korea's soft power to Singapore and the broader ASEAN region deserves a deeper anthropological study than what this commentary can offer. Briefly, several characteristics or themes in South Korea's soft power could be plausible driving factors. Much of its thematic content focuses on popular, everyday appeal and are constructed as packaged narratives without sensitive sociopolitical messaging. Such an approach finds wider acceptance and gradual normalisation across the generally conservative, traditionally Confucianist-influenced cultures across Southeast Asia. With diligence and self-sacrifice being focal Asian values that both Singaporean and South Korean societies share, the portrayal of pursuing perfection and success is also a common theme across popular K-dramas. Singapore and many other Southeast Asian states are also steeped in deep, collective historical experiences, such as those from World War II, that relate to the emotive pull of Korea's unique *han* (한)—the generational complex of emotions encapsulating sorrow and injustice, among others—that draws its roots from the historical tragedies of its past in Japanese colonisation, the Korean War and domestic instability.

It is likely that South Korea's soft power influence will continue to grow, and in a manner that is positive for both societies. The nature of South Korea's soft power is mutually reinforcing, particularly through aligned strategic interests. Both Singapore and South Korea seek similar regional strategies towards a rules-based, stable regional order that prioritises mutually beneficial and inclusive economic relations. This galvanises South Korea's soft power and in turn drives the continued improvement of bilateral ties. The former Moon Jae-in administration's New Southern Policy had successfully created closer interlinkages between ASEAN and South Korea. The Yoon Suk-yeol administration's announcement of the Indo-Pacific

2022).

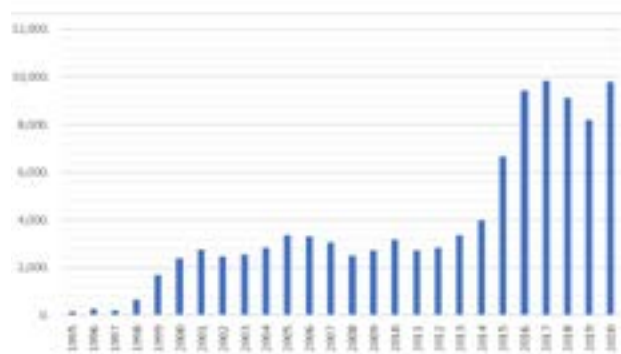
⁵ See <<https://www.mti.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Releases/2022/11/Singapore-and-the-Republic-of-Korea-sign-the-Korea-Singapore-Digital-Partnership-Agreement>> (accessed 29 September 2022).

Figure 3. Singapore's Import of Services from ROK, 2001–2020 (S\$ million)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Singapore Department of Statistics, 2022.

Figure 4. Singapore's Direct Investment abroad into ROK, 1995–2020 (S\$ million)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Singapore Department of Statistics, 2022.

Strategy and South Korea's aspirations to be a “global pivotal state” within the US-led Indo Pacific strategic framework has thus far included the ASEAN-specific Korea–ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI)—an important policy initiative demonstrating the ROK's continued commitment to ASEAN and Southeast Asia.

These developments provide predictability and help solidify assurances that the ROK–Singapore relationship continues to function as an important node—one that will be fundamentally based within the Indo-Pacific Strategy's principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and trust. By precluding overtly political rhetoric that applies pressure to take sides in the broader arena of great power politics, South Korea's soft power will continue to find widespread acceptance in Singapore and successfully allow its constructive benefits to be felt in both country's societies.

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South Korea's Soft Power in Indonesia

Aisha R Kusumasomantri



Ms Aisha R Kusumasomantri

South Korea's soft power in Indonesia is prominent and has become a mainstream aspect of Indonesian society, especially among the youth. While South Korea has indubitably considerable influence across ASEAN, for the purpose of developing deeper bilateral relations, and particularly that between Indonesia and the Republic of Korea (ROK), more clarity is required so as to better understand the semantics behind the ROK's soft power influence within Indonesian society. This article seeks to contribute to this discussion and explain the ROK's soft power influence on Indonesian society.

As is widely known, soft power is the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce. However, there is also an intangible aspect of soft power that cannot be measured in society—it is dependent on the recipient and is made more complex in that the response of the recipient cannot be controlled too. The responses also vary across different types of soft power, which Joseph Nye postulates can be found in culture, political values and foreign policy.

Indonesia has shared a very positive relationship with South Korea, since the establishment of their diplomatic relations in 1973. Both Indonesia and South Korea also have complementary bilateral trade relations, with total trade in 2020 reaching US\$18.57 billion and a surplus of US\$2.3 billion for Indonesia. South Korea's foreign direct investment (FDI) in Indonesia hit US\$8.5 billion—the second-largest of South Korea's investment in ASEAN behind Vietnam and also South Korea's third-largest globally. Conversely, South Korea is Indonesia's fourth-largest FDI destination, as Indonesia set its 2022 goal to achieve US\$30 billion in bilateral trade. However, bilateral trade had experienced some declines due to sensitive trade products—from 2003 to 2017, Indonesia–ROK trade decreased by 10.34%.

Nonetheless, there are growing opportunities to revive this decline since the ROK announced the launch of its New Southern Policy Plus. The New Southern Policy Plus, as a form of public diplomacy, could be translated as the ROK's soft power to engage Southeast Asian countries and India. The establishment of the presidential committee on the New Southern Policy during the former President Moon Jae-in's administration also demonstrates South Korea's commitment to Southeast Asia. The Indonesian government perceived these developments as an opportunity to revive relations between South Korea and Indonesia.

Additionally, political relations between Indonesia and the ROK had also improved. In 2017, Indonesia and South Korea signed a special strategic partnership agreement, which covers defence and foreign relations, bilateral trade and infrastructure cooperation, people-to-people exchanges, and regional and multilateral cooperation. Both Indonesia and South Korea are also very strong democracies, and this enhances the sense of closeness and similarity between them. Nevertheless, such forms of top-down cooperation have presented a perplexing situation of declining trade relations, given that Indonesia and South Korea are special strategic partners.

South Korea's pop culture is a particularly popular form of soft power in Indonesia. In terms of entertainment, there are currently three forms of popular subculture in Indonesia: K-pop, K-dramas and webtoons. The popularity of webtoons in Indonesia is interesting but yet it is an understudied

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aspect. In Indonesia, there are six million users of LINE webtoons and two million users of Kakao's webtoon platform—indeed, Indonesia has become one of the biggest markets for web comics outside South Korea. It should be highlighted that South Korea is not the only state whose soft power pervades in Indonesia—Hollywood, Bollywood and Chinese entertainment industry likewise have posed competition to South Korea in exerting its influence. However, as observation has shown, only Hollywood has the most consistent presence in Indonesia. J-pop used to be popular in Indonesia but today, its popularity has waned, and Chinese dramas are also facing declining popularity.

The differentiating attributes of South Korea's soft power

INDONESIA IS THE LARGEST K-POP MARKET GLOBALLY AFTER SOUTH KOREA, ACCOUNTING FOR 9.9% OF MARKET SHARE AND THIS IS STILL GROWING.

and Korean entertainment products are their relatability, modernity and accessibility via technology, whether on YouTube or social media. Technology applications bringing South Korea's entertainment products to homes have won great appeal, especially, to younger generations in Indonesia. One of the most popular K-dramas, *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, was consistently ranked top in Netflix Indonesia from August to October 2022. A webtoon titled *True Beauty* also enjoyed immense popularity and millions of readership in Indonesia.

Indonesia as a South Korean pop culture market is also very promising. Indonesia is the largest K-pop market globally after South Korea, accounting for 9.9% of market share and this is still growing. Korean dramas are beginning to dominate Indonesia's entertainment industry. Major streaming platforms, such as Netflix, and local streaming platforms in Indonesia, such as Vidio and Viu, have also attempted to increase their offer of Korean dramas due to the potential of K-dramas to attract viewers and subscribers to their platform.

The appeal of South Korea's entertainment is utilised by many companies in Indonesia and in South Korea. Korean companies' familiarity in the Indonesian market has created plenty of opportunities for Korea. Many companies have attempted to leverage the popularity of Korean culture and idols to market their products, whether mobile phones or cars. Ten years ago, there were not many Korean restaurants in Jakarta; today, the number of Korean restaurants has mushroomed in malls, evidence of the growing demand for Korean food culture. Popular online shopping platforms, such as Shopee in Indonesia, also widely use Korean girl and boy bands as brand ambassadors. This has generated interest from the young generation, especially those youths who follow closely South Korean cultural products; this resulted in fandoms and some fans even take pictures or selfies with advertisements featuring their favourite idols in train stations.

