“Beyond Security: South Korea’s Soft Power and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance in a Post-Pandemic World”

Video and Welcoming Remarks

DATE
Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. EDT

FEATURING
Sue Mi Terry
Senior Fellow, Korea Chair, CSIS

John J. Hamre
President and CEO and Langone Chair in American Leadership, CSIS

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com
Sue Mi Terry: Good morning, good evening, good afternoon to all of you joining from Washington, D.C., from Seoul, from West Coast, Paris, from all over the world. My name is Sue Mi Terry, and I want to welcome you to CSIS Korea Chair Conference on South Korean Soft Power. I’d like to thank the Korea Foundation, our co-sponsor for the event, for their generous support.

We are here today to discuss soft power, specifically South Korean soft power, aspects of Korean power that we don’t really get to discuss too often in Washington, D.C. South Korea is not as large as China and the U.S., of course, and not even as Japan. But it has in many ways become not only an economic powerhouse but what we might consider a soft power superpower. The Korean wave, Hallyu, has swept the planet, literally, with pop music, film, TV, dramas, gaming industry, food, education, sports. BTS has become the most popular boy band, loved by the people around the world. They just spoke at the start of the U.N. General Assembly. And over 1 million people tuned in to watch the band speak.

According to Hyundai Research Institute, BTS alone is estimated to bring more than $3.6 billion into South Korean economy annually. In pre-pandemic time, it was estimated that around 800,000 tourists to South Korea – that’s 7 percent of all visitors to South Korea – they visited South Korea because they were motivated to visit by the band. Meanwhile, the strong showing of the “Parasite” at the Academy Awards in 2020 – it won four Oscars, including becoming the first non-English language film to win best picture – it shows us how the appeal of popular culture – South Korean popular culture has expanded well beyond music.

K-drama is also a very successful cultural export. The Netflix Korean drama, the original series, “Squid Game,” (I have to admit, I binge watched all nine episodes over the weekend), it has become the newest cultural Hallyu sensation all over the world. Since its release a few weeks ago, I think it was, like, September 17th, the “Squid Game” has become the biggest show in Netflix’s history in any language, hitting number one spot all over the world, over 90 countries, including the United States. First time for a Korean drama.

South Korean soft power does not end with popular culture. The 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics set the stage for additional South Korean soft power in the field of sports and sportsmen and sportswomen who dominate from golf to archery. Beyond culture and sports, South Korea’s attraction for international students is also one of the critical sources of South Korean soft power, which really helps shape other nations’ view of Korea. The number of foreign students studying in Korea grew at a pre-
pandemic high of 160,000 foreign students in 2019. Compare that number to just 12,000 foreign students in South Korea in 2003.

So I could multiply such examples for hours to come, but I won’t do that. You know, there is a billion-dollar gaming industry, contemporary arts and crafts, health care, K-beauty, and my personal favorite, food, mukbang. But I’m sure you’d rather much hear from our panelists and experts. The first panel today will discuss the nature and extent and growth of Korean soft power. The second panel will discuss the implications of these developments, including how South Korea should leverage its accumulated soft power resources to get the outcome it seeks in security and foreign policy. Will South Korea’s soft power resources be able to change the preference of others in concrete setting? How can soft power enhance South Korea’s national security, economic prosperity, international prestige, pride, international influence, and so on? These are just some of the questions that our experts and panelists will address today.

Our keynote address will be given by Harvard’s Professor Joe Nye, one of the world’s most respected scholars of international relations, who coined the term “soft power.” And since he coined the term, he’s been a leading explainer of soft power as a concept. So I don’t think we can have a better person to launch off our discussions today. But before we hear from Professor Nye, I would like to first introduce CSIS President and CEO, Dr. John Hamre for his welcoming remarks, someone that I know who has a genuine affection for South Korea. Thank you.

John J. Hamre: Good morning to – and good evening, and good morning to all of my friends in Korea, my Korean friends here in the U.S., and Americans that love Korea. This is going to be a very, very interesting discussion we’ll have today. And I want to say special thanks to Dr. Sue Mi Terry for leading this effort, and also for the Korea Foundation. I’ll say a bit more in just a second about how important this is but, again, let me just say how proud and pleased I am to be able to participate in this.

And I will very soon introduce Joe Nye. He doesn’t need an introduction, but I’m going to introduce him anyway because I don’t know of another academic policy leader since Hans Morgenthau who’s had a bigger impact on intellectual thinking in foreign policy circles in America than Joe Nye. But we’ll – I’ll come to that just shortly.

I really am – this is very timely. And I’m very glad that Sue Mi Terry has worked with the Korea Foundation to create this event, because in many ways I feel it represents the next big step for Korea on the world stage. You know, soft power is not public relations. You know, anybody that
tries to fake soft power through a public relations campaign, it fails almost instantly. People can see the artificiality of that.

Soft power grows out of the strength and confidence of a society, and the wholesomeness and constructiveness of a society’s construction. It’s, you know, for that reason where we see the most dynamic soft power in Korea now is in the entertainment industry. I mean, it’s because that is an industry that has energy and ebullience. It has – it has creativity, positivity. You know, the entertainment industry has done remarkable things.

The rest of Korea needs to start embracing that creativity, that optimism, that self-confidence. Korea’s such a hugely successful society. I don’t know of another country that has been more successful over the last 60 years than Korea, but too many Koreans think they are weak and falling behind. You know, and that affects your sense of optimism. It affects your sense of creativity. And I want this to be a chance for you to reflect on this success. And because you do have a successful foundation. That is the basis of soft power.

But it’s embarrassing for me to be talking about this, because the inventor of the term and the most thoughtful exponent of soft power is now going to speak with us. It’s Dr. Joe Nye. It’s one of my great privileges to be able to say he’s a friend. And we worked together for 25 years. I’ve never had a meeting with Dr. Joe Nye where I didn’t learn something really important and new. And he’s always been my mentor, my guide in so many things. And I remember when soft power first came out. And I’ll be honest, I didn’t like the term. I thought it was something like inspirational power or something. But it captured the world’s imagination. And it spoke to a whole different way of thinking about leadership in the world. This book, and all of Joe’s subsequent writings – and he’s been just doing an enormous amount of work recently in helping us think through, you know, the health and strength of democracy, accountable governments, rule of law. These are themes that Dr. Nye has been exploring in depth for these recent years for every good reasons. (Laughs.) You know, we have – we have needed to have a guide. You know, we needed somebody ahead holding the lantern, keeping us walking on a safe path. And Joe has done that. But today we are going to pick up on a theme that he made so powerful and so famous. And that is soft power, and what it means for Korea. So, you know, I can’t hear your applause because this is all virtual. But I’ll tell you, everybody across the continent and across Asia is applauding right now, Joe. Welcome. We’re so pleased that you’re here today. And let me turn it over to you. I’m going to be taking notes, as I always do every time you talk. Thank you.
TRANSCRIPT
Online Event

“Beyond Security: South Korea’s Soft Power and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance in a Post-Pandemic World”

Keynote Address

DATE
Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 9:10 a.m. EDT

INTRODUCTION
John J. Hamre
President and CEO and Langone Chair in American Leadership, CSIS

FEATURING
Joseph S. Nye, Jr.
Distinguished Service Professor, Emeritus, Harvard University

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com
Joseph S. Nye, Jr.: Well, thank you very much, John, for that generous introduction. I am very proud to be a member of the CSIS family and applaud your leadership of CSIS. It's been a wonderful institution. Also, I am glad to – or I congratulate Sue Mi Terry for taking up the topic of Korea’s soft power. Like John, I think Korea is one of the world’s great success stories. And I don’t think enough attention has been paid to the soft power part of Korea’s capabilities and success. Let me quickly go back to the beginning, so to speak, which is: What is power? Power is simply the ability to affect others to get what we want. And you can do that in three ways. You can do it through coercion, or threats of coercion. You can do it with payments or inducements. And you can do it through attraction. The first we often refer to as carrots and sticks. And we don’t pay enough attention to the third, which is sometimes we can economize on carrots and sticks if we can make ourselves attractive to others. So, I define soft power as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment. Now, nobody believes that soft power is sufficient to get everything that you want, whether you’re an individual or an organization or a country. And the ability to combine those three sources of power – coercion, payment, and attraction – is what I call smart power. Indeed, some years ago, about a decade ago, CSIS had a commission on smart power. And I think it’s important that we be realistic about soft power isn’t the answer to all of a country’s problems. However, when we neglect soft power, we are missing something which is crucial in international politics. I often give the example of the Berlin Wall. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, it didn’t come down under a barrage of artillery. It came down under hammers and bulldozers that were wielded by people whose minds had been changed by exposure to Western culture and broadcasts that had crossed the Iron Curtain. So, if we ignore soft power, we’re ignoring a very important power. And that is just as important as making the opposite mistake of thinking that soft power can solve all problems. It’s part of international relations – (audio break). Now, when we ask what are the resources that produce soft power for a country, it’s a country’s culture, its values, and – in the domestic domain – and its policies internationally, whether they’re seen as legitimate in the eyes of others. If you take those three criteria and you apply them to Korea, you would see that Korea really is well-endowed with soft power. On culture, Sue Mi just gave an excellent example of the way K-pop and Korean popular culture has captured so much of the world. So, I think I don’t need to elaborate on that. But let me mention that the other two sources of soft power are also important. I spoke of domestic values and how they’re practiced. Well, you know, Korea is quite a remarkable success story on that. First of all, it was a great economic success, but then it followed that up with great political success by creating a vibrant – fractious, admittedly – but a very vibrant and successful democracy.
So, in terms of domestic values, the Korean example of combining economic success with a democratic culture is another source of soft power for Korea. If we take the third resource that can produce soft power, which is a country’s policies, there Korea also can have effects, through its policies – particularly aid to other countries or accepting – helping students from other countries, as Sue Mi mentioned. But here’s an area where I personally think Korea could do more. I think Korea could be outstanding in terms of demonstrating through its international policies what success means. And if I were to say of the three pillars, resources for soft power, to my mind that would be the one that Korea might do more of. And that’s an outsider’s view, but I hope in your discussions over the next set of panels that you will be able to address that as well. Now, let me compare Korea’s soft power to two other countries. First, China, and then the United States. Obviously, these are much larger countries, but remember soft power is not necessarily correlated with size. You can be very big and not very attractive. And alternatively, you could be very small and very attractive. Take Norway, which only has about 5 million people. But with its democratic culture at home, its policies of 1 percent of its GDP given for aid to developing countries, its interest in mediating peace agreements, Norway punches above its weight, so to speak. So, there’s a small country with a lot of soft power. But let me go back to China and the U.S., which are, obviously, giants. China has been paying a lot more attention to soft power in recent years. In 2007, Hu Jintao told the 17th Party Congress that China needed to invest more in soft power. Now, that’s a very smart strategy for China, in the sense that as China’s hard power – economic and military – has increased, it could reduce the interest of others to form alliances against it if it could make itself attractive. So, a smart power strategy for China is to combine soft power with its hard power. And when Hu Jintao spoke about this, he talked about the importance of spending more money on soft power. Now, according to David Shambaugh, it’s about $10 billion a year that China spends. But it hasn’t produced the results it wants. If you look at the effects as measured by Pew polls, China has not become a soft power superpower. And as for the United States, it has traditionally had a good deal of soft power. The big question for the U.S. now is will we retain it? If we ask does U.S. culture attract others? Yes. Science and technology attract others as well. But the key question is, how do we improve American democracy and overcome the difficulties with the reduction of power that we saw during the four years of the Trump administration? So, in that sense, all countries have to be attentive to their soft power. And I’m delighted that you’re having a conference which is focusing on Korea, because Korea has enormous soft power. And I believe with the right investments and efforts, it can have more to come. So, thank you very much for your attention, and I wish you well with this great conference.
“Beyond Security: South Korea’s Soft Power and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance in a Post-Pandemic World”

