

National Image of South Korea: Evolution and Trends

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, the political, economic as well as social position of any country is largely affected by its image. The image of any country is considered as one of the key assets the country possesses. National image means an image, which public has in mind to perceive a country's identity. National image contributes in perceiving, understanding, remembering and concluding an image of certain country. National image can be defined as a perceptual structure for people to form his or her accumulated information or expectations about certain country. It is a combination of the images of the citizens, the government, businesses, products, cities, economic level, traditions, culture and a particular person of the country. Thus, National image is a thought or belief that people has on the country or its people. It is a general understanding of the country, which has historic, political, cultural, diplomatic, economic, social, art, and sports elements. This paper examines efforts of South Korea in building its 'National image' throughout the period of contemporary modern history.

1. Concept of Image

In the contemporary world, the political, economic as well as social position of any country is largely affected by its image. The image of any country is considered as one of the key assets the country possesses. The word 'image' originated from Latin language "imago", is defined as a picture that is mentally projected. It usually includes not only a visual object, but also a mental picture. Walter Lippman defined an image as a mental picture in a mind.¹ Beyond the definition of Walter Lippman, John Berger did it as a newly created or reproduced picture.² Many number of definitions about Image have been formulated over the years and can be formulated as follows: (1) the whole of impressions about an object, (2) a symbol including meanings or values of an individual or society, (3) meaning based on experience of an individual, (4) characteristics given by personifying of an object, (5) physiological elements to perceive an object such as sense or attitude.

2. Definition of National Image

National image means an image, which public has in mind to perceive a country's identity. National image contributes in perceiving, understanding, remembering and concluding an image of certain country. National image can be defined as a perceptual structure for people to form his or her accumulated information or expectations about certain country. It is a combination of the images of the citizens, the government, businesses, products, cities, economic level, traditions, culture and a particular person of the country. Thus, National image is a thought or belief that people has on the country or its people. It is a general understanding of the country, which has historic, political, cultural, diplomatic, economic, social, art, and sports elements.

3. Image of South Korea from the 1970s to the Olympic Games in 1988

In the early 1970s, the South Korea adopted strong export-oriented and economic policy dominated by government. In South Korea, the 1970s and early 1980s were a time of notable change, not only on economic, but also on the national image strategy.

While the Yushin system³ of the Fourth Republic (1972-1979) inherited the material and human resources of the Third Republic⁴ (1963-1972), it had a fundamentally different ideology and social structure. The Park Chung-hee government of the 1960s had upheld many democratic values, such as freedom of the press. The authoritarian government of the 1970s and 1980s, however, was blatantly oppressive to a South Korean populace that had already been inculcated with the values of American democracy.⁵ However, in such circumstances, we could see that positive changes happened in South Korea. It is not easy for the government to handle all the problems overnight. Simply because of the ideology and social structure, on the one hand South Korea could inherit the traditional culture of the country, and on the other hand South Korea could learn some modern civilization and new mode of social development from America. Obviously, this is the beginning of the formation of the national image strategy. This

³ The Fourth Republic was the government of South Korea between 1972 and 1981, regulated by the Yushin Constitution adopted in October 1972 and confirmed in a referendum on 21 November 1972. From 1972 to 1979, power was monopolized by Park Chung Hee and his Democratic Republican Party under the highly centralized authoritarian "Yushin System".

⁴ The Third Republic was the government of South Korea from 1963 to 1972. It was presented as a return to civilian rule after a period of rule by the military junta known as the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, which had overthrown the Second Republic of South Korea in 1961. However, throughout this period the presidency was held by Park Chung-hee, who had also been an influential member of the junta. He left his military post in order to run as a civilian in the presidential election.

⁵ Park, Tae-Gyun. 2009. "Compositional Changes of Economic Policymakers and New Economic Discourses in the 1970s and 1980s." *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 22 (1), 1.

¹ Lippmann, Walter. 1991. *Public Opinion*. New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers., 3-20.

