MAPPING SOUTH KOREA'S SOFT POWER:
SOURCES, ACTORS, TOOLS, AND IMPACTS[*]

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Debates concerning the rise and effects of soft power have flourished since Joseph Nye differentiated it from hard power by defining it as 'the ability to alter other's behaviour for what we want them to do by attraction' (Nye, 2004: 11). According to Nye (1990, 2004, 2006) power can be generated by coercion (sticks), payments (carrots) or attraction (soft power). Among those means of power, soft power can be enhanced by sharing culture, values and foreign policies accommodating international norms.

Despite the fact that some time has passed since the concept was first introduced as a principle of scholarly literature, soft power remains a somewhat ambiguous and multifaceted concept frequently put to work in social and political sciences in an attempt to explain the complexities of the contemporary world.

In social and cultural studies the term is frequently used interchangeably with 'cultural influence'. The export of popular culture is seen as the main vehicle through which the world comes to know about and is attracted by a country. Nye (2004) even includes pop culture in a collection of social institutions, such as education and political ideology that he considers to be instruments of a 'soft power', that is, a country's ability to attract and to influence an international audience to accept its ideas and cultural products on the basis of influence with no constraints.

The dynamics of cultural flows within East Asia showed the fact that 'soft power' had caught the attention not only of scientists, but also of governments and trans-national organizations. It is not an accident that South Korea seized the diplomatic opportunity and elevated the status of pop culture to that of an economic sector, spreading the K-Pop and K-Dramas first at the regional (inter-Asia) level, then world-wide. In this regional and international contest, for conquering larger

audiences, the South-Korean government had taken an active role since the 1980's. Immediately after the demise of the military authoritarian regime in 1987, the television market was liberalized in South-Korea (Shim, 2010). The internal 'drama war' among the three main Korean TV stations (MBC, SBS and KBS) combined with the pressure exercised by cable TV and satellite broadcasting led the South-Korean government to establish the first 'Cultural Industry Bureau' within the Ministry of Culture and Sports in 1994 (Yang, 2012) to conduct cultural strategies that aimed to spread the Korean popular culture's products at the international level. In 2009 South Korea moved a step further and established a 'Presidential Council of National Branding' (Kim, 2011) with the aim of enhancing Korea's national status and prestige in the international community by implementing systematic and comprehensive strategies of nation branding (Korea Brand.net, 2015). This government strategy had two components. On the one hand, the spread of *Hallyu* showed that cultural values are multidimensional. It is not strictly a matter of what language an audience or a public has knowledge of, it implies also the circulation of general-human narrative themes, the interaction of production and consumption over the borders of nation-states, the universal material and the symbolic qualities of the cultural products. This explains why – despite its initial disadvantage caused by the inability to understand the language spoken in the dramas and by the lack of diaspora in the target markets – the so-called Korean Wave could be so successful, using the polyvalent Korean culture to its advantage (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2001). It could be said that Korea's historic experience of colonisation and cultural exchanges it had with other countries could be assessed as some factors that helped Korean cultural products to attract foreign audiences – first at the regional and, later, at the international levels. Korean popular products are seen as being, at the same time, 'particular' (as belonging to East Asia) and 'common' (as expressing values one could notice as world-wide) and, as such they are an expression of 'glocalism' which characterise the modern media products.

Shin (2006) underlines that the paradox of globalization takes the form of two apparently contradictory tendencies in South Korea: a nationalistic approach of globalization and an enhancement of the ethnical/national identity as a reaction to globalization. As Shin stressed (2006) although Korea is being (economically, socially and culturally) globalised, the Korean response to globalization was shaped by the ideology of ethnic nationalism that lay at the hearth of its national development. Much more, the persistence of nationalism during the globalisation of South Korea is still strongly connected with the use of Korean (high and popular) culture as means to achieve a Koreanised globalisation (Shin, 2006). In this respect, *Hallyu* is more and more seen as an alternative to the cultural globalization dominated by the USA or/and by the Western world (Ryoo, 2008), a new type of globalization which includes in its cultural products both Western and Eastern elements (Jenkins, 2006).