Today, the social aspect of South Korea's subculture is also increasingly embedded in Indonesians' daily lives. South Korean fashion, skincare and social mannerism have become a major influence on Indonesian youths. For example, while the standard haircut in schools or universities is short hair, but in recent times, more of the youth prefer Korean-style haircuts, makeup and fashion. South Korea's historical culture and language education of Hangul have also gained increasing popularity. Through interviews of the Indonesian youth conducted earlier in 2022, many had joined Korean fan bases and *hallyu* (Korean wave) communities across Indonesia, with some spending around US\$200 per month in merchandise as a show of

support for their idol groups. There are many fan bases, such as NCTzen Yogyakarta, Komunitas Hallyu and Komunitas Cinta Korea, established across various Indonesian cities.

The influence of South Korea's entertainment industry also reaches Indonesian entertainment products as well. This is evident in the establishment of Indonesian Korean-style boy bands and girl groups, such as Cherry Belle and Smash, as well as the adaptation of Korean dramas and movies in local productions like *Miracle in Cell Seven*. For webtoons, NAVER's LINE webtoon opened a local platform for self-publication in Indonesia, providing local creators space and opportunities to post digital comics with Korean influence and style. This revolutionised the comic and digital industry in Indonesia, as local creators create their own community such as "Webinal ID".

Nonetheless, there are several criticisms of the ROK's soft power influence in Indonesia. First, the Korean wave has become a cultural export somehow, rather than a cultural exchange between South Korea and other countries. In many ways, this is largely a one-way interaction, whereby South Korea provides a product of Korean entertainment without any people-to-people exchange of cultural interaction and diplomacy.

Second, there are also concerns regarding the incompatibility of *hallyu* with local cultures. This concerns the particularisms of different countries' cultures. For example, a Korean brand ambassador received complaints from one of the conservative parties in Indonesia regarding female clothing that are "sexy" and "provocative" in nature—this became very controversial in Indonesia, as one camp claimed that such fashion is normal, but the more conservative camp argued that it is actually incompatible with the local culture in Indonesia.

Third, the concern that the ROK's soft power is largely business driven, following a cost-benefit analysis rather than striving to build positive relations with other countries. South Korea's entertainment products clearly generate significant revenue, leading to the common perception that many of these companies focus on generating profit instead.

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THROUGH INTERVIEWS OF THE INDONESIAN
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Fourth, many countries express concerns of facing exploitation from outsourcing many of their needs to other countries. For instance, the payment rates for copywriters or illustrators in the webtoon industry between South Korea and ASEAN countries differ vastly. Across the entertainment industry in general, individuals also face risks of being exploited in the industry itself as well.

Nonetheless, I believe that the success of the Korean wave in Indonesia is significantly linked to Indonesia–ROK trade relations. In general, while bilateral trade declined in 2015, the attempt to arrest the decline in 2017 with the signing of the strategic partnership showed some improvement for a short period of time before trade decreased again in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An interesting observation is that in terms of the composition of total exports of commodities between both countries, cultural products—including the entertainment industry—does not translate to overall trade significantly. There still exists a gap between both states in utilising political and economic aspects of soft power to effectively increase bilateral trade. Exports from South Korea to Indonesia consist mostly of energy, electrical machinery, and iron and steel products, whereas those from Indonesia to South

Korea cover mineral fuels, mineral oils, iron and steel, and many more.

In conclusion, South Korea's soft power in Indonesia is conducted via a top-down approach in foreign policy, embedding in Indonesia's grassroots and society. K-pop culture, in particular, has gained popularity and become mainstream in the everyday lives in Indonesia. Nonetheless, this wide-ranging, intangible nature of the ROK's soft power has had little effect on bilateral relations at the state level. South Korea, with a strong positive image, remains widely attractive to the broader society, and this could garner political support and market demand benefitting future agendas. Nonetheless, moving forward, it is important to investigate how both South Korea and Indonesia could utilise the soft power for their mutual benefits.

Note: Gordon Kang summarised Ms Kusumasomantri's presentation of her topic "South Korea's Soft Power in Indonesia" at the EAI Seminar on "South Korea Soft Power and its Foreign Policies in the ASEAN Region".

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Chinese Soft Power in Southeast Asia

Li Minjiang

Many people tend to believe that soft power comes from certain power sources: culture, values, institutions and foreign policy. But what actually produces the attraction of soft power? How could one build his/her persuasive power? Does soft power originate from various sources of power? Does one's capability of attraction exist in nature or by nurture?

This article argues that soft power needs to be nurtured. A country's soft power is nurtured via interactions with foreign countries. Culture does not have to be a source of soft power, as it can lead to displeasure and even motivate violence. Military power does not have to be the primary source of hard power, as it can produce attraction and help to build persuasion as well. Similarly, economic power, which can be used for punishment, can also be utilised as a source of welfare provision to benefit people in other countries. In essence, there is no intrinsic nature of any power element that can be regarded as soft power—it eventuates towards how power is nurtured.

This, however, does not imply that culture does not matter, given that culture is only one of many sources. One should examine how cultural traditions and norms are promoted, culminating in soft power. How is the correlation between culture and soft power established? For instance, do South Korean soft power in Southeast Asia that include such attributes as the Korean restaurants, Korean cultural facilities and programmes in Southeast Asia also help cultivate North Korea's soft power in Southeast Asia? The same could be alluded to China versus Taiwan. Do China's



Dr Li Minjiang

Confucius Institutes, in promoting Chinese language, traditions and culture, also help cultivate Taiwan's soft power? In-depth research needs to be conducted to clarify some of the conceptual issues pertaining to soft power.

China's soft power approach in Southeast Asia includes the following elements. Notwithstanding the numerous Chinese cultural activities and education exchange programmes between China and Southeast Asia as well

as various scholarship opportunities available for students in Southeast Asia, China's soft power in Southeast Asia presents a mixed picture in terms of ideology and political values. Primarily, political, diplomatic, social, educational and cultural engagement, and especially the role of non-state actors in China are key factors of engaging Southeast Asian countries and societies. Participation in regional multilateralism, as evident in China's stance towards ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN way, etc., has contributed to generating China's soft power in the region as China has attempted to commit efforts in mitigating some of the security concerns in the Mekong region. Economic statecraft, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative, has also helped to generate China's influence and, to a certain extent, China's soft power in Southeast Asia.

Two general observations can be made, analysing the survey results of the ISEAS annual reports. First, over the past two decades, China achieved remarkable success in building and expanding its influence in Southeast Asia. Second, the influence, however, does not translate into China's soft power. One should note that there is a distinction between influence and soft power. Influence does not necessarily mean attraction and persuasion. Based on the ISEAS 2022 survey reports, China was currently regarded as the most influential strategic and political actor in Southeast Asia. Over 80% of people in Southeast Asia expressed anxiety over China's political and strategic influence. The economic arena also witnesses a similar trend: a vast majority of people in the Southeast Asian region perceived China as the most powerful economic partner, but they displayed highly negative attitude and deep concerns towards China's economic influence. With regard to people's level of confidence in major powers, survey respondents chose overwhelmingly "no confidence" in China, i.e. China lagged far behind Japan, the United States and the European Union (EU). In terms of people's perceptions of the major powers' track record of complying with international law, China again lagged far behind the United States, ASEAN and the EU. On how people in Southeast Asia perceive the re-emergence of China as a major power, a significant proportion of respondents regarded China a revisionist power, and that China is gradually overtaking the United States. Therefore, these survey results do not present a positive picture of China.