² Berger, John. 1973. *Ways Of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corp., 29

period, is very essential to the development of the national image strategy in South Korea.

The development of the national image strategy stems from economic development, especially on the efficacy of economic policy. In the wake of the government led economic development, 'Overall Policy' (Overall Policy for Economic Stabilization: abbreviated hereafter as 'Overall Policy') was created in March of 1979 through discussions at the policy meeting headed by Park Chung-hee.⁶ In the era of rapid economic development that started in the 1960s, 'growth' was considered sacred. However, the flaws of their economic development came to light gradually, such as inflation and price control.

'Overall Policy' could not be immediately put into effect, but it is helpful for economic development to eradicate negative perceptions. It is this evidence that illuminates why the government has been able to solve the current problems and achieve its current course, which is also the shift in appearance from a poor, war-torn country to a country focused on developing economic democratization. It is expected that there are multiple reasons influencing the change, which may include economic or political dimensions. During the period from the 1970s to the Olympic Games in 1988, the national image strategy had mainly developed in three capacities, which is explained here in more detail.

The rapid growth of the economy had developed a batch of influential, international corporate brands. In South Korea, effective state strategies focused on private enterprise have enkindled keen interest in the role of the state and large business conglomerates, or chaebols.

South Korea mainly focused on developing its enterprise economy, especially when Park Chung-hee was president. So its local enterprises were increasingly active in their performance. Hyundai Motor, Samsung, LG, amongst other transnational enterprises who joined the world top 500 companies later, had been established and developed in the high-end field of shipbuilding, machine manufacturing, electronics and chemical engineering. It indicated that the South Korean industry had been transformed from simple processing into high-tech manufacturing. Taking Hyundai Motor Company as an example, in 1965, its subsidiary, the South Korean Hyundai Engineering & Construction Group was the earliest enterprise in South Korea to open up and develop its overseas market. In 1972, the Hyundai Motor Company⁷ set up its shipyard and announced the establishment of Hyundai Heavy Industries, and received its first overseas order immediately.⁸ The world didn't initially approve of products which were 'Made in Korea', but it proved to be gradually accepted by more and more people. The growth and

⁶Park, Tae-Gyun. 2009. "Compositional Changes of Economic Policymakers and New Economic Discourses in the 1970s and 1980s." *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 22 (1), 19.

⁷ The Hyundai Motor Company is a South Korean multinational automotive manufacturer headquartered in Seoul, South Korea.

⁸ Park, Kwanghae. 2013. "The Research of Channel, Method and Strategy on South Korean National Image Building." *Proceedings of Korean Studies* 21 (3): 198.

development of those companies acted like a passport for South Korea to go to the world.

Because of the national democratic transition, political democratization was conducive to the beautification of South Korea's national image. The evolution of South Korean democracy is a tortuous process, which, generally speaking, experienced three stages: the first stage being the introduction and trial period (1948-1961); the second was growth of the democratic forces in the process of industrialization (1961-1986); and the third was the official performance and consolidation period (1987-).⁹ So the period from the 1970s to 1988 was only in the second stage. It is believed that because of Park Chung-hee, the way of authoritarian development, with the sacrifice of democratic political development in a favored pursuit of rapid economic growth, brought about a momentous leap forward in the South Korean economy.

The historical development of kinds of South Korean cultural organizations could explain the situation why the period of 1970s is so essential for the development of South Korea's national image strategy. Until now, there are kinds of cultural organizations in South Korea, mainly including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST), Korean Cultural Centre (KCC), Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), and Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea (CHAK).

In 1948, the Office of Public Information was established, which is predecessor of Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Later in 1968, the Ministry of Culture and Public Information was inaugurated. Until 1989, the Ministry of Culture and Public Information was divided into two divisions of the Ministry of Culture and the Department of the Public Information. Therefore, the period from 1968 to 1989 was considered to be the transition and development period of the government cultural institution. Because of its position and function, it plays a decisive role on the development of Korean cultural industry.