On the other hand, giving its recent historical past, especially the colonial period, the Korean War, and the transition to democracy that followed it, South

Korea saw soft power in the cultural domain as a means to overcome its cultural marginality. As Cho (2005: 173–174) noticed, for South Korea soft power is to be built on the foundation of acceptance:

> 'To the people of a 'marginal country', who had for so long lived under the oppressive vulture of other countries, the news that their own culture was influencing other countries' cultures could have been nothing other than amazing and wonderful.'

Yet, as many scholars stressed in their analysis on the limits of South Korea's soft power strategies in the cultural domain (Lin & Tong, 2008; Kang & Soo, 2009), nobody (individual or group) wants to be the target of someone else's (even soft) power. From that perspective, the movements and reactions against Soft-Korea's use of soft power in the cultural domain draws attention to the political dimensions of the concept. As Otmazgin noticed (2008) from a political perspective, soft power can be counter-productive. While bearing lots of critiques on the notion of soft power as many believe that real power is based on hard power or economic power as most effective foreign policies or sees it as another form of imperialism (Gray, 2011: ix, Ferguson, 2004: 24) various scholars have focused on assessing or measuring soft power of countries by looking at their cultural influence to other countries such as movies, music, and soft opera or a country's cultural centres in foreign countries or foreign students studying at their home countries. This multiplicity of voices and disciplinary perspectives has resulted in a nuanced understanding of soft power. This special issue presents such attempts at understanding the sources of Korean soft power, the actors involved in producing it, the tools used to do so and its impact by bringing together anthropologists, sociologists, ethnomusicologists, and social/political scientists.

As we were keen on presenting a coherent, yet complex, picture of Korean soft power rather than merely juxtaposing voices and disciplines, the task of publishing a special issue on Korea's Soft Power for the *Romanian Journal of Social Sciences* was extremely challenging to us. The first three articles provide social perspectives at micro-level and the remaining three look at political issues from a macro-level perspective.

The first article, 'Gangnam Style (Politics, Parody and the Paradox of Psy: Why don't K-Pop fans like *Gangnam Style*?') (by Keith Howard) explores the modern Korean Pop Culture in a peculiar case (Psy's famous song 'Gangnam Style' which became a world-wide success, as the most viewed and listened song world-wide in 2012). Using an ethno-methodological approach, Keith Howard deconstructs the social orders used to make sense of the world through the accounts and descriptions of experiences presented in Psy's song about the affluent district of Seoul. The author used conversational analysis to point to the multifaceted character of South Korean popular products and demonstrated that a song (e.g. 'Gangnam Style') can be interpreted differently inside and outside a specific region

within it appeared (in that case, South Korea). At the same time, following Iwabuchi's thesis about 'statelessness' or 'nationlessness' of Japanese popular culture's products as qualities that make them relatable and marketable all over the world (Iwabuchi, 2002) the author raised questions related to 'Korean identity' of the products of K-Popular culture in a globalised world. In fact, as Keith Howard shows, Psy's success stressed the paradox in which the parodies spawned across the globe through the lyrics of 'Gangnam Style' had enabled Koreans to celebrate its success while ignoring its message.

'Confucianism and the Contemporary Korean society' (by Bianca Mitu) analyses the complexity that lies at the heart of modern South Korean society, that is the role of Confucianism in the democratic and the capitalist development of Korea. As the author points at the outset, Confucianism has played an important part in the process of Korean post-war modernisation but, as the existing studies showed, Confucian values are considered both a support and an impediment for democracy in Korea (Kim, 2012; Kim, 2011). Therefore, in contemporary Korea we still find an unstable combination of Western democratic practices and Confucian values. As Bianca Mitu showed both the negative traits of Confucianism (the emphasis on the collective, authority or harmony) and the positive characteristics (loyalty to the family, subordination of the individual to the collective, commitment to education and dependence on authority) can be used for a better understanding of contemporary East Asian societies.

