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## Soft Power Propaganda or Diplomacy? A Detailed Exploration of Russia's, India's, and Korea's Soft Power Tactics

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper discusses the emerging importance of soft power in global diplomacy from various perspectives, particularly the forms and methods developed in international cooperation, trust building, and categorizing cultural influence. Using the contexts of three case studies- Russia, India, and South Korea, this paper further elucidates how countries engage in soft power strategies from media influence, and cultural exchanges, to technological leadership in boosting their countries' global ranking. The analysis extends to how soft power works in the mold of global challenges and geopolitical tensions, where potential future diplomatic relations might take shape.*

**Keywords:** *Soft Power, Russia, India, Korea, Military Domination, Education, K Drama, Bollywood*

### Introduction

#### What is soft power

According to Joseph Nye, soft power refers to the ability to influence others by attraction and persuasion rather than through force or coercion; it refers to how attractive a nation is through cultural appeal, political values, or foreign policies. It differs from hard power because it depends on military might or the offering of economic incentives. It works by shaping the preferences of other states, making the need to be more aligned with your interests because they admire your culture, values, or policies. In a nutshell, soft power is about co-opting others through shared ideals and narratives and making them behave in ways that favor you. (Viswanathan)

To handle sustainability and global concerns, develop economic influence, establish credibility and trust, and advance international cooperation and peace, soft power is essential. (Brand Finance)

#### The importance of soft power

Soft power gauges its influence on world order through attracting manners of foreign culture, political values, or diplomatic force over the use of attraction rather than coercive interactions. By uniting institutions such as the United Nations, these tools can build framework agreements that bring a coalition of nations together to solve shared problems. Many of these act as mechanisms for identity formation, allowing cooperative action and communication on a worldwide scale. As a result of this shared identity, countries create opportunities for positive branding and social influence to alter the public understanding with an international perspective equally important than foreign policy itself. In the end, unifying institutions give countries more soft power as other nations trust and relate with them on some level. (Brand Finance)

#### Economic Influence

A significant tool of soft power is the capacity to enhance trading and attract investments from abroad. By the same token, when a country has stronger soft power, it tends to do better in foreign direct investment and trade, creating an upward spiral where economic strength then enhances their soft power further. For example, The Global Soft Power index reports that Brand Finance discusses how countries can emphasize the role of cultural exports — films and music are largely positive propaganda — in a nation's attractiveness to foreign markets / economic integration. (Brand Finance).

### ***Building Trust and Reputation***

Trust is essential for long-term investments and serves as a key soft power of global play. In the case of cities and universities, it is by building their image through artistic exchanges or international academic collaboration (and so forth) — they all work to increase that soft power. Investment becomes even more appealing to universities that are working hard on their academic credentials or a city that is selling itself as a cultural hub with international connections. These favorable recognitions translate into trust and confidence that further drive foreign partners to invest. This suggests that improving soft power is beneficial not only in terms of the global brand name resulting from the city or university but also for continued economic success. (Brand Finance)

### ***Sustainability and Global Issues***

The ability of nations to shape global priorities is a fundamental feature, not only in terms of conventional balance-of-power politics but also about power configured based on soft issues tabulated by social scientists as indicators that can be employed for causal analysis more than standard currency exchange and military hardware sales. Also, an aspect of countries leading in these areas is to attract investment from those who look for eco-friendly practices thus investing prudently concerning sustainable initiatives. Greta Thunberg is the best example of her activism for climate change has made an indelible impression globally. Governments and businesses worldwide have been influenced by her to become more environmentally aware. It ennobles a nation or leads to green investments, which has procedures for long-term economic growth by removing damage from nature (Brand Finance)

### ***International Cooperation and Peace***

Soft power advances much more than just economic interests, as it fosters global cooperation and peace. In nations perceived to be suspicious or even hostile, the realization of common interests and active cultural diplomacy can send those nations on their way toward creating stable relay relations based on peace. Soft power allows for conversations, and exchange rather than war-shaping a stable international world (Brand Finance). Countries that use soft power to promote international peace and cooperation are Japan, Canada, Brazil, and Germany. (Brand Finance)

### ***Why I chose this topic***

How soft power works in Indian foreign policy is a subject worth examining, given India's rich cultural heritage and increasingly prominent role globally. Aspects of this subject include how things like Bollywood and yoga influence the international image of India and its diplomatic strategy. In practical terms, it offers analyses of how countries employ non-material forms of influence to develop relationships, tackle global problems, and prop up their worldwide presence. The significance of cultural diplomacy for modern international affairs cannot be overstressed if we choose this mode of study.

