

South Korea's Public Diplomacy Actors in Uzbekistan¹

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Abstract

During the last decade, there has been growing academic interest in new public diplomacy, which anticipates a more collaborative approach to international relations and contributes to mutual understanding among nations and foreign publics. One of the central debates in recent public diplomacy research concerns the role and place of the new public diplomacy actors. This study aims to identify public diplomacy actors and their role in South Korea's public diplomacy strategies in Uzbekistan, thereby providing additional insight into the implementation and development of public diplomacy mechanisms. Furthermore, the article explores and analyses the relationship between state and non-state actors to examine how these networks collaborate to promote South Korea's national image. The findings show that South Korea has actively used cultural organizations, educational institutions, hospitals, and businesses as public diplomacy tools in Uzbekistan. The study also found that Koryöin, or the local Korean diaspora, takes a special place in South Korea's strategies.

Keywords: new public diplomacy, Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan, Koryöin (Koryoin, Goryeoin, Koryo saram), non-state actors, labor migrants, medical diplomacy, education diplomacy, business diplomacy

Introduction

Public diplomacy actors are no longer confined to those who are diplomats, foreign officers, or other state representatives directly engaging with foreign publics to achieve their national interests. Instead, new public diplomacy involves a bewildering array of new actors, including international organizations, corporations, subnational governments like provinces, diasporas, and networks of individuals who may be connected because of shared ideas.⁵ As the range of public diplomacy actors grows, the need for more relational, networking, and collaborative practices and strategies of public diplomacy is required to meet the changing dynamics of international relations in today's globalized world. Against this backdrop, the appearance of new actors and interactions among them create new topics for discussions in the field. The research analyzed South Korea's public diplomacy strategies in Uzbekistan, focusing on its non-state actors and drawing on a case study approach to using soft power and public diplomacy concepts.⁶

The article will describe how the Korean government assists non-state actors and how its multiple agencies engage with the Uzbek public, especially with the Korean diaspora. With power assets such as cutting-edge information and communication technology, pop culture, the Korean wave, economic development, and democratization achievements, Korea strives to achieve its public diplomacy vision, just as Enna Park, the former South Korean Ambassador for Public Diplomacy described the Korean public diplomacy agenda as "Fascinating Korea, Communicating Worldwide, into the World with People."⁷ Notably, Korea was the first country to enact the Public Diplomacy Act and the Enforcement Decree in 2016. The central state actor is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), specifically "the Ambassador for Public Diplomacy," who is responsible for public diplomacy matters. Other ministries have designated personnel who collaborate with the ambassador and affiliate with external organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to direct efforts to advance Korea's public diplomacy aims jointly. This paper will shed light on how the South Korean government generates soft power using universities, language-learning centers, hospitals, corporations, Korean Cultural Centers, and the Korean diaspora.

In addition, the largest Korean diaspora in Central Asia resides in Uzbekistan, and South Korea has issued several immigration laws to enable local Koreans to receive necessary visas and permits to work, study, or live in Korea. In this article, Uzbekistan is shown as one of the priority partner countries in Central Asia, with which South Korea has established diplomatic relations ever since Uzbekistan's

Independence on 1 September 1992. Furthermore, Uzbekistan has been receiving the largest share of South Korean Official Development Assistance (ODA) among Central Asian countries and was the first country to receive medical aid during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this light, Ayhan notes that states aim to acquire authority in important global governance decisions, and they have exemplified this in the case of COVID-19, when countries promoted their aid to others and projected the image of responsible international citizens who help those who are in need.⁸ These are important facts, and there will be a section on South Korean–Uzbekistan relations in this article, as the authors believe that the state of diplomatic relations has a pivotal impact on the nature and effects of public diplomacy. Therefore, examining historical bilateral relations provides a deeper understanding of South Korea’s presence and its choice of regional actors. As Brown asserts, it is essential to recognize the interdependence between diplomatic relations and public diplomacy both analytically and programmatically.⁹ In this context, South Korea has prepared a solid ground for its public diplomacy ambitions in Uzbekistan.

South Korea, which is among the world’s ten most economically powerful countries, realized that its national image abroad was weak and not on par with its economic strength.¹⁰ Therefore, since 2010, the South Korean government has laid the foundation for strengthening its public diplomacy capacity as a middle-power state through its history, traditions, culture, arts, values, and policies. However, although studies in public diplomacy have examined South Korea’s public diplomacy strategies, little attention has been paid to the engagement among its state and non-state actors in Uzbekistan. As such, this study asks, “How does South Korea implement its public diplomacy strategies in Uzbekistan?” and “Who are South Korea’s public diplomacy actors in Uzbekistan?” to provide additional insight into the implementation and development of public diplomacy mechanisms.