Discussion Session I: Understanding South Korea’s Soft Power

DATE
Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 9:20 a.m. EDT

FEATURING

Bernie Cho
President, DFSB Kollective

John H. Lee (Lee Jae-han)
South Korean Film Director and Screenwriter (A Moment to Remember, Operation Chromite)

Euny Hong
Author and Journalist (The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture)

Jiyoon Kim
Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Democracy and Education

Daniel Tudor
Author, Entrepreneur, Former correspondent for The Economist

CSIS EXPERTS

Sue Mi Terry
Senior Fellow, Korea Chair, CSIS

Ambassador Mark Lippert
Senior Advisor, CSIS Korea Chair; Former U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com
Sue Mi Terry: Thank you, Professor Nye, for the great framing remarks. As the lead thinker in defining soft power, his works on soft power you should all check it out, including “Bound to Lead” and “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics,” as well as numerous other books and scholarly journals on the topic of soft power. They were really instrumental in setting up theoretical framework for this project and this conference. So, thank you so much. And so with that, let’s get to our panels. Moderating the first panel is Ambassador Mark Lippert, senior advisor for Korea Chair at CSIS, moderator of CSIS Korea Chair Capital Cable series, former very popular ambassador to South Korea. Really, I think there’s no other U.S. ambassador to South Korea who blended the instruments of U.S.-South Korea soft power into more traditional elements of U.S. foreign policy and bilateral U.S.-South Korea relationship. So, he’s really perfectly positioned to moderate this panel. Very well known to all Koreans and all Korea watchers, super fan of chimaek and his beloved Doosan Bears and KBO. Ambassador Lippert, please.

Mark Lippert: All right. Thanks, Sue. I really appreciate it. It’s a great honor to be here at CSIS in person. It’s a little strange, the first in-person event I’ve done in about two years. So, Sue, for soft power, I’m willing to get on a plane and get to D.C. So, thanks for that. And thanks for the KBO shout out. I noticed it wasn’t on your list of opening cultural exports. But KBO, ESPN, a match made in heaven last year during the pandemic. Too bad Doosan lost today. Anyway, with Dr. Nye and Dr. Hamre’s comments, we wanted to get on to the first panel and, really, I think I wanted to underscore this is the first one of these types of panels that I have seen here in D.C., and I think there’s a real recognition of the importance and success of these areas and how they’re increasingly intertwined with geopolitics, economics, global influence, as I think was set out by the introductory remarks today. A couple of examples of this I would quickly proffer. In the interests of time, I won’t be too long, but the other piece of this is that governments come and go. Ambassadors come and go. Foreign ministers come and go. Presidents come and go. But the people-to-people foundation, especially in two democracies, is critical in maintaining resiliency, allowing for creative policymaking and, basically, driving the relationship forward. That’s, I think, a unique piece to the U.S.-ROK bilateral relationship. We’ve seen it entwined in the THAAD dispute in terms of Chinese retaliation against K-pop, K-drama, so on and so forth. And finally, the per se value of the two countries – and, again, not – I’m talking not here about the global piece but the bilateral piece – but the per se value of the cultural exchanges, education, the entertainment and commerce that all comes with this. And I would say this is probably the first part of soft power that Dr. Nye outlined earlier today in his introductory remarks. Our charge here on this
panel is to build on those remarks and really build a deeper understanding of what happened in Korea, the implications for the society, the country, the world, and then bridging to Panel II of the larger frameworks of security, trade, and the U.S.-ROK alliance. So let’s get into it, as they say, with that intro to Panel I. I’m going to quickly go through our participant bios here. They are impressive, remarkable. Look them up online. I will not do them justice. But in the interests of time, I will go fast but I will hit some of these amazing highlights. Let me start with Bernie Cho. First, Bernie Cho is the president of DFSB Kollective, a Seoul-based artists and label services agency that specializes in providing digital media, marketing, and distribution solutions to 600 Korean pop music artists. The agency, since 2009, has successfully produced numerous K-pop concerts and showcases in North America, Asia, Europe, and as well secured the number-one digital music chart debuts for various K-pop albums in the United States, Canada, Japan, Korea, greater China, Southeast Asia, Australasia, and Europe – in short, the world. There’s a whole other piece to this but DFSB Kollective has also served as special project consultants for international advertising agencies, video game developers, and documentary and production shows such as YouTube Originals where Bernie is featured, and I’m going to come to that later on in the panel. Earned a B.A. from Dartmouth College and graduated from the Vancouver Film School. Next, John H. Lee – this is great in his bio – captivated hearts through Korea and a large part of Asia with the successful second film “A Moment to Remember,” and everybody loves that film, I have to say. Get lots of questions about it. Following up on this success, he went on to paint an electrifying love story in “The Third Way of Love.” His success with war films “Into the Fire” and his most recent “Operation Chromite” starring Liam Neeson demonstrates the director has the versatility to make films across genres and diverse audiences. He’s also produced other documentaries and I believe he is a Silver Spring native, so just up the road here from Washington as well. So, John, welcome to the show. Impressive bio and look up his bio online. Euny Hong, third up here in our bio lineup, journalist, thrice published author, most recently “The Power of Nunchi: The Korean Secret to Happiness and Success,” and her previous book, “The Birth of Korean Cool,” which I have right here with me, has been translated into eight language(s). The Telegraph of the U.K. described the book as fabulously snarky, and a – The New York Times described the book as incisive and humorous. Lots of other appearances in media. She’s very, very well-traveled in terms of an author, an expert on a range of different issues. Graduated from Yale University with a B.A. in philosophy and is a former Fulbright Scholar, is fluent in English, French, German, and Korean. Getting to the final two here, Dr. Kim – Jiyoon Kim – a senior research fellow at the Institute of Democracy and Education. She is also a popular and highly acclaimed
political analyst specializing in election and public opinion analysis. She was most recently the host of “Jiyoon Kim’s Evening Show” on TBS FM, where she discusses current issues with high-profile politician(s) and opinion leaders. Dr. Kim also hosted NBC’s “100 Minute Debate.” She has affiliated with several research centers on public opinion and holds a Ph.D. from MIT. Last but not least, Daniel Tudor, writer, entrepreneur, former journalist from Manchester, United Kingdom. After a short stint in finance was the Korea correspondent from the Economist from 2010 to 2013, reported extensively on North and South Korea. He also wrote a book called – actually, a first book – I’m sorry, rather – “Korea: The Impossible Country,” an introduction to Korea for an international audience. Co-founded the Booth Brewing Company, Korea’s first venture-funded craft beer firm, in 2013. Also, wrote a second book called “North Korea Confidential” with my good friend James. And Dan worked as an advisor to the international press for the president, Office of South Korea, and so on and so forth from there. A graduate from Oxford University with a B.A. and Manchester University from MBA.

Unbelievably impressive panelists. We could stay here all morning talking about their bios. But I think in the interests of the conference and the interests of time, let’s get on with the show. And I’m going to come welcome – first, I’m going to welcome all of our panelists again. Thank you. And I am going to go right to Euny to kick us off here. And Euny, your book, which I hold up –

Euny Hong: Thank you, Ambassador. That was a very, very moving introduction and this is probably the most illustrious group I’ve been with. Professor Nye, I’m so glad you’re here because my book would not exist without you. “The Birth of Korean Cool” is, basically, a case study of soft power in Korea. I want to focus on the word “cool” because it’s another way of saying soft power. That Korea became rich is kind of interesting. But what’s more interesting is why they focused on being cool, and the answer is that cool is the most important thing in the world. It’s the one thing that everybody wants. An analogy I like to make is there was a popular movie called “Mean Girls,” which was about high school cool and, basically, the theme is if you’re cool you can do no wrong. And so one of the popular girls is very hated and a classmate cuts holes all over her sweater as revenge, and what happens the next day at school everyone has cut holes into their sweater. And that’s what America did and has been doing for the entire 20th century. You know, if you watch a lot of early Italian and French movies, they’re talking about Cadillacs and Levi’s and Marlboro cigarettes like it’s some kind of, like, magic thing that you only get in heaven. And, you know, evidence that cool is important was – this is right up Professor Nye’s alley – the Velvet Revolution in ’89 after – you know, which is how the former Czechoslovakia became –
you know, shed the yoke of communism. It's called The Velvet Revolution because of the Velvet Underground. Václav Havel and his fellow revolutionaries were really big fans of this cool New York band. And so don't ever let anyone tell you that cool is not important. It is extremely important. And when I first pitched “The Birth of Korean Cool” it was in 2013. A lot of people thought it was a pathetic joke. They thought that I was making an entire narrative about just one popular video, namely, Psy’s “Gangnam Style.” In fact, they put his picture on the cover of my book because they knew that people would not be aware of anything else. And one – when I was shopping the book around, you know, they have you meet with prospective publishers. You know, one clown said to me, oh, you know, “Gangnam Style” didn't really get a billion hits. You know, South Korea – you know, the South Korean government hired a click farm in China and they had, you know, a thousand people click it, you know, a hundred million times, or something like that. And I was, like, how would they do that? You know, and if they were going to do that, they would not pick this video. It doesn't make any sense. And the story there was that for some people they recoiled at the idea that Korea wanted to be cool. They wanted to believe anything else except that Korea was cool. So, you know, I know that others will talk more about things that they're experts in. Daniel Tudor, for example, I cede to him – I cede to him on economic issues on this panel. But, you know, it was – the cool project was a pivot that Korea made after the financial crisis in Asia in the late '90s because they decided they didn't want to rely on heavy industry. They wanted something which, once created, would be self-perpetuating. In other words, be the popular girl in high school where no matter what you do you can't make any mistakes. So that is why cool is important. I was told I have three minutes, so I will do the right thing and pass the baton.