According to its 'Vision', the main purpose is the 'Happy Korea with Vibrant Culture life'. There are four strategies for cultural prosperity: Strategy 1 is 'Expanding Cultural Experiences of Citizens'; Strategy 2 is 'Rediscovery of Humanities and Tradition'; Strategy 3 is 'Promotion of the Culture-based Service Industry'; Strategy 4 is 'Spreading the Value of Culture'. Especially the Strategy 4, which is mainly focus on the external communication, for example, 'Creation of the new Korean Wave through K-Culture' is an essential approach to promote the development of the modern culture of South Korea.

As we know, when there is a mention of the Korean culture or South Korea's national image, the Korean Cultural Centre could not be ignored. According to the latest news of the Federation of Korean Cultural Centre in 2015, the Korean Cultural Centre has 229 local Korean Cultural Centres in different areas of South Korea. Furthermore, except the local

⁹Li, Dunqiu. 2000. "The Changes and Directions of South Korea's Democratic Politics." *International Forum* 2 (2): 68-76.

Korean Culture Centres, there are 28 overseas Korean Cultural Centres in 24 different countries as well.

For example, The Korean Cultural Service New York (KCSNY) is one of the Korean Cultural Centers overseas. It is a government institution established in December 1979 for the establishment and promotion of Korean culture and aesthetics in New York. In fact, sometimes culture doesn't mean national image, but national image cannot exist without national culture.

From above, it can be observed that the inauguration of organizations in the period of 1970s laid a solid organizational foundation for the future development on promoting South Korea's national image strategy. The foregoing efforts by the Korean government indeed were expanded to all the parts of Korean society.

For example, students who wished to study abroad up until the early 1980s all had to pass the Government-imposed Examinations in the field of Korean history and traditional culture plus languages of the countries he or she planned to go. At the time the examination was offered only twice a year and quite difficult to pass, and therefore the students had to study very hard not only the language but also the Korean history and culture. Even after the examination, those who passed the examination must attend one full day lectures offered by the Korean government. These students were asked to behave properly once they go to other countries, and the teachings at the meeting were very concrete and focused on the image of Korea.

Moreover, even after the passing of the examination, prospective students must get permission from the university and then a visa from hosting government. After the Korean War, South Korea presented the negative image of that of a 'Land-divided' or 'Autocratic country'. However, political democratization strengthened the positive image of South Korean government. Domestically, in accordance with the new constitution, the implementation of directly electing the President and giving the public the right to vote in 1987 increased government transparency and credibility. The organizational development in 1970s is also considered to be a powerful guarantee to the development of South Korea's national image. Thus, all above had played the role of driving forces in improving the South Korea's national image.

4. Image of South Korea from the Olympic Games in 1988 to the World Cup in 2002

From 1988 to 2002, South Korea experienced many significant events, which played an important role in the promotion the development of the South Korea's national image strategy. Whilst the events of this period were numerous enough to devote more investigation, for practical reasons focus is on the key events: The Olympic Games, in 1988; the Financial Crisis, in 1997; the Inter-Korean Summit, in 2000; and the 'Korean Wave', in the 1990s, all of which played significant roles in the transition and development of South Korea's national image.

The Seoul Olympic Games is called the turning point in the modernization of South Korean promotion. The South

Korean government regarded the Olympic Games in 1988 as free publicity for the country, and proposed some related principals on how to improve its national image. First of all, in order to host the Olympic Games successfully, South Korea should present its traditional culture, mature national character, social development, orderly and tidy cultural city and people's energetic lifestyle; but above all else, to display its social democratization In September 1979, South Korea announced its decision to bid for the Olympics, soon after, in October, President Park Chung-hee was assassinated¹⁰. Since then, the political environment has seen continued turmoil. In June 1987, close to the 1988 Seoul Olympics Games, South Korea broke out in huge democracy movements, beginning a democratic transition. Coincidentally, the time of bidding and preparing for the Olympic Games almost overlapped the time of the political transition, which makes many public opinions correlate the two. However, there is also the view that with ever-growing international attention it became more problematic for the government of South Korea to deal with increasingly emphatic calls for democracy, so it can be said that the Olympic Games played a crucial role in bringing democracy to South Korea¹¹. Taking only this political situation into account, South Korea could not only bring the cultures that people really interested in, but could give visitors a sense of changing social morality. It is believed that this is the political dimension of the construction of the South Korea's national image strategy.