Theoretical background: Public diplomacy as a soft power tool and its role in South Korea’s foreign policy

In the mid-1960s, the term public diplomacy was allegedly coined by a former American diplomat and Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Edmund Gullion.¹¹ Since then, the practice of public diplomacy has become closely associated with the United States. After the attacks on 11 September 2001, it became a weapon in the battle for hearts and minds. According to Joseph Nye, an American political scientist who pioneered the concept of soft power, only after September 2001 did Americans begin to rediscover the importance of investing in the instruments of soft power.¹² He concluded that in international

politics, the resources that produce soft power arise in large part from the values an organization or country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. Notably, public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the citizens of other countries.¹³

It is worth paying attention to Louis Althusser's theory about "Ideology and ideological state apparatus" when mentioning public diplomacy because it is clear from the history of propaganda that state leaders use different mechanisms to spread their power within and outside their countries.¹⁴ Thus, Althusser, a Marxist sociologist, made the distinction between the State Apparatus (SA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA).¹⁵ He defined the ISA as comprising the following institutions: the religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private "schools"), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties), the trade union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio, television), the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports), and others.¹⁶ In fact, Althusser considered schools and educational institutions part of the ISA as they prepare working-class pupils to accept a life of exploitation by the ISA.¹⁷ Althusser's concept of the SA, or the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), which consists of the government, administration, army, police, courts, and prisons, suggests that the SA functions by violence, and it certainly resembles "hard power."

In contrast, the ISA constitutes "soft power." Another remarkable statement by Althusser was that "there is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus."¹⁸ Althusser believed that despite institutions such as education, family, culture, and the churches being initially outside state control, they transmitted the values of the state and maintained order in society.¹⁹ Although Althusser's theory is based on the example of ISA within a country and was not created for diplomacy, new public diplomacy utilizes some of the ISA institutions, for example, in educational and cultural diplomacy, to engage with foreign publics.

Public diplomacy plays an important role in creating an attractive image of a country, which can improve its prospects for obtaining desired outcomes through education, culture, sports and legitimate policies, and can promote a greater understanding of the country and create and maintain long-lasting international relations.²⁰ Hence, soft power does not work solely on positives as Cull states:

There is such a thing as negative soft power: negative policies and behaviors can reduce an actor's ability to lead on the international stage; cultures of

discrimination and inequality; ugly words from bigoted leaders; and withdrawal from alliances can all repel as surely as noble ideas can attract.²¹

Countries have different foreign policy objectives, therefore, they execute a variety of public diplomacy projects based on their soft power assets. According to Kathy R. Fitzpatrick,²² the relationship approach has been put at the conceptual core of public diplomacy, the fundamental purpose of which is to help a nation establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with strategic publics that can affect the national interest. Public diplomacy is also regarded as a new approach to studying the impact of foreign publics to influence decisions in most cases through social media and modern technology. Middle powers display foreign policy behavior that stabilizes and legitimizes the global order, typically through multilateral and cooperative initiatives.²³

As South Korea realized the importance of improving its national image and global influence, the budget for public diplomacy increased from KRW 6.7 billion (approx. US\$7.2 million) in 2013 to KRW 14.4 billion (approx. US\$16 million) in 2018.²⁴ Moreover, the first Public Diplomacy Act and the Enforcement Decree were enacted in 2016. The Public Diplomacy Act is South Korea's first law on public diplomacy to improve Korea's image and prestige in the international community.²⁵ Furthermore, following Article 6 of the Act, the MOFA formulates a "Master Plan for Public Diplomacy" every five years. Moreover, it organizes the Public Diplomacy Committee to review and coordinate the principle matters of the public diplomacy policy.²⁶

South Korea has actively promoted its national image in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) through educational, cultural, economic, and medical channels. The CIS counties have also been recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from South Korea. Notably, the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan is the largest in the CIS and the fifth largest in the world. It is known that South Korea was the first country to provide COVID-19 support to Uzbekistan at the beginning of 2020. Such measures indicate that public diplomacy holds a dominant place in South Korea's foreign policy. Furthermore, governmental agencies such as KOICA (the Korea International Cooperation Agency), KOTRA (the Korean Trade-Investment Promotion Agency), the Korea Foundation, AKS (the Academy of Korean Studies), and OKF (the Overseas Koreans Foundation) cooperate with Korean businesses, universities, hospitals, and other private organizations in introducing them to the Uzbek market. These influential state actors have a lot of financial resources to offer grants, scholarships, and other special agreements to South Korea's non-state actors to engage with the Uzbek public through their fields of activities to achieve public diplomacy goals.

Whereas old public diplomacy is a state-centric undertaking characterized by one-way flows of information, new public diplomacy is more about a greater exchange and collaboration as well as dialogue, new technologies, and new actors such as non-state actors including NGOs and civil society actors.²⁷ To further understand new public diplomacy, Fitzpatrick highlighted that the new public diplomacy is based on principles of dialogue and mutuality.²⁸ It is important that the new public diplomacy favors people-to-people interactions over mass messaging techniques and has a primarily proactive, long-term focus on relationship-building.²⁹ In order to understand how South Korea exercises its soft power in Uzbekistan, it is essential to explore the countries' bilateral relationship since Uzbekistan proclaimed its independence.

