South Korea's Soft Power in the Era of the Covid-19 Pandemic —An Analysis of the Expert Survey in Europe

Seo-Young Cho, Eric J. Ballbach, Daniela Claus-Kim, Hyun Gyung Kim, Eun-Jeung Lee and Jaemin Shim

Since the recent outbreak of the Covid-19, South Korea has demonstrated successful pandemic management that can be exemplary to other countries. This paper analyzes how South Korea's responses to the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the perceptions of the country in Europe. Through a survey conducted with Korea experts in 16 European countries, this paper documents the positive recognition of South Korea's pandemic management by the European public. Part of the positive appraisal can be attributed to South Korea's extensive testing, high technology, and the culture of wearing a face mask, while the opinions were more mixed regarding its comprehensive tracking and tracing strategy due to privacy concerns. Furthermore, the findings of the survey show that Europeans' overall perception of South Korea has improved together with its Covid-19 management. This evidence suggests that the country's success in pandemic management can be an instrument of public diplomacy to enhance its soft power, for which the government of South Korea currently invests considerable efforts.

Keywords: Covid-19, South Korea, Expert survey, Public perceptions, Pandemic management, Soft power, Public diplomacy
JEL Classification: C83, H12, I18

Seo-Young Cho, Corresponding Autor, Free University of Berlin (FU-Berlin), Institute of Korean Studies (IKS), KDI School-FU-IKS Korea-Europe Program, Otto-von-Simson-Str. 11, 14195 Berlin, Germany. (Email): scho@zedat.fu-berlin.de, (Tel): +49 30 838 56894; Eric J. Ballbach (FU-Berlin IKS); Daniela Claus-Kim (FU-Berlin IKS); Hyun Gyung Kim (FU-Berlin IKS); Eun-Jeung Lee (FU-Berlin IKS); Jaemin Shim (Hong Kong Baptist University, Department of Political Science).

We are grateful to the KDI School of Public Policy and Management for providing financial support. We also thank the Korea experts who participated in the survey.

[**Seoul Journal of Economics** 2020, Vol. 33, No. 4]
DOI: 10.22904/sje.2020.33.4.005

I. Introduction

This study aims to identify whether South Korea's successful pandemic management has changed public perceptions of the country in Europe in the time of Covid-19. Since the World Health Organization declared the spread of Covid-19 as a pandemic on 11th March 2020, the international community and governments have struggled to cope with this unprecedented health crisis in the 21st century. In South Korea, the first confirmed case was reported on 20th January 2020, which was relatively earlier than in many other countries. Since then, the government of South Korea has conducted rapid and extensive tests, isolation of infected persons in public shelters, and tracking, tracing, and quarantining those who contacted infected ones. In this manner, South Korea has handled the pandemic without an entire lockdown of cities or the whole country, different from many other countries in Europe which implemented massive restrictions of human contacts and mobility. Whereas one should continuously observe further spread of the pandemic, South Korea has so far proven successful in its pandemic management with a Covid-19 related mortality rate as low as 1.75 percent (compared to 2.92 percent worldwide), an incident rate below 50 per 100,000, and cumulative cases of 24,422 (as of 08 October 2020).[1] In contrast, European countries have been affected by Covid-19 to a considerably higher degree than South Korea – for instance, Italy has 333,940 cases and France 693,603 – both countries are similar to South Korea in terms of population sizes.[2] Seeing this, the European media have starting to report South Korea's pandemic responses and pay attention to its success in fighting Covid-19 (see DW News, 18 March 2020; The Guardian, 20 March 2020; BBC, 23 March 2020).

[1] See the statistics of the Ministry of Health and Welfare of the Republic of Korea. http://ncov.mohw.go.kr/

[2] See Covid-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at johns Hopkins University. https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6

By taking this observation as a starting point, this study investigates changes in European perceptions of South Korea in the period of Covid-19. To do so, we conducted a survey to collect opinions of experts in Korean studies at European universities who evaluated public perceptions in their respective countries. The results of the survey show that the public in Europe well-recognize South Korea's pandemic management and furthermore, the overall perceptions of South Korea have positively changed. This evidence proposes South Korea's successful pandemic management as an instrument of public diplomacy to promote its soft power worldwide.

II. Research Method

A. Survey Design

The survey aims to probe public perception of European countries regarding South Korea's responses to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. To this end, the survey was designed for Korea experts in Europe in order to gauge their assessments of public attitudes and perceptions towards South Korea's Covid-19 governance.