Based on the notion of soft power as the ability to get the other party to do what one wants, two very important developments have emerged in the Indo-Pacific region's security landscape, namely the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and AUKUS (the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States). In Southeast Asia, nearly 60% of people agree or strongly agree that strengthening the QUAD would be constructive for the region. China is opposed to the QUAD—certainly, most people in the region are not supportive of China's strategic or security interests. Such negative sentiments also apply to AUKUS. Over 36% of people in the region believed that AUKUS would help balance China's growing military power. On the question that required respondents to choose between the United States and China,

findings from 2022 and 2021 showed that more people in Southeast Asia tended to choose the former, the United States. Pertaining to respondents' concerns about future relations with China, the primary concern cited, garnering over 50% of responses, was China's growing economic dominance and political influence in their country. The second primary concern was China's strong-arm tactics in the South China Sea and in the Mekong region. Nearly 40% also perceived that China would use economic tools and tourism to punish their country's foreign policy choices. What do respondents expect China to do? Mainly, they expect China to respect their own country's sovereignty, and to attempt to maintain mutually beneficial bilateral trade relations. Based on findings from 2022 and 2021 on Southeast Asians' trust in China, most people ranked China far behind Japan, the United States and the EU. For distrust, China was ranked No. 1. Nonetheless, there has been some slight positive developments in China's soft power in Southeast Asia from 2020 to 2021. COVID-19 and China's vaccine assistance to ASEAN countries could be the mitigating factors in this respect.

Over the years, China has established a strong strategic position in Southeast Asia, but its soft power foundation remains weak and uncertain. Logically, if China wants to further improve its soft power in the region, it would need to exercise caution on how it uses its power, especially in the context of South China Sea dispute. The imminent

BASED ON THE ISEAS 2022 SURVEY REPORTS, CHINA WAS CURRENTLY REGARDED AS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL STRATEGIC AND POLITICAL ACTOR IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. OVER 80% OF PEOPLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA EXPRESSED ANXIETY OVER CHINA'S POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC INFLUENCE.

future would witness a continuation in China's soft power strategy: engagement, some efforts in de-escalating the South China Sea dispute and economic statecraft, which are some of Beijing's main foreign policy tools. China is unlikely to significantly increase its soft power in Southeast Asia for various reasons, not least with the extent of surging nationalism in China today.

Note: Gordon Kang summarised Dr Li Minjiang's presentation of his topic "Chinese Soft Power in Southeast Asia" at the EAI Seminar on "South Korea Soft Power and its Foreign Policies in the ASEAN Region".

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Role of South Korea's Soft Power in South Korea–Viet Nam Relations

Tran Xuan Thuy



Mr Tran Xuan Thuy

On 5 December 2022, at the new Presidential Office of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in Yongsan, Seoul, Viet Nam President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol announced the decision to upgrade the 30-year South Korea–Viet Nam bilateral relationship to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”. How South Korea and Viet Nam grew from old enemies to comprehensive strategic partners is a lesson worth exploring. This is a textbook example as to what countries could do to overcome the past and cooperate towards a shared future full of opportunities. In this case, culture—in other words, South Korean soft power—is instrumental in charting the course of the two nations’ bond.

Viet Nam–South Korea: 30 Years of Relations

During the Cold War, South Korea, as an ally of the United States, participated in the Viet Nam War on the supporting side of South Viet Nam. In spite of the memories of the potentially hindering war history from the 1980s that the two countries share, both Korea and Viet Nam agreed to put historical issues aside and to cooperate for the sake of the future. Both sides started humbly from exchanging their liaison offices and quickly agreed to upgrade those to full-fledged diplomatic missions at ambassadorial level on 22 December 1992. Since then, the two countries’ relations have achieved impressive successes in every possible aspect.

In 1992, trade volume between Viet Nam and South Korea was only US\$0.5 million but has since tremendously increased. Thirty years on, Korea is currently the third-

largest trade partner of Viet Nam (after China and the United States), with a two-way turnover of US\$80.7 billion in 2021 that would be expected to reach US\$100 billion in 2023. While Viet Nam is the fourth-largest trade partner of South Korea (after China, Japan and the United States). Compared to 1992, the difference in two-way trade volume today is 161 times higher and is still rising. At regional scope, among ASEAN members, Viet Nam is currently the focus of South Korea’s New Southern Policy and New Southern Policy Plus, with bilateral trade accounting for more than 40% of total turnovers between the East Asian country and the bloc.

South Korea is the largest foreign investor in Viet Nam, injecting US\$74.7 billion in total capital as of 2021. There are around 4,000 South Korean companies operating in Viet Nam, including South Korean global-level corporations such as Samsung Electronics, SK, Hyundai Motor, LG Electronics and Lotte. South Korea is also Viet Nam’s second-largest labour export market after Taiwan, with around 48,000 Vietnamese working in South Korea. There are about 216,000 Vietnamese residents in South Korea and nearly the same number of South Korean living and working in Viet Nam. Travellers to and from both countries had reached 4.8 million in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic).

About 60 provinces and cities between both countries signed and successfully implemented approximately 80 memorandum of understanding covering investment, trade, agriculture, education and training, labour and people-to-people exchanges. South Korean investors invested in 49 localities out of total 63 provinces and five centrally governed cities of Viet Nam. About 95% of South Korean projects were undertaken by small and medium-size investors. Most of the South Korean chaebols (large family-controlled business conglomerates) already invested in Viet Nam, mainly in huge projects that include providing Vietnamese enterprises assistance to build their supply chain.

South Korea experienced its development boom much earlier than Viet Nam. As one of the United States’ most important strategic partners in East Asia, South Korea has many opportunities and strong capabilities to cooperate with a variety of powerful economies. Nevertheless, compared to many other regional and international partners, Viet Nam has quickly become an important partner in South Korea’s trade and investment. This could be attributed to not only economic interests but also, to a deeper level, the cultural similarities between both nations. *Hallyu (the Korean wave)—long recognised as a tool of Korea’s soft power and a unique element of Korea’s public diplomacy—may explain why Viet Nam and South Korea were able to expedite the process of bilateral reconnection and relations development.*

Culture—the Bridge between Two Nations

In the 1990s, hallyu swept the planet, literally, with Korean pop music, film, TV, dramas, gaming industry, food, education, sports, etc. Starting from *First Love* (1996), *Medical Brothers* (1997), *Star in My Heart* (1997) and then *Winter Sonata* (2002), Korean dramas had won the heart and mind of Vietnamese audiences, who were captivated by the good looks of Korean actors and the strong content.

After K-dramas, K-pop in turn became a strategic cultural product of South Korea that boosted foreign audiences' awareness of South Korean values via endorsement of brands and products, hence generating hugely successful economic and cultural values. Through idols and pop groups like Girls' Generation, BTS or Psy, the attitude and lifestyle of Vietnamese people, especially the young generation, have been heavily influenced by hallyu. K-fashion, K-cosmetics and K-food have become popular in every corner of Viet Nam. The "content to commerce" concept embedded in hallyu has led to efficiently high recognition of South Korean national values. Many critics even label Viet Nam as the most successful case of the hallyu effect.

The popularity of hallyu has created a favourable environment for Korean entrepreneurs and Koreans in Viet Nam. The Vietnamese public is believed to generally hold a positive perception of Korea and such cultural attraction has turned into real business advantages for South Korea. Viet Nam is considered "one of the friendliest countries"

VIET NAM IS CONSIDERED "ONE OF THE FRIENDLIEST COUNTRIES" TOWARDS SOUTH KOREAN BUSINESSES AND AMONG THE MOST ATTRACTIVE PLACES FOR SOUTH KOREA'S DIRECT INVESTMENT.

towards South Korean businesses and among the most attractive places for South Korea's direct investment. The mutually complementary industrial structure is a reason for a successful economic cooperation, but the hidden engine of success must be their cultural similarities that include shared historical background, cultural ideology, culinary preferences, the timing synchronisation of their development and their style of doing business.

First, Viet Nam and South Korea share a similar historical background that is dominated by the idea of division and reunion, of fighting against foreign invaders and of establishing an independent identity. Putting historical issues aside, this historical aspect generates a deep sympathy that both Viet Nam and South Korea share, and they are thus able to amicably and openly discuss any matters.

Second, both nations embrace Confucianism as the core moral values and code of conduct in families and community. They share many cultural values like patriotism,

self-reliance, solidarity, kindness, tolerance, affection, studiousness, diligence and optimism, and thus they naturally forge ties of brotherhood.

In terms of culinary experience, Korea and Viet Nam are two among four countries that use chopsticks every day for meals with rice consumed as staple foods. Unlike Japan or China, South Korea and Viet Nam have very strong and highly interactive culinary exchange between them. Korean bulgogi restaurants can be found in any Vietnamese city, while pho (Vietnamese noodle soup) and bun cha (noodles and grilled meat) restaurants have become popular in Seoul and other South Korean major cities. Kimchi and Vietnamese spring rolls are also common home-made dishes in both countries.