An overview of the South Korea–Uzbekistan relationship

South Korea and Uzbekistan's relationship dates back to 1992. South Korea recognized the independence of Uzbekistan on 30 December 1991 and diplomatic relations were established on 29 January 1992. More recently, in 2017, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the newly appointed President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, took part in a South Korea–Uzbekistan business forum with the participation of heads of economic and financial structures in South Korea.³⁰ The former President of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in, said that the people of Uzbekistan and South Korea are bound by a long-term friendship and share a similar culture and mentality.³¹ It became obvious that the new President of the Republic of Uzbekistan continued close cooperation through numerous bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding with South Korean entities. For example, Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Moon Jae-In signed documents between the governments and ministries regarding the promotion and mutual protection of investment, exploration of space for peaceful purposes, cooperation in technology, science, and creation of the Korean–Uzbek center for cooperation in the health sector during their meeting in Uzbekistan between 18 and 21 April, 2019.³²

Moreover, in 2019, bilateral trade increased by 27% compared to 2018, including exports by 30.1%.³³ Additionally, 198 South Korean enterprises, including joint ventures, were created in Uzbekistan in 2019.³⁴ In fact, as of 1 July 2022, according to the State Statistics Committee, the number of enterprises and organizations registered in Uzbekistan with foreign capital amounts to 14,353. Leading foreign companies with capital investments in Uzbekistan claim the following nationalities: Russian (2,654 companies), Turkish (2,032 companies), Chinese (2,011 companies), Kazakh (1,161 companies), and South Korean (905 companies).³⁵ All these economic achievements were supported by South Korea's special public

diplomacy strategy in Uzbekistan, involving its state and non-state actors, where mutually beneficial support circles are created. It is worth mentioning that the size of the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan is the largest in the CIS and the fifth largest in the world after the United States, China, Japan, and Canada. Another good example to show the close relationship between the two countries is the opening of the House of Korean Culture and Art in Tashkent in April 2019.³⁶

In addition, the Uzbek mass media regularly announce news related to Uzbekistan–South Korea relations. Since January 2021, the major news headlines have demonstrated positive discourses on Korea–Uzbekistan relations. The examples of the headlines can be grouped in several categories: business and finance (“Economic diplomacy: Uzbekistan, South Korea discuss mechanisms of financing industrial projects”);³⁷ politics (“President of Uzbekistan receives Parliamentary delegation of South Korea”);³⁸ education and research (“Uzbekistan and South Korea are interested in enhancing cooperation in research and use of space for peaceful purposes”³⁹ and “An agreement signed to introduce Korean technologies in Uzbekistan’s preschool education system”);⁴⁰ trade (“Expert assistance from Seoul contributes to obtaining the most favorable conditions for Uzbekistan’s membership in the WTO”);⁴¹ medical cooperation between Korea and Uzbekistan (“COVID-19: IVI Director General confirms attendance at the 1st International Scientific Congress on COVID-19”);⁴² construction (“The delegation of the Korea–Uzbekistan Business Association discussed issues of the practical start of the construction of Kokand City and implementing other joint projects”);⁴³ cultural exchange (“Uzbekistan to open Korean language centers in its five cities”);⁴⁴ knowledge transfer (“MoU was signed between the State Customs Committee of Uzbekistan and Korea Customs Service for the exchange of experience and cooperation in the field of professional education”);⁴⁵ tourism (“Uzbekistan, South Korea enhance collaboration in pilgrimage tourism”);⁴⁶ and ODA projects (“Politics: Deputy Foreign Minister and Director of KOICA Uzbekistan discuss the implementation of joint projects”).⁴⁷ These news headlines demonstrate that close cooperation between the countries involves various governing bodies of South Korea.

The roles of Uzbek migrant laborers and the Korean diaspora

A Korean presence on the territory of the then-Russian empire was first established in the early 1860s, when Korean farmers and peasants were fleeing money-lenders and landowners on the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁸ In 1937, Soviet Koreans were deported by Stalin, and in the autumn of that year, they were forcibly resettled

in the Central Asian steppes.⁴⁹ Uzbekistan hosted the largest Korean diaspora (Koryōin) deported by Stalin's order. Later, Koryōin, who are also called the Koryo saram,⁵⁰ urbanized and turned into a Russified community. The Korean diaspora, at less than 1%, represents a small part of the Uzbek population; however, it is an urbanized and well-organized demographic involved in business, and some Koreans are also part of the Uzbek government.⁵¹

Recently, South Korea set up a number of programs aimed at reviving cultural identity among a Russified diaspora community.⁵² The South Korean government has special approaches toward the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan, which differentiates its public diplomacy strategy from the general approach. Within public diplomacy, diasporas are mainly relevant in bilateral relations, but they also play a wider role in regional or global issues.⁵³ Deepening ties between South Korea and Uzbekistan are well received by both sides. The Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan has bridged the gap between the two nations, and it is very often mentioned during official governmental meetings.