The government should also of showing an historic and traditional country to foreign visitors. With the improvement of people's living standards and increasing demand for travel, Seoul hotels and tourist facilities have seen a gradual increase. In the build-up to the Olympic Games in Seoul, the construction of tourist hotels, tourism facilities and foreign tourism publicity all saw increase or improvement, coinciding with the period of time that saw the tourism industry experience substantial growth. At the same time, the development of tourism spurred on the rapid growth of high value-added industries and created more employment opportunities. Before the Olympic Games, because of economic development, numerous social and public benefits were realized or improved, including the extension of the transportation network, social stability and the development of tourism resources, although still trailing, in relative terms, to more advanced countries. At the same time, because of the geographical location of South Korea, and a lack of suitable infrastructure, the network and air traffic connections were inadequate. This was compounded by a lack of unique tourism resources, limited internationally palatable food options, and restrictions from regional tourism conditions, such as heavy flowing traffic; all of which was not conducive to attracting international visitors. As such, the influx of Olympic tourists for the Seoul Olympic Games had a regenerative effect on the infrastructure and perceptions of tourists and so is considered as the turning point of revitalization of the tourism industry. In addition, during the Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988, South Korea used 25 satellite routes and broadcasted to 85 countries and regions,

¹⁰ Despite surviving several assassination attempts, including two operations by agents of North Korea, Park Chung-hee was eventually assassinated on 26 October 1979 by Kim Jae-gyu, the chief of his own security services.

¹¹ Han, Sung-joo. 1989. "South Korea in 1988: A Revolution in the Making." *Asian Survey*: 29-38.

which was unprecedented in the history of the games. The total broadcast time of 160 television channels was approximately 9,200 hours, which is more than 3 times that of the Los Angeles Olympic Games' 3,000 hours.¹² The Olympic Games in Seoul has made a great contribution to promote the development of the tourism industry, as well as the media connections for the country. There is no doubt that the 1988 Olympic Games became a significant window through which to introduce and promote South Korean culture and the civil society.

At a similar time to this, President Kim Dae-Jung visited North Korea, which led to him being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. During this visit, the Inter-Korean Summit made the world feel confident in settling issues peacefully on the Korean Peninsula and greatly change the South Korea's national image of 'Land-divided Country'. Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations said that he was so delight that the Inter-Korean Summit was successfully held, and believed that continuing dialogue on relations between north and south, which would have beneficial effects on North and South Korea people's blessings; and the international community should support the constructive development of the Korean peninsula, and help to build trust in the region.

In the cultural field, South Korean entertainment stars became very popular and their music, dance and TV dramas spread all over Asia, and even the world. As a result, the term 'Korean Wave' was coined. Korean Wave refers to the popular phenomenon of South Korean popular culture, raised within the scope of Asia from 1990s onwards. It is thought that the gradual emergence of Korean Wave in China was synchronous with CCTV's (China Central Television's) broadcasting of the South Korean TV drama named 'What is Love'¹³, in 1997. In Japan, Korean wave began with the TV drama 'Winter Sonata'¹⁴ replayed four times in Japan, and captured the hearts of Japanese middle-class women. In order to meet their stars, some women even made a special trip to Korea. Then, the dances and popular songs of South Korea were widely spread by Chinese youth. As a result, the South Korean government began to pay great attention to the economic effect, developing policy with 'Korean Wave' as the new power behind the country's economic growth. From the height of the national policy, the government began to discuss the expansion of Korean Wave and how it could be further applied flexibly.