The third article ('The concept of open-air museum: From mediation of national identity to entertainment', by Angelica Helena Marinescu) discusses the new social, cultural and economic role of the open-air museums in a post-nationalist period. By using two case studies – two open-air museums (The Korean Folk Village in Seoul, South Korea and the 'Dimitrie Gusti' National Village Museum in Bucharest, Romania) the author analyses the rethinking of the relationship between culture and economy, in the context of globalization. Using a qualitative (anthropological) approach, Angelica Marinescu points out that the relation between a place (a museum) and people (the visitors of a museum) can be understood as a form of cultural mediation, a performance, as it has the capacity to create a symbolic, pedagogical, experiential relationship with the public, being at the same time a significant construction.

The fourth article 'Revisiting Global Korea' by Cornelia-Alexandra Lincan and Elena-Adina Voicilă explores South Korea's Official Development Assistance (ODA) and argues that the government align ODA and soft power strategies. The authors contend that South Korea is a middle power in terms of its position surrounded by major powers (US, Russia, China, Japan) and that the middle power countries are inclined to enhance their position via soft power (Nye, 2011, cited in Lincan & Voicilă 2015: 44). As a recipient of foreign aid 60 years ago after the colonization and the Korean War now South Korea is the world's fifteenth largest economy and is emerging as an important donor country. Aid received from abroad in the form of

grants and loans (among others) enabled Korea to achieve its economic miracle (Heo & Roehrig, 2014). Lincan and Voicilă maintain Korea's ODA policies have three main characteristics: 1. Dual system management under Prime Minister with four main actors. 2. Private sectors are also involved to carry out the project. 3. Concentration on the bilateral aid and concessional loans and the ODA is linked with Korea's economic interest. Korea runs its ODA through a dual system, under the National Committee for International Development Cooperation (NCIDC) run by Prime Minister, MOFAT along with KOICA are in charge of technical cooperation and MOSF and EDCF are working for concessional loans (See the figure below).
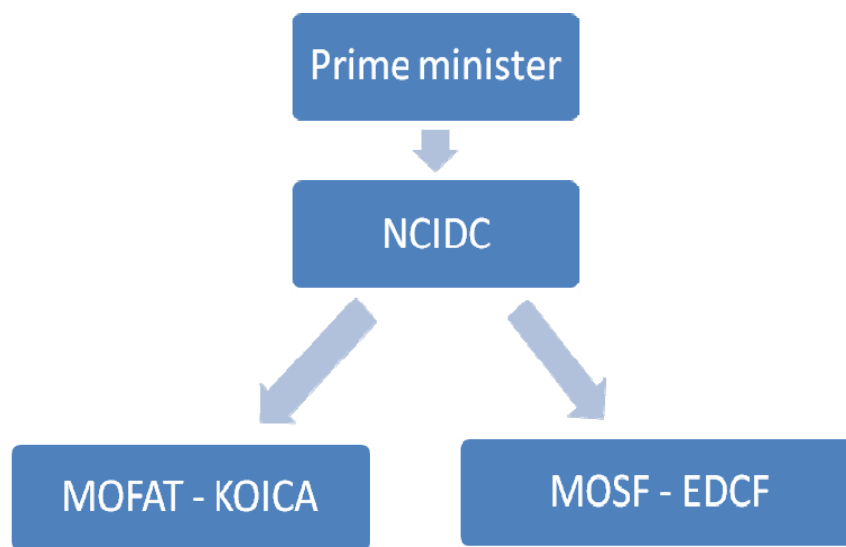
(ODA policy making and implementation – a dual system with four actors, source: Youngmi Kim, account based on the article by Lincan & Voicilă, 2015).

However, this dual system has faced criticism due to the lack of coordination among the actors and its fragmentation. The OECD recommended ODA to be run by a single entity (Lincan & Voicilă, 2015: 49) Korea's ODA is strongly oriented towards Asia and the post-Soviet space (especially Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan), and aid is limited to addressing specific vulnerabilities of recipient countries while advancing Korea's national economic interests.