Fourth, the "Doi Moi", or opening up, of Viet Nam attempts to mirror the Asian success, including the Han River Miracle. Viet Nam benefitted from the lesson of the South Korean post-war rise and development model, and this laid a favourable foundation for promoting Korean businesses in Viet Nam.

Fifth, compared to South Korea's bilateral relations with other countries or Viet Nam's relationship with other countries, Viet Nam–South Korea relations are characterised by active and enthusiastic promotion of Korean enterprises and people, as well as local authorities in building close ties.

Looking to the Future: Rise Together, Shine Together

Bonded by the similarities in their historical background, culture and their development paths, South Korea and Viet Nam have become each other's best development partners. Both countries should work harder to shine together in the future.

High-quality projects that focus on technology transfer and higher value-added are the priority for Viet Nam–Korea cooperation in the imminent future. On 23 December 2022, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and Samsung Electronics Executive Chairman Lee Jae-yong officially inaugurated the US\$220 million Samsung R&D Centre in Hanoi, the South Korean conglomerate's largest research facility in Southeast Asia. Both countries also target to achieve a trade turnover of US\$100 billion in 2023—a new milestone in their relationship that translates to a "comprehensive strategic partnership".

Viet Nam and South Korea should continue to promote cooperation mechanisms for mutual benefits in order to enhance mutual trust pertaining to issues related to core interest.

Cultural exchange has been and will always be an important pillar of cooperation. South Korea and Viet Nam are working closely to strengthen cultural exchange to a two-way partnership, especially in people-to-people exchange. Such a cooperation will continue to enrich the culture industries of Viet Nam and support provision of cultural expressions to a multicultural community in South Korea.

Tran Xuan Thuy is a PhD student at the Diplomatic Academy of Viet Nam.

South Korea Could Do More to Enhance its Soft Power in ASEAN

Yeo Sunha



Dr Yeo Sunha

The soft power of South Korea (hereinafter Korea) has permeated Southeast Asia since the 2000s. During this period, it was often reported that Korea's soft power would soon end. However, Joseph S. Nye, who coined the term soft power, recently offered a different opinion. Nye mentioned at an international conference held in Washington, DC in 2021 that Korea is well-endowed with soft power and added that Korea could do more. Specifically, he suggested Korea to adopt relevant investment strategies and remain open to additional efforts. Pertaining to the former, the new Yoon Suk-yeol administration had already made considerable progress as it announced to double its annual contribution to the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (US\$32 million). However, active discussion of additional efforts has yet to take place. This article aims to identify what efforts the Korean government could make to promote soft power in ASEAN countries.

Areas Where South Korea Could Do More

The new administration, in the transition period, could adopt two different strategies. The first is to strengthen efforts taken by the previous administration and the second is to implement new, fresh efforts. This approach is expected to allow for more specific insights into the actions that could increase the efficiency of Korea's soft power for a longer-lasting impact.

Strengthening Previous Efforts

Maintaining preceding strategy

In 2017, former Korean President Moon Jae-in announced the launch of the New Southern Policy. He described ASEAN as a "special and valued friend" of Korea in his statement at the 19th ASEAN-Korea Summit. Public relations scholars argue that relationships can be based

on either exchange (where one party benefits the other under the expectation of receiving a comparable benefit in return) or communal (where each party cares about the other's welfare). Friendships are more communal in nature. Former Korean President Moon's statement shows that Korea views its relationship with ASEAN as communal. The new administration should maintain the communal orientation and place the people of ASEAN at the centre of its foreign policy. Increased investment in human resources to empower ASEAN people is expected to strengthen the ASEAN-Korea relationship. Korea, which expressed full support for the United Nations campaign #ENDviolence, could provide financial and welfare assistance to women and girls in ASEAN countries.

Expanding preceding strategies

As an extension of this effort, Korea should share this strategy—i.e. building continuous communal relationships with ASEAN—with its key actors (e.g. Korean entities in the field of official development assistance, education, etc.). In particular, Korea needs to share its plan with those entities in the economic sector that tend to view this relationship from a marketing point of view and focus more on economic benefits. Past studies found that cost-benefit-oriented relationships could be more productive and effective, but they are not long-lasting. Korean entrepreneurs should develop their relationships with the ASEAN public into communal ones by fostering a truly caring atmosphere that focuses on the welfare of their employees and residents where their factories are located or hosted.

In addition, the Korean press should exercise care in reporting the Korea-ASEAN relationship. The Korean media outlets have covered the exchange relationship between Korea and ASEAN closely. For instance, the Korea Times, one of the oldest and most widely circulated sources of Korean news in English, published 158 articles containing the term ASEAN between January and November 2022. Economic-related reports accounted for a large significant proportion—at 40.5% (64 articles)—of the total articles. Only 6.5% (10 articles) dealt with history, culture, cooperation and aid of the two countries. Such extensive coverage on exchange relationships could deliver a false impression to the general public in both Korea and ASEAN that the New Southern Policy is a diplomatic effort with economic purposes. A balanced coverage of both relationship types is necessary to avoid misunderstandings.

Implementing New Efforts

Narrowing the discrepancy between experiential and reputational relationships

There are two characteristics that define relationships between the peoples of Korea and ASEAN. The first is

experiential relationships that refer to direct experiences which ASEAN people built with Korea (e.g. ASEAN tourists, immigrants, exchange programme participants). However, few ASEAN people have the opportunity to visit Korea. Most of them experience Korea indirectly through the media or other local sources (e.g. neighbours and friends who have direct experiences with Korea) and build reputational relationships with Korea.

Recent research by the ASEAN–Korea Center found that most ASEAN youths evaluated their reputational relationship with Korea positively. They picked Korea as the most trustworthy country (93.6%). The initial favourable attitude, however, gradually diminishes after they get a chance to experience Korea or Korean entities directly. Active efforts to narrow the discrepancy between experiential relationships and reputational relationships should be initiated in the future at the governmental level by raising awareness of the Korea–ASEAN relationship in Korea, educating organisations entering ASEAN and encouraging corporate social responsibility activities in ASEAN.

Realising two-way communication in the practical field

A nation can also improve its experiential relationships with ASEAN people via two-way communication, which differs from one-way communication in that it not only disseminates favourable information but also listens to the other party's voice to manage conflict.

Korea's public diplomacy already includes two-way communication in the vision. Setting forward this vision reflects that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea recognises the importance of two-way communication. However, it remains questionable whether ASEAN people perceive the communication strategy of Korea as two-way. A recent study found that 15.8% of the Vietnamese respondents (n=221) expressed disagreement that there was a two-way flow of communication in Korean public diplomacy programmes, indicating that there is still room for additional efforts to improve Korea's experiential relationships.

To succeed in this endeavour is a worthwhile pursuit. Several studies have provided evidence that communication impacts organisation outcomes (e.g. opinion-sharing behaviour) mediated by relationships. The higher the likelihood of a two-way communication strategy, the higher is the likelihood that Korea could build a trustful relationship with ASEAN, thus eventually generating support among ASEAN people towards Korea.

Monitoring the opinions of ASEAN people

For public diplomacy practitioners, the critical issue is how to realise two-way communication in practice. Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs carefully screens the opinions of formal organisations (e.g. governments, media, corporations, interest groups), but not those of the general public. This article suggests developing a monitoring system for informal ideas and opinions uploaded on social networks. If the Korean government could detect negative opinions shared by the ASEAN public online, it would be able

to identify areas where two-way communication is lacking. Toolkits like SMAT or SMART would enable the Korean government to engage in more two-way communication with the ASEAN public.

Expressing endorsement on multilateral platforms

Korea has continuously expressed its support for ASEAN at various summits and conferences. Openly showing its support for ASEAN in multilateral political settings could be another avenue to foster Korea–ASEAN relationship. As support becomes more critical than ever when an entity faces challenges, this article recommends that Korea express endorsement for ASEAN, especially during times of hardship.

In July 2019, Japan imposed new trade restrictions on Korea, the only Asian nation on Japan's trade white list at the time. In response, Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan commented that Japan should reconsider its decision. The thrust of his argument was that Japan should include ASEAN instead of excluding Korea from its white list of preferred trading partners. Although the remark did not change Japan's decision, it showed other countries that Korea and ASEAN share a special relationship.

