

**Recalibrating Middle Power Diplomacy:
The Changing 'Soft Power' Brands of
Republic of Korea and Canada in Comparative Perspective**

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Knowledge-Net for a Better World

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I. Introduction

The re-shaping of the global system requires a fundamental re-thinking of what middle powers need to do to navigate the fast-shifting global geometry of power. In a world that privileges scaling up, across the spectrum from big emerging countries to an over-arching concert of powers with an extended scope of regulatory authority, and elaborate and well-resourced public-private transnational networks, secondary players could well be marginalized. However, the middle power model exhibits an impressive, albeit not unchallenged, capacity for revitalization as in past eras of transition with a shift away from a unipolar locus of power.¹ Moreover, there is a strong evidence that this trajectory of re-location can move towards an extension as opposed to a contraction, beyond the model of traditional middle powers. What can be described as an extended 'rising middle', encompassing both established and non-traditional middle powers, if still structurally constrained in many ways, exhibits a capacity for innovation as both receptors and agents of change.

No where is this 'rising middle' more visible than in East Asia. The Republic of Korea (South Korea) in particular has gone to great lengths to brand itself as a middle power that combines a presence within the G20 with an abundance of intellectual, entrepreneurial and technical soft power capacity. The fundamental theme of this chapter is that South Korea not only has importance as a specific case, but as the leader in a wider East Asian wave. In doing so, South Korea has built on, but also diverged from, the the brand projected by traditional middle powers, notably Canada. Given this context, a comparison



between South Korea as a stand out in East Asia with Canada as the exemplar of the traditional middle power model merits attention.

From the late 1960s, Canada built up a distinctive brand in the use of soft power, building on an institutional platform associated with middle power status, privileging the United Nations (UN) in particular and the use of functional initiatives ranging from peacekeeping and forms of mediation. The embedded nature of this approach can be seen as late as 1995, when in a Canadian foreign policy review, the promotion of culture and values was recognized as a ‘third pillar’ of Canada’s foreign policy; in theory, it was equal to the first two pillars of promoting economic growth and international peace and security.² Yet, in more recent years, Canada has become more instrumental, shifting the emphasis away from symbolic representation to concrete delivery, privileging the economic and security domains. South Korea at the head of an East Asian wave, by comparison, has expanded its brand away from traditional notions of economic-oriented developmental states to countries that possess cultural dynamism.

Although explanations for these shifts necessitate explorations into domestic politics that go beyond the purview of this chapter, the reversal in branding – with Canada moving from soft power to focused forms of delivery and Korea becoming more identified with a more comprehensive approach, also relates to global structural transformation. The rise of Canadian soft power came in tandem with enhanced space for Canada in the global arena. In the late 1960s there was not much competition for Canada as a middle power outside of Australia and some small albeit significant European countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden. In its revived form in the late 1990s, Canadian niche diplomacy caught the wave of post-Cold War globalization of norms. Canada could stand out as a middle power without considerations of downward mobility. As will be detailed in the next sections of the paper, however, the structural changes in global politics over the past decade have restricted space for this branding. Even before the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper came into office in 2003, a backlash developed against the traditional Canadian ‘soft’ brand.³ What Canada needed to do was not showcase symbolic attributes concerning its middle power status, but leverage in tangible fashion forms of activity that could allow Canada to gain recognition in the global system.

Paradoxically, this sense of insecurity was reinforced by the creation of new forums, whether the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) or indeed the G20 in which Canada was a member. Both crowded space for Canada. Rather than viewing the G20 as an upgrade, and certainly a platform by which it could ratchet up a reinvigorated form of soft power, Canada kept its involvement in the G20 in as parsimonious manner as possible. Unlike South Korea, the G20 did not represent the main game of Canadian dip-



lomacy. Rather Canada accented its role as a core member of the G7, with a focus on both the unique and generic qualities that were embedded in its membership in this core forum.

The creation of the G20, by way of comparison, provided South Korea with a significant new platform by which to project its brand on the global stage. Akin to Canada, South Korea was a member of the OECD. But beyond this connection, until the creation of the G20, South Korea did not have a presence in any hub informal institutions. Beyond the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), South Korea was restricted to a presence in regional forums such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Plus Three.

The G20 acted as game changer. Notwithstanding a structural weight below that of not only China but Japan and India, Korea raced ahead to grab the right to host the first G20 outside the West. In doing so, it sought to magnify its 'bridging' role with respect to its evolution from a developing country to a developed (OECD) state. Although not alone in its ambitions, Korea's unique brand is important here. As President Lee Myung-bak stated in the run-up to the Seoul G20, 'The world can be split into two groups: One group sets global rules, the other follows. South Korea has successfully transformed itself from a passive follower into an active agenda-setter'.⁴

In this vision, however, Korea moved to diversify its brand away from a self-help entrepreneurial developmental state (associated with the success of the large business groupings or *Chaebols*, and the close relationship between the Korean state and corporate giants such as Samsung) to one that possessed an attractive cultural, social as well as economic model.