Moreover, the government established some institutions, such as the Korean Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE), in order to enrich and promote their culture. Based on this, the South Korean government even put forward the 3Cs (Creativity, Contents, Culture) that should serve as important economic growth principles and be the

¹² The 1984 Summer Olympics, officially known as the Games of the XXIII Olympiad, was an international multi-sport event held in Los Angeles, California, United States in 1984. Los Angeles strictly controlled expenses by using existing facilities except a swim stadium and a velodrome that were paid for by corporate sponsors.

¹³ 'What is Love' is a Korean drama first showed in weekend on TV from November 23, 1991 to May 31, 1992 in South Korea.

¹⁴ Winter Sonata is a South Korean television drama series that aired on KBS2 in 2002.

precondition of C-Korea (Cultural Korea) Policy. Therefore, the government had realized that the Korean Wave could be a useful and efficient tool to enable more people to understand the current society of South Korea, and introduce the advanced entertainment culture to other foreign countries. This is an example of soft power, which is the most powerful cultural weapon in some capacities.

Until now, as a new style of the Korean music, 'K-pop' has become one of the important music categories. The theme is mainly focus on love and happiness, instead of pain and sorrow. Because of the 'K-pop' and 'Korean Wave', many foreign people get to know South Korea and its culture, including modern culture and traditional culture.

5. Conclusion: Image of South Korea from the World Cup in 2002 till Present

Although the World Cup in 2002 was labelled the Korean and Japanese World Cup, its influence on improving Japan's national image was not as distinct for several reasons, most notably its level of development. On the contrary, South Korea seized the opportunity to positively disseminate its national image and culture to the world.

During the World Cup period, municipal construction and urban tourism infrastructure had been improved greatly, and the relevant industries and economic effects were also improved remarkably, which greatly improved the position of South Korea in the hearts of the world. With regard to the economic effects of hosting the World Cup, the Korean Development Institute (KDI) had already predicted before the World cup, the expected benefits. During the World Cup, the foreign tourists of South Korea will reach 400,000, which would cause a production effectiveness about 11.5 trillion won (about 1 Dollar=1,250 Won), create additional value for 5.3 trillion won, and add 350,000 jobs. But according to the final statistics, the actual effects were far greater than the predictions of the KDI.¹⁵ Therefore, South Korea not only obtained the economic benefits, but also improved its international popularity.

Specifically speaking, South Korean high technology projected an image of 'IT power'. National team supporters called 'the Red Devils' showed an image of an 'Energetic South Korea'. In 2002, the country was back on Korean boulevards comparing 1988 with the performances of hundreds of thousands of Koreans out in public 'Being the Reds', that is, supporting the Korean football team during its World Cup matches. But with far fewer foreigners around to provide an in-person public show, the attention was focused this time on the huge video boards showing the games.

Whether in the form of sports fanship or of political demonstrations, these mass gatherings were unprecedented in contemporary Korean history, and many Korean commentators have now strongly linked them to subsequent electoral developments. While hardly unorganized, these rallies were not perceived as 'owned by' the state but rather by the

¹⁵ Luo, Qiuju. 2003. "The Impact of World's Big Events on Tourism and its Implications for China: A Case of South Korea World Cup and Olympic games *Business Studies* (11): 150-152.

organizations of 'civil society', or new cultural movement networks. These observations in Korea have proved that the advanced technology and enthusiasm of South Korea are important characteristics for the improvement of national quality. Therefore, the World Cup is not only an activity, but also could become an engine strongly promote the development of South Korea's national image strategy environment in its full glory. The government and non-government organizations carried out a variety of traditional folk activities during the World Cup, putting on almost 128 cultural tourism activities, for example South Korea's most prominent sect of Buddhism, *Jogye Order*, carried out a tradition cultural tourism project named "South Korean Buddhism Tradition cultural Experience", with 33 famous monasteries in South Korea participating in the project.