Koryōin are a link of mutual understanding and cooperation between Korea and Uzbekistan. South Korea heavily uses the connection with the Koryōin to access Uzbekistan's infrastructure, culture, healthcare, and business. The following example proves that the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan is an important link in South Korea's public diplomacy strategy. In 2019, in honor of the 100th anniversary of the "March First Movement"⁵⁴ and the formation of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, the fourth generation and above of ethnic Koreans in Uzbekistan were ranked among foreign compatriots. The government of the Republic of Korea previously did not recognize fourth-generation ethnic Koreans as such. In order to eliminate the problems associated with the separation of the fourth generation ethnic Koreans from their parents living in the Republic of Korea, the government amended the regulation on the implementation of legislative acts related to the entry or exit and legal status of foreign compatriots.⁵⁵

On 25 January 2019, the Ministry of Justice of Korea revised the "Enforcement Decrees of the Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans" to extend the scope of the overseas Korean designation from the third-generation Koryōin, mostly grandchildren of the original Koreans from Russia and Central Asia, to the fourth generation, namely direct descendants. The fourth generation Koryōin, with a foreign nationality, can now stay in Korea, receiving the same rights as Korean citizens in real estate and financial trading as well as qualify for national healthcare, for up to three years at a time, and they can extend their stay without difficulty. The Ministry of Justice said in a news release that the law will help more descendants of overseas Koreans gain legal status to freely travel and

stay in Korea, allowing them more opportunities and pride as Korean nationals. Furthermore, the South Korean government offers classes to Koryōin to adapt to life in Korea, such as basic Korean legal information and an understanding of Korean society.⁵⁶ This act shows that the Korean diaspora takes a special place in South Korean public diplomacy strategies. South Korea treats the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan as a long-lost family member, therefore, Uzbekistan for South Korea is the home of the largest Korean diaspora in Central Asia. This factor clearly influences South Korea's public diplomacy strategy. South Korea offers a special immigration visa (F-4) for Korean people in Uzbekistan. Whereas the older generation finds it hard to leave Uzbekistan for a new country, younger people are able to quickly learn Korean and start their new lives in Korea. The attraction of the Korean diaspora to South Korea via special visas for ethnic Koreans from CIS countries can also be related to South Korea's hidden agenda to raise its birth rate and secure a labor force.

According to the World Bank, South Korea's birth rate of 5.3 per 1,000 people (as of 2020) is the lowest in the world, even lower than Hong Kong and Japan;⁵⁷ therefore, the government is trying to increase it and recover from the demographic crisis. This rising social phenomenon in South Korea is often called "the Sampo Generation," which refers to the younger generations who give up three things: relationships, marriage, and children.⁵⁸ Thus, this public diplomacy gesture for the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan is a win-win situation for South Korea. The UN predicts South Korea's population will peak around 2024, but by 2100, the UN forecasts South Korea's population will only be around 29 million, the same as it was in 1966.⁵⁹

Additionally, the economic activities of overseas Koreans have the effect of expanding the country's economic territory, namely, domestic investment, money transfer, and job creation. For example, remittances to Uzbekistan from ethnic Koreans, who moved to South Korea to work, were estimated to exceed US\$100 million in 2010.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the role of the Korean diaspora and labor migrants from Uzbekistan contribute to product exports. Furthermore, the Korean diaspora promotes friendship and establishes cooperative relations between the mother and host countries.⁶¹ The OKF indicates that the Korean diaspora enhances the national image and cultural events in Korean communities and promotes the Republic of Korea.⁶² According to International Migration Statistics, the incoming migration of Uzbekistan nationals changed from negative net migration (-6,000 persons) in 2020 to positive net migration (+2,000 persons) in 2021.⁶³

Notably, in 2017, Uzbeks were in the top three foreign-born population groups in Korea.⁶⁴ Uzbekistan is the fifth most represented country in South Korea in terms of migration according to the report of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic

of Korea published in June 2017.⁶⁵ There are about 66,181 Uzbek migrants in South Korea as of 2021, accounting for 3% of the total number of foreigners. In addition, South Korea keeps simplifying the working visa procedure for Uzbek citizens (for both Korean diaspora and non-Korean diaspora), which attracts an increasing number of labor migrants.⁶⁶

In this light, the Uzbek Koryōin members founded the Uzbekistan Korean Culture Association in 1991. It was established to revive the culture and advocate the interests of Koreans in Uzbekistan. The Association's partners are the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Uzbekistan, the Korean Language School—King Sejong Institute, the OKF, KOICA, and the Republic of Korea Education Center.⁶⁷ The Uzbek Korean Culture Association holds various events to defend the interests of Koryōin in Uzbekistan such as support of the local Korean newspaper.⁶⁸ Currently, the Association unites the Korean cultural centers of nearly all regional centers of Uzbekistan except for Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya, as well as the Association of Koreans of Karakalpakstan and the city of Tashkent. The Association consists of the Tingbo Scientific and Technical Society, the sports department, the editorial board of the newspaper *Kore Sinmun*, the literary club Arirang, four ensembles of Korean traditional dance—Koryo, Kot Bonori, Asadal, and Samdiyong—the Shinsedae Youth Center, the Council of Elders, and Korean language classes.⁶⁹

South Korea's public diplomacy strategy targets the younger generation of Uzbekistan. The Shinsedae Youth Centre is another example of a South Korean state public diplomacy actor that supports the Korean diaspora culturally by offering Korean language classes, employment preparation seminars, and other cultural activities. All committees are chaired by heads and their deputies, who together constitute the Asset of Shinsedae Media Committee.⁷⁰ Its Media Committee covers the activities of the center and collaborates with other media.