The episode serves as a good precedent that should inspire Korea to do the same for ASEAN. Providing support to one another in times of need and sharing in one another's joy in times of accomplishment could raise the relationship to paramount importance.

Conclusion

It is essential not to overlook the fact that the New Southern Policy considered ASEAN as a friend at the outset. To develop the foundation for a long-lasting relationship with ASEAN, the Yoon Suk-yeol administration should attempt to sustain the underlying communal motivation of the New Southern Policy by valuing ASEAN people more than the ASEAN market.

This article also proposes that any Korean entity related to ASEAN should enhance two-way communication in practical settings, as communication is the avenue that shows what kind of relationship Korea is pursuing through its actions. An online monitoring system could facilitate the Korean government's efforts to find ASEAN people in search of a two-way communication with Korean entities. With the help of advanced technology, Korea can regularly check the feedback of the ASEAN public, identify its mistakes and pinpoint the target with whom it needs to establish further dialogue.

On a final note, both Korea and ASEAN should commit to supporting each other continuously, even at summits or talks in which the heads of state or governments of other countries also participate. These efforts would place Korea's relations with Southeast Asian countries on the same level as its ties with the four major powers, the ultimate goal of Korea's New Southern Policy.

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Highlights at the Korea Centre



**Seminar on
South Korea's Soft Power and its Foreign Policies in the ASEAN Region**
Organised by Korea Centre, East Asian Institute (EAI), National University of Singapore (NUS)
Sponsored by The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Singapore
Wednesday, 5 October 2022
Lecture Theatre, Level 3, Block B, Bukit Timah Campus, National University of Singapore

5 October 2022. The Korea Centre, East Asian Institute (EAI), National University of Singapore (NUS), co-hosted a seminar with the Embassy of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in Singapore on "South Korea's Soft Power and Foreign Policies in the ASEAN Region" at the NUS Bukit Timah Campus in Singapore. The seminar consisted of three sessions that assessed the soft power strategies of South Korea and major powers towards ASEAN countries, and provided analyses on potential strategies to strengthen soft power influence in ASEAN to foster a more stable and mutually prosperous region. His Excellency Ambassador of the Republic of Korea Choi Hoon is next (right) to EAI Director Prof Bert Hofman (fifth from the left).



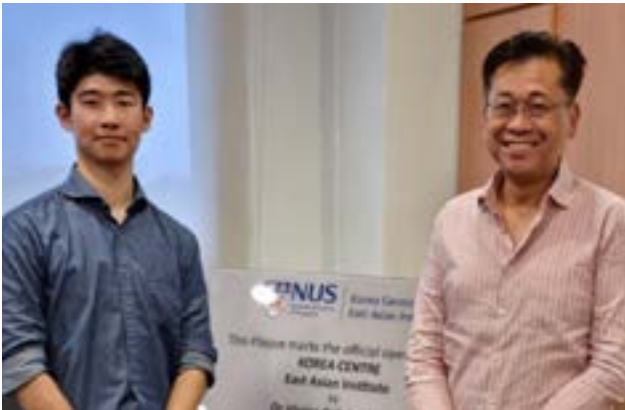
(Top left) 19 October 2022. The Korea Centre welcomed Ambassador of Ireland to Republic of Korea Michelle Winthrop for a friendly discussion on contemporary events in the region and humanitarian relief work on the Korean peninsula.



(Top right) 26 October 2022. The Korea Centre hosted a visiting delegation of officials from the Republic of Korea's National Assembly Research Service, Foreign Affairs and National Security Team. The delegation consisted of Legislative Researcher Park Myung-hee (PhD), Legislative Researcher Cho Sung Hoon and Senior Researcher Lee Seung-Hyun (PhD). The two sides exchanged views on Northeast Asian and ASEAN relations, as well as other issues of common interest to the region and on the Korean peninsula.



21 November 2022. The Korea Centre held a productive dialogue with a visiting study group of students from the Hopkins Nanjing Centre (HNC), Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. The study trip was led by Dr David Arase, resident professor of international politics at the HNC, and saw a fruitful exchange of views on contemporary regional geopolitics.



December 2022: Head of Korea Centre Dr Lam Peng Er's Meeting at the Korea Centre with Mr Ha Chae Kyoung, PhD candidate at Cambridge University and student of Dr John Nilsson-Wright, Cambridge University and Visiting Senior Fellow (non-resident) at Korea Centre, EAI, NUS.



December 2022: Dr Lam Peng Er's Meeting with Dr Han Intaek, President of Jeju Peace Institute



(Top left) November 2022: Dr Lam Peng-er presenting his edited book *Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian Relations: Bilateral and Multilateral* to Vice Chancellor of Germany Robert Habeck



(Top right) 24 – 26 November 2022. The Korea Centre sponsored Korea Centre Research Assistant Gordon Kang to the North Korea Review/Journal of Territorial Maritime Studies (NKR-JTMS) Joint Conference and Korea International Studies Association (KISA) 14th Annual Convention hosted by the Yonsei Institute of North Korean Studies in Seoul. Gordon chaired the panel on "DPRK Relations Theory", where he presented his ongoing research on North Korea's ontological insecurities in the COVID era, and its relation to conceptualising engagement strategies.

SEMINAR

Trends in North Korean Economic Research and Market Transformation

Dr Justin V Hastings

Professor in International Relations and Comparative Politics in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney



Dr Justin V Hastings

Through a joint paper written with Dr Haneol Lee of Sogang University, Dr Hastings presented the findings from their study of the relationship between economic policy change in North Korea and North Korean economic research. Broadly, North Korean research across science and technology often follows North Korean state policy direction. However, it significantly also focuses on problems that exist informally in North Korea. North Korean medical research literature has studied food parasites even when the state does not explicitly implement policies towards tackling this problem.

Over the past two decades, North Korea's economic transformation has been driven informally through marketisation, despite official state policy of a formal command economy. In some instances, formal economic policies have also been implemented in response to de facto changes on the ground to re-establish state political

control and revenue extraction from informal economic activities. For example, the 2002 '7-1' economic reforms were implemented in an attempt to legalise markets in response to the growing informal economy at the time. Thus, Dr Hastings and Dr Lee sought to investigate the extent to which economics research in North Korea serves as a precursor to intellectual support for, or justification of, the North Korean economic policy.

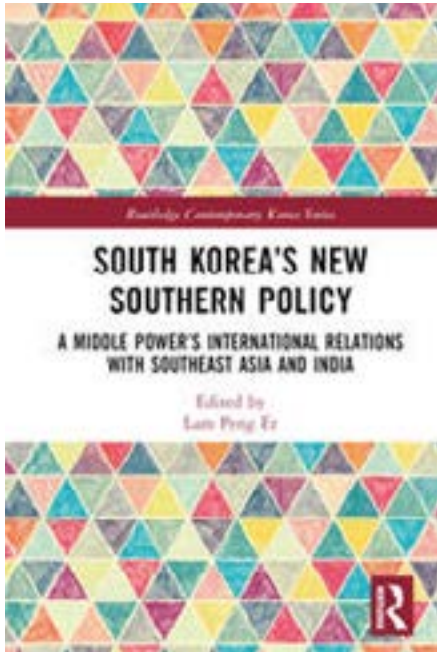
The speakers utilised a dataset involving over 3,600 North Korean journal articles and 1,700 unique authors across nine economics-related journals between 2000 and 2019, such as the *Journal of Kim Il Sung University (Philosophy and Economics)*. Over-time frequency and in-depth analysis was conducted to identify frequencies and perspectives across topics, along with a network analysis of connected topics for discerning the trends and research communities over time. This allowed the speakers to discover, for example, the correlation between the spike in research of 'zones' (i.e. Trade or Special Economic Zones) during the Kim Jong-un era, particularly after the passing of the Special Economic Zone law in 2014, in contrast to the lack of mention during the Kim Jong Il era. Additionally, the speakers were able to distinguish the growth of interconnected topics across the 2000-2019 period, such as on 'price' and 'finance', 'zones' and 'investment', and 'trade' and 'zones'.