Mark Lippert: All right. Thanks, Euny. Thanks for the setup there on the cool factor and its implications, not just in terms of Korea but you wove in some other elements in terms of how pop culture affected geopolitics in Europe, number one, and number two, you set up a little bit on the economic piece. And you mentioned Dan, so let's go to Dan next. And, Dan, you wrote a really interesting book on Korea that does a wonderful job observing some of the more conventional elements of Korean society but blending in some of the soft power elements. So can you talk about some of these bigger issues of Korean popular culture and how it's evolved both inside of Korea and what it means to Korea's role in the world?

Daniel Tudor: Sure. I'll try my best. First of all, you know, I don't know very much about cool, unfortunately, and also, Euny, I don't know very much
about economics either. (Laughter) So, there wasn’t too much of it in my book either. But yeah, I’ll try and talk a little generally about, yeah, the question at hand. Actually, when I first came to Korea, it’s been 19 years since I first became interested in Korea, as my best friend at university was a Korean guy. He invited me for the World Cup and it just – yeah, it literally changed my life. It was the turning point in my life. And before that, I hadn’t known anything about Korea as none of – nobody in my country did at the time. And having come here, I feel like, wow, actually, this country is so rich in all kinds of things and I think, honestly, like, I think Korea has its own version of everything. I’ve always felt this. Korea has its own – most of them say “my country” even – a very particular national dress traditionally, a very particular kind of cuisine. Even if you search for something on the internet, there’s a specific search engine. There’s a specific Korean version of everything. If I do online banking, there’s a very annoying but very specific system for buying things online in Korea. There’s always a very – there’s always a Korean way of doing something and a Korean system, and I think that reflects the richness of and the depth of what is available here. And just until now, people weren’t really aware of it and I think that’s partly, I think, a result of, I think, what was mentioned in the opening comments, that you’ve had this very rapid growth in GDP, wealth, in Korea and then democratization. I think before that point, it’s very hard to have this kind of exchange back and forth. I think a big part of that is – was the human factor of just being able to meet people. I mean, before the democratization of Korea and before the growth in, you know, Korean wealth, it was very difficult to meet Korean people outside Korea. Certainly, growing up, I never met anyone Korean until I went to university. But now in a big city in the U.K., you know, if you’re – you know, if you’re living in a big – you know, somewhere like London or Manchester, you may well have Korean friends and, to me, that’s the greatest, hallyu, in a way, more so than even, you know, Korean films or TV; you know, hallyu music becoming popular. It’s actually just being able to meet people, and that’s something that’s not really discussed. But yeah, aspects of Korean soft power. Of course, music has been discussed, “Squid Game” on TV right now, but also books. There’s a lot of Korean literature in translation that’s doing very well these days. But I think, really, in a way, it’s just Korea’s turn in the sense that Korea has a very long history and a rich cultural tradition. And yet, you know, until certain conditions were met, the wealth and democratization, I don’t think it was necessarily possible for the rest of the world to come to know about these things. But now it’s become very possible and what I was lucky enough to feel when I first came here 19 years ago, I think it’s now being seen by everyone and correctly so. And I don’t know if that’s three minutes but – (laughter) – I’ll –
Mark Lippert: No, Dan, that’s great. Hey, can I just follow up on one quick question – one point? You really made this really interesting comment about Korea maintaining its own way, its own cultural – unique, I guess – aspects and there’s a Korean method for everything, right, in some respects. Yet, they’ve been so successful in blending elements and projecting that globally. What accounts for that?

Daniel Tudor: I mean, I think also Korea has also a long history of accepting foreign influence. I mean, right now, the predominant foreign influence is the U.S. But historically, there’s, you know, been great Chinese influence as well and unwanted Japanese influence at a certain point, too. So I don’t think Korea has ever been particularly closed to overseas influence. But yeah, I think there’s an aspect of, you know, this is our stuff that, you know, we’ve made but we’re prepared to – we’re prepared to blend it with something else. Yeah. I don’t know. I mean, I’d be curious to know what you think is all about that. (Laughter.)

Mark Lippert: All right, thanks, Dan. We’ll take it – we’ll take it back here. All right. Over to Bernie, who does know something about cool, unlike some of us on the panel. But Bernie, you know, interested, obviously, in your thoughts on any of the comments that have just been laid down. But let me ask you a deeper question on K-pop. You’re an expert. You’re a practitioner, as has been laid out in your bio. Take us a little bit deeper into the vertical of K-pop where the – you were – you talked about – I’ve seen you on a documentary talking about the early days of K-pop when things started to evolve from trot music, I believe, to the impact of the ’97 financial crisis. So can you just walk us through this evolution of K-pop and maybe touch on a little bit about its economic import – export, economic impact – specifically exports, pardon me – experience – your experiences in China, Japan, Southeast Asia, the appeal. Bernie, you know, broad strokes here, please. The floor is yours.

Bernie Cho: My goodness. That question almost felt like three minutes. So, I’ll try my best. You know, I came out to Korea in the early to mid ’90s, and when I had come out to Korea, in many ways, you know, Korea was – to politely speak, it was an emerging economy and, you know, when I’d come out to Korea, I mean, the word K-pop didn’t even exist. It was probably predominantly dominated by Western music, I would say about 80 percent market share, and that remaining 20 percent was sort of a mix of trot music, which is, basically, like Korean country music. But it was music, essentially, that either your parents listened to or it was playing in the taxi or was in the background of restaurants, or stuff you used to sing at karaoke. And then something happened in the mid ’90s and it was really sort of a convergence and confluence of technology, and over time, this idea of both culture and technology. In
Korea, the two words actually go side by side and hand in hand. You know, credit where credit’s due, but Chairman Lee – Lee Soo Man of SM Entertainment – he coined the phrase. But he wasn’t just talking about theory. He put it to practice. It was really sort of his business model, his modus operandi. And what he was doing was he was, essentially, using culture to fuel technology and technology was fueling culture, and that really kind of came ahead during the 1997 IMF crisis here in Korea when the economy collapsed. The country went bankrupt. And the best thing that could have happened was, you know, we had a different superstar DJ back then. It wasn’t Fatboy Slim or – it was President Kim Dae-jung, and what he did is he doubled down. Instead of building real highways for Korean automobiles, he actually built – he laid the groundwork for the information superhighway, the internet. And what ended up happening was technology was fueling the economy, but more importantly, culture – pop culture, in particular. And so we saw the emergence of a lot of technology companies, but also a lot of these technology companies were dipping into the culture space because, for them, it was ultimately content. It was the software that was going to power the hardware. And what we started seeing is that in the late ‘90s a lot of the Korean pop culture and pop music was just made for Korea. It was just made by Koreans for Koreans. And then from 2000 to 2010, Korea transitioned in the same way that we saw, you know, whether it’s Samsung smart phones to Hyundai cars to LG TVs, Korean pop culture, and then particularly with K-pop they started evolving into what I would say was the made in Korea phase where the music was made in Korea but it was starting to find traction and attraction across Asia. And then come 2010, Korea transitioned again where K-pop was no longer made for Korea. It was no longer made in Korea. It was made by Korea. We started seeing a lot of the K-pop music but, more importantly, the artists and the companies becoming not just multilingual but multicultural and, more importantly, multinational. And so now when we listen to and hear experience K-pop, you know, in the same way we look at a Hyundai car or a Kia car that’s been designed by somebody from Germany that might be put together in a factory in Georgia and is sold somewhere, you know, in Eastern Europe or Latin America, K-pop is really no different in terms of that kind of production process and marketing process and marketing process because K-pop has, truly, gone global, not just in terms of its appeal and in terms of its creative but also the commercial aspects. You know, like, I think today is a perfect day to illustrate the number-one song right now in the U.S. on the Billboard Hot 100 is a collaboration between Coldplay and BTS. Years ago if we put the letters BTS next to Coldplay, it would have just been naturally assumed it would have been a behind-the-scenes video of Coldplay just being cool. But now BTS is now that new cool and, as a result, you
know, we’re starting to see these creative collaborations, commercial collaborations. But these are global collaborations. And so, you know, when people talk about K-pop going global, it’s not just the appeal to fans, but if you dig a little deeper and, you know, maybe dig through the liner notes or the credits, K-pop has really become a very global product. And, you know, if you look at who the directors are and, you know, right now, members of K-pop bands, it’s become more the rule and not the exception that you have non-Koreans in the bands. You know, for instance, a great highlight is Lisa from Blackpink. This is a young woman from Thailand who is, arguably, the – one of the most popular members of Blackpink and she, just two weeks ago or actually maybe last week, became the first Asian female to ever hit number one on the Billboard hip-hop singles chart. And she checks off all the boxes. She’s a female artist, an Asian artist, a K-pop artist, and a Thai artist. And so what we’re starting to see is there is very much an interest now in not just K-pop the music but K-pop the business model, and I feel in many ways we’re starting to see not only the export of artists but the export of the business model. You know, for instance, another huge deal, and this is probably more up Daniel’s alley, but HYBE, the home to BTS, acquired for a billion dollars the super-agent Scooter Braun and his Ithaca Holdings, who represents Justin Bieber, Ariana Grande, J Balvin, and a whole slew of other superstars. And so we’re starting to see K-pop go global not just creatively but now commercially as well.

Mark Lippert: And, Bernie, just one quick follow-up. Fascinating in terms of you really blend this narrative of Korean economics, Korean development model, essentially, if you will, into the cultural space and that they’re converging at the same time and almost supercharging. Take us back. Just real quick answer here. You can't export something that doesn’t have a market, right, and you have this place where you are developing inside Korea, but yet finding markets in early days Japan, China, Southeast Asia. How did that happen?