During the Lee Myung-bak administration ODA policies have been flourishing however there are still limits in supporting developmental assistance at the international level. The authors suggest developmental aid for institutional and capacity building should be further implemented.

Park Geun-hye's administration, in line with its predecessor, also sought to align ODA with soft power policies. Seoul's ODA policy was further encouraged

with two major initiatives such as the Development Alliance Korea (DAK) and the World Friends Korea. The two initiatives aimed to link government, NGOs and the private sectors to accomplish the ODA goals and also enhance the large number of Korean volunteers to work for the NGO projects. Park Geun-hye also tried to revive the 'new village movement' which was considered as a successful strategy – under her father – as a combination of the state-led projects and voluntary local communities' participation. It was also recommended by the United Nations as a strategy which developing countries might consider adopt (and adapt) locally. In the case of African countries it was not possible to replicate such movement at the local level due to the lack of ethnic homogeneity, a criterion which was seen as contributing to success in Korea, but whose lack hindered its application in Africa owing to the fragmented nature of its societies and the lack of state capacity at central level. The authors also claim that the ODA budget has fallen short of its target by a half for 2015 and the ratio ODA/GNI in Korea is fairly low compared to other OECD countries (Lincan & Voicila, 2015: 50). Moreover ODA data reveal a regional bias and low allocation to promote the gender equality and environmental improvement.

The following article 'South Korea: A Major Regional Player' by Veronica Dumitrașcu examines South Korea as a regional major power in global politics, economics and culture. In her article borrowing the concepts from Wight (1978) and Shim and Flamm (2013) she discusses the applicability of the concepts of regional power and middle power to the Korean case. For Osterud (1992) a state with regional great power can be 'highly influential and stand up against other states (Osterud, 1992, cited in Dumitrașcu, 2015: 54) 'while middle power is unlikely exercise such power in its region. As Cooper notes, a middle power is at the middle point in terms of its positional status on population, economic power and military capacity. Geographically, a middle power is also located somewhere in the middle so as normative or behavioural approaches (Cooper, 1993; Lee, 2012, cited in Dumitrașcu, 2015: 54, 56). Middle power can be understood as its capabilities, function and behaviour and middle power diplomacy is often regarded by 'a means of building, consolidating and enhancing the regional and global rules' (Rudd, 2012; Teo, Singh & Tan 2013, cited in Dumitrascu 2015: 55).

Referring to Korea as a middle power, the author explores South Korea's resource foreign policies in Central Asia. Indeed Central Asia is where the great powers compete for influence and resources due to energy wealth (Young, 2009; Blank, 2008; Fumagalli, 2012).

Since the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–2008), South Korea has become one of the main investors and partners for the Central Asian countries. In 2009 the Lee administration in South Korea launched the 'New Asia Initiative' in order to deepen economic ties with the Central Asian countries and enhance its diplomatic clout. That expands not only South Korea's foreign policy from Northeast Asia to the Central Asian region, but also signals a shift from the economy focus to security, culture and energy (Zhu, cited in Dumitrascu 2015: 56).

Hosting the G20 summit in Seoul in 2010 and the speedy response to the earthquake in Haiti also showed such effort of the government to play its activities in the international relations as a major player. The present Park's administration has improved ties with China as well. Dumitrascu maintains that South Korea showed its regional influence in the geopolitical relations with major powers through a middle power role particularly through the promotion of its culture and tradition (Dumitrascu, 2015: 59). The author argues that success in the diplomatic real mirrors the expansion of South Korea's soft power. According to Nye soft power can be maintained by culture, political values and foreign policies and South Korea has shown an impressive potential in terms of its soft power (Nye, 2009, cited in Dumitraşcu, 2015: 60). The author argues that South Korea's engagement with Central Asian countries has helped the country to become a major player in the region combining soft power with a focus on development, trade, and energy.