In fact, diaspora communities create transnational networks, and exemplify global connectivity and the functioning of multidimensional networks by forming connections among members in their home and host cultures.⁷¹ As economic actors who have access in their countries, the diaspora becomes an instrument of outreach for the home state.⁷² In public diplomacy, the diaspora are natural ambassadors of the country of origin and can play a special role in the development of its soft power in the target country.⁷³

Educational diplomacy actors

South Korea also promotes awareness and understanding of Korea through knowledge-based public diplomacy.⁷⁴ For example, MOFA and AKS worked

together to correct erroneous information on Korea and expand detailed descriptions of relevant issues in foreign textbooks. The Korea Foundation under MOFA establishes “Korea Corners” in local universities, libraries, and cultural centers to promote knowledge of Korea. The Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies also fund research on Korean studies overseas and operate overseas scholarship programs.⁷⁵ Exchanges and international education are some of the best-known components of public diplomacy. They are a foundational “relationship-building” layer at the base of the entire foreign engagement structure.⁷⁶ At present, there are dozens of centers of Korean culture in Uzbekistan. The Korean language is taught in twelve higher education institutions and in forty-eight schools and lyceums.⁷⁷ The number of international students from Uzbekistan to South Korea has increased from 600 in 2013 to 7,400 in 2019.⁷⁸

South Korea has engaged with Uzbekistan at different educational levels. According to Eriks Varpahovskis,⁷⁹ South Korea actively uses the education channel by means of government and university scholarships such as KOICA and OKF to establish deeply strategic relations with Uzbekistan.⁸⁰ He listed a number of mutual benefits of the multilevel approach for Uzbekistan and South Korea, emphasizing that the Korean government employs a mixed approach toward selecting people for its public diplomacy policies, for example, focusing on young and talented people, and engaging with Uzbekistan’s public by supporting language and culture centers.⁸¹ Besides universities and educational centers for adults, South Korea has also engaged in preschool education in Uzbekistan. The first experimental kindergarten was constructed using Korean standards, and instructors received training from specialized Korean institutions.⁸² Through this preschool approach, Korea might win the hearts and minds of Uzbek families whose children attend the kindergarten: the children are taking the first steps in becoming aware of Korean culture by playing different national musical instruments, including Korean instruments.⁸³

One of the most remarkable channels of South Korea’s educational diplomacy is creating partnerships with Uzbekistan state institutions of higher education and opening Korean universities’ campuses in Uzbekistan. All the South Korean campuses in Uzbekistan are joint projects between the state and non-state actors of public diplomacy. One example of a South Korean university’s campus in Uzbekistan is Inha University in Tashkent (IUT), founded in 2014.⁸⁴ It is the first Korean university campus which opened in Uzbekistan. In April 2019, President Moon Jae-in visited the campus in Tashkent to see Uzbek and Korean medical teams jointly demonstrating telemedicine.⁸⁵ Another university, Bucheon University in Tashkent (BUT) was established by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 2 July 2018 at the initiative of the Ministry of

Higher and Secondary Special Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Ministry of Preschool Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and Bucheon University (South Korea). Another example is Yeosu Technical Institute in Tashkent (YTIT). Within the Korean-Uzbek business forum dedicated to the state visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyayev, to the Republic of Korea on 22–24 November, 2017, a Memorandum on the creation of Yeosu Technical Institute in Tashkent was signed between Korean and Uzbek partners.⁸⁶ Ajou University in Tashkent (AUT) was established to promote the socio-economic development of Uzbekistan by agreement between the Management of Ajou University's academic curriculum, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education, Republic of Uzbekistan, and Ajou University based on the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 30 November 2018. Universities can be perfect public diplomacy tools as they reach foreign publics through their internationalization activities, recruitment of international students, cross-border mobility of students and scholars, language learning, internationalization of curriculum, and cross-border institutional partnerships for learning, research, and development.⁸⁷

Besides the above-mentioned universities, other educational institutions in Uzbekistan contribute to South Korean public diplomacy. The King Sejong Institute Foundation (KSIF) offers Korean language courses for the Uzbek public. KSIF is dedicated to reaching out to the world using the Korean language as a tool. The students of KSIF deepen their understanding of Korea, including enhancing their enjoyment of K-pop, learning the Korean language, traveling, studying, and working in South Korea.⁸⁸ The Ministry of Culture of Korea plans to open five "special" Sejong Hakdang classes in Vietnam, Nepal, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, and Cambodia for people who wish or plan to work in Korea.⁸⁹ The Korean-Uzbek International University in Fergana (KIUF) was established by the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan in cooperation with leading specialists in the higher education system of South Korea and the Republic of Uzbekistan to develop professional, practical, and world-class talents.⁹⁰ This is the first state university resulting from cooperation between the two governments.

