

The Development and Problems of Soft Power between South Korea and Japan in the Study of International Relations

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The Development and Problems of Soft Power between South Korea and Japan in the Study of International Relations

ソフトパワーをめぐる日韓関係の変容と課題

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近年、日韓関係における相互交流が拡充している。しかし、両国における歴史を見ると、日韓関係は対立と葛藤の歴史であったと理解できる。ただし、両国の関係が対立の関係であったとしても、最近ソフトパワー理論が注目されるなかで、同理論は両国の関係を改善させる可能性を潜めているものとして認識されるようになった。このような状況を踏まえ、本論文では、日韓関係において文化資本がどのように相互受容され、拡大されたのかを検討する。その上、日韓における文化資本の拡大過程の特徴と問題を考察し、ソフトパワーが日韓関係に果たした役割と国際関係上の意味と課題を論じる。

I . The significance of soft power in Japan and Korea today

Generally speaking, the basic concept of “power” is the ability to influence others to get them to do what you want. There are three major ways to do that: one is to threaten them with sticks; the second is to entice them with carrots; the third is to attract them or co-opt them, so that they want what you want. If you can get others to be attracted to want what you want, it costs you much less in carrots and sticks.

However, the meaning of “power” in the department of study of international relations indicates the ability that nations influence on other nation.¹ Actually, the concept of power is

divided into two types: hard power and soft power.²

Traditionally, hard power has comprised two factors: military power and economic power. A nation protects its people and territory from other nations using military power. At the same time, a nation can intentionally buy or sell the property of other nations by using its economic power. That is to say, it is hard power which has historically been the predominant realist measure of national power, through quantitative metrics such as population size, concrete military assets, or a nation’s gross domestic product.³

Soft power, on the other hand, is the concept that runs counter to hard power. Soft power represents the third way of getting the outcomes

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you want. It recognizes the fact that having extensive resources does not always produce the desired outcomes, as the United States discovered in the Vietnam War. Soft power consists of resources such as culture (when it is attractive to others), values (when there is no hypocrisy in their application) and foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others). Unless these conditions are present, culture and ideas do not necessarily produce the attraction that is essential for soft power behavior. Additionally, the extent of attraction can be measured by public opinion polls, by elite interviews, and case studies.

For the reasons mentioned above, Nye insists that soft power is more than influence, since influence can also include the hard power of threats or payments. And soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it. It is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence.⁴

If so, why is soft power noticed between Japan and Korea today? The reason is caused by the expansion in cultural exchanges between Japan and Korea. For the last few years, the entertainment of South Korea known as “Hanryu (Kanyu)” has become popular in Japan.

Conversely, Japanese manga (comics) and pop music has become popular in South Korea. As cultural exchange between the two nations expands, the competition to obtain national profit in terms of soft power between Japan and South Korea has begun.

II .The form of soft power in Japan

Soft power in Japan can be grasped in terms of the process of expansion of cultural capital. The basic form of soft power in Japan is explained in terms of the cultural strategy and cultural policy. Actually, the cultural strategy of Japan was started during that country’s economic difficulties of the 1990s. At that time, many economists forecasted that the Japanese economy would decline. However, McGray insisted that economic stagnation could be overcome, as Japan eventually recognized. The reason for his confidence in the cultural power of Japan is as follows.

The Japanese manga, pop culture, electronics companies such as Sony, Panasonic and Sharp, fashion and art like Miyake and Murakami have been popularized worldwide. This is an example of the cultural capital of Japan exercising its influence over other countries. For example, in the case of South Korea, Haksan Munhwasa said, “The Korean comic market is dominated by Japanese comics, which accounts for 70% of the market share.”⁵ On the other hand, if we look at the case of Taiwan, surveys have shown that 30% of young people are fans of Japanese culture such as music and drama.⁶

Judging from the above, it is clear that Japanese cultural capital has had an influence on other East Asian countries. Consequently, the point that should be confirmed next is how Japanese cultural capital has been popularized in other countries such as South Korea and Taiwan. This point is discussed below.

The concept of soft power in Japan was

primary discussed in 2001. After that, the government of Japan started to develop a concrete policy of soft power that could obtain economic benefit by focusing on cultural strategy in international relations. One such policy, which pursues the growth of tourism, is the so-called “Yokoso Japan.” Through tourism, the government hopes that foreigners will show an interest in the culture of Japan and visit the country in the near future. If so, soft power such as the cultural capital of Japan will have had an influence on people overseas.