### ***Russia***

The tapestry of global diplomacy—few forms transcend power. Military might and economic clout usually dominate the headlines, but a subtler, equally potent force creates international relations: soft power. Introduced by political scientist Joseph Nye, soft power essentially represents the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce. It deals with influencing others through cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policy. For a country steeped in so much history and one having huge geopolitical ambitions like Russia, soft power becomes an essential component of its foreign policy toolkit.

In the early 1990's as the Soviet Union dissolved and Russia sought a new identity for itself on a global scale, the concept of soft power was conspicuously missing in the foreign policy toolbox of Moscow. The first Concept of Foreign Policy in 1993 outlined a commitment to the development of the Commonwealth of Independent States based on common interests, yet it remained rather vague without a clear vision for such projection of the Russian image with its values. The period of incoherent narrative and low image-building profile was, therefore, especially followed concerning other post-Soviet states. (Feklyunina )

The Kremlin smartly manipulated the grip on Russia's main print, radio, and television outlets in the projection of a single and patriotic image abroad—one of the cornerstones of its soft power strategy. It is, however, such media dominance that is strategically used to cultivate not only national pride but also a multipolar world in which U.S. dominance is to be diminished and that of Russia, together with its allies like China, Iran, and Venezuela, amplified. Central to this effort is RT (formerly Russia Today), which in 2005 was created with the express remit to counter what the Kremlin sees as anti-Russian bias from Western media outlets like CNN and the BBC. The budget surged from \$30 million at the beginning to more than \$200 million by 2008 (3), when its channel was airing in multiple languages and featuring a strong online presence that includes one of the most popular YouTube channels. Though RT does concentrate on some of the more positive aspects of Russia, the pillars of its coverage are indictments of the United States, Western Europe, NATO, and the global economic order, often flavored with controversial material and conspiracy theories that question the West's narrative. As the Ukraine crisis was one such period of geopolitical tension, Russia intensified its media efforts to project its viewpoints, portraying itself as a critic of NATO expansion. (Feklyunina )

In the face of challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia exploits its media to brag about its vaccine and rant against the Western response. RT went on to play a frontline role in shaping international perceptions and portraying Russia's vision of a multipolar world. In addition to RT, Russia's international media outreach includes a multilingual radio network – the Voice of Russia – and paid advertorials in Western leading newspapers, which carry Russian perspectives in formats similar to the standard news articles. RIA Novosti, the state-owned press agency, provides professional news coverage of events all over the world, adding to Russia's international media presence. The comprehensive strategy will enable Russia to build international perceptions, articulate its geopolitical narratives, and counter Western influence in a way that cements its position in the global arena and advocates a multipolar world where U.S. dominance is challenged. (Feklyunina)

## **Russian soft power influence in Ukraine**

In the complex landscape of Ukrainian identity, soft power plays a significant role due to intervention by Russia in attempts to circulate the idea of the "Russian world." Most emphasis has been dedicated to demonstrating a unified, cultural-historical bond between Ukraine and Russia as a way to maintain influence over the country. This narrative, however, has not been uniformly received across Ukraine, reflecting deep regional, linguistic, and cultural divisions within this country.

The Ukrainian identity has always been complex and controverted because of a long history of being divided among different empires and states. Large regional differences in ethnic composition, language use, and religious affiliation, added to this history, have provided fertile ground for competing identity narratives. Those stories are conventionally read as a split between an "Eastern Slavic identity complex" oriented toward Russia and an "ethnic Ukrainian identity complex" that stresses distancing from Russia and orienting toward Europe. However, such a binary pays little heed to much on-the-ground reality. Indeed, most Ukrainians cross a more complex identity where Russian and Ukrainian cultural spheres are simultaneously accessed. This is so because the identities are analogous, resulting in superimposed cultural relations and influences.

The story of the "Russian world" has been central to Russia's soft power strategy in Ukraine. Contrary to hard power, soft power functions through cultural appeal, common values, and projection of collective identity, rather than by coercion or military force. Through the "Russian world" narrative, Russia had the desire to foster a sense of shared civilization, language, and Orthodox Christian heritage that would keep Ukraine more closely aligned with Russia. This narrative was directed especially at the Crimea and south-east of Ukraine—large Russian-speaking areas where rhetoric over a shared Russian cultural space might find more resonance.