South Korea has the largest number of overseas university campuses in Uzbekistan. South Korea has created a lifetime collaboration circle of its public diplomacy's state and non-state actors, where the introduction of one actor involves the participation and support of other actors. Moreover, South Korea's public diplomacy has a long-term vision of the return on investment. South Korea creates a perfect education circle, where it opens university campuses to provide education in different fields such as engineering, preschool education, medicine, Korean studies, and other subjects. Their alumni will have an advantage

when applying for jobs at Korean companies, thereby securing a future for themselves. Korea's national brand improves from year to year and has a greater number of non-state actors in public diplomacy who promote its image further.

Many recipients of scholarships and grants, as well as alumni of Korean universities, constitute the core personnel involved in joint ventures undertaken by the Korean and Uzbek governments. Alumni of Korean universities are prospective employees of Korean enterprises operating in Uzbekistan and other countries. Their education from Korean universities and training programs will help secure their future and build ties to Korea. McClory holds that the ability of a country to attract foreign students or facilitate exchanges even between countries with a history of animosity, is a powerful public diplomacy tool.⁹¹ McClory also notes that prior research into educational diplomacy gives empirical evidence for reputational gains that accrue to a host country when international students return home.⁹²

Medical diplomacy actors in Uzbekistan

South Korea has launched two large hospitals in Uzbekistan in cooperation with the Uzbek government. The beneficiaries are the people of Uzbekistan, who need medical treatment, and Uzbek doctors, who receive training from their South Korean colleagues. Both projects involve South Korean state and non-state public diplomacy actors.

The Bukhara Himchan Hospital opened in 2019 as a jointly operated facility that provides orthopedic services, general internal medicine, and neurosurgical procedures, thanks to the exchange and cooperation between the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Korea and the Ministry of Health of Uzbekistan.⁹³ Himchan Hospital was founded by the Dongwon Scholarship Committee in 2002,⁹⁴ and since then hospitals have been opened in Uzbekistan, the United Arab Emirates, and the Russian Federation. Himchan Hospital is the first local, private medical institution to open a branch in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. The Korean hospital has invested about KRW 10 billion (approx. US\$7.5 million) into restructuring buildings and installing equipment; the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Korea also provided financial support of KRW 360 million (approx. US\$270,000) for the hospital construction through the Korea Health Industry Development Institute's Medical Overseas Support Project.⁹⁵

Under the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the 21st Century Uzbekistan–Korea Friendship Children's Hospital opened in 2020.⁹⁶ The creation of the children's medical center was a joint project of many South Korean organizations, including the Export-Import Bank of Korea

(Korea Eximbank), Busan National University Hospital, Dongwon, Samsung, KOICA, BAUM architects, and the Korea Foundation for International Healthcare.⁹⁷

Furthermore, the South Korean government has been helping Korean medical institutions advance abroad. For example, the Ministry of Health and Welfare of the Republic of Korea established an expert advisory group by region and sector and has been providing consulting support projects to reduce risks associated with overseas advances by private medical institutions.⁹⁸ In addition, South Korea and Uzbekistan drew up an action plan to strengthen public healthcare cooperation. The plan included the implementation of the following tasks by 2021:

- establishing a strategy to digitize information for public healthcare in Uzbekistan
- conducting pilot projects for ICT-based medical system cooperation
- developing and operating education programs to nurture e-health experts and collaboration for the advancement of the pharmaceutical sector.

Moreover, in a summit with President Moon, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed building a special pharmaceutical complex to attract Korean medical companies.⁹⁹

In Uzbekistan, in cooperation with AKFA University, Gacheon University College of Medicine provided a Korean medical school curriculum to establish the first private medical university in the country in 2019. Additionally, Kyungpook National University Hospital signed an MOU to build a partnership in medical treatment with the First and Second Samarkand State Medical Institutes in Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁰ In medical diplomacy, South Korea has created an interconnected circle of state and non-state public diplomacy actors, where all the actors collaborate with each other and promote Korea's national image.

Businesses as public diplomacy actors in Uzbekistan

It is worth noting that, since Uzbekistan gained its independence in 1991, there have been two Uzbek presidents. When the second president came to power in 2017, the Korean–Uzbek relationship significantly improved. More companies with Korean investment have been registered during this period, and there have been regular meetings among government officials to promote further cooperation between the two countries.

South Korea has abundant capital and technology, which Uzbekistan needs for industrial diversification and infrastructure development, while Uzbekistan can offer energy, natural resources, and cheap labor. According to Hwang,¹⁰¹ by