Bernie Cho: Well, one of the things about Korea is the music industry realized the market was too small and, if anything, the IMF and the collapse of the economy really forced the industry to look outwards because they had no choice. And, you know, I think what’s been really impressive, and this is usually sort of the cocktail party, you know, trivia that I throw out now and people spill their drinks when I tell them that Korean pop culture is the second largest consumer goods exports coming out of Korea. Automobiles, number one. You know, people just say, oh yeah, Korean cars. We get it. It exports well. But it shocks people when they hear that Korean pop culture is the number-two export. I think last year it was $10.6 billion in exports. And that’s, you know, roughly, about 1.5 times bigger than electronic exports out of Korea and 2.6
times more than mobile smart phone exports out of Korea. And when we talk about Korean pop culture, to tell you the truth, the overwhelming pop culture export is actually video games, but the fastest growing pop culture exports for the past two years and projected for the next three years is K-pop at 9.4 percent cager (ph). And so we – and because Korean pop culture, not as a sort of fuzzy feel good, you know, idea or concept but as an industry is very important to the Korean economy and, as we’ve seen recently with BTS going to the U.N., you know, to the politics of Korea as well. And so, you know, I think one of the things that Korea was very good at was because the economy as a whole was so export driven in consumer goods, it was really a natural extension, I think, of a lot of best practices crossing over into the pop culture industries and, specifically, namely, K-pop.

Mark Lippert: All right. Outstanding. Thanks, Bernie. All right. There was, I think, a time in Sweden also, right, when ABBA was number two to Volvo at some point. So interesting. Take us back there as well. Really interesting that it’s repeating itself. But maybe I’m wrong on my –

Bernie Cho: Oh, no. And a shout out to ABBA. They just made a comeback.

John H. Lee: Thank you.

Mark Lippert: – also, I would say, cool as well. And, John, let’s talk a little bit about the film industry in that we’ve had some recent success on the international stage in terms of Academy Awards, best picture, actresses, all of that. But this has been a journey in terms of Korean film, and some of your credits are key elements in that journey. You look up the history of this and you see the old days in Korea screen quotas, smaller film industry, smaller audiences. So take us through your experience with the film industry and a little bit of the history there, and how did we get to where Korea is today on the international film industry scene?

John H. Lee: Well, I started my career in Korea in 2004 officially with “A Moment to Remember.” Can you hear me, by the way, well?

Mark Lippert: Got you. Yeah. Loud and clear.

John H. Lee: OK. Cool. Yeah. I made my first film in New York City with “Cut Runs Deep.” That was an indie film, and I ran out of money to finish it, and I found money in Korea and that’s how I got connected to the Korean industry. And I finished my first film in Korea and then it took me four years to get my second film made, and during those times, I interacted a lot with Korean filmmakers, and I made music videos and TV commercials and, you know, just got acquainted with Korean culture.
And with "Moment to Remember" my – I had this little – these are my personal experiences – I had this little – three little personal dreams or goals I had made going into this film, “Moment to Remember,” was that I had to make my name and put my name out there as a commercial theatrical movie director – feature film director. So, first goal was to – the movie will break even, make investors happy, and second goal was to make a movie that people will watch more than once. And third goal was to make a movie that people will remember 10 years later. So, I sort of achieved all that my first Korean film and it did really well in Korea, close to 3 million admissions. At the time it was huge, and it was the biggest romance film in Korea. And then something really interesting happened. It did even better in Japan. The budget of the movie was only $3 million, and it was sold for 3 million (dollars) to Japan and it did even better, huge box office there, and still to this date I believe it’s still number-one movie in Japan. So that’s – that was my first taste of, like, my – the Korean film industry and at the same time, luckily, I was able to experience the international market, you know, and through Japan, and along with that I was witnessing the birth of K-pop. So, I got – you know, I got to make friends with a lot of – lot of K-pop artists including Bernie Cho, who’s here, yeah, and – yeah, and I – so I continued making films and music videos and TV commercials and, you know, I expanded my market to Japan, China, and Southeast Asia and all that stuff. And so, I agree with Bernie that the market in Korea is really small and, collectively, the – you know, that’s a remarkable achievement by filmmakers in the film industry or the K-film, K-drama and stuff. But, individually, it’s always a struggle, you know. Individually as a director you try to sell your next script. You try to get your next movie made, and if the market is small and you really have to be on top of your game to get investments and stuff and, you know, like, the paradigm has shifted after Netflix landed in Korea and filmmakers are really, like, they – I think it’s the Korean thing. They adapt to situation really fast. Yeah. So –

Mark Lippert: John – hey, John, what elements do you think – you make the point – you make an excellent point about export. You’ve worked in other markets. You make the point about Korean success on Netflix. What is it about Korean film that has this international appeal, in your opinion? Why is – why do these movies grip international audiences

John H. Lee: Well, you know, they’re – you know, you hear only about successes but there are a lot of failures, you know. The Korean people, you know, with offers from China and Japan and other places they tried a lot of co-productions in the past. A lot of them failed and you don’t really hear about failures. But, you know, like a lot of failures, if I can give you a little bit of my analysis, is that they try to, you know, the – how
can I say this? OK. So they make up stories like, you know, oh, this Korean guy meets, like, a Japanese, like, foreign student who's like – whose grandmother was, like, Korean or, you know, it turns out – like, you know, those things, you know, like, you know, the money and intent, it’s not just set up right, the stories. You know, they try to put, like, Japanese actor, Korean actor, Chinese actor and try to create some sort of, like, a story, and it’s always been a failure that way. And I thought that having made a Japanese movie myself and also a Chinese movie, I believe that, you know, you got to make – when you – I’m just telling you from the director’s perspective. You have to make a movie that’s culturally sound and culturally grounded and real. You know, you can’t – and genuine. So and instinctually I think Korean filmmakers know that. And then, you know, you have a lot of, like, filmmakers that are, like, they studied abroad and they’re very international, but you still have a lot of filmmakers that are really – like, they want to write stories in Korean culture. And, you know, we have this peculiar thing in Korea where the audience in Korea are very smart and very picky. So we really – the first audience we had in Korea we had to – that’s the first audience we had. So and that – so the calculation, I mean, when you – when you’re writing a story you have to make a believable story that – you know, that could – and the thing with “Parasite” and the “Squid Game” it’s very domestic, very, like, local, and that’s what a lot of people are saying. You know, to go international you really have to look into yourself inward and, you know, I think it’s all interrelated with what other people say. You know, cool and, you know, like, all that. I think it’s the film makers that are looking inwards to find something.

Mark Lippert: And, John, that’s a great point in terms of looking into Korea and then outward. Let’s move on. Thanks for the insights. Really great stuff. Let’s move on to Dr. Kim. We’re going to try to wrap in about 15 minutes. Dr. Kim let’s take this all together here. You’ve heard – we’ve gotten a lay down from practitioners, from artists, from journalists, on Korea’s soft power, on different elements. K-pop. We’ve heard a little bit about film. We’ve heard Euny’s great treatise on cool. Where do we – how does this impact Korea’s international relations? We’ve mentioned BTS at the U.N., and how does this impact on the domestic political scene in Korea? You are someone who is eminently familiar with both. So, the floor is yours.

Jiyoon Kim: Well, I feel like myself as a parasite to this very talented and gifted and creative panelists as a boring political scientist. First of all, it’s my great honor to be with Professor Nye. You know, I’ve been trained as a political scientist so reading your book, and so it’s my great honor. So, basically, from the perspective of a political scientist, this is all about the influence and the power. So in terms – in the case of soft power
differing from the hard power, we are wanting to have an influence on other countries without coercion. That’s, basically, the essence. This is really embarrassing to say in front of Professor Nye. So having said that, I mean, first of all, I would like to say that how the other people outside Korea see Korea. I mean, so to many people outside Korea, it is – the country is perceived as the one with economy success, the success with democratization so and also, you know, a very strong military as well. I mean, if you go over there and look at the – how strong our military is, it’s always within the top 10 and also in terms of the economy power it’s around the 10 – the top 10 countries. But, unfortunately, the soft power of Korea is not really par with the hard power we have. So it’s been upgraded recently, thanks to the BTS and, of course, the Oscar-winning movie “Parasite” and recently the “Squid Game.” But, usually, the soft power of South Korea is a little bit behind the hard power of South Korea. So that’s how we were perceived and, definitely, it is changing. But, mostly, it is changing thanks to the cultural elements, as Professor Nye correctly indicated. But there are other measures of the soft power, for example, like, you know, the technologies and also there’s something that the government can do, for example, like ODA. So in that area, I don’t really think the Korean government and Korea in terms of public – not really doing a lot or doing enough. So it’s not putting that much effort in that. So the cultural elements is gaining more regard and also the respect outside of Korea but it’s, basically, you know, very much of a performance and successful performance of individual Korean citizens. So what the government can do in terms of that and that’s something that we have to ponder on. And also, I would like to raise one more question, actually. So it is – you know, in essence, it’s the power and influence. That’s all we think about as political scientists, of course. But then having said that, I mean, you should have some target countries or target area or target regions. I mean, the case of the United States, all over the world, like, you know, the democratic values and also the American culture as well, and in terms of the, like, West Germany, those are the – it’s Germany, of course, and with the help of other Western countries as well. But for us, what it should be? I mean, most of Korean – foreign policy of Korea and international relations is now putting a lot of effort into the North Korean policy and I don’t really think it is the country that we can have an influence with the soft power, with the supplementary, you know, help of the soft power. Then we have to go beyond the North Korean policy. Then we will – then what is our long-term and consistent foreign policy that the soft power can have some influence and can help – or assistance. Now, in that – having said that, I don’t really think the Korean government is very much ready for that. Have we ever thought about it really seriously or considered, really, what is our long-term goal or ultimate aim or goal of Korean foreign policy, not just in three years or five
years, not just getting into the Billboard chart or getting the Oscar, but in terms of, like, after one generation what do we see as a – the power of country, I mean, in the world, in the global community, and I don’t really think we have thought about it very seriously and that’s the thing that we have to do first and then we can go on to the discussion how we can blend a mix of soft power and hard power of Korea and go forward. I’ll stop here.

Mark Lippert: All right. Excellent, Dr. Kim. Thanks for those insights. Really, really good stuff. All right. We got about 10 minutes left and we’re going to squeeze in two questions from the audience. I’m going to try to come back to a couple of our panelists here, and so short answers, please, as we try to wrap up. But let me come back to Euny. Euny, please pick up on what Dr. Kim said just in terms of the cultural piece. The question that I have is, is this sustainable? We’ve got this big wave and waves sometimes crash, right, and we’ve got BTS conquering the world. We’ve got, really, Academy Awards. Is this sustainable over the generations in coming years?

Euny Hong: It doesn’t matter because that’s sort of what the whole ecosystem was built for. You know, the reputation of the cars feeds into the reputation of the phones and the reputation of makeup and the movies and the films. If one falters, the others can pick up the pace, and it’s dynamic. It’s not static. And, you know, Korea is very innovative and, you know, they’re always ready to move in – you know, they’re very good about dropping things that are not working quickly and moving on to the future, and you can only do that if you’re very – if you have very long sights, like, if you’re doing – if you have, you know, four-year terms to have plans, it doesn’t work, you know. But so, for example, now Korea is getting very involved in lending. It was the first country in the OECD that was a borrowing nation and became a lending nation, you know, structuring financial products. So the cool aspect, I think, is permanent. You know, will music stay a trend forever? History says no. But it also doesn’t matter.