In particular, Japanese animation, movies and television shows have recently been popularized worldwide. The METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) announced a government plan to actively support Japan’s brand value.⁷ In other words, today the government recognizes soft power in terms of diplomatic strategy and economic development because there is attractive cultural capital.

Soft power in Japan is seen as a significant way of showing the country’s possibilities and brand value in international relations. That is to say, the main point of soft power in Japan is the fact that it has been developed as part of government policy. The next section will describe how soft power has developed in South Korea.

III. The form of soft Power in South Korea

The cultural capital of South Korea, known as “Hanryu” or “Kanryu,” was first used in Beijing in 1999. At that time, this word (Hanryu or Kanryu) was just used as expression to indicate “Korean pop music.”⁸ Subsequently, however,

the cultural capital of South Korea has rapidly expanded in Asian countries. For example, movies, TV dramas, theater, food and Korean popular music have also been categorized as “Hanryu” or “Kanryu.”⁹ In fact, according to a survey by the Korean Tourism Organization in 2004, foreigners ranked South Korean cultural capital in the following order: food, TV drama, movies, fashion, beauty, theater and computer games, etc.

If so, the first point to be discussed is the main causes for the spread of South Korean cultural capital to Japan and other East Asian countries. The first reason that the cultural capital of South Korea has expanded is due to an increase in the amount of cultural information exchange between nations by socio-changeable factors such as the digital revolution and globalization. In other words, the changing political-economic environment in international relations can be indicated as a primary cause.

The second reason is that some high quality cultural content has been produced within the last few years, as shown in Table 1. The profit generated by “Hanryu” or “Kanryu” has been increasing for several years now.

Based on the above information, we can see that South Korea has competitive power in the cultural market. In particular, the country in which South Korea’s cultural capital made the largest profit was Japan, at \$346 million.¹⁰ The increase in competitive power caused by high quality cultural contents has resulted in the expansion of South Korea’s cultural capital in other countries.

However, a particular point in terms of the

Table1. The economic profit of cultural capital

Profit factors	Income (millions of dollars)	Percentage of GDP
Export goods of cultural capital	918	0.07%
Tourism	825	0.09%
TV or Movie content	130	0.02%
Total	1,872	0.18%

(KITA Report, *Economic profit of Hanryu is 144.9 billion won*, 2005.5.4)

expansion of the cultural capital of South Korea is the fact that this phenomenon was not led by the policy and strategy of government but by the private sector, based in the business field. Take, for example, a company planning to make a profit in the Asian market for the first time. The company exported many music stars to the Asian market and created an amazing profit.¹¹ As a result, this was considered a successful corporation in the entertainment industry. In other words, the export of cultural capital of South Korea was led by the private sector. This means that South Korea's soft power was developed at the private level, not the political level. This point is in striking contrast to the developmental form of soft power in Japan, which was spearheaded by government policy.

IV. Two meanings of soft power between two nations

We can see from the above that the developmental form of soft power between Japan and South Korea until now has been in definite contrast. However, the area responsible for Japan's increase in soft power has moved from the public sector to the private sector. The reason that the Japanese government expects the expansion of cultural capital by the private sector is because leaving it to the public sector gives rise

to depreciation in the level of creative activity and the competitive power of co-operation for the development of cultural capital to be popularized in countries such as South Korea. Therefore, the government is leading the expansion of cultural capital by the private sector.

In other words, if the governments of Japan and South Korea hope to expand their cultural capital through their private sectors, the competition between the two nations will be serious. In fact, if the culture of Japan is spread in South Korea, Koreans may feel that Japan has 'invaded' the Korean peninsular, in a cultural sense. At the same time, Korea maintains a negative image about Japan, based on a past history of 36 years of occupation. That is to say, the expansion of cultural capital between nations, referred to as soft power, has the potential to develop into a cultural conflict.

On the other hand, competition for the expansion of cultural capital between nations could be discussed in a positive aspect. Briefly speaking, the expansion of cultural exchange between Japan and South Korea seems to be effective in terms of a deep mutual understanding through the spread of a free approach in the private sector.

Although soft power has contrasting character between Japan and South Korea, the positive

aspect of soft power between two nations is that it leads to the expansion of cultural exchange in two nations. Of course, as has already been mentioned, the negative side is that it brings antagonism between two nations because Koreans or Japanese feel their culture is being invaded by the other culture and that the profit of the cultural capital of their own country is being deprived by the other country's cultural products. However, the significant point in terms of understanding soft power is the fact that the competition for the expansion of cultural capital between the two nations is not, in fact, bringing cultural conflict between two nations but providing the opportunity to understand the different cultures that the two nations have to offer.