1992, South Korea was the leading foreign investor in the Uzbek economy with more than US\$1 billion in investments, mainly the automobile manufacturing joint venture Uz-Daewoo based in Andijan, the telecommunications project by Daewoo Unitel, and Kabool Textiles Ltd. In March 2006, the Korean National Oil Corporation, Korea Gas Corporation, and Uzbekneftegaz (the national Uzbekistan gas company) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), giving Korean companies exclusive exploration and exploitation rights for the two oil and gas deposits in Chust-Pap and Namangan-Terachi. Later in 2008, the Korean gas company KOGAS and Uzbekneftegaz agreed on the joint exploration and exploitation of the Surgil gas site on the Uatyurt Plateau for an estimated cost of US\$1.84 billion.¹⁰² As of 2017, the total volume of investments of South Korea attracted into the economy of Uzbekistan exceeded US\$7 billion dollars.¹⁰³ As a result, there are 461 enterprises utilizing South Korean capital in Uzbekistan, including 386 joint ventures and 75 enterprises with 100% South Korean capital. In 2016, South Korean investments of US\$4 billion were used to build the Ustyurt Gas Chemical Complex.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, Korean Air has been carrying out cargo transportation through the Navoi airport since 2008.¹⁰⁵ In 2019, bilateral trade increased by 27% compared to 2018, including exports by 30.1%. More recently, 198 enterprises, including joint ventures with Korean capital, were created in Uzbekistan in 2019, and their total number exceeds 800. Major projects such as the Surgil gas processing complex, textile factories in Fergana and Bukhara, and a Hyundai automobile manufacturing plant in Namangan have been implemented with investments from leading South Korean companies.¹⁰⁶ Commercial actors have begun to work in the cultural space, associating themselves with international cultural projects and events to enhance their brand and improve their countries' national image.¹⁰⁷ Public diplomacy actors increasingly build coalitions. South Korea's effort in Uzbekistan is an example of the actors' partnership. Partnerships have always been central to public diplomacy, its main argument being that a partnership has an increased ability to solve complex international problems.¹⁰⁸

The South Korean government supports its businesses in Uzbekistan by signing bilateral agreements with the Uzbekistan government so that Korean businesses could promote their national brand by producing Korean goods and services for the Uzbek public. It is clear that the newly appointed president of the Republic of Uzbekistan means to continue close cooperation with South Korea. For example, Tashkent hosted a meeting of the Uzbekistan and South Korean Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation in 2019.¹⁰⁹ The parties discussed the need to create joint centers, construct high-speed railways in Uzbekistan,

produce environmentally friendly cars, launch projects to create a tourism infrastructure, construct a smart city, and cultivate export-oriented agricultural products.¹¹⁰

With the technical assistance of KOICA, two grant projects in healthcare were completed in 2019 for US\$13 million, and six projects worth US\$29.6 million are under implementation involving Korean companies. Another ten projects worth US\$72.2 million are being developed for implementation between 2020 and 2022.¹¹¹ Moreover, in cooperation with the Export-Import Bank of Korea, resources for US\$2 billion have been attracted to Uzbekistan.¹¹²

In July 2020, Minister of Trade, Industry, and Energy, Sung Yun-mo met Sardor Umurzakov, Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, in Seoul to discuss ways to overcome the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy.¹¹³ This time, South Korea came up with a new model of free trade agreement that would promote sustainable cooperation in the fields of trade and investment in Uzbekistan. During the meeting, SK Engineering and Construction Co. inked a front-end engineering design agreement with Uzbekistan's state-run oil and gas company, Uzbekneftegaz, to modernize an oil refinery.¹¹⁴ The parties agreed to develop a new three-year financial and technical cooperation program between Uzbekistan and Korea for 2021–2023 with an increase in the program's budget up to US\$1 billion. Future projects will involve the creation of a Korean–Uzbek research center to introduce advanced construction technologies, construct an integrated center for training, education, and personnel development and to establish an innovative state preschool educational system.¹¹⁵

Business has a considerable role to play in public diplomacy as customers, vendors, and business partners need a firm relationship of trust in foreign environments.¹¹⁶ Business has rediscovered its purpose in this context as a global citizen, expanding beyond the definition that the purpose of business is to create wealth for its owners. Different stakeholders are to be seen in multiple roles: (1) owners or investors are also employees, (2) employees are also customers, (3) consumers are also local business partners, (4) business partners are also local stakeholders, (5) local stakeholders are also media, (6) consumers are also media, and (7) media are also NGOs. Global companies and their brands touch more people's lives than government representatives ever could.¹¹⁷ Business professionals in international companies are more likely to be citizens of the country they are in and representatives of their companies. They can then serve a diplomatic function because of their cultural sensitivity to their environment and the global enterprise for which they work. In a world

of instantaneous media coverage, transparency, and intangible value drives, a successful company will welcome the opportunity to play a role in public diplomacy.¹¹⁸

South Korean public diplomacy strategy in Uzbekistan demonstrates an example of a cooperative process of state and non-state actors. The government assists Korean businesses in securing major projects in Uzbekistan through various governmental agencies such as KOTRA and KOICA. Figure 1 shows that Korea has used the ODA to create a special relationship with Uzbekistan since 1992.¹¹⁹ As a result, Uzbekistan has been receiving the largest share of ODA among Central Asian countries.