One way by which South Korea shifted its brand was to directly project itself as a country that had moved from developing to developed country status. Korea is not only a middle power but also a newly developed economy, a trajectory that gives it a huge amount of credibility in projecting its brand to developing countries. A crucial component in this projection has been the emphasis on the Knowledge Sharing Program that fully takes into consideration the political and socio-economic condition of partner countries. In the context of the 2010 Seoul G20 meeting, the leaders, in the finalized document called the 'Seoul Development Consensus for Sharing,' agreed to work towards allowing low income countries to enhance their growth potential for global balance and manage risks, and the Korean government made an effort to include knowledge sharing as one of nine pillars.

However, in an indirect fashion, there was also an attempt to ride the '*hallyu*' or 'Korean Wave' as part of a wider approach of soft power branding. Such an approach could to some extent be promoted by the government, through programs supported by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, unlike other areas of soft power branding, notably the Knowledge Sharing Program, the utilization of the Korean Wave moved beyond government control.



II. Pressures from Hierarchical Change in the Global Order

As laid out in a rich body of literature, the global hierarchy in state-centric terms is being re-shaped in the 21st century.⁵ The ascent of China, India and Brazil, commonly viewed both individually and collectively through the BRICS model, has served to address imbalances in the globalization process, one which up until now has mainly reflected the greater influence of long-standing powerful states in the core regions of the ‘trilateral world’: North America, Europe and Japan.⁶ Yet, it is not only at the top layer of the global system that signs a fundamental transition is underway. In an unanticipated fashion, a number of secondary states possess considerable ability to influence the global ability on an issue-specific basis.

Such a transformation has many positive attributes for global political and economic life. It reverses the historically weak mechanisms of collective action associated with forums such as the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and it counteracts the splintering effects of the ‘policy competition’ that has been associated with the diplomatic behavior of developing states.⁷ Furthermore, it allows greater latitude to these rising powers to forge lessons-learned for overcoming developmental vulnerability.

At both the systemic and national level, these dynamics are commonly depicted as game-changers. This presumption, however, leaves moot what the motivation, site, and means of this game is about in the first place. Systematically, the global financial crisis of 2008 has enhanced the position of selective multilateralism as the global main game, with some momentum towards thicker, albeit still domain-restricted, modes of governance. Nonetheless, a serious interrogation must be conducted around questions about why, how, and to what degree, countries from both the old trilateral core states and the cluster of rising powers are committed to this form of reconfigured multilateralism.

The image of shift changing for middle powers is accentuated by two other important factors. In a world of diminished U.S. hegemony, it is much harder for middle powers to take on a repertoire of familiar activities beyond mediation. At the end of the Cold War, middle powers could relocate themselves as both supporters and occasional counterfoils to the dominant power. Within some basic boundaries and guidelines, middle powers held key roles both as loyalists and issue-specific dissenters. The pathway forward appeared to contain dualistic and even paradoxical components, although both had functional features. On the one hand, in a unipolar world, middle powers were pushed to play the role of followers whether in the core security domain (the first Gulf War), the economic arena (the move from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to the World Trade Organization (WTO)) and on social issues (human rights, democratization). On the other



hand, in select niches, middle powers had considerable space and incentive form coalitions that took on the U.S., whether on land mines, the International Criminal Court (ICC) or child soldiers.⁸

In the post-2008 environment, the U.S. remains uncomfortable with any fundamental shift that reinforces multipolarism, but there is an enhanced recognition that its position of hegemonic power is eroding and quite possibly over. Power – particularly political and economic aspects of power – is more widely diffused. If the U.S. is to continue to exert authority in an issue-specific fashion, it will have to do so with more partners and a more explicit set of institutional bargains that share governance authority and the burdens of providing global public goods.⁹

Along with the renewed controversy about the U.S.'s 'ownership' of the system,¹⁰ a debate has opened up about the extent to which big emerging powers buy into the rules of the system. One school of thought, epitomized by John Ikenberry, argues that this category of countries may be competing over the leadership of the international system, i.e., who has authority over what, but they are not contesting the basic rules of the system, namely openness, multilateralism and the rule of law.¹¹ Such an argument is supported by the fact that China and other members of the BRICS, rather than rejecting the principles and practices of the liberal international order, have joined and thoroughly engaged major multilateral organizations including the International Financial Institutions, the WTO, and the G20. If some features of international liberal order such as the concept of sovereign independence may change, and elements of pluralism at the top-tier of the international system introduced, the international system as a whole is not challenged or polarized.¹²

Other commentators privilege contestation, a sober view based on far lower expectations about the ability of the old establishment and emerging powers to reach an agreement when they hold such different views about the role of government, as well as the importance of political freedom in the economy.¹³ Kagan is particularly robust, arguing that it would be naïve to expect countries like China to maintain the international system that America built in its own image.¹⁴ Charles Grant embellishes this point further, by maintaining that China as well as Russia is instinctively suspicious of the very notion of global governance as a self-serving Western concept. As such, these countries are still strongly resistant to international interference in internal affairs, with a preference for informal gatherings of big powers and regional institutions to formal multilateral machinery.¹⁵ The other BRICS share, for the most part, the sentiments on global governance as being essentially unequal and unfair and the importance of non-interference in internal affairs.