Indeed, in these Russian-speaking regions, the ideas and themes within the "Russian world" narrative did resonate to some extent. These were territories where there were vast majorities of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, thus more attuned to perceptions of being part of a bigger Russian cultural and civilizational space. The "Russian world" narrative spoke not only to this audience but also to political elites and public figures in those regions—in particular, political forces connected to the Communist Party of Ukraine and the Russian Unity Party in Crimea. For instance, former leaders of the Communist Party, Petro Symonenko, and Russian Unity in Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov, expressed discourses portraying Ukraine within the Russian world, with emphasis on cultural and historical interrelationships with Russia. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate also contributed to this narrative by describing it as spiritual and historical unity that supplemented, rather than negated, Ukrainian national identity.

Even in these areas, however, acceptance of the "Russian world" narrative was not unanimous. On the one hand, cultural closeness to Russia was recognized, but on the other, there was clear opposition to understanding Ukraine as a subordinated component of some Russian-led community. Even in the Party of Regions, several political actors were to be found who formulated alternative visions: those acknowledging the close cultural connection of Ukraine with Russia but underscoring its differences and independence. Volodymyr Zhanov, a deputy head of the Party of Regions, came up with the concept of "Slavic Europe," placing Ukraine at the center of the wider Slavic world and not as a junior partner of Russia. That meant conditional acceptance of the "Russian world" narrative: cultural ties with Russia were recognized, but the idea of Russia as their natural leader was rejected.

In contrast, in areas where Ukrainian national identity was more resilient, most notably in the western and central parts of the country, it is where the "Russian world" narrative found considerable resistance. Instead, the "Ukraine as Europe" narrative, focusing on Ukraine's historical and cultural connection with Europe and its difference from Russia, found much more resonance. These different identity narratives point to the limitations of Russian soft power. While the narrative of the "Russian world" did have a certain impact in some regions, it was unconvincing for large parts of Ukraine, especially when the country already had its course towards Europe.

These different levels of receptiveness of the "Russian world" narrative throughout Ukraine are indicative of evidence about the inequitable impact of Russia's soft power. While it managed to wield significant influence in some areas and over certain groups, Russia could not shape Ukrainian national identity at large. This limitation more and more became obvious as Ukraine sought closer ties with the European Union. While the EU propagated its narrative of a "Wider Europe," within which Ukraine formed part of European culture and a common political space, many Ukrainians began to reject the notion of Ukraine's subordination to Russia. What is compelling about the case of Russia is that its soft power in Ukraine, primarily through a "Russian world" narrative, met with ambivalent consequences. Although some areas and populations accepted this, many people resisted —by changing the narrative to illustrate their separation from Russia— underlining also how ambivalent national identity could be. This war continues to do irreparable harm to those relationships as Russia's savagery amplifies discord and stanches the resistance. This highlights the scope of Russia's soft power in a society that embodies distinct historical, regional, and cultural identities...where efforts to influence perceptions of national identity are hardly any less daunting.

(Feklyunina #)

## **India Russia Relationship**

The relationship between India and Russia has traditionally been underpinned by robust defense and military ties. This came about because of India's strategic outreach as a means to further support its autonomy and avoid entrapment by the military purposes of the West, especially the United States. During the Cold War years, the Soviet Union had emerged as the principal supplier of military equipment for India, and this close defense relationship continued unabated after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, even as military ties have been the bedrock of the relationship, they do not capture the gamut of India-Russia interactions.

The last couple of years in the India-Russia relationship has witnessed a strong mooring towards soft power, showing the deeper realization that hard power—although needed—will not be an end in itself without the augmenting effect of soft power to help forge a holistic, resilient partnership. Such soft-power initiatives have thrown up several new opportunities for cooperation, extending beyond the military and strategic relations, to enrich the relationship between the two countries.

The bilateral relationship between India and Russia has been fostered through cultural exchanges where both countries have propagated their vast cultural heritage in various dimensions of life. Take the influence of Bollywood movies in Russia for example; it is a huge part of how the average Russian perceives India today. Films like *Awara* and *Disco Dancer* became household caricatures, laying the foundations of Russian love for Indian cinema. The film exchanges are not the only such activity; both countries have cultural centers that conduct exhibitions, music as well literary events focusing on their respective traditional heritage. These efforts have further strengthened the bonding between Indians and Russians, which has led to mutual respect and understanding of each other's cultural identities over time.

One more key area of soft power exercises its potential levers in education and academic exchanges. Russia has remained a destination of choice for Indian students, especially in medicine and engineering fields. Student and academic exchanges between India and Russia have contributed to increased mutual understanding beyond educational ties. Such academic exchanges establish long-term relationships and build up networks of persons who know each other's cultures and societies.