The survey consists of close-ended, open-ended, and rating type questions and was implemented as an online survey through the EU Survey online survey management system. Experts in Korean Studies were contacted directly via email and were asked to participate in the survey (see Section II, *B.* that describes participant recruitment in more detail).

The survey is structured into five parts (see the survey questionnaire in Appendix C), beginning with the first part on the overall perceptions of South Korea's Covid-19 pandemic management in the respective European countries. The second part focuses specifically on three essential components of the pandemic management, *i.e.* testing, tracking, and tracing, and includes a set of more detailed questions on the individual elements of the strategies. This part was designed to find how South Korea's extensive testing and contact tracking and tracing strategies were perceived, if it's extensive testing strategy provided particular lessons to the respective country, and if its tracking and contact tracing measures raised concerns about privacy protection. The question on privacy protection was of particular importance in designing the survey and thus, follow-up questions were inquired in

this regard to identify types of privacy concerns raised in the respective countries.

In the third part of the survey, further influencing factors were incorporated. In specific, the experts were asked to evaluate public perceptions of South Korea's innovative technological solutions in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic as well as changes in public perceptions regarding wearing a face mask. The fourth part extends questions beyond the boundaries of Covid-19 pandemic management by integrating questions about South Korea's public image as a whole, which can link the country's Covid-19 governance and public diplomacy. In closing in the fifth part, a set of demographic questions were asked for statistical purposes.

B. Korea Export Pool in Europe and Participant Recruitment

To implement the survey, we contacted 54 renowned Korea experts from the 27 EU member countries and the United Kingdom (UK). They were selected based on their expertise on Korea and their affiliation and/or position within universities, Korean Studies institutes, other related research institutes, and high profile think tanks. Experts from 16 countries responded to the survey. The countries from which we received feedbacks are Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK (see Appendix A). 23 online questionnaires were completed, amounting to a response rate of 42.5 percent. The gender ratio is 1: 1.09 (female: male) with 11 female and 12 male respondents. The age distribution of the survey respondents shows a high representation of participants within the age range of 40–49 years (around 48 percent), followed by the age range of 30–39 years (22 percent), 50–59 years (17 percent), and 13 percent of participants over the age of 60. As for the participants' institutional affiliation, multiple-choice selection was made available, with a total of 82.61 percent stating their affiliation with universities and 26.09 percent with think tanks and research institutes.

III. Analytical Findings

In this section, the overall and country-specific findings of the expert survey are discussed through analyzing descriptive statistics

and qualitative answers provided by the respondents. Accordingly, the survey outcomes are presented as stylized facts summarized in tables.

Before starting the discussions, the robustness of the findings was examined by checking for the consistency of the answers. The results of a correlation test (Rodger and Nicewander 1988) show positive correlations across the answers that each respondent provided: Pearson correlation coefficients r = 0.1776~0.9389 (see Appendix B), except the negative correlations between the importance of South Korea's technological solutions (*Tech)* with the other variables. *Tech* is an exception because this question received positive responses from those who evaluated perceptions of South Korea's other types of strategies negatively. The negative correlations between *Tech* and the other variables do not necessarily stand against the consistency of the answers but, rather, indicate the specialty of South Korea's status in technological development (see Section III, C. below). The generally positive correlations across the majority of the variables corroborate that the respondents answered the questions in a consistent manner to a large extent.

On the other hand, whether the expert evaluation presented in this survey can be representative to public perceptions in the respective countries remains as an issue. The central motivation of this survey is to elucidate informed opinions on the chosen issues expressed by experts so that assessments are well-focused to reflect public debates in respective countries. Yet, as the survey relied on a small number (1–2) of experts for each country, the findings are not free of personal biases. In nine out of 16 countries, evaluation was carried out by one expert only. In the other seven countries, two experts provided assessments: the Czech Republic (hereinafter Czech), France, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. However, comparing the responses between the experts from the same country assures a high level of commonality between their answers: r = 0.63 for the Czech and the UK, respectively; r = 0.75 for Poland and Spain, respectively; and r = 0.88 for Romania and Sweden, respectively. An exception is France whose two experts often expressed conflicting views (r = 0.50, *i.e.* they agreed on half of the answers only). Nevertheless, the relatively high level of the similarities of the answers in the aforementioned six countries supports the representativeness of the experts' evaluation to a considerable extent. But caution is still required in generalizing the findings given the remaining differences and the small number of observations.