Still others highlight the salience of inexactness in the multilateral components of the system, with the tendency of the big emerging countries to wait and see, buy time, and



hedge within the system. These features can be illustrated through the dynamics of the G20 in economic governance. Schrim highlights the degree of fluidity within the summit process, whereby the G20 exhibits variability among the national units that comprise the forum. Lines of division are not rigid and do not adhere to traditional North-South alliance formations, with the G20 process featuring a myriad of cross-cutting cleavages on issues relating to modes of financial regulation, stimulus versus fiscal restraint, bank levies, exchange rate and monetary policy, and global imbalances.¹⁶ Brazil, Canada, Japan, China, Mexico, South Africa and others opposed the French, German and U.S. proposal for a banking levy which aimed at making banks contribute to a rescue fund for bail-outs in future crises. In a second illustration, Germany, the European Union (EU) Commission and Brazil aligned in their criticism of U.S. and Chinese exchange rate and monetary policy. China, Japan and Germany put themselves in the same camp by supporting U.S. criticism of 'global imbalances' and being vigorously opposed to U.S. demands for political intervention against trade surpluses.

At the same time, it must be noted that the big rising powers have not taken on a comprehensive role as managers in re-shaping the global system. Rather, a selective approach has been adopted: going along with some G20 initiatives in some issue-specific domains but resisting in other areas on grounds of national interest. Flexibility of choice is enhanced by the support given to alternative institutional arrangements via the BRICS and/or IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) and through other forums including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.¹⁷ Such an approach is consistent with the contention of Barma, Ratner and Weber that the big rising states or BRICS do seem to be willing to work within key multilateral mechanisms as a means of status-enhancement, but that they see these efforts primarily aimed at protecting their sovereignty and building global and regional institutions in which they have more autonomy.¹⁸

The priority to status enhancement also can be seen in the massive attention given by the BRICS countries to projecting soft power through the hosting of major global events. China has taken the lead in this approach through the 2008 Beijing summer Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo, but all the BRICS have followed in a similar vein. Pointing to the competitive nature of this process, Beijing beat out Toronto, Paris, Istanbul and Osaka. Likewise Rio won over Chicago in the allocation for the prize to host the 2016 Summer Olympics, and England lost out to Russia for the right to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup.



III. The Opening up of New Space for Middle Powers

The focus of this chapter is on a re-examination of the ‘soft power’ brands of secondary or intermediate powers in a world of diminished hegemony and leadership. In doing so, it will move beyond the emphasis on the ‘rise of the rest’ in global affairs.¹⁹ Such a kaleidoscopic perspective, if valuable as an antidote to the retention of U.S.-centrism in so much of the literature, misses the degree to which a new form of hierarchical differentiation has reappeared in the 21st century. The ‘rise of the rest’ does not create uniformity; instead, it creates variegated layers on the global scene, each of which deserves careful scrutiny.

In an era in which there is an obsession with the new global geometry of power, it is easy to downplay or even dismiss completely a distinctive middle segment of countries separate from potential great powers either in the traditional (the EU-4 of Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom) or non-traditional (China, India and Brazil) group.²⁰

One reason for this ‘missing middle’ is the heavy weight in the literature on geopolitical competition at the apex of power. The context and contours we have before us in the first decade of the 21st century, however, are very different from the image of a single challenger to the status quo.

Instead of one emerging power there are a number of countries that can be deemed emerging powers.²¹ Moving from one to a cluster of countries, however, does not mean that there is any precision in determining which countries are in ascendancy. This puzzle jumps out in the popular acronyms used to showcase the emerging powers – whether BRICS, IB-SA, or BRICSAM (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and Mexico).

Even if the exact composition of the cluster cannot be precisely pinned down, nonetheless, what a broadening out does to an extended ‘rising middle’ is to turn the focus toward the form of the diplomatic activities associated with emerging powers. If the first distinct characteristic of the current phenomenon of ascendancy relates to numbers, the second deals with the manner of their diplomatic behavior usually via multilateral means.