Through their study, Dr Hastings and Dr Lee found that North Korean researchers appeared to be largely responding to formal changes in economic policy under paramount leader Kim Jong-un, particularly during the 'Byungjin' period. Under Kim Jong-un, economics research has also gradually moved towards practical problem-solving rather than simply providing ideological bases for economic policy, with the resultant formulation of economics research networks across varied research topics. Importantly, these developments have significant implications for inter-Korean engagement and unification. As North Korean researchers are encouraged to publish in international journals and collaborate internationally, opportunities to assess successes and failures outside of North Korea, as well as examine the technical workings of marketisation (or marketisation itself), may provide bases for cooperation. Further, the study of economic trends under Kim Jong-un can further inform North Korea's economic situation, the gap between both Korea's epistemic communities on economic development, and the basis and direction that unification policies should take.

BROADLY, NORTH KOREAN RESEARCH ACROSS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OFTEN FOLLOWS NORTH KOREAN STATE POLICY DIRECTION. HOWEVER, IT SIGNIFICANTLY ALSO FOCUSES ON PROBLEMS THAT EXIST INFORMALLY IN NORTH KOREA.

Recent Publications

South Korea's New Southern Policy: A Middle Power's International Relations with Southeast Asia and India



Editor:

Lam Peng Er

Publisher:

Routledge

Year of Publication:

April 2023

Description:

This book examines the first regional strategy of South Korea towards Southeast Asia and India. At issue is how a middle power (a G20 country with the tenth largest economy in the world) seeks to play a larger and more comprehensive role in regions beyond the Korean peninsula. Hitherto, South Korean foreign policy has focused on nuclearizing North Korea, alliance maintenance with the United States, tricky relations with its most important economic partner China, and difficult ties with Japan marred by historical and territorial disputes. The Moon Administration has sought to diversify South Korean foreign policy by elevating ASEAN and India to the same strategic level as the United States, China, Russia and Japan. To be sure, the latter countries continue to be most significant to the Korean peninsula. However, this book offers different country and regional perspectives on Seoul's first regional grand strategy to play a role commensurate with its status as a middle power.

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CHRONOLOGY

ASEAN - Korea Relations

A Chronology of Key Events:

October 2022 to December 2022

Gordon Kang

Korea Centre, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore

THE Korea Centre at the East Asian Institute closely monitors Southeast Asian regional developments vis-à-vis the Korean Peninsula. This chronology considers key bilateral and multilateral interstate interactions between both Koreas and individual ASEAN countries, as well as with ASEAN as a regional institution.

October 2022

5-7th	The ASEAN-Korea Centre (AKC) participated in the “Korea Auto Industry and Global TransporTech Show 2022” at KINTEXX 1, Ilsan. It is the biggest exhibition related to automotive and transport industries in Korea, co-organised by Ain Global and Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency. Through this exhibition, the AKC showcased 12 companies from six ASEAN member states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand), bridged ASEAN companies with Korean buyers, and provided networking opportunities for stakeholders and potential investors.
5th	The Korea Centre, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore (NUS), co-hosted a seminar with the Embassy of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in Singapore on “South Korea’s Soft Power and Foreign Policies in the ASEAN Region” at the NUS Bukit Timah Campus in Singapore. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Embassy of the ROK in Singapore, HE Ambassador Choi Hoon, gave congratulatory remarks while Professor of Public Diplomacy at the Korean National Diplomatic Academy Ministry of Foreign Affairs of ROK, Professor Kim Taehwan, delivered the key-note speech for the event. The seminar consisted of three sessions that assessed the soft power strategies of South Korea and major powers towards ASEAN countries, and provided analyses on potential strategies to strengthen soft power influence in ASEAN to foster a more stable and mutually prosperous region.
7th	Two individuals, Singapore-based Kwek Kee Seng and Taiwan-based Chen Shih Huan (Kwek’s business associate), and three companies, are sanctioned by the US Treasury Department for helping to smuggle oil into North Korea. These three companies are the Marshall Islands-registered New Eastern Shipping Co. Ltd, and the Singapore-registered Anfasar Trading (S) Pte. Ltd. and Swanseas Port Services Pte. Ltd, all of which are owned by Kwek. Between 2019 and 2021, these entities were involved in brokering several shipments of refined oil for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). Kwek has been wanted by US law enforcement since an oil tanker, ‘Courageous’, under New Eastern Shipping Co. Ltd was seized by Cambodia on behalf of the United States in mid-2021.
12th	The Philippine Embassy in Seoul, led by Ambassador MariaTheresa Dizon-De Vega, commemorated the 72nd anniversary of the participation of the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea in the Korean War with a programme and wreath-laying ceremony at the Korean War Memorial Museum in Seoul.
16th	The 13th ASEAN and ROK Transport Ministers Meeting was held in Bali, Indonesia. The meeting was co-chaired by the Indonesian Minister of Transportation HE Mr Budi Karya Sumadi, and Chair of Metropolitan Transport Commission, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the ROK HE Mr Lee Seonghai. The meeting positively noted on progress in various projects and activities, such as those under the ASEAN-ROK Transport Cooperation Roadmap 2021-2025 and the port documentation survey for the Pilot Project on the Operationalisation of ASEAN Single Shipping Market.
17-18th	Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ROK Park Jin visited Hanoi for a two-day trip to discuss bilateral relations as the two countries marked the 30th anniversary of establishing diplomatic ties On 18 October, Foreign Minister Park held talks with Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son. They discussed areas for expanding cooperation related to diplomatic, security and economic ties, as well as on strengthening existing bilateral dialogue mechanisms. Foreign Minister Park also paid a courtesy call to Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and other politicians.

17th	ASEAN ambassadors to the ROK countries participated in the Korea Enterprises Federation Business Roundtable at the Four Seasons Hotel in Seoul. During the meeting, participants discussed ways to enhance economic cooperation between ROK and ASEAN member states.
18th	To mark the 15th anniversary of the meeting between Chairman Kim Jong Il and Nong Duc Manh, general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, a film show was screened at the Taedonggang Diplomatic Club of the DPRK. Vietnamese Ambassador to the DPRK Le Ba Vinh, and his embassy staff, joined Vice Department Director of the WPK Central Committee Han Su Chol, and officials of the International Department of the WPK Central Committee at the screening of the Korean documentary film, "The Great Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il Meets Nong Duc Manh, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam", (October 16-18, Juche 96 [2007]). The entourage from the Vietnamese embassy also visited the Pyongyang Electric Cable Combined Factory 326 on the same day.
18th	The Second Joint Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation meeting was co-chaired by the Philippines' Department of Trade and Industry Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo and South Korean Ministry of Trade Industry and Energy (MOTIE) Deputy Trade Minister Jeong Dae-jin. During the meeting, the officials discussed supply chain links, cooperation on nuclear energy and the upcoming bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). The two countries agreed to push for a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Korea-Philippines Core Raw Materials Supply Chain, particularly on nickel, chromium and copper. A new working level communication channel was also established for energy efficiency, and both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation on nuclear energy to revive the Philippines' nuclear reactor industry.
20th	The first ASEAN-ROK Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management (1st AMMDM Plus ROK) was held in hybrid format in Bali, Indonesia. The meeting was co-chaired by Thailand's Vice Minister of Interior HE Pol. Lt. Gen. Nadhapit Snidvongs, on behalf of the chair of the AMMDM, and South Korea's Vice Minister for Disaster and Safety Management of the Ministry of the Interior and Safety HE Kim Sung-Ho. During the meeting, participants affirmed and agreed on various agendas. Amongst these, participants agreed to adopt the ASEAN-ROK Work Plan on Disaster Management 2021-2025, and had expressed appreciation for the ROK's support for two ongoing projects, namely (i) Disaster Risk Management Capacity Building Programme for AMS (D-CAB) Project and (ii) ASEAN Standards and Certification for Experts in Disaster Management Project.
25th	The 15th Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum was held in Busan, South Korea. Amongst the senior officials present were high-level diplomats from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Park Jin. This forum, launched in 2007, serves as a significant dialogue platform for strengthening cooperation between Korea and Central Asian nations. Diplomats and experts discussed ways to increase cooperation in the energy, digital technology, economic, security, tourism and healthcare sectors. Foreign Minister Park Jin also requested for support for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan.
26th	The 22nd Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry Plus Three was held virtually. The meeting was chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry of Lao PDR HE Dr Phet Phomphiphak. It commended the progress made in the implementation of the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Strategy 2016-2025, the ASEAN Plus Three Food Security Information System and the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve Agreement.