Mark Lippert: And so, last, let me follow up one quick – you make the point, too, in your book that you – that you helped articulate here about the brands, right, coming along – Samsung, others. One really fast follow is what’s next? Where’s the next area where this ecosystem will produce some international phenomenon? Do you have any thoughts there?

Euny Hong: Well, a lot of – there’s a lot of talk, of course, about AI and also hologram technology. Well, it’s not just about entertainment. Anything that is developed for entertainment has other real-world applications. You know, so just like NASA created things, you know, for the Space Shuttle and now we use them in braces, Korea made
technologies for entertainment, like holograms, that they’re developing so that you can use – so surgeons can use them and have holograms of surgeons in every country or every medical school in the world performing open heart surgery or something like that. So, basically, now that they’ve built the entertainment infrastructure, they’re going to extrapolate that into things that will actually help make the world a better place.

Mark Lippert: All right. Excellent. Thanks so much. All right. Let’s go to Bernie. Bernie, question for you just in terms of, perhaps, sustainability. The creator-creative economy ecosystem – is this something that is built to last, here to stay, and where is this ecosystem headed in terms of direction and its creative energies and expressions?

Bernie Cho: Well, I think, you know, some of the speakers earlier touched on the point and yourself as well, Mark, is the fact that in Korea there are technology equivalents of what are considered normal dominant standards in the West. You know, for instance, you know, Naver is considered, you know, Korea’s Google. There’s a Korean version of major technology, you know, platforms and services in the West here in Korea. But what we’re starting to see is in certain areas Korea’s technology has actually not only pulled up level, but in some ways have actually gone ahead. For instance, during COVID, Korea was the fastest growing music market in the world at 44.8 percent year on year growth, which stuns people because COVID and the pandemic was really hard for most industries and most people around the world. But what Korea did was during the pandemic they pivoted with amazing live-streaming technology, which now has not only done wonders for Korean acts but Universal Music has now decided that they want to use that technology and that platform and create a new joint venture so that Korean technology and Korean platforms are not just for Korea only, but it’s made by Korea and these are things that are now starting to export as well. So it’s not just the fancy videos, it’s not just the formulaic business models, but it’s the technology and I think Korea, having the benefit and maybe the luxury of exporting culture but also technology at the same time is, I think, it’s what’s going to keep the industry not just sustainable but really thrive for at least, I would say, the next five to 10 years.

Mark Lippert: And, Bernie, last question to you and then we’re going to get to – try to get a question of the audience just to follow up. You know, there are issues in South Korea with aging population, cost of living. Sustainability issues are straining the system, so to speak. How do you see the interplay between this cultural creative ecosystem and some of the stresses on Korean society?
Bernie Cho: Oh, that’s a tough question. I definitely think that at least what we’re starting to see in the music industry, I think, we’re seeing in society as a whole, where what is considered, quote/unquote, “Korean” is now being redefined and, if anything, maybe being expanded, and that’s really just out of necessity in the sense that, for instance, as Korea’s population is aging and maybe even shrinking and slowing down, it requires Korea to start thinking of immigrants and people non-Korean who become Korean citizens and classifying and considering them embracing as Korean. We’re starting to see this in the music industry where, you know, they have to reach out and collaborate and work with people who are non-Korean. And it’s not just out of charity, it’s out of necessity. It’s just good business. And so I think that, you know, as K-pop and Korean pop culture goes global we’re going to start seeing a reflection of Korea becoming maybe, perhaps, more diverse. And, you know, for me, I think what was just absolutely incredible in Austin was watching “Squid Game” and seeing the casting. It wasn’t a hundred percent Korean cast. It was very diverse and it was just wonderful to see that all the actors, regardless of their passports or visa status, have all gotten, you know, huge praise and bumps in their social media numbers and whatnot. And so I think the idea of diversity being reflected in Korean pop culture is – we’re starting to see, you know, a mirror of that in the society and in the country as a whole as well.

Mark Lippert: All right. Last question – excellent – from the audience, and I’m going to go – we’re out of time. So, I’m just going to go to Dr. Kim. Dr. Kim, please, short answer. But essentially, we don’t want to leave our audience members neglected here. What can the Korean government achieve through soft power? What kinds of strategic goals can be achieved by soft power tactics if South Korean policymakers have in mind any of the country’s grand strategy? This is from a graduate student in King’s College. Dovetails with some of your comments about putting emphasis in certain areas. But a one-minute answer, please, and then we’re going to gavel out.

Jiyoon Kim: Well, I expected this question but, no, I don’t have an answer for that. (Laughter.) But, well, my feeling is our foreign policy is not really catching up with the soft power – the progressing soft power of South Korea. So, there is something there at a public level we can do, which as I said, ODA and other things. And first of all, I would like to – first, the government officials and the Korean government should have a goal and how we would like to make ourselves to, I mean, be perceived by the world, I mean, in a generation. It’s not like just in a very spontaneous foreign policy. But what is the ultimate goal of South Korea and what kind of country we would like to be? And that should be first set, I think, or established and then we can go forward. At this
point, I don’t really think any of the parties, the political parties in Korea, and the politicians have the answer for that or have a vision for that. We are just doing the power mongering (people?), so. (Laughs.) So that’s the thing that our government have to do first.

Mark Lippert: All right. Outstanding. You set up Panel II. The direction of soft power needs to be more conjoined with hard power and some of our strategic goals between the U.S. and ROK and the Koreans themselves. Fantastic panel. Thanks to everybody. Bernie, John, Euny, Jiyoon, Dan, outstanding analysis. We really appreciate it. Wherever you are in the world we are grateful for your participation, counsel, advice, and insights. Thank you very much, and we are on to Panel II. Thanks again.
“Beyond Security: South Korea’s Soft Power and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance in a Post-Pandemic World”

Discussion Session II: The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance: How South Korea Can Leverage Its Soft Power

DATE
Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 10:10 a.m. EDT

FEATURING

Sook Jong Lee
Professor of Graduate School of Governance, Sungkyunkwan University; Former President, East Asia Institute

Shin-wha Lee
Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Korea University

Scott Snyder
Senior Fellow for Korea Studies and Director of the Program on U.S.-Korea Policy, Council on Foreign Relations

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.
Distinguished Service Professor, Emeritus, Harvard University

Chung Min Lee
Senior Fellow, Asia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Chairman of the International Advisory Council, IISS

CSIS EXPERTS

Sue Mi Terry
Senior Fellow, Korea Chair, CSIS

Victor Cha
Vice Dean for Faculty and Graduate Affairs and D.S. Song-KF Professor of Government, Georgetown University; Former Asia Director at the National Security Council; Senior Vice President and Korea Chair, CSIS

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com
Sue Mi Terry

OK, thank you so much to Ambassador Lippert and the first panel. Moving right onto the second panel, I would like to introduce the moderator for the second panel, Professor Chung Min Lee – (speaks in Korean) – senior fellow in the Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, chairman of the International Council of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, IISS, and recently appointed as university professor at the Institute of Convergence at KAIST, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology – congratulations – former longtime professor at Yonsei University, extensive experience in academia, think tank, advising the government. Please check out his bio when you get a chance. Most importantly, Professor Lee’s also my sunbae (ph) from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Professor Lee, please take over. Thank you.

Chung Min Lee

Well, thank you so much, Sue. This is a great event. I just listened to everyone in Session I, beginning with Professor Nye, the father of soft power. I still see him on our screen, so it’s a real pleasure and an honor to meet you, Professor Nye, at least virtually, anyways, this time.

And I think CSIS really is onto something because last December, in 2020, I wrote a small compendium with a number of colleagues at Carnegie on precisely this topic. We talk about North Korea, we talk about “hard” politics and geopolitics and so forth, but there’s much more to the Korean story than, of course, what we are usually introduced to. And so after “Squid Games” (sic; Game) – I think everybody on this panel has seen it – I listened – I watched “Squid Games” (sic; Game) again, except this time in Japanese and in English to get a sense of whether this really was truly a global phenomena, whether I could feel the “Koreanness” of this program. And I think they did a fairly good job.

As I was preparing for this panel, Sue, I looked into so-called rankings of soft power. These are nebulous terms, of course. Brand Finance, for example, says Korea ranks 11th among the world’s top 20 soft-power nations in 2021. The Soft Power 30 matrix, from Portland, a consultancy, says Korea ranks 19th, and compare it to 21st back in 2017. U.K. magazine Monocle noted in its January ’21 issue that Korea ranks second in the world, only next to Germany, as a soft-power superstar. Now, how does all this translate into real, tangible benefits? That’s something that we have to wait and see.

We’re joined by outstanding panelists here today. I think many of them are well known to audiences in Korea and the U.S. and Europe
and abroad. We have, first, Dr. Sook Jong Lee. Sook Jong is a Harvard Ph.D., so there's something in common with our Harvard people here today. She was a former president with the East Asia Institute, is an adviser to many ministries, has done great work on civil society, democracy, participatory politics, and global governance. She's also married to a great guy who's a great friend of mine.

Scott Snyder from the Council on Foreign Relations is perhaps the most astute Korea watcher in Washington. Among his many books, he is the author of “South Korea at the Crossroads.” And if you're doing research on Korean politics and foreign policy and you do not know Scott, then you're in the wrong field.

Dr. Shin-wha Lee – I hope she's here – of Korea University is the busiest IR specialist I know, given her wide-ranging interest and focus on multilateralism, foreign policy, the U.N. and Korea, and democracy and human rights.

Last but not least, I think I see Victor and he is senior VP at CSIS, holder of the Korea Chair at CSIS, and at Georgetown, prolific author, most recently of the book “The Impossible State,” and the person who began the Beltway's interest, abiding interest, on Korean politics and foreign policy. So, Victor, thank you for leading the way, as they say.

We listened to a great first panel from practitioners, and so we go to the more boring academic session. But I want this to be as lively and as fun as possible. So my first question is to Scott: We're all big fans of Korean soft power, Scott, but take a step back; is it being overblown? Is there too much excitement? Or are we at an inflection point whereby, you know, truly Korean soft power can be a global phenomenon?

Scott Snyder (Off mic.) Sorry about that.