A. Main Findings of Public Perceptions

Overall, the majority of the Korea experts in Europe who were surveyed rated the general perceptions of South Korea's Covid-19 pandemic management positively (see Table and Figure 1). 19 out of 23 respondents (in 13 countries) answered that the overall public perceptions were either positive (11) or very positive (8) in their respective countries.[3] The countries whose experts provided very positive assessments are the Czech, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the UK. Among them, Romania and the UK have two respondents, respectively, and both experts in each country agreed on very positive public perceptions, reinforcing the particularly high recognition of South Korea's Covid-19 management there. None of the respondents evaluated the perceptions negatively, while two respondents – one in France and the other in the Netherlands[4] – were neutral (note that France has two experts, and the other French expert rated the perceptions positively). The experts in Austria and Denmark answered, '*I don't know*'.

TABLE 1[5]

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH KOREA'S COVID-19 PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT

Answer	No.	Ratio	Countries
Very positive	8	34.78%	Czech (1), Poland (1), Portugal (1), Romania (2), Spain (1), UK (2)
Positive	11	47.83%	Czech (1), Finland (1), France (1), Germany (1), Italy (1), Lithuania (1), Poland (1), Slovakia (1), Spain (1), Sweden (2)
Neutral	2	8.7%	France (1), Netherlands (1)
Negative	0	0%	
Very negative	0	0%	
I don't know	2	8.7%	Austria (1), Denmark (1)

[3] These results correspond with media coverages that highlight South Korea's successful pandemic management (see Diplomat, 30. March 2020; Handelblatt, 15. March 2020; Süddeutsche Zeitung, 23. April 2020; TAZ, 27. February 2020 and 21. April 2020).

[4] The expert in the Netherlands described that South Korea's pandemic management was not appreciated because it was seen as part of collectivist culture and violating individual privacy.

[5] Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of answers in each country.

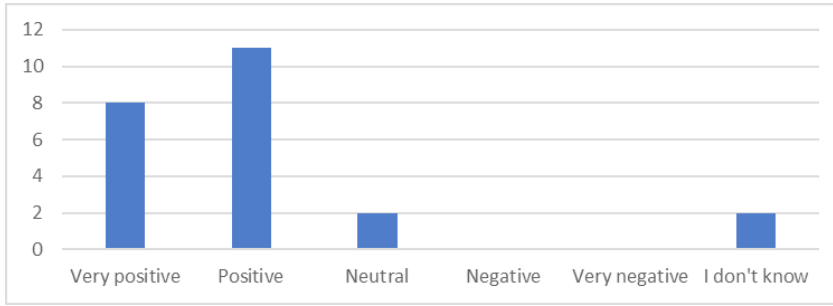

Figure 1
Overall Perceptions of South Korea's Covid-19 Pandemic Management

When the experts were asked to evaluate perceptions of South Korea's extensive Covid-19 tests in specific, positive assessments remain consistently. The 19 experts who answered positively regarding the overall perceptions above also responded that South Korea's extensive testing was perceived either very positive or positive by the media, government, and general public in their countries (Table and Figure 2). Among them, one expert in the UK provided additional comments on how extensive tests of Covid-19 in several East Asian countries were differently perceived; Singapore's approach was praised first in the UK, and then South Korea's, while Taiwan was not recognized, and Japan was rather criticized. In contrast, two experts in the Netherlands and France – who rated the overall perceptions above as '*neutral*' – assessed the perception of the extensive testing as negative in their countries. These experts explained that South Korea's approach of extensive testing was not favored by the government and the media and considered unpractical or impossible. Nonetheless, the French expert further commented that such negative responses may have originated from public unawareness and the lack of capabilities to implement extensive tests at the point of time surveyed.

Among the 19 experts who provided positive evaluation of South Korea's extensive testing, 14 agreed that the South Korean strategy was considered in public debates as providing lessons to their countries (Table and Figure 3). These include ten countries: the Czech, France, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and the UK. South Korea's approach was particularly well-received as an exemplary lesson in Eastern Europe. The experts in the Czech Republic,

TABLE 2
PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH KOREA'S EXTENSIVE TESTING AND COMPREHENSIVE TRACKING AND TRACING