November 2022

8th	The 13th Korea-Indonesia Energy Forum, was jointly held virtually by South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) and Indonesia's Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. The annual Korea-Indonesia Energy Forum serves as a basis for cooperation in energy and resources policy exchange and joint projects. The three sessions covered resource supply chain cooperation, clean energy cooperation plans, and measures for building a sustainable collaboration base for technology and people-to-people exchange.
10-13th	"ASEAN Week 2022", organised by the ASEAN-Korea Centre, was held at Cociety in Seongsu-dong, Seoul. Under the theme of 'Ancient Futures - Treasures of ASEAN Fabric', the exhibition showcased unique fabric and lifestyle elements of the 10 ASEAN countries, as well as tourism related to the production of these fabrics.

10-13th	The 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits and Related Summits took place in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, under Cambodia's ASEAN chairmanship theme of "ASEAN A.C.T.: Addressing Challenges Together". ASEAN leaders discussed ways to continue strengthening ASEAN Centrality towards regional peace, prosperity and stability, explore avenues for further regional cooperation, and exchange views on regional and international developments. Officials will also meet with various external partners at the 25th ASEAN Plus Three Summit, the 17th East Asia Summit and various bilateral summits including with ROK.
10th	The fifth ROK-Vietnam 'Seminar for the Future' was held in Seoul, attracting 200 participants. This year's conference aimed to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of ROK-Vietnam diplomatic ties, such as on the achievements and prospects of ROK-Vietnam economic cooperation, close cultural linkages and people-to-people exchanges.
11th	The 23rd ASEAN-ROK Summit was chaired by the Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, and attended by ASEAN member states and ROK President Yoon Suk Yeol. The secretary-general of ASEAN was also in attendance. President Yoon Suk Yeol unveiled South Korea's new Indo-Pacific strategy, based on the three key visions of freedom, peace and prosperity, and under the three key cooperation principles of inclusivity, trust and reciprocity. An ASEAN-specific plan, the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI), was also introduced as a core aspect of the Indo-Pacific Strategy; it proposed strengthening strategic, economic and environmental cooperation. These elements include cooperation on North Korea, enhancement of the South Korea-ASEAN FTA, and an upgrading of relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of establishing a dialogue partnership in 2024.
11th	Thailand's Prime Minister HE General Prayut Chan-o-cha held a bilateral meeting with ROK President Yoon Suk Yeol for the first time since President Yoon's inauguration in May 2022 on the sidelines of the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit and Related Meetings in Phnom Penh. The Prime Minister of Thailand reaffirmed the readiness of the Royal Thai government in strengthening cooperation with the government of the ROK, in particular on the occasions of the 10th anniversary of the Thailand-ROK Strategic Partnership (November 2022) and the 65th anniversary of Thailand-ROK diplomatic relations (October 2022 - September 2023). He also extended an invitation to the President Yoon to pay an official visit to Thailand at a convenient date to discuss ways to steer forward relations between Thailand and the ROK towards a shared future.
11th	South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol held a summit with Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen on the sidelines of the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit and Related Meetings in Phnom Penh. They agreed to further expand bilateral relations on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the reestablishment of diplomatic ties, and exchanged views on bilateral relations, South Korea-ASEAN cooperation and Korean Peninsula issues. The two leaders also expressed hope to increase trade and investment between the two countries on the back of their double tax avoidance agreement and bilateral FTA which took effect on 1 December 2022.
12th	The 25th ASEAN Plus Three Summit was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The Summit was chaired by Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, and attended by heads of state/government and high representatives of ASEAN the People's Republic of China, Japan and the ROK. The secretary-general of ASEAN, secretary-general of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat and director of ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office were also in attendance.
12th	South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol held a summit with Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr on the sidelines of the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit and Related Meetings in Phnom Penh. The two leaders discussed various issues, including ways to develop bilateral relations and further strengthen cooperation in the economic, infrastructure, defence, maritime security and nuclear power sectors. They also exchanged views on regional and international developments, including those in the Korean peninsula.
13th	The 17th East Asia Summit was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The summit was chaired by Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, and attended by the heads of state/government and high representatives of ASEAN, Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America. The secretary-general of ASEAN was also in attendance.
14th	The 5th ASEAN-Korea Heads of Intellectual Property (IP) Offices Meeting was held in Seoul with the theme of "IP and Innovation towards a Sustainable Future". The meeting was co-hosted by the Commissioner of the Korean Intellectual Property Office (KIPO) Insil Lee and Chair of the ASEAN Working Group on IP Cooperation and Director General of the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines Attorney Rowel S Barba.

14th	Japan, South Korea and the UK signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Indonesian government in Bali on their interest in developing Jakarta's railway project. Three agreements were produced: (i) an MoU between the Indonesian and South Korean governments to conduct phase four of the Jakarta MRT project for the Fatmawati-Kampung Rambutan line, (ii) a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) between the Indonesian and Japanese governments on the continuation of the Jakarta MRT East-West line phase one, and (iii) a letter of intent (LoI) with the UK government on collaboration for the railway project's development. The signing ceremony was attended by the Indonesian Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi, South Korean Land, Infrastructure and Transportation Minister Won Hee-Ryong, Japanese Foreign Cooperation Deputy Minister Satoru Mizusima and British Ambassador to Indonesia and Timor Leste Owen Jenkins.
14th	South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and South Korean MOTIE Minister Lee Chang-yang were amongst those present at the Korea-Indonesia Business Roundtable held on the sidelines of the G20 summit held from 15 to 16 October in Bali, Indonesia. The roundtable was co-hosted by the Federation of Korean Industries and Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and attended by 40 officials and business representatives. It was the first event for business leaders held in tandem with an ASEAN country following President Yoon Suk Yeol's official proposal at the 23rd ASEAN-ROK Summit to upgrade Korea-ASEAN relations to a "comprehensive and strategic partnership". Ten MOUs were signed by public and private parties of the two countries, including the ones on Korea-Indonesia economic cooperation MOU amendment (digital partnership), green transition initiative, critical minerals and infrastructure development cooperation. These MOUs are follow-up measures to the Indo-Pacific Strategy announced by President Yoon during the Korea-ASEAN summit, addressing five key areas: digital, supply chain, climate change, development cooperation and investment.
18th	Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemned the testing of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) by the DPRK on 18 November 2022. In a press release, the ministry reiterated its longstanding call for the DPRK to immediately cease all provocations and abide by its international obligations and commitments.
21st	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK states that South Korea will provide US\$500,000 in humanitarian assistance to Indonesia due to a 5.6-magnitude earthquake on 21 November 2022 that left more than 200 dead, over 1,000 injured and destroying over 22,000 homes.
21st	South Korea and Singapore signed the first digital economy deal, the Korea-Singapore Digital Partnership Agreement. It is the Singapore's fourth of such a pact with other countries following those with Chile and New Zealand, and with Australia and Britain separately. The Korea-Singapore Digital Partnership Agreement will allow the two countries to align their digital rules and standards and promote interoperability. Consumers and businesses in Singapore and South Korea will benefit from smoother digital activities, such as e-payments and paperless trading. It will streamline cross-border data flows and build a trusted and secure digital environment for businesses and consumers. It will also deepen bilateral cooperation in emerging areas, including personal data protection, e-payments, artificial intelligence and source code protection.
22-24th	The three-day ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) was attended by defence chiefs from 10 ASEAN countries and eight others, including the ROK, United States, China and Japan. It convened in Siem Reap, Cambodia, under the theme of 'Solidarity for Harmonised Security'.
22nd	South Korea's Defence Minister Lee Jong-sup held bilateral talks with his counterparts from Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam in Cambodia on the sidelines of the ADMM-Plus in Siem Reap to discuss arms industry cooperation and other security issues.
23rd	In the main session of the ADMM-Plus, South Korean Defence Minister Lee Jong-sup further explained Seoul's new Indo-Pacific strategy that President Yoon Suk Yeol unveiled at the 23rd ASEAN-ROK Summit, including the KASI. Defence Minister Lee also asked ASEAN and international partners to support negotiations and dialogue with North Korea towards denuclearisation, as well as Seoul's "audacious initiative" that entails significant economic recovery in return for denuclearisation.
24th	South Korean Defence Minister Lee Jong-sup held bilateral talks with his Cambodian counterpart, Tea Banh, on the margins of the ADMM-Plus in Siem Reap. The two leaders discussed regional security issues, such as North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, Seoul's recent unveiling of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the regional vision for ASEAN cooperation. Foreign Minister Banh expressed hopes that military exchanges can be expanded to include military education for Cambodian officers in South Korean military institutions. The two sides also signed an MOU on bilateral cooperation on UN peacekeeping operations and South Korea's provision of engineering equipment to Cambodia.