The need to extend the mapping of who or what is rising is reinforced by the tendency to over-emphasize the degree of concentration in the shift of global affairs. Through a liberal internationalist framework, the focus is placed on the ability of the international system to adapt through the formation of new concerts or coalitions. The main focus of this stream is how the West needs to strengthen the Western liberal alliance, on the one hand, while simultaneously ‘bringing-in’ China and other rising powers, on the other. A considerable amount of attention is placed on the attributes of like-mindedness; and alternatively on the need for institutional management or socialization.

This chapter attempts to tease out the content, meaning and symbolic status of being a



middle power vis-à-vis a smaller set of countries, each of which belongs to the G20 or makes serious claim for membership. Special attention will be paid to an identity dilemma each of these countries possess relating to how middle power status is contested from a variety of alternative positions. This debate about middle power identity is most visible (and contested) in two traditional middle powers: Canada and Australia. The Harper government has embraced the middle power model, albeit with a variant approach that puts the emphasis on instrumental delivery as opposed to declaratory statements. The Gillard/Rudd government before its defeat in 2013 revitalized the notion of Australia as a 'creative' middle state. There is also evidence of a conceptually sophisticated and policy-relevant engagement with the middle power model among a wider cluster of states, most concerted in South Korea, and to some extent in Indonesia, Turkey, South Africa, Mexico, Spain and the Netherlands.

Middle power identity is enhanced by domestic political incentives to both elevate and nuance their location in the global system. At the same time, however, this middle power identity is projected over other forms of alternative identities by membership in the G20, as witnessed by the robust re-configuration of Korea's identity in the context of the G20. Alternatively, those countries such as Spain and the Netherlands that make the claim for membership but have gained only partial access to the forum have not undertaken a similar process of re-orientation.

The core objective of this chapter is to analyze how such middle powers are situated and operate in the pluralistic space located in the world order. Middle powers face the reality that their voices may be diluted as leadership groups in international organizations enlarge their membership and expand their inclusive consultation mechanisms. As already suggested, though, a counter-argument can be made that the process of transition offers significant opportunities for the advancement of the foreign policy of middle powers if they can apply their national strengths such as diversity, innovation, openness, and connectedness to specific global problems. While the impact of the BRICS has to be taken seriously, the rise of these big countries do not close space completely for alternative forms of leadership from an entrepreneurial and technical perspective. Put another way, power now is a more diffuse, smarter, and asymmetric concept.²²

In conceptual terms, there continue to be a host of puzzles associated with the middle power concept. As Gareth Evans, the former Australian foreign minister, noted in a recent address, 'trying to define middle powers with any precision, and coming up with a list of, say, twenty or thirty or maybe more countries that would command universal acceptance as such, is an exercise fraught with peril. Objective criteria like GDP, population size, physical size and military capability can be no more than starting points. For example,



Australia, which would be on everyone's list, ranks only 50th in the world in terms of population size, although it is 13th in GDP.²³

As noted, others in this category are Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico and possibly South Africa (notwithstanding its shift to the BRICS) and Argentina. Yet, middle power status is not only about objective criteria, but also about self-identity. A country such as South Africa that objectively is best located as a middle power has shifted identity to become a BRICS. Conversely, Indonesia, often viewed as a regional power (in which middle power status served as 'a reflection of lack of international ambition')²⁴ joined with South Korea, Australia, and Turkey to become the MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, and Australia) group.²⁵

Recognition concerning the resilience of the middle power model therefore requires a reformulation that highlights some elements of flexibility. A push along these lines fits neatly with the notion Robert Cox introduced, 'the middle-power role is not a fixed universal' but a concept and set of practices that continually evolve in search of different forms of actorness.²⁶ Rather than being a mode of conceptualization that reinforces the sense of continuity in global politics, the middle power model provides a porous and accessible window of change.

IV. The G20 as the Hub of a Revitalized Middle Power Diplomacy

Middle power activism has been relocated by the transformation of global governance in the context of the G20. As rehearsed above, unlike classic forms of concert diplomacy, the G20 allows space for another layer of states beyond the established elite and one or a small number of new rising powers.

One of the major changes has been a diminution of one of the key features of earlier waves of middle power activism: a strong sense of shared normative purpose. This commonality of purpose is best captured in reference to the high profile initiatives in the 1990s on anti-personnel land mines, and the ICC. In these examples, campaigns animated by middle power norm-building stood in contrast to the resistant behavior of major powers in the global hierarchy.

The institutional context for the projection of middle power behavior is also sharply different. In the initiatives of the 1990s, middle powers worked either to go around established institutions (the land mines campaign) or to build new institutions (the ICC). In the case of the G20 a cluster of middle powers were accorded equality of club membership in



the original institutional design. This common and equitable site of activity provides a valuable benchmark for a mapping exercise vis-à-vis middle power diplomacy.