I think the challenge in South Korean foreign policy is really the paradox of how to translate soft power in areas of nontraditional security to the things that South Korea as a country really cares about, like the immediate neighborhood and preserving security in a neighborhood where South Korea is the smallest country among larger major powers. And so I think that soft power can be helpful, as Professor Nye has suggested. It might be useful in trying to achieve some economies. But ultimately, I think that for South Korea the big challenge is that, you know, having the power of attraction is like having a great playmaker on your team, but you still need a closer. And I think that maybe the playmaker can improve, but
without the closer, or without taking the role of the closer, it’s going to be very difficult to fully achieve the core foreign policy objectives that are most central, I think, to South Korean interests.

Chung Min Lee

OK, let me move on for the beginning comments to Sook Jong. You’ve observed generational shifts in Korea for a long time. You’ve been active in civil society, in NGOs, in think tanks. In other words, from your perspective, what is the secret sauce that makes Korean soft power possible? Is it because of the pop culture, the spaghetti bowl where everything’s mixed up in Korea? What is the secret sauce, Sook Jong?

Sook Jong Lee

Chung Min, I think there are many different dimensions of soft power. As Professor Joe Nye has already mentioned, there is a cultural basket and the political basket and also some policy things. And I’m glad you quoted the USC soft power index, I think the last one of 2019. And if you compared all different baskets, Korea excels in digital and education, but South Korea is a bit low in international participation and also public opinion. So therefore, there are – you know, some baskets we are doing great, especially the mass popular criteria, the “K wave”; however, the international – how can I say? – the agenda setting and also promoting more the universe of values that Koreans can do better in international politics. We are still backward. And remember, all this soft power and the public diplomacy have been recognized under the – in Myung-bak government with its slogan of a global Korea, so our Foreign Ministry created this public diplomacy division and they were very – tried to invest a lot for the soft power.

But as we discussed in the previous panel, there is a kind of limit for government if they want to do soft power in an artificial way. So for me, yes, we are great in culture stuff because of all the combination of a commercial culture, a popular culture, and digital technology, but they cannot be converted to the political aspect or our influence in international arena unless – unless – we are active, active as a good citizen in the international politics.

So let me stop there.

Chung Min Lee

That’s a really great point, Sook Jong. And if Dr. Nye’s going to be here for the second session, is it possible to pick your brain, Professor Nye, in the next five minutes after I ask the panelists? Because I would love our viewers to hear you say also something really, really great in my session.
So Victor, from where you stand, you see Korea from a global vista; you've done this for the last 20 years-plus. What are some of the key takeaways that you have on how the world sees Korean soft power today? In other words, was there a particular inflection point when you said, aha, Korea is finally becoming more globalized? Was it "Gangnam Style" with Psy? What is it that really was the tipping point from where you sit?

**Victor Cha**
Well, thanks, Chung. Can you hear me?

**Chung Min Lee**
Yes. I hear you great.

**Victor Cha**
Thanks, Chung Min, and it's good to be on this panel with you and Scott and Sook Jong.

So I would say – there are a couple things that I would say: The first is I think that, you know, Korea – to pick up from where we left off in terms of global citizenry. Right? I think, you know, Korea has done an adequate job trying to be a global citizen in terms of trying to give public goods – provide public goods to the international system. But where I think it's the pivot point, if you will, I do think was – you know, had a lot to do with Korean pop culture. I mean, this is when sort of mainstream Americans, at least, became interested in – you know, the average American became interested in Korea. Like, on university campuses now, Korean language classes are full. I mean, they're full at Georgetown; they're probably full at Harvard as well. And half of the students are non-heritage – right? – in other words, non-hyphenated Koreans. And all of it has to do with Korean pop culture, Korean TV shows, Korean music. So I think, you know, that's been a very important point.

And so to pick up with the last point, the bridge that Korea has to make in terms of soft power is to try to pivot from that really grassroots interest in Korea among a younger generation and somehow turn that into lifelong friendships and supporters of Korea, you know, not unlike what Japan has been very successful at doing with the past generation. But for Korea it’s not the past generation, or it’s not the current generation; it’s really the next generation. And here I think it means – you know, again, as Scott mentioned earlier, it’s trying to project, like, what Korea stands for. Right? What is the Korea model? What does it stand for? And part of that I think is also acknowledging the difficulties, that Korea is a very successful country but it’s also, as you all know well, one of the most stressed societies among OECD countries. It has all the indicators of being one of the most stressed societies. So being a model in terms of not just everything that’s good but, you know, some of the difficulties or
the blemishes that come with that I think is a very important part of explaining Korea's success, and it's something that I think every striving society around the world can relate to because, you know, as they try to grow and develop quickly, they're experiencing the same sort of stresses. So for them to see successful middle powers like Korea going through that, it's important for them to know that because it's something that they can relate to.

And then the final point I'll make is that – you know, as I said, Korea has done an adequate job providing public goods, whether it's in U.N. peacekeeping or Peace Corps or climate or nuclear energy; there are a variety of different places where Korea's contributed. But I think Korea has to do more. Right? When I think about U.S. soft power and what made it so appealing, it was not – you know, obviously it was the values, it was democracy, it was the notion of freedom, it was the notion of people – America's concept of citizenry; anybody could be an American. But it was also the fact that the United States in the immediate postwar period going forward was an incredibly generous country to the world. I mean, when you compare, for example, what China’s doing with BRI, you know, some have described that as China's Marshall Plan. It's not China's Marshall Plan? Right? (Laughs.) The Marshall Plan gave – the United States gave things to the world. You know, in China’s case, these are loans. In the U.S. case, these were grants that the United States gave to Europe and to the world. So there’s an aspect of generosity, I think, that comes with the attraction that creates a generation that identifies with the model and supports the model and wants to be associated with it going forward. And so I know that’s a big ask, but if we’re talking about how Korean soft power can really be amplified, I think that’s also a consideration that we can’t discount.

Chung Min Lee Right. So before I turn to – well, to Shin-wha, you know, Koreans are always comparing themselves with Japan and China. And with the advent of Korean soft power, how do you see Korean soft power from the vantage point between China and Japan? Are we really unique? And, you know, apropos what Victor just said, I agree that America played a critical role in propagating soft power post-World War II, but we have to also understand the huge damage, in my personal opinion, that was wrought by the Trump administration. And so if the beacon of freedom and democracy in the U.S. is not able to get its act together on domestic politics, that sends a very negative message across the world. And that’s something I hope that the Biden administration will do double time to basically pick up. But there are people across the world that are very concerned whether American democracy, for example, is sustainable, and that’s the question I want to ask Professor Joe Nye.
But let me go turn quickly to Shin-wha, and then I’ll ask Professor Joe Nye for that question.

Shin-wha?

Shin-wha Lee Well, before I mention about Korea comparison with Japan and China, this session is talking about soft power from the perspective of Korea-U.S. alliance, right? But as you noted, Joe Nye’s soft power was highlighting for how big powers such as U.S. can be better off in order to become a hegemonic country, not only solidifying, consolidating their hard power but also how to use the soft power to become a most respected and powerful nation. But on the other hand, I think Korea together with Japan and, to some extent, China, I think we need to improve the soft power in order to fill our hard-power deficit by increasing soft-power resources, because it’s not easy to close the gap with the great powers, no matter how hard-power capacities transcend. But still I think what Victor was talking about, Korea has a long way to go to improve the genuine soft power capability, not only by entertainment industry or culture but also we have to genuinely improve our value and norms by incorporating the more benevolent nature of the country.

But still, I have to remind you that the U.S. case is also – have a long way to go. As we see in Afghanistan’s case at this time, no matter how successful U.S. exit strategy from the Middle East, if humanitarian crisis worsens, the U.S. legitimacy for advocating superiority of morality and norms to China will be weakened. Why? Because the U.S. highlighting importance of democratic allies and norms in human rights in the form of the multilateral approaches, but are we talking here about multilateralism or multilateral approaches or multinational approaches? Because I think we are not sure if the Biden – American principle, including values such as democracy and market economy, human rights (universal ?) enough to be accepted by all nation(s), I think that is also the case generally we have to think about. For that, if we’re talking about in this session about soft power, how soft power can contribute to the U.S. and Korean alliance, I think it’s going to be challenging for both of our countries – for Korea’s case, how we can adjust our own way of soft power feeding into Korea-U.S. bilateral alliance and multilateral democratic alliance; on the other hand, how U.S. can be more persuasive to their allies to show there are genuine values in market democracies.

Chung Min Lee Thank you, panelists.
Let me turn to Professor Nye, and my question, Professor Nye, is this: Given the central importance of democracy and domestic governance in promoting a country's soft power, like the U.S. or Korea or Japan or any other advanced economy who's a democracy, what – how do you see the relationship between domestic politics and governance and the sustainability of a country's soft power? In this case South Korea, but your insight on what this means for the U.S., given what Shin-wha just said on the implications for the U.S.-ROK alliance; it seems to me quite valid.

Joseph S. Nye Jr.

Thank you. Let me just quickly make a comment on what I've heard about how domestic change in South Korea is affecting it so far.

Very often people look at South Korean culture, Korean culture as insular, not orienting itself toward the rest of the world. I thought it was particularly fascinating by that first panel was the signs that we see in popular culture of an opening up. So in that sense, I think it's going to make South Korea even more attractive. But in terms of – there's a question on the – in the chat about, does this help with North Korea? And I suspect the answer is not much, though there are other friends who know much more about that than I do. But remember, Kim Jong-il loved films, loved Western films, even movie actors. It didn't affect his policies much. And I doubt that Kim Jong-un is going to be much affected by the attractions of “Squid Game” or “Parasite.”

Chung Min Lee  (Laughs.) Right.

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

So I think – I think hard – this is what I mentioned in the first comments I made. Hard power still will remain extremely important to South Korea, which is basically caught geographically between two large countries, China and Japan, and has followed a wise strategy of borrowing hard power from a distant power, the United States, which has no territorial claims. But then it has to ask: Is the United States going to remain? And Trump raised that or brought that into question with his actions with North Korea.

I think, obviously, here’s where Korean – South Korea’s soft power is effective. The more that Americans feel that Korea’s a welcome democracy and a country that we really closely relate to, which comes partly – (audio break) – popular culture and partly from the diaspora of Koreans in the United States, the more Trump’s type of actions are rejected. So I think in that sense soft power does affect the relationship with hard power, but more in that indirect direction rather than directly affecting Kim Jong-un.
The question I think you asked about – (audio break) – a country’s soft power. Right now the United States is going through a bad spell. If you look at the Trump period, the international polls – Pew Polls, which – (inaudible) – show a considerable decline in American soft power around the world during the Trump years. And then the question is: Can we retain – (audio break)?

It’s worth looking back to the 1960s, where the United States was wildly unpopular because of the Vietnam War and people were marching through the streets opposing the U.S. But what’s interesting is they weren’t signing the “Communist Internationale,” they were singing Martin Luther King’s “We Shall Overcome.” So – (audio break) – anthem – (audio break) – domestically was the language of protest against American government policy. But that shows – (audio break) – a residual soft power drawing out of the culture and it can counter state government politics to some extent.