Uzbekistan is an attractive business partner for South Korea. Uzbekistan has a strong agricultural base and is one of the world's largest cotton producers. It is also endowed with abundant natural resources, including hydrocarbons, gold, copper, and uranium.¹²⁰ With a growing number of Korean companies in Uzbekistan, these non-state actors have become more involved in efforts to influence foreign publics' views and to promote South Korea's national image through extensive networks and locals on the ground: employees, alumni of Korean educational and training programs, consumers of Korean goods, and diasporic communities. Moreover, international corporations have enormous communication budgets, global impact, and sensitivity to intercultural communication, which could be of great value to governmental diplomacy.¹²¹ In addition, these companies have

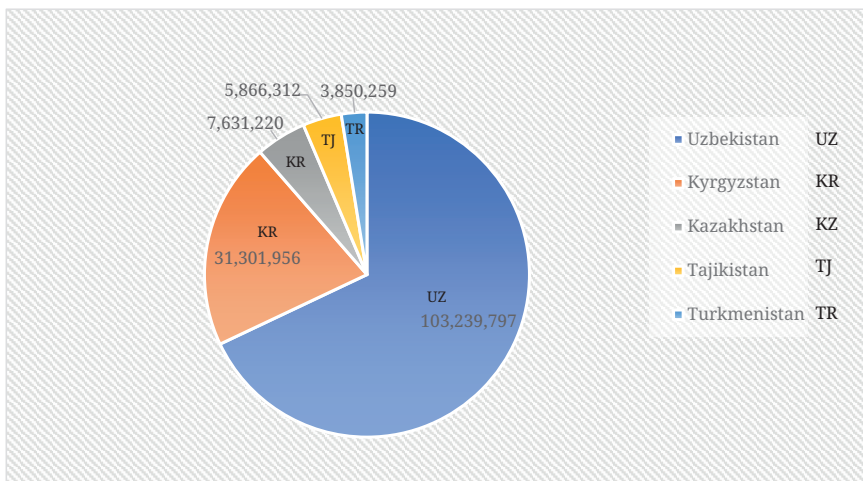


Figure 1 Korean ODA to Central Asia (2010–2018) in US dollars.

Source: KOICA, "KOICA statistics: type of aid."

vast soft power resources, global worldviews, expertise in consumer research for international audiences, and greater credibility than governments, which can be advantageous to public diplomacy.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that, since the independence of Uzbekistan on 30 December 1991, South Korea and Uzbekistan have established diplomatic relations and relations became a positive prerequisite for future bilateral cooperation in many spheres of economics, culture, and politics. According to Robin Brown, it is essential to recognize the interdependence between diplomatic relations and public diplomacy “analytically” and “programmatically.”¹²² Thus, South Korea has prepared the ground well for its public diplomacy ambitions in Uzbekistan. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks of Cull and Nye,¹²³ the Korean government engages its agencies, non-state organizations, and institutions to implement public diplomacy strategies in Uzbekistan.

This article points out that South Korea emphasizes the Korean diaspora as a link between the countries by offering special immigration visas (F-4) for Uzbek Koreans to fill its labor gap. This visa enables the Korean diaspora to permanently settle in South Korea, thus increasing its population and possibly contributing to an increase in the birth rate. A large Korean diaspora resides in Uzbekistan, strengthening South Korean public diplomacy goals in the country. The results appear to show that the Korean diaspora receives extensive support from the South Korean government with access to education, such as preschool education, Korean language support at numerous South Korean institutions, scholarships and grants for higher education, training, and employment opportunities in South Korea. The diaspora is engaged with Korean state public diplomacy agencies such as the House of Korean Art and Culture, the OKF, the Korea Plant Industries Association,¹²⁴ and even such non-state actors as the Uzbekistan-Korean Culture Association. These public diplomacy agencies are heavily supported by the Korean government. South Korea promotes a positive image of itself by supporting the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan and reaches out to local Korean people who will continue being public diplomacy “ambassadors.”

Another significant finding is that South Korea manages to create so-called public diplomacy circles, where the government, state, and non-state actors cooperate with each other to involve Uzbekistan’s human resources for long-term collaboration. This can be seen in the case of the government’s help for Korean universities to open their campuses in Uzbekistan to prepare specialists in various areas such as technology, business, preschool education, medicine, architecture

and design, and other fields with the prospect of socio-economic development. The alumni of the universities will become future employees of Korean companies as they are trained to Korean standards and have higher chances of being employed by Korean companies. The government's role in relational public diplomacy initiatives is limited to designing and facilitating interpersonal interactions between home and foreign publics, whereas it is the human factor, as non-state actors, that builds and maintains these relations and interactions.¹²⁵ Moreover, many young people in Uzbekistan are involved in the educational and cultural programs organized by South Korean public diplomacy agencies, thereby ensuring a long-lasting relationship with the Uzbek public.

The growing number of South Korean businesses in Uzbekistan further promotes the South Korean national image by providing services and goods and employing the local population. To promote its positive image in Uzbekistan, South Korea has been allocating its largest aid share in Central Asia to Uzbekistan since 1992. Diaspora, education, hospitals, businesses, and culture and technology are very powerful public diplomacy tools that Korea uses in Uzbekistan. South Korea's strategy is directed at the Uzbek public and links it with its existing public diplomacy actors.

In conclusion, the study identifies various non-state actors that the Korean government uses for public diplomacy, including Koryōin (Goryeoin, or Koryo saram), university campuses, Korean culture centers, hospitals, and businesses, which are seemingly irrelevant to diplomacy. The study results suggest that these actors have closely collaborated to promote South Korea's national image with the maximum engagement of the public in Uzbekistan. South Korea's public diplomacy initiatives result from joint efforts among the government, its agencies, and non-state actors aimed at the Uzbek public.

Notes

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