To be sure, the G20 can be seen as consistent with traditional middle power ends, with the onus on reinforcing collective behavior in support of the international system. Indeed the point that Keohane made in the late 1960s remains valid in the context of the G20: ‘[A] middle-power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively, but may be able to have a systemic impact in a small group or through an international institution.’²⁷

However, in terms of means, membership in the G20 provides a platform for a more intense stylistic differentiation in the projection of middle power diplomacy. G20 dynamics reveal the differentiation between those countries (notably Canada) that have used the G20 as a platform to showcase its technical capacity and those (notably South Korea) that have used the G20 as a platform to highlight not only its intellectual/technical leadership but its soft power profile.

Although most of the media attention is focused on the countries at the core of a purported emerging multipolar world, it is middle powers that are the biggest champions of the G20 and work the hardest in the background to make it work, notably via taking on the hosting functions. In structural terms, the stakes are high for middle powers in terms of the operational efficiency in that they strongly support the rules of the international order. Even beyond the BRICS, moreover, the G20 offers middle states immense status enhancement as members of a self-selected and exclusive top-tier club at the apex of the global hierarchy.

If the methods of support have been sharply dichotomized, a split that can be located especially in the divergence between a key traditional middle power (Canada) and a key non-traditional middle power (South Korea). Using a template from a previous era of transition (in the post-Cold War period), Canada relied on some issue-specific forms of technical/routine leadership. Korea, by way of contrast, pushed forward with a more robust and diversified style.

V. Canada’s Instrumental, More Restricted Turn

Canada is the only country defined as a middle power that is a member of both the G8 and G20. There are potential weaknesses associated with this duality. Nevertheless, under current conditions, it also provides Canada expanded diplomatic space for initiatives at odds with the image of being relegated to marginal status.



At the ideational stage, it is the entrepreneurial role of Canada that stands out. Indeed the concept of the G20 itself originates in Canada. It was Paul Martin as the Canadian finance minister in 1998 that persuaded the United States and other G7 countries to form a new group, the finance G20, to invite leaders of developing countries to participate in international economic decision-making process. Paul Martin was also the first major politician to call for the elevation of the G20 Finance Ministers' group to the G20 Leaders' group in 2005.²⁸ Without Canadian leadership, the G20 might never have existed in its current form.

However, in more recent years under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, an embrace of the G20 was an ambiguous one: accepted but equated with downward mobility, in that it diluted Canada's elite standing within the G7/8.

The Harper government has embraced the middle power model, albeit through a variant approach that puts the emphasis on instrumental delivery as opposed to declaratory statements.²⁹ In doing so it differentiated the model of middle power diplomacy practiced under the Liberals in the late 1990s through such initiatives as the campaign against anti-personnel land mines and to create the International Criminal Court.

In keeping with this resistance to change, much of the ambitious initiatives in Canadian diplomacy is routed through this older 'like-minded' vehicle. This legacy was witnessed via Canada's strong support for the L'Aquila food security initiative. Canada, along with the U.S. and Japan, are credited at L'Aquila with meeting, if not exceeding, its 2005 commitments to double aid to Africa. Prime Minister Harper showcased this issue as one that confirmed the need for accountability: 'Countries who have not been living up to their commitments are going to face increasing heat as we go forward.'³⁰

The Canadian approach at the Pittsburgh Summit of G20 leaders followed in some of the same restricted trajectory. The government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper devoted most of its attention on getting the balance right between continuing the recession-fighting stimulus packages and implementing a collective exit strategy when the recovery was ensured. But it was made quite clear that the time was not yet right to move from one stage to the next. Harper stated: 'While we are seeing signs of recovery, the gains are, at best, fragile. We must stay on course.'³¹

In terms of Canada's diplomatic status, the debate centered on whether or not Canada's international role was strengthened or weakened by the accession of the G20 as the hub of global economic governance and the G8 concentrating on security issues. Mr. Harper acknowledged that Canada's voice in the world on economic issues could become watered down. He explicitly stated: 'Will Canada's role and Canada's voice be diluted [in the G20]? Well, look, it would be crazy for me to deny that in some degree. Obviously if you are one of 20 instead of one of eight it is a different dynamic.'³²



The positive assessments concluded that Harper and the Canadian government were left with some considerable diplomatic strength even amidst this transformation. Canada as the co-host of the G20 with South Korea in June 2010 could reinforce its credentials as a country with solid diplomatic and economic strengths. But as the host of the Muskoka G8 summit, Canada could not only shape the agenda in the way it wanted but do so in a way that reinforced the G8's like-minded ethos.

Such an instrumental turn multilaterally went hand in hand with a similar national branding exercise. Completed in May 2005, Canada's new branding initiative was based on ten years of accumulated tourism research and had involved twenty workshops and eighteen focus groups in twenty-three cities and six countries. Additionally, it held consultations with industry associations, tourism operators, and all levels of government. The result was a refashioned brand aimed at communicating and promoting Canada as a more compelling tourist destination in a more focused fashion. In terms of sports branding, the emphasis was placed firmly on top-tier results, as showcased by the 'Own the Podium' campaign at the time of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics.