So we’ll have to wonder what happens now, given we still don’t know what’s going to happen with the Trump phenomena, looking ahead to 2024. But if we weaken American – (audio break) – over the challenge that Trump has created, that will greatly reduce American soft power. So there is a close relationship – (audio break) – sometimes indirect between a country’s domestic practices and policies and its international soft power, and I think that’s true for Korea as well as for the United States.

But I have found this very interesting to listen to. I just want to listen and learn.

Chung Min Lee

Thank you so much.

My second question to all panelists is this: South Korea, as many have mentioned, faces enormous challenges: a demographic cliff; there’s the oncoming, you know, fourth industrial revolution; there’s a massive energy transition; there’s going to be lots more civil society space, as Sook Jong well knows. And who knows who will become the next Korean president in March 2022. We’ll save that for my last – for your last comments.

So my question is this – and let me go first with Shin-wha this time, and please make your, you know, remarks as crisply and as quickly as possible. As Korea faces all of these enormous challenges, global and regional and local, Shin-wha, will South Korea help the next Korean government mitigate some of these large challenges?

(No audible reply.)
I think she's having some difficulties, but let's wait for her.

So Sook Jong, go ahead.

Sook Jong Lee

I guess because we're discussing the soft power in this panel, of course we are facing many difficulties. The North Korean triad is still there, and all this intensity of U.S.-China rivalry and geopolitical changes are just adding more difficulties for South Korea because we cannot choose one side in clear way. However, I think there are, you know, many ways for – Korea can do, going back to our effectiveness.

In terms of resource power to foreign aid, our ODA is only 0.15 percent of gross national income, even though we are 15th largest donor in DAC. But I think that story of South Korea is very appealing to many developing countries. We were very poor and we were colonized and we had war, and despite all these difficulties – and also we have many decades of authoritarian period. Right? So South Korea is somewhat more like – we have very bad things in the past. However, we made it. We had the economic miracle and also we have a democracy miracle.

So therefore, Chung Min, I think our soft power is a very strong, persuasive story to developing countries who like to achieve economic development and also democratizations. So South Korea is very popular to African countries and Asian countries.

However, we are very weak in Northeast Asia, where the stronger nations are there. Our soft power is creating backlash in China, and of course, our soft power cannot persuade Kim Jung-un. However, I'm sure the North Korean people are watching Korean drama. I think that will help when we are reunified because those Koreans do not have to be afraid of South Korea. So, therefore, when there is a – in a democratic country, the people's public opinion is aligned with the government leadership, I think our soft power can be stronger. And despite all these difficulties, we have great potential.

Chung Min Lee

Thank you.

Well, Shin-wha, you're back online. Can you hear us?

Shin-wha Lee

Sorry, I couldn't hear you before. Something wrong with this new equipment for me. I'm sorry about it. If you can ask me –

Chung Min Lee

Yeah, the question was, to all the panelists: Korea faces enormous challenges: a demographic cliff; we have the fourth industrial
revolution, a massive energy transition, a very vocal, for example, civic society, and a critical presidential election next year. So if Korea faces all these huge challenges, global, regional, and local, Shin-wha, will soft power help us a little bit in mitigating those problems?

I think so, although soft power cannot cure all those problems. But when it comes to nature and extent of soft power of South Korea compared with its hard power, I think definitely we are better off. But as you know, the soft power is not just a cultural attraction, but a country’s political values and ideas and norms and methods are very important. So in order to strengthen soft power in our country, I think it is vital not only in economic aspects or cultural attraction but also in the positive perception of Korea as a country is very important. The actual actions of the state – that is, the way a foreign policy is implemented and the perception of other country as a result of our policy implementation – is very important. It is difficult to say that Korea is a diplomatically stable country because there is a lot of variation depending on the regime and leadership, who has become the leader or which, you know, like, political orientation we get in this regime. So the political culture that has been established, particularly since 2000, has very different foreign policy and rhetoric between the ruling and opposition parties, and is highly responsive to the people’s political interests and issues.

This is somewhat related to the frequent change of government between the ruling and opposition party, leftist or rightist. Although it may be positive in terms of the value of preventing democracy or a power concentration within the country, I think there is a high possibility that it will be recognized as a very unstable country when dealing with the, quote/unquote, “Republic of Korea” from a foreign perspective.

So I think no matter who becomes president and no matter what kind of regime we are getting in, I think we should remember what is our national interest, what is our national identity. And for those things we Koreans should have, you know, a consensus. Otherwise, I think there – we will debilitate our soft power which was accumulated by this culture and industry.

Scott, your thoughts?

Yeah, I mean, I think that the fundamental challenge that we have in this discussion is that soft power is a power of attraction at a societal level, and it is very difficult for governments to figure out how to effectively operationalize soft power in order to achieve specific objectives. And in fact, one way that usually backfires for
governments to try to operationalize soft power is try to control it or
to actually try to use it in order to send out public diplomacy
messages that may end up sounding more like propaganda. And so if
we think about the social connection that goes beyond governments,
I think that what we begin to realize is that, you know, maybe the
variable in soft power that is most difficult is that soft power is about
an intercultural experience and that experience can either be
ephemeral or it can be transformational. And a lot of our
experiences actually turn out to be ephemeral, but some of them are
transformational. And I think the key is to try to figure out how to, as
Victor said earlier, amplify the impact in order to make it
transformational.

Chung Min Lee

Victor, on this notion, but because you’re so familiar with Japanese
policy as well, we have a new prime minister in Tokyo who was just
inaugurated, you know, yesterday, the 100th prime minister, and
we’ll have a new Korean president in March next year. Is it possible
that soft power can play a small role in bridging the huge divide
between Korea and Japan?

Victor Cha

Well, I certainly hope so. There is, as you know well, I mean, there’s a
great deal of cultural affinity between the two countries, despite the
difficult history. You know, bilateral travel between the two
countries is – you know, up until the recent difficulties – is always
quite high. You know, there’s a lot of Korean soft-power attraction in
Japan, as you all know well – food, culture, music, all these sorts of
things. So, you know, I think if we were going to try to get a new
start in the relationship, you know, the low-hanging fruit would be
something on the soft-power side, and, you know, that’s probably
something they should think about.

But if I could also just pick up on your first question, Chung Min, and
offer just three quick points –

Chung Min Lee

Of course.

Victor Cha

– listening to the great responses by Sook Jong, Shin-wha, and Scott.
So on the question of soft power and North Korea, I entirely agree
with Sook Jong. I mean, Joe’s right; it’s not having an effect on the
leadership, but it is having an effect on society, right, in terms of the
way they crave South Korean music, South Korean movies, these
sorts of things. And it is – has the potential to have a transformative
effect on the way the average North Korean thinks, even though they
cannot yet express how they think. You know, that in combination
with the growth of markets in North Korea is the biggest agent for
change potentially in the country when an opening presents itself.
Second, I think it was Sook Jong or Shin-wha’s point on developing countries. I mean, if we think about where Korea is a model for countries to aspire to, it really is in the developing world. And apropos the Japan example, that’s – part of Japanese soft power is all the stuff they’ve been doing in Southeast Asia and in other parts of the world, but Korea is even more of a model for these countries for all the reasons that Sook Jong suggested; you know, having been colonized, having been poor, ravaged by war, but then to be both a peaceful democratic transition and economic miracle. I mean, this is what all these countries strive for. And it’s both at the regular population level, it’s also at the leadership level. Do leaders in developing countries – are they – when they think about their future, are they informed by what they see in Korea? Right? Is this something that they see as being the path for them? That’s a very important part of the amplification of Korean soft power. It’s not the same in the developing world, obviously, because it – I mean the developed world, because Korea’s a developed – advanced, industrialized democracy, but other ones don’t necessarily look to the Korean model. But they – in that case they see Korea as a partner, as an important partner in providing public goods for the international system.

And then, finally, on values: You know, I think the whole question of Korea as a value producer in the world, you can’t deny the 800-pound gorilla in the room, which is China – right? – because, as I think was said earlier, Korea’s having difficulty making choices between the United States and China. But on values, they shouldn’t have difficulties making a choice. It’s easy for Korea to project and talk about values in other parts of the world, you know, in Sub-Saharan Africa or in Southeast Asia, but it’s very hard for Korea to talk about values anywhere that China has a proximate interest, for example, in Hong Kong. And that’s problematic, if we’re talking about soft power. You can’t be a values producer and values projector on a conditional basis.

Chung Min Lee

Professor Nye, since we still have you on air, as it were: As someone who has studied this, you know, for the last several decades, who practiced it in government, you’ve met world leaders across the world but especially in Asia where you have a high level of trust; people trust you, regardless of where they’re from. Going forward, because, as Victor just pointed out, soft power has limitations because it’s not going to stop the Chinese from cracking down on its domestic politics, but, as we know, the Chinese government also cracks down on so-called, you know, K-pop stars. And so my
question to you, Professor Nye, is this: How can South Korea use soft power as a viable toolkit in its foreign policy? Is that possible?

Joseph S. Nye, Jr. Well, I think the – I agree with – (audio break) – look in different areas with different effects. For North Korea, it won’t affect the leaders but it will affect the populace for long-term change. For Japan, I think the fact that there is a broad cultural base among younger people will provide support for Kishida to basically change policy, if necessary. For China, it’s going to be harder because China’s going through an intensely nationalistic period now which has produced “wolf warrior diplomacy.” And China is, I think, having trouble projecting its soft power. Belt and Road Initiative is not a real charity and it also creates resentment as much as gratitude. So if you have a Korean policy of aid and assistance infrastructure, which doesn’t have the strings attached that the Chinese aid does, that can make Korea more attractive. So there’s not one answer; it has to be tailored for different countries where South Korea has a number of objectives. But I definitely think that the government should be tailoring its policies more toward using South Korea’s soft power. And Scott Snyder is correct that if you try to manipulate too much, it looks like propaganda, but you can, in fact, make particular policies along the lines I directed, which can increase South Korea’s soft power.

Chung Min Lee You know, our last question is from the overall, I guess, designers of this panel, which is, what is the impact of Korean soft power on the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance? This is – it cannot be answered in, you know, in five minutes, but we must try. So my question is, how can South Korea leverage soft power in strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance?

In May of this year, President Moon had a very successful visit, in my view, when he visited President Biden, and if you see the U.S.-ROK joint statement, it looks as if it was done by another leader other than the Korean president, because it is everything from technology to climate change to Central America to human rights. Victor’s laughing because he helped draft it probably. And so it goes on for – it’s the longest joint statement, word by word, in the history of the U.S.-ROK alliance. Is this sustainable? That’s my question.