The last article, 'Nations, Nationhood and National Culture: Theorizing a genealogy of Korean Nations to understand the logics of soft power on a divided peninsula' by Etienne Girouard maps how the two states in the divided Korean peninsula ended up having different foreign policy choices over hard power or soft power. Girouard looks at the different national cultures developed in the two different states asks why North Korea chose to strengthen hard power while South Korea's policy headed towards soft power. The author claims that this is due to the different national culture for the North (a closed national culture) and the South which instead developed an open national culture more linked to soft power. The author starts with a focus on the common national culture and then traces the different trajectories, for the North as a revolutionary nation and the south as a developmental nation.

The author points out the gap in the literature on nationalism in Korea which seems to ignore the emergence of proto-nationalism which existed beyond and prior to Western modernization (Shin, 2006, cited in Girouard, 2015: 68), thus making the Korean experience quite distinctive (Kang, 2012, cited in Girouard, 2015: 68). In the late nineteenth century the Chosun Dynasty was weakened within the Sino-centred tributary system during the Chinese Qing Dynasty and also faced the encroachment of Western and Japanese imperialism. The peninsula was annexed by Japan and became a colony. Thus the author argues that the Gellnerian approach of statehood and nation as one system did not develop in the Korean case, leading to a divided nation in divided states (Girouard, 2015: 70). Girouard proposes to see national genetics to understand the Korean nationalism's case. For Girouard Korean national genetics can be traced by three stages: the republication nation (1919–1945), the revolutionary nation in North Korea (1950–2012) and the developmental nation in South Korea (1950–2012) (Girouard, 2015: 73). During the Japanese colonial period there was a nationwide social movement in March 1919 and Girouard sees this moment as critical to the making of the modern Korean national consciousness, when they – he argues – the population on the

Korean peninsula became 'effectively Koreans' (Weber, 1983, cited in Girouard 2015: 77) as an imagined community. Girouard contends that a century of nationalist discourses and popular movements was the milestone where people fought against imperialism and found the political legitimacy of the Korean State. Thus imperialism was the 'first national universal chromosome' for Korean nationalism (Girouard, 2015: 79–80). For Girouard, Korea went through the wave of imperialism and colonialism that led to he modernization process, which sets Korea apart from Gellner's model whereby nationalism is built on the wave of industrialisation. Japanese rule fuelled a nationalist (counter-hegemonic) discourse asking for political legitimacy for the people.

After the colonial period more external hurdles followed in the nation-building process due to the civil war and especially the division of the peninsula. The nation-state was divided into North and South and went under the provisional control of the Soviet Union and the United States. The two states developed a different trajectory of nationalism: the North with a revolutionary nationalism and the South with a developmental nationalism. With Soviet influence the NPRK sees South Korea under US imperialism thus Pyongyang's version of Korean nationalism is built on an anti-imperialism/ anti-American revolutionary discourse and rhetoric.

South Korea took a different road to re-build the nation in the South as a developmental nation. After the first and the second authoritarian republic the corrupt and weak government caused the military coup by General Park Chung-Hee. With the national economic plans and state aid the military regime focused on rapid industrialization with Chaebol (multinational conglomerates) by nurturing state capitalism with anti-communism.

The papers compiled for this issue explore various topics related to Korean soft power. We tried to divide the topics in micro and macro levels. For the micro level analysis pop music culture was analysed and the author argues when K-pop music reveals non-Koreanness and that was the main key to success in the global market attracting global wide music fans. The second article emphasizes the Confucian values were accommodated with the Western values in the rapid democratic consolidation and industrialisation era in South Korea. The comparative research on open-air museums in South Korea and Romania explores different views on the museum and the visitors at different cultural mediation and performances. We move on to the macro level looking at the state performance on foreign policies on Overseas Development Aid, Resource diplomacy and the role of middle power in the region, and the different trajectories of nationalism on the peninsula. The article on ODA suggests where South Korean ODA policies can improve for better performance. The following article examines Korea's middle power in the region and the government's effort expanding diplomatic ties in the region and the final article presents the origin of nationalism on the Korean peninsula and how it developed into two different trajectories of foreign policies in different views on nationalism in North and South Korea.

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