Unlike South Korea, however, Canada did not use the 2010 Toronto G20 as a platform for soft power. Unlike the G8 tradition there were no major cultural events attached to the summit. The image that is most attached to the Toronto G20 is, conversely, the securitization brand amid major tensions between police and demonstrators.³³

VI. South Korea's Entrepreneurial Leadership

A core theme of this chapter is that the mapping of middle powers needs to be broadened beyond the orientation of established states such as Canada (with its technical and restricted bias). To a considerable extent, the mantra of middle state diplomacy has been passed over to non-traditional states such as South Korea, willing to take on robust forms of entrepreneurial leadership. In taking on these new responsibilities, the unique and generic qualities of Korea's diplomatic repertoire must be placed in a comparative context not only with traditional middle power such as Canada and Australia but also with non-traditional increasingly self-identified middle powers within the G20 such as Mexico, Indonesia and Turkey.

As with traditional middle powers of past eras, South Korea identifies itself as a bridge in global affairs. Unlike other middle powers, however, South Korea had a limited ability to



act in this fashion prior to the creation of the G20. Mexico, by way of contrast, could do so in a number of ways. Mexico most notably assumed a very active bridging position in the Heiligendamm process. As a member of the OECD and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico, like South Africa, had shed the developing-country identity in the mid-1990s. Still, skillful diplomacy, leveraged by a Mexican Secretary-General of the OECD, rather than leadership based on merit, has facilitated the role of Mexico as a convener of the O5.³⁴ The G8 dialogue was an opportunity for Mexico to realign its foreign policy more with the South and try to push migration as a major topic for debate within the G8-O5. It was also another avenue for Mexico to try to go around unsuccessful regional attempts of bridging the North and South American continents that significantly damaged Mexico's relationship with Brazil. In similar fashion the O5 provided Mexico with a good venue for mending its strained relationships with China and India, given their direct competition in the U.S. markets.

Unlike the BRICS, there was no sense of aloofness or hedging by South Korea. Nor were there any explicit recriminations about the causes of the crisis that led to the creation of the G20. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva went so far as to say that the global financial crisis, 'was created by white men with blue eyes.'³⁵ The BRICS also blamed U.S. 'aggressive policy actions' to stabilize their domestic economies that had spilled over into emerging market economies by generating 'excessive liquidity' and fostered 'excessive capital flows and commodity prices.'³⁶ South Korea, in contradistinction, used the familiar repertoire of traditional middle power statecraft, with a heavy reliance on quiet diplomacy and issue-specific mediation.

For the rising middle powers, the G20 did not present challenges in terms of being 'responsible stakeholders' but opportunities in terms of access to the 'high table' at the apex of power. Nor did Korea have the contradiction facing the BRICS as being a rising state power at the same time as it continued to have embedded within them a massive degree of societal inequality.

South Korea's presidency of the G20 also presented an opportunity to bring development issues to the table. With its vivid memories of both development successes and failures, Korea pushed for a development agenda and multi-year action plan, including a pledge for duty-free, quota-free market access for low-income countries. The focus of the Republic of Korea has been on human resources/technical transfer, infrastructure development, and public/private partnerships, private sector innovation and south-south/triangular (North-South, South-South) cooperation with the theme of bridging developed to developing countries to engage a new "consensus on development." At the core of this new development paradigm, Korea stresses the importance of "ownership" as a key component of effective aid delivery.



Korea also hosted the 4th high level panel on aid effectiveness in 2011, from which emerged the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, establishing a new mechanism for international dialogue on aid effectiveness and which is reflective of the changing reality of aid and development architectures, in particular, the increasing importance of development finance from emerging economies.

In addition to agenda setting and coordination, the Korean government in Seoul demonstrated its commitment to effective consensus-building and global communication in the run-up to the G20 Seoul Summit. It hosted the World Bank and IMF conferences alongside the meetings of finance ministers and central bank governors in Korea and invited most top government officials from Africa to hear their opinions about the G20 agenda and build up a consensus on the development issue. It also organized a gathering of more than 100 chief executive officers from Fortune 250 companies during the Seoul Summit in a bid to reflect the private-sector views when political leaders discuss the global issues and concerns. This ‘business summit’ model became a regular sideline event of the annual G20 Summit as it moved from Cannes, Los Cabos, and St. Petersburg.