Another soft power element of the India-Russia relationship is tourism (Maniyar). The two countries have been striving to facilitate tourism, which eventually helps increase economic linkages and strengthen the cultural and social connections between the people on both sides. There are many reasons why people from Russia visit India for its cultural diversity, while Indians go to Russia for a variety of historical and cultural sites. The most significant contribution of this tourism exchange has been toward strengthening one of the most crucial parts: people-to-people ties, that underpin any healthy bilateral relationship.

People-to-people exchanges, so facilitated by soft power initiatives, have contributed much toward building the relationship between India and Russia. These have included joint research and development projects, collaboration in sports, and cooperation in medicine. For instance, during COVID-19, the two nations have cooperated on medical research, including vaccine development and distribution. Such interactions build trust and mutual respect, which are important if the partnership is to survive over the long haul.

The other major area where soft power comes into action is in the cooperation between India and Russia about multilateral institutions. The two nations have been like-minded on a large number of international issues, ( for example - At the BRICS meeting on June 10, 2024, the ministers discussed major global and regional issues and reaffirmed their commitment to further deepening the BRICS Strategic Partnership, with an accent on cooperation in politics, security, the economy, and cultural exchanges. All these aspects of mutual respect and solidity indicate that Russia and India may have aligned on the issue of multilateralism. )moving toward a multipolar world order with a belief in sovereignty. It was the presence of a common understanding and common interests that enabled them to cooperate in such international forums, which were further supported by their soft power exchanges.

As India aims at greater self-reliance in matters of defense procurement, reflected in initiatives such as "Atmanirbharta" or self-reliance, the role of soft power in India-Russia relations is only likely to grow further. While hard power is quite important in its place, soft power gives a strategic counterbalance that will let both countries move ahead with the relationship in a more balanced and sustainable way. Soft power opens a door for sorting out the differences and settling them through dialogue and cooperation, not confrontation.

In conclusion, hard power has constituted the bedrock of the India-Russia relationship all these years and is now expected to acquire newer dimensions with an increased role of soft power. It will be initiatives in culture, education, tourism, people-to-people exchanges, and other areas of soft power that will not only enrich the relationship but also build a wider and resilient bilateral framework. The role of soft power in the relations between India and Russia is more likely to become instrumental shortly while the global landscape unfolds, providing a pathway to deeper and more enduring cooperation.  
(Maniyar)

### **The Growth of South Korean Soft Power and Its Global Implications**

Together with its export of culture and high technology, strategic diplomacy has created what is today known as South Korean soft power—an effective force in the global arena. Joseph Nye defines soft power as the ability of a state to shape others' preferences through appeal and attraction and not through coercion or applied force. But one of the most truly outstanding things about South Korea has been its trajectory toward the development of such power, indicating strategic and multi-dimensional efforts at improving its standing in the world.

Of all the colorful, extensive, and lasting components of South Korean soft power, perhaps the most strident is the Korean Wave or Hallyu, which swept in at the end of the late 1990s. From an initial impetus by the popularity of South Korean TV dramas in Asia, the wave rapidly swept over all continents to emerge as a genuinely global phenomenon. The wave has been led most recently by South Korean music, especially K-pop. The success of K-pop groups globally recognized today, such as BTS and Blackpink, has not only opened up avenues for South Korean culture to reach the international masses but has also created a strong emotional bond with fans worldwide. This bonding process was further amplified through the strategic use of social media and digital platforms that enabled these artists to reach out to millions of fans globally, breaking through language and cultural barriers. But South Korean culture's influence goes far beyond the area of entertainment. Hallyu itself has played a role in popularizing many more aspects of Korean culture, which include fashion, beauty products, and food items.



From this country, beauty standards have come to be known as K-beauty, which has a pretty huge following across the world, driving trends in global beauty and opening up a new market for Korean products. Also, healthy eating and finding a balance is why Korean cuisine has been adopted worldwide by food lovers. In this respect, this cultural diffusion can increase South Korea's visibility and also attach a positive image to it as a modern, dynamic, and innovative country.

On the other hand, South Korea has utilized its technological advantage to boost its soft power. The country is the global leader in the development and deployment of state-of-the-art technologies such as 5G, the Internet of Things, and information and communications technology. These technological innovations are not only significant for South Korea given economic development but also create the foundation for cultural industries. Intersections between technology and culture have created synergies that amplified the wave of South Korea's influence globally. For instance, if the situation of the fast dissemination of 5G technology is considered, then it has made it possible for South Korean cultural content to spread across borders quickly and become more accessible to global audiences.