In the case of South Korea, accepting the cultural capital of Japan is effective in terms of learning a developed culture, and constructing new relations between two nations by overcoming the pain historical Japanese occupation and proceeding with international exchange at the private sector level through popular culture.

In the case of Japan, accommodating the cultural capital of South Korea can improve the negative image of South Korea as a poor country that has conflict problems surrounding territory such as Dokdo or Takeshima. As a result, South Korea might feel that Japan shows tolerance towards South Korea and that the Japanese market is a valuable place in which to increase national profit by selling the cultural capital of South Korea.

That is to say, through soft power, two nations

can change their relationship from one of confrontation or rivalry to one of coexistence. As evidence, they can share economic profit from buying and selling cultural capital and expanding mutual exchange in the private sector. In the end, it is worth noting that the meaning of soft power between Japan and South Korea has a reciprocal factor of antagonism and coexistence or commensalism.

V. The development and problems of soft power in East Asia

We have seen that soft power is a significant concept in constructing mutual relationships between nations in the modern world. With this in mind, this section will discuss the developmental problems of soft power in East Asia.

The first point about soft power in East Asia is how governmental policy can support the promotion of soft power by the private sector. In the case of Japan, soft power has been led by the government, as mentioned above.

However, a significant point is the fact that the cultural capital of other countries like South Korea and the US (for example, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Winter Sonata and Daejangum) were previously produced by the private sector even though the government used them as soft power after they had expanded worldwide. In other words, soft power was spread by the endeavor of corporations, the activity of human capital of the entertainment business and changes in the social environment such as globalization. It means that the framework of soft power has changed from being led by

government to being led by the private sector. Therefore, when the framework of soft power in the field of international relations in East Asia is discussed, its focus should be on the private sector.

The second point is the construction of the concept of soft power as being suitable in the context of the East Asian socio-economic and socio-political situations. In the case of the US, this nation has elements of both hard power, such as military power, and soft Power, such as Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Hollywood movies.

However, East Asian nations, at first, showed concern about soft power. The reason why Japan and South Korea focused on hard power rather than soft power is because those two countries do not have the elements of hard power, particularly military strength. This means that the political environment surrounding soft power is different between nations of East Asia and the US. Therefore, when we discuss how soft power in East Asia should be developed, first of all the essential political condition is that we consider the situation of each country. Then the framework of soft power that is suitable in East Asian nations can be constructed.

For the reasons mentioned above, the challenge of soft power in East Asia is to change the framework from the public sector to the private sector, considering the particular socio-economic and political situation in East Asia.

VI. Conclusion

This final section will summarize the main points that have been made in this paper. Soft power serves to transmit a nation's culture to

other nations and can lead to a rise in economic and cultural status. However, the fact that the concept and theory of soft power was fundamentally advocated in the US implies that the meaning of soft power is based on the political, economic and social situation of US. Therefore, this paper discussed the particular characteristics of soft power in East Asia through the example of international relations between Japan and South Korea. By analyzing developed forms of soft power between Japan and South Korea, this paper identified three significant problems in international relations between the two nations.

Firstly, soft power between Japan and South Korea has been developed by the contrasting subjects of operation and practice. In the case of Japan, soft power was promoted by the public sector and government policies. On the other hand, South Korea's soft power was promoted by the private sector.

Secondly, if we look at soft power from the point of view of international relations between two nations, soft power has two meanings.

One is that soft power can lead to cultural conflicts between two nations because the competition becomes serious in order to gain economic profit from cultural capital.

The other is that it can lead to a rise in cultural exchange at the private sector level because cultural capital between nations can be traded freely.

That is to say, it means that the soft power has two different meaning such as conflicts and coexistence in the point of view of international relations.

Thirdly, the framework of soft power in East Asia has moved to the private sector. The main reason is that East Asian countries, as represented by Japan and South Korea, have cultural capital that has been popularized worldwide, such as Dajangum, Winter Sonata, animation and sushi. Furthermore, if we consider that this cultural capital was created by the private sectors, it is expected that the framework of soft power in East Asia will be led the by private sector in order to promote sustainable national development through soft power.

In conclusion, the meaning of soft power from the point of view of international relations between Japan and South Korea is significant because cultural exchange between two nations will expand further in the future. And then, as described in this paper, the problem will be how the framework of soft power in East Asia can be led by the private sector in the future in order to promote free trade of cultural capital between nations and spread sustainable cultural exchange.

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