The extension of the developmental model was complemented the projection of an attractive cultural and social model characterized by the ‘Korean Wave.’ Although worked through diffuse means,³⁷ such projection meshed with state-controlled soft power. One embedded element of this approach was *hallyu*, both in terms of Korean TV dramas and K-Pop. In soft power terms, Korea also found an unlikely source of attraction in Psy — whose dance video ‘Gangnam Style’ became a YouTube global phenomenon. Taping into this appeal, the Korean Wave Research Institute was established in 2010 to promote South Korean popular culture globally. In March 2012 the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism announced a substantive budget increase for *hallyu*, promoting Korean arts and culture abroad.

VII. The evolution of soft power projection

In the past eras of strong states and inter-state rivalry, the role of middle powers was essentially that of establishing a ‘good international citizenship, within the utility, and necessity, of acting cooperatively with others in solving international problems, particularly those problems which by their nature cannot be solved by any country acting alone, however big and powerful. The crucial point to appreciate about good international citizenship is that



this is not something separate and distinct from the pursuit of national interests...On the contrary, being, and being seen to be, a good international citizen should itself be seen as a third category of national interest, right up there alongside the traditional duo of security and economic interests.³⁸

At the systematic level, in the transition from unipolarity to multipolarity, the missing middle is commonly left out (with some exceptions) even in the context of the G20.³⁹ Amid the focus on jockeying between the U.S., the BRICs and the EU, relocation of middle powers continues to remain below the radar in academic circles with the scholarly ambit stuck in 19th and 20th century terms.

An appreciation of the means by which middle powers use soft power allows a more nuanced mode of analysis on how this cluster of countries adapt to new structural circumstances. Canada has chosen to discard the power of attraction built up in earlier eras.

What stands out in the period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s is the accentuation of Canada's soft power via similar means as exhibited in the Korean wave. South Korea, up to the contemporary era, did not have an autonomous tradition of transmitting cultural values or products to the rest of the world. On the contrary, Canada has long experienced one of the highest degrees of foreign cultural penetration in the world.

As with South Korea, however, it is important to distinguish the emergence of a conscious and ongoing program of state-directed public diplomacy and private initiatives by creative, interpretative and performing artists. What was different in the state-directed approach was that there remained a dualistic function. No less that South Korea, Canada wanted to change its image, in particular from a portrayal that played up Canada's physical endowments (the Rockies and Niagara Falls in particular) to a more diversified representation. Canada's public diplomacy, nonetheless, cannot be looked at in symbolic terms. The program remained thoroughly embedded in an instrumental utility 'inexorably linked to political, economic, commercial and industrial policy.'⁴⁰

The dimension that differentiated Canada's soft power projection in the 1960s to early 1980s period was the connection between the state-based approach by the federal government and Canadian federalism. If there was a competitive component it was not directed at external actors but internal ones, especially the push by the Quebec government into the international arena. Notwithstanding the cultural benefits of Quebec's own approach, Quebec also used culture as a weapon in its wider struggle with the federal government over legislative powers, a struggle in which, in the early stages in the 1960s, Quebec placed the federal government on the defensive.

If the motivations diverged though, the effort in terms of the mobilization of resources approximated South Korea's later efforts. By the early 1970s state-based help for the Canadian



artistic community to go abroad was highly generous, with support from the National Museum, the National Arts Centre, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, and the Canada Council. The proliferation of Canadian Studies programs on a global basis opened up access to a wide number of universities and other academic institutions.

While a thin legacy of this era has been maintained, instead of expansion, Canada has contracted into core concerns related to instrumental and more explicitly competitive delivery. As noted, an illustrative case that stands out is “Own the Podium,” designed to prepare Canadian athletes to achieve success in terms of medal count for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, expanded since to encompass summer sports as well, known through the Road to Excellence program. Indeed, in many ways the emphasis placed on winning was a rebuke at the failure in terms of tangible results in the sporting component of public diplomacy going back to the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal, at which Canada failed to win a single gold medal.

South Korea, through parallel means, raised both its symbolic profile – and image for instrumental delivery – by its hosting of the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, where it won 12 gold medals. Korea, unlike Canada, has mixed this competitive based model with a stepped-up approach in terms of the projection of soft power, with a mind to boost its position in the global system. Given the cultural distance between South Korea and the core markets for cultural visibility and marketing, to some extent this is harder. The distance, nonetheless, in other ways is an advantage. Canada in the 1960s to the 1980s concentrated on elite culture because so many of its popular cultural icons (Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young) were transnational. As such there was little in the way of a connection between these high profile performers and the image of Canada.

Initially South Korea appears to have followed a path in the projection of soft power that broadly replicated Canada’s approach: with a focus on shifting its image from traditional stereotypes (a poor war ravaged country) to an alternative model, as a ‘developed, post- industrial middle power with an important role to play on the global stage both as an economic and a cultural power.’