And so my last question to the panel is this: How can we use soft power to strengthen our ties with the U.S., make us more attractive, and make the alliance more resilient going forward? So let me begin with Scott and then we’ll go down the line.
Scott Snyder: Well, I think that the other aspect of soft power that we haven’t talked about necessarily is that it has a long tail, and so when I look at this joint statement, what I think about is the tens of thousands of South Koreans who have come through the American educational system and gone back to Korea, and I see that joint statement as the fruit of that decades-long investment. And so what was really striking to me in the first panel was the reference to the expansion of foreign students in South Korea, from 12,000 to a hundred-something-thousand people. And so, you know, really I think the interesting question is, as that experience has a long tail, how can the U.S. and South Korea actually work together in order to take advantage of and move forward with that potential influence, especially given the fact that we’ve got a coherence of common values and interests that underpin the alliance?

Chung Min Lee: Thank you.

Shin-wha?  

Shin-wha Lee: Yes. I think when it comes to soft power in terms of the Korea-U.S. alliance, I want to highlighting the Korea’s role in galvanizing multilateral cooperation, particularly in East Asia or in the Indo-Pacific, because creating – increasingly considering multilateral cooperation as a supplementary or alternative way to traditional bilateral relations. So Korea’s multilateralist approach focuses on cooperation between middle powers who wish to gain niche issues or gain leverage from the influence of U.S. or China. But yet, this strategy need to be readjusted in light of ongoing multilateral approaches, especially democratic alliances such as the U.S.-led Quad, Five Eyes, and AUKUS, vis-a-vis China-led One Belt, One Road or various regional initiatives.

Originally, multilateralism as a soft power-like asset was the preferred principle and method of the middle powers, but recently the U.S.-China strategic competition for hegemony intensified. The two great powers are very actively using multilateral approach as a diplomatic and security means to increase their side in international relations. Therefore, I think how we can join in deeper international order in the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific multilateral alliance framework should be linked with what kind of value or what kind of national interest we will define, by which and through which we, Korea, should clarify our national identity as a free market and democracy and human rights the, like, value the country vis-à-vis North Korea or other illiberal democratic countries. So that’s what I think what we need when it comes to pursuit of soft power.
Chung Min Lee: Thank you.

Sook Jong Lee: Well, I would definitely advise him that the democratic cooperation to support global democracy will be a very good angle to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance and also to enhance the level of South Korea’s soft power. As you know, South Korea has been recognized as a very dynamic democracy. Think about Asia. Which country has a stable democracy except Japan or Australia? South Korea has been very active, so that’s why we’ve been invited to the G-7 meeting in last June to Cornwall in Britain and also South Korea will be invited in December, President Biden’s Summit for Democracy, and South Korea has been invited by many other European democracies as well. So I think this is a good, good source of South Korea’s soft power. However, our government has been passive in using our, you know, the soft power resource, South Korean democracy. So I will say to the next president and also our civil society as well that we should engage to support the better democratic governance in Asia together with the USA.

Chung Min Lee: Victor? You know, you meet with many senators and congressmen in the Beltway; you interact with high-level officials all the time on both sides of the Pacific. If you were to tell your American political friends or high-ranking officials in the Biden team, what would you tell them to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance by leveraging Korean soft power?

Victor Cha: So first let me agree with what my fellow panelists have said in this last round of questioning. I think they’re entirely on the mark.

So what I would say is that the May 21 summit joint statement – you’re right, Chung Min; it was a very long – (laughs) – a very long statement. But what to me was very significant about it was it was almost a calling out of new constituencies that should be brought under the alliance umbrella. I mean, not just the national security folks like you and me and others, but it was really a calling out to the tech sector, to climate, to global health, to all of these new areas of – I mean, we know that they’re not new, but highlighted as areas of cooperation for U.S.-South Korean alliance. And why that’s significant is that it means that the alliance is now engaging with new constituencies, new generations of people that will have Korea as a part of their professional life and, you know, if they have kids who love pop culture, a part of their personal life as well.
So, you know, I think the summit did a very good job of setting the mark, the sort of starting line, and it’s really going to be the follow-through on whether, you know, the cooperation will continue in all of these new areas. I mean, Mark was here earlier. When Mark was ambassador he used to give speeches about the new horizons in the U.S.-Korea alliance relationship, and this was including these areas; it was also in terms of outer space and fourth-generation industrial revolution. I mean, there’s so many areas where Korea and the United States can work together, and if it’s – you know, if it’s built into this presidential summit statement it really sort of sets the path going forward. So I think, you know, what should be done should be to follow what has been the template set forward by the alliance because I think that is the way to engage the next generation of supporters of the alliance.

Chung Min Lee  
You know, Professor Nye, final word: Is it possible you think for South Korea to become, in a global diplomatic sense, the next Japan in terms of carrying its fair share of the weight as the U.S. faces perhaps the most difficult part of its foreign policy in the next 10, 20 years with the rapid rise of China?

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.  
I think if you – I agree with what Victor said, that when you look at the broadening of the agenda beyond just security and you include climate and pandemics, which are going to be extremely important for this younger generation that is being attracted by Korean popular culture, this, I think, is a very important avenue for South Korea. So joining in those production of global public goods I think is going to be good for South Korea, it’s going to be good for generational power.

Chung Min Lee  
Thank you so much.

Let me thank – I have one really, really last question. It’s from DFAT in Australia. And one listener basically says: Do you think it’s possible to change Korea’s focus on the DPRK over its overarching national security foreign policy by stressing soft power – will that give Korea a bigger space? And so let me ask Scott; this must be done in less than 10 seconds.

Scott Snyder  
Well, the challenge is walking and chewing gum at the same time and South Korea has the capacity; it may end up revolving more around political leadership.

Chung Min Lee  
So it was a real honor to chair this session. Let me thank the CSIS and Sue Mi Terry in particular for bringing all this together and our great panelists.
Dr. Joe Nye, it was great to see you. I thought we were only having you for Session I but you were kind enough to stick around for Session II, and you made it much more richer. And so to Victor, whom I’ll turn the microphone off to in a second for his final remarks, to Sook Jong for her great work – hope to see you in person very soon.

Scott, it’s always a pleasure.

Last but not least, to Shin-wha for her really, really critical and crisp comments, and so it’s a real honor that I’ve known all of you throughout my professional life. So it’s good to have very smart friends.

So, Victor, the final word is yours.
“Beyond Security: South Korea’s Soft Power and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance in a Post-Pandemic World”

Closing Remarks

DATE
Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 11:00 a.m. EDT

FEATURING

Victor Cha
Vice Dean for Faculty and Graduate Affairs and D.S. Song-KF Professor of Government, Georgetown University; Former Asia Director at the National Security Council; Senior Vice President and Korea Chair, CSIS

Sue Mi Terry
Senior Fellow, Korea Chair, CSIS
Victor Cha: Thanks. Thanks, Chung Min. And I too, on behalf of CSIS, want to thank all of the panelists today. It’s really good to see on the screen here Shin-wha, Sook Jong, Scott, Joe, and you, Chung Min. I look forward to the day where we can call gather together here either in D.C., or in Seoul. This, I thought, was a – this was, you know, all Sue Terry’s idea to do this particular conference. And I’m so glad that we did it.

I think we’ve really emphasized how when we talk about the Korean Peninsula it’s much more than just about North Korea. I know we tend to get focused on North Korea, because it is sort of a proximate national security problem. But as all of the scholars on the screen and in the panel before have demonstrated in their work and in their various talks around the world, that there’s so much more to the Korean Peninsula than the nuclear problem in North Korea.

And I want to thank, again, the panelists, and I want to thank my colleague Sue Terry in particular for bringing this particular conference to CSIS. So let me turn it back to Sue.

Sue Mi Terry: OK. Thank you, Victor. I also want to thank all the panelists and moderators today for this very illuminating discussion we had today. I thank everyone for watching. Thanks, again, to the Korea Foundation for co-sponsoring for this event. Special thanks to also Korea Chair’s events team. Andy Lim is here, Seiyeon Ji, and others. This event would not have been possible without their hard work and dedication.

I hope there was important takeaways for all of you. I hope this discussion we had this morning was hopefully raising your understanding of soft power in general as a concept, and specifically about practical aspects of South Korean soft power – including a lot of the challenges that the second panel talked about, from demographic challenges, to regional, and global challenges. And, you know, as Scott said, about South Korea being able to operationalize their soft power, or amplify.

In utilizing soft power resources, I think it’s true that it’s far from clear how South Korea’s cultural resources can concretely produce changes in the preference of other nations. But as you’ve heard today, I think it’s important for us to remember that soft power is going to have a diffuse effect. So it’s going to create a general influence, rather than producing easily observable specific action.

So while it may be difficult for the government to use soft power as an immediate policy goal, still soft power is very much relevant to the environment and the milieu in which a country seeks specific goals, and and can be realized over extended time. So in this regard, soft power
public diplomacy is based on more long-term perspective. And if a country like South Korea is determined to implement public policy based on soft power, it has to explore how to make countries resources, values and policies attractive over time.

Just because the North Korea question has come up, I just want to echo what Professor Lee Sook Jong and Victor has said about the impact on North Korea. You know, the regime’s efforts to maintain the North with ideological indoctrination and monopoly on information, that’s really changing because the elites and ordinary citizens are already watching South Korean dramas and listening to K-pop. Maybe they have watched “Squid Game” and, you know, many of you still have not. (Laughs.) So it is really chipping away at the regime myth in the North. I do think that soft power might be amorphous, but it is also real and can be a force for greater freedom.

I just want to make a last comment on the U.S.-ROK alliance, because one of the questions that came up. I saw the surveys and polls show that Koreans and South Koreans are seen very positively in the United States. There’s a national survey by Pew Research Center conducted on 2020 – in May 2020, that found that Americans gave very high marks to South Korea, while having unfavorable views of some other countries.

Some 77 percent of Americans have a positive view of South Korea, up from 46 percent in 2003. This is far higher than American views of traditional allies, like U.K., 57 percent, even Australia, France, and Germany. And so, America’s positive perception of South Korea, and Koreans’ largely positive perception of America, I think, is a secret sauce that have made the U.S.-ROK alliance so deep and durable.

So thank you for joining us. I think we’re out of time. This concludes CSIS Korea Chair conference “Beyond Security: South Korea’s Soft Power and the Future of U.S.-ROK Alliance in a Post-Pandemic World.” Everyone, thank you for watching. Have a good day, or evening.

(END)