24th	The “2022 ASEAN-Korea Forum” was jointly held by the ASEAN-Korea Centre, Korea University Asiatic Research Institute ASEAN Centre and Korea Academic Council on the United Nations System. Under the theme “Cooperation for a Sustainable ASEAN-Korea Partnership”, the forum invited the former ASEAN Secretary General Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Deputy Secretary-General for ASEAN Political-Security Community at the ASEAN Secretariat Robert Michael Tene, and policymakers and renowned scholars from ASEAN and Korea. Participants discussed challenges and solutions for a sustainable ASEAN-Korea partnership.
30th	Lee Soo-man, founder of SM Entertainment, one of South Korea's biggest entertainment companies, in an interview with American news portal CNBC stated that it plans to set up its Southeast Asian headquarters in Singapore as part of its expansion plans in the region. This would include retail businesses, including cafes, merchandise stores and pop-up exhibitions in Singapore, and possibly a new sub-unit of NCT, a South Korean boy band, called NCT Singapore.
30th	The Vietnamese embassy in Pyongyang hosted a reception on the occasion of the 64th anniversary of President Kim Il Sung 's official visit to Vietnam. In attendance were Vice Foreign Minister Pak Sang Gil and other officials of the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK, hosted by Vietnamese Ambassador to the DPRK Le Ba Vinh, and his embassy staff.

December 2022

2nd	The Lao Embassy in Pyongyang hosted a reception at the Taedonggang Diplomatic Club to mark the 47th founding anniversary of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. In attendance were Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Pak Sang Gil, Vice-Chairman of the Korean Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries Pak Kyong Il, who is also vice-chairman of the DPRK-Laos Friendship Association, officials concerned and members of the diplomatic corps in the DPRK. They were hosted by Lao Ambassador to the DPRK Sisavath Khamsaly and staff members of the Lao embassy. A performance was given by the schoolchildren of the DPRK-Laos Friendship Chongryu Junior Middle School in Taedonggang district.
4-6th	Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc visited Seoul at the invitation of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol. President Phuc's visit, the first to Korea by a foreign head of state since the inauguration of the Yoon administration, comes at the occasion of the 30th anniversary of bilateral ties between Vietnam and South Korea. On 5 December, the two leaders attended a welcoming ceremony, conducted a small-scale chat, participated in their bilateral summit and then a state banquet. At a joint press conference following their summit, the leaders announced their decision to upgrade bilateral relations to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”. This will entail enhanced measures to improve existing mechanisms for diplomacy, economic growth and national security. Specifically, the two countries seek to strengthen the stability of supply chains, boost cooperation in areas of maritime security, information and communications, and energy amongst many others, and expand ‘tailored’ developmental cooperation with Vietnam in science and technology, health care and infrastructure. President Phuc also joined representatives of over 500 enterprises at a Vietnam-ROK business forum while receiving leaders of nearly 30 major enterprises, banks, financial organisations, and investors of the RoK. Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh and other officials from Vietnamese ministries, sectors and localities also held meetings with local partners in Seoul to discuss cooperation.
6th	Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc met Speaker of the ROK National Assembly Kim Jin-pyo as part of his ongoing official visit to the East Asian nation.
6th	Singapore and South Korea sign an MOU on artificial intelligence collaboration in Seoul. Present for the signing was Singapore Minister for Communications and Information Josephine Teo and South Korean Science and ICT Minister Lee Jong-ho. The collaboration will further serve to deepen both countries' digital partnership.
8th	The ASEAN Expanded Connectivity Forum was jointly held by the ASEAN-Korea Centre and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK. This forum is the only of its kind that specialises on ASEAN Connectivity in Korea and has been held for nine consecutive years since 2013, marking its 10th anniversary in 2022. The Forum was held under the theme of “Advancing ASEAN Connectivity through Partnerships among ASEAN Dialogue Partners”, featuring experts from the government, private sector and academia of ASEAN as well as its dialogue partners, including Korea. Discussions revolved around the progress and future of ASEAN Connectivity.
9th	Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, HE Prak Sokhonn and Ambassador of the ROK to Cambodia Park Heung-kyeong signed the Framework Arrangement between the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Government of the ROK concerning Loans from the Economic Development Cooperation Fund of up to US\$1.5 billion for the years 2022 through to 2026. Presiding over the signing was Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen.

9th	An MOU on the Reinforced Cooperation on Intellectual Property was endorsed by the International Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPIL) Director General Rowel S Barba and the Korea Intellectual Property Office (KIPO) in Seoul. Through the MOU, IPOPhil will continue to benefit from the capacity building programmes of Korea through KIPO such as the Knowledge Sharing Programme, IP Consulting Programme and IP Officers Nurturing Programmes. Director General Barba also met Philippine Ambassador to Korea Theresa Dizon-De Vega to discuss the signing of the MOU and Philippine initiatives on Intellectual Property.
9th	On an official visit to Hanoi, Minister of the National Court Administration of the ROK Kim Sang-hwan met Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc. President Phuc expressed his hope for deeper cooperation between the Supreme People's Court of Vietnam and the Supreme Court of Korea. The two leaders assessed that the bilateral relationship has reaped many important achievements in the past three decades with impressive growth in trade, investment and people-to-people exchanges. They saw the necessity to further strengthen cooperation between the National Assemblies and political parties of the two countries, as well as promote the role of their legislatures in supporting the governments' efforts to foster bilateral relations in all fields.
12th	Singapore's judiciary charged sales manager Phua Sze Hee of the company Pokka with illegally selling US\$1 million of canned coffee and milk beverages to North Korea. Phua pled guilty to the four charges of breaching the Regulation of Imports and Exports Regulations and was sentenced to five weeks in jail.
21st	Secretary for Foreign Affairs Enrique A Manalo and Korean Ambassador to the Philippines Kim In Chul signed the Framework Arrangement between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and government of the ROK Concerning Loans from the Economic Development Cooperation Fund for the Years 2022 through 2026. With this framework arrangement, the Philippine government is eligible to obtain Official Development Assistance (ODA) loans from the Korean government for up to a maximum commitment of US\$3 billion until 2026.
22nd	South Korean Trade, Industry and Energy Minister Lee Chang-yang visited Hanoi on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and Vietnam. Minister Lee met Vietnam's Industry and Trade Minister Nguyễn Hồng Diên at the 12th Korea-Vietnam Industrial Joint Committee and sixth Korea-Vietnam FTA Joint Committee meetings. During the meetings, the two delegations discussed measures for stronger economic partnership through cooperation in trade, energy resources and industrial technology. The meetings are a follow-up to the bilateral summit talks held earlier in December. The delegations also agreed to work together to reach trade volume of US\$100 billion by 2023 and US\$150 billion by 2030. In doing so, a component of these efforts will utilise the multilateral trade platform which they are both a part of. On industrial technology, shipbuilding, textiles and automobiles were sectors highlighted for further development. With energy, the two delegations decided to deepen their countries' partnership in clean energy and liquefied natural gas power generation for carbon neutrality and further cooperate on life cycles of critical minerals.
26th	President Yoon Suk Yeol appoints Lee Sang Deok as the new South Korean ambassador to Indonesia. Ambassador Lee previously served as ROK's ambassador to Singapore and wrote the foreign policy manifesto for then-Presidential candidate Yoon.

This chronology of events is cross-referenced from the following ministries, institutions and news sources:

The ASEAN Secretariat; The ASEAN-Korea Centre; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Cambodia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea; Channel News Asia; The Borneo Bulletin; Khmer Times; Phnom Penh Post; The Jakarta Post; The Laotian Times; The Star; The Myanmar Times; The Philippine Star; The Straits Times; Bangkok Post; Nhan Dan; Vietnam News Agency; The Korean Central News Agency; NK News; NK Pro; Yonhap News Agency; and the Korea JoongAng Daily.