	Extensive Testing			Comprehensive Tracking and Tracing		
Answer	No.	Ratio	Countries	No.	Ratio	Countries
Very positive	10	43.48%	Czech (1), Poland (1), Portugal (1), Romania (2), Spain (2), Slovakia (1), UK (2)	2	8.7%	Czech (1), UK (1)
Positive	9	39.13%	Czech (1), Germany (1), Finland (1), France (1), Italy (1), Lithuania (1), Poland (1), Sweden (2)	3	13.04%	Czech (1), Romania (1), Spain (1)
Neutral	0	0%		10	43.48%	Finland (1), Germany (1), Italy (1), Poland (1), Portugal (1), Slovakia (1), Spain (1), Sweden (2), UK (1)
Negative	2	8.7%	France (1), Netherlands (1)	2	8.7%	Netherlands (1), Poland (1)
Very negative	0	0%		2	8.7%	France (2)
I don't know	2	8.7%	Austria (1), Denmark (1)	4	17.39%	Austria (1), Denmark (1), Lithuania (1), Romania (1)

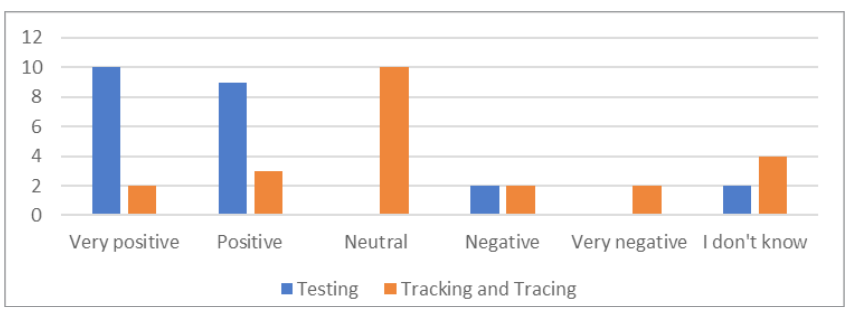

FIGURE 2
PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH KOREA'S EXTENSIVE TESTING AND COMPREHENSIVE TRACKING AND TRACING

Lithuania, Slovakia, and Romania reported that South Korea was often referred to by politicians as a positive example in fighting Covid-19. Interestingly, experts in Sweden and Italy who evaluated the public perceptions of South Korea's extensive testing positively did not find that the South Korean model was regarded exemplary in their countries. A Swedish expert explained that it was because Sweden decided a

TABLE 3
SOUTH KOREA'S EXTENSIVE TESTING STRATEGY AS LESSONS TO THE RESPECTIVE COUNTRY

Answer	No.	Ratio	Countries
Yes	14	60.87%	Czech (1), France (1), Germany (1), Lithuania (1), Poland (2), Portugal (1), Romania (2), Slovakia (1), Spain (2), UK (2)
No	6	26.09%	Austria (1), France (1), Italy (1), Netherlands (1), Sweden (2)
I don't know	3	13.04%	Czech (1), Denmark (1), Finnland (1)

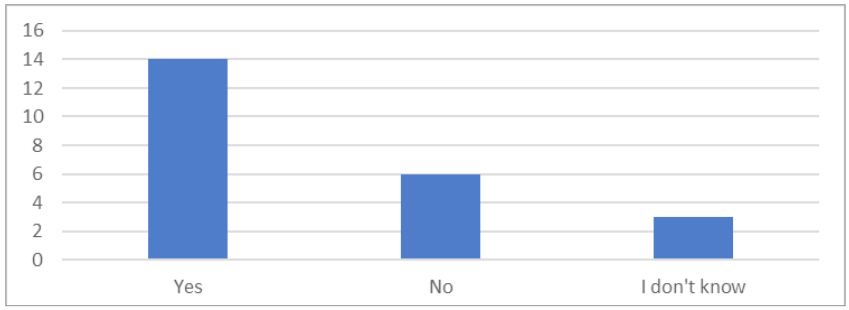

FIGURE 3
SOUTH KOREA'S EXTENSIVE TESTING STRATEGY AS LESSONS TO THE RESPECTIVE COUNTRY

different strategy – *i.e.* herd immunity – instead of extensive testing. The other expert from the same country provided a different view that limited capacity to test prevented Sweden from adopting South Korea's approach. The expert in Italy added that South Korea was not seen as providing lessons for Italy not because its approach was valueless but because the public was unaware of the South Korean model. This view of public unawareness was shared by the other experts in France and Spain.

When the respondents were asked to evaluate public perceptions of their own Covid-19 testing, the Korea experts in Europe assessed them more negatively. In answering the question, *whether one's own government was seen as having conducted tests early enough*, 14 experts in ten countries[6] disagreed, while only six agreed (in addition, three

[6] The Czech, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain,

chose, '*I don't know*'). In another question about the comprehensiveness of Covid