Enterprises took this opportunity to establish their corporate image. If an enterprise wants to improve their brand awareness around the world, for every 1% increase in awareness, \$20 million is required. However, the World Cup presented an opportunity where awareness can be increased by 10%, so enterprise partners are willing to pay significant amounts to become the official sponsor of the World Cup. During the World Cup, many large enterprises of South Korea greatly improved their international fame. As the World Cup's official sponsors, 'Hyundai' and 'Korea Telecom (KT)' were the two greatest beneficiaries. Hyundai have since continued their association with football overseas, especially in Europe, where their logo is regularly visible on the hoardings at matches. According to a survey by the Hyundai Research Institute, during the World Cup, as the official sponsors, Hyundai's popularity in Japan greatly increased from 32% to 67%. The statistics of Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA)¹⁶ showed that because of the World Cup, Korean auto sales in the world's major markets showed a straight upward trend.¹⁷

In addition, South Korea's famous large enterprises, like Samsung, LG and SK Telecom, while not the official sponsors, didn't overlook the opportunity of the World Cup. They booked World Cup boxes and actively invited overseas business partners to visit Korea during the World Cup, taking the chance to explore opportunities and push the sales. Moreover, some big companies also utilized the occasion of the World Cup to send promotional groups abroad, hold goods exhibitions, and expanded their overseas enterprise's reputation. During this period, the world became very familiar with South Korean companies, and the South Korean enterprises also indirectly let the world know the country, in a symbiotic nature. In conclusion, by hosting the World Cup, South Korea defined its national image to be 'Dynamic Korea'. All incidences and efforts noted above aided the South Korea's national image strategy to grow into maturity gradually. Therefore, because of the influences of the 2002 World Cup, not only the enterprises, but also the citizens' daily lives, have greatly developed. Until

now, we should believe that the government of South Korea has efficient used the advantages of World Cup.

On August 15th, 2008, President Lee Myung-bak stated at the ceremony of the Gwangbokjeol¹⁸, "If we want to become a developed country, we should greatly improve our country's overall image and prestige in the world". This was the first time that the South Korean president had stressed the importance of national image and had announced the intention to improve it. In January 2009, President Lee Myung-bak directly established the Presidential Council on Nation Branding. It was established by Executive Decree 21283 having the objective to promote Korea's global image; to right misconceptions about Korea, its culture, its products, and its people; and to raise respect for Korea so as to support Korean businesses and nationals abroad through governmental initiated strategies and policies.¹⁹ It was supposed to be a new engine to enhance the national image strategy, although economic growth was currently in recession.

By the end of 2012, Park Geun-hye who was the candidate of the South Korean governing party, the Saenuri Party, succeeded Lee Myung-bak as the new President of South Korea by gaining 51.6% votes. At February 25th, 2013, Park Geun-hye, on his inaugural speech, announced that South Korea would start a new era by realizing the three dreams, which were economic recovery, national happiness and cultural prosperity. She specially stressed the importance of cultural prosperity and considered the worldwide spread of South Korean culture to be another motivation for improving South Korean economic development. In addition to this, by the image construction of a female president, Park Geun-hye subverted the traditional thinking model of a male dominated South Korean society. She used political and diplomatic skills to improve the tough situation caused by ex-president Lee Myung-bak, and presented to the whole world a brand-new national image of 'Park Geun-hye Era' Korea.

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¹⁶ KOTRA was established in 1962 under South Korea's first 5-year Economic Plan.

¹⁷ Park, Kwanghae. 2013. "The Research of Channel, Method and Strategy on South Korean National Image Building." *Proceedings of Korean Studies* 21 (3): 198

¹⁸ Gwangbokjeol (literally "Restoration of Light Day") is Independence Day of South Korea, It is celebrated annually on August 15 and commemorates Victory over Japan Day.

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_Council_on_Nation_Branding,_Korea

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