Secondly, there are critical implications for global security from South Korea's leadership in technology, especially so in the line of cybersecurity. The growing cyberattacks, particularly by North Korea, are of key concern to many nations' financial systems and national security. South Korea's sophisticated information technology industry is only fit to cooperate with other nations in the strengthening of cybersecurity and the development of international norms regarding digital security. Such proactive engagement furthers South Korea's reputation as a responsible global player but also cements its soft power contribution to the safety and stability of the international community.

The other important facet of soft power is the role that South Korea can play in development and cooperation. Having been transformed from an international-aid-receiving country to a donor country itself, South Korea would be better placed to share its peculiar experiences with developing nations. It has enormous experience in economic development, and declarations of democratic values, and now stands out as a model for countries striving to replicate South Korea's example. Membership to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD DAC, therefore, really signifies South Korea's wish to contribute towards global development. KOICA has been part of a number of development projects in its bid to improve the quality of life in developing nations. These have been particularly focused on the Asian continent, with special emphasis placed on Southeast Asia, where the Korean Wave first sprouted its roots.

The development cooperation of South Korea in Southeast Asia has become of strategic importance. The interest in development and cooperation existing in this region can be an opportunity for South Korea to put into practice the global agenda at a regional level. South Korea can build trust and deepen its relations with ASEAN {4} and its member states through joint projects in such areas with Southeast Asian countries. This kind of cooperation will help in addressing some very vital themes in climate change, energy, health, and education issues relevant to Southeast Asia. This cooperation can also provide an enabling environment for South Korea itself to engage in solving its geopolitical challenges, not least of which would be building consensus against the North Korean nuclear program.

The other pillar of South Korea's soft power is the promotion of human rights. As a liberal democracy, South Korea commits to the dissemination and preservation of human rights at home and abroad. It is in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: underscoring freedom, equality, and no discrimination against any individual. South Korea's proactive stance on human rights issues, like its efforts related to human rights in North Korea, further reinforces the image of the country on the world scene as a champion of universal values. By promoting and advocating human rights, South Korea is not only empowering its soft power but will be contributing to global action toward the security of fundamental human rights.

Throughout the past couple of years, under President Yoon Suk-yeol's leadership, the South Korean government has constantly referred to its aspiration to become a "global pivotal state" {4} in which freedom, peace, and prosperity are core concepts. This vision underlines the very foundation of soft power in South Korea's foreign policy and squarely points out the necessity of engaging with the international community through cultural, technological, and humanitarian activities. Contributions that South Korean artists like BTS and Blackpink have made toward global discourse on themes such as sustainable development and climate change reflect the country's wider commitment to using its soft power for the greater good.

Soft power is not an independent tool of cultural diplomacy but is rather an integral element in South Korea's holistic foreign policy strategy. Banishing its cultural appeal, technological precociousness, and commitment to human rights and development, South Korea has been able to elbow up to the frontline of leading global players with the influence to shape international norms and contribute to producing global public goods.

(“The Growth of South Korean Soft Power and Its Geopolitical Implications”)

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, soft power has proven to be an important element in shaping international influence by emphasizing cultural appeal and economic collaboration instead of military power. Russian soft power strategy - or rather, its media part, represented by RT and RIA Novosti - mainly engages in projecting patriotism while instructing others how to think about the West. This has been most evident in its policy toward Ukraine, where Russia stresses cultural and historical connections even as that policy is gaining greater resistance from Ukraine's desire to look toward Europe. The case of Russia points out the strong allure and weak point of soft power against competing identity narratives.

It throws light on the still unfolding cooperation between India and Russia, now extending far beyond security partnership alone to include the exchange of students, tourism, and even medical cooperation, as was perfectly evident recently about COVID-19. Such an evolution would have been unthinkable if not for the growing realization that soft power, as achieved through academic or cultural diplomacy, is important to strengthen bilateral ties.

International development and technological power in all its diverse manifestations further typify South Korea's rise as a global cultural power. For example, K-pop, K-dramas, and Korean beauty products have become extremely popular throughout the world, accented by the country's leadership in technology and international development. South Korea, being a "global pivotal state" for peace, freedom, and prosperity is, therefore, one of the manifestations of the integration of soft power into its global foreign policy goals.

It can, therefore, be said that the importance of soft power is based on its ability to create trust, facilitate international cooperation, and solve global issues using culture and diplomatic leverage. In all these aspects, the cases of Russia, India, and South Korea have proven that soft power is essential in creating dynamics globally, as well as in building lasting collaborations. ("Key Players and Regional Dynamics in Eurasia"<sup>13</sup>)

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