Although unlike the Canadian soft power projection of the late 1960s to early 1980s, much of the South Korean outward-cultural projection approach remained market driven, some parallels were retained, above all the use of government-funded bodies including the Korea Foundation, Academy of Korean Studies and Korean Literature, that replicated the use of Canadian Studies programs abroad. Instead of fading, what stands out is the intensification of the soft power initiatives. The establishment of the Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB) in 2009 demonstrated the high stakes of this approach.

In overall terms, the shift in dynamism from the traditional developed middle powers, such as Canada, to the non-traditional middle powers, such as South Korea, underscores



the changing location of middle powers with respect to their strategic and pivotal positions. In the late 1960s to the early 1980s, the soft power approach of Canada was fairly predictable in terms of cultural visibility and production, in the sense that the projection was elite-oriented. What exceptionalism it possessed was in relation to the nature of federal-Quebec competition.

There was a synergy, therefore, between other components of projection (including peacekeeping and mediation) and the cultural projection among middle states. Culture was a means by which the image of respectability and value in universal terms was reinforced.

In the 21st century, middle state soft power projection has to be much more agile. Externally, as in other areas of global politics, middle powers came up against rise of the BRICS. To host major events, middle states in particular needed to deal with the enhanced competition from China, India, Brazil and South Africa. Internally, the source of cultural attraction has morphed from high artistic endeavors that fit with state-based institutions to various forms of popular culture that the state could capitalize on, but only with a degree of unpredictability.

South Korea epitomizes the strengths of middle power flexibility, albeit sometimes this capacity is projected in an uneven fashion. Using the G20 as a platform, South Korea has moved to host a number of major events, such as the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation in 2011 that allows it to distinguish itself both from traditional middle powers and from the BRICS. In terms of state-based agencies, South Korea has tried to capitalize on the popularity of *hallyu*, through Korean TV dramas and K-Pop not by extending the number of Korean Cultural Centers, but in coordination with the Federation of Korean Industries to create the Bureau of Cultural Diplomacy.

But this form of soft diplomacy by its very nature is not a fixed entity. The Psy phenomenon fit well with the state-based approach, even to the point where the Gangnam Style performer states he is ‘a guy who has more bulging ideas than muscles.’⁴¹ But even if this phenomenon can be understood, it is hard to repeat even by the most concerted state-based efforts. Moreover, in the context of digital artistic activity more generally, government facilitation will remain a catch up effort. What is impressive is the willingness of state-based officials to associate themselves in a manner that is the polar opposite of the image of older forms of public diplomacy, risk-averse and inward-looking.⁴²

Given these circumstances, the projection of soft power by middle powers will be a contested mode of operation. In the era of Canada’s embedded middle power identity, the repertoire of soft power was highly curtailed. In a world conditioned by Cold War bipolarity, with an explicit division between the North and the global South, Canada’s main focus was on demonstrating that it was a country that deserved respect by its other western part-



ners. Public diplomacy was an extension of functionalism in other areas of policy, where Canada received kudos because it filled certain niches in a seamless manner.

In terms of South Korea's projection of soft power via the Korean wave, one risk is a backlash in other East Asian countries. Indeed, to prevent anti-*hallyu* attitudes in countries such as Japan and China, the South Korean Culture Ministry moved in 2014 to focus on the connections between Korean Wave to an Asian Wave, with an emphasis on themes that connect countries.

Another risk is that the alternative dimensions of branding projected by the Korean government have become diminished by the success of the Korean wave. If UN Secretary General expressed the view in 2012 that he felt overwhelmed by the success of Psy, the other components of the soft power approach are also subordinated.

At the same time though, the Korean wave showcases many of the benefits of projecting an innovative brand. Not only has *hallyu* allowed South Korea to move beyond historical images of a poor war ravaged country, it has given a boost to the image of a bridge at the centre of South Korea's soft power, with the appeal of the Korean wave being both East Asian and global.

Being a middle power in the 21st century is, through this lens, much more difficult. Not only do middle powers risk being crowded out by the BRICS, some smaller states also seek recognition by finding specific areas of public diplomacy where they can utilize to grab attention. With South Korea at the head, there is an impressive East Asian wave of soft power brand projection. While there have been signs of a significant debate in Indonesia about the accentuated use of soft power, as well as substantive expressions of activity around the promotion of democratic and pluralistic values,⁴³ there is serious competition from smaller states, notably Singapore and Thailand.⁴⁴

New informal institutions, above all the G20, rebalance the position of middle states. Some, such as Canada, use this re-location to accent its trajectory away from the traditional brand of middle state diplomacy, favoring a projection that fits its perceived main game in policy as opposed to niches. Other non-traditional middle states, however, fill the gap. Without the same tradition as Canada, a country such as South Korea can re-model the middle power identity. Whereas Canada sought respectability in terms of cultural projection, in the same way as it did in peacekeeping and mediation, South Korea has sought to make itself look and feel relevant and exciting in terms of its application of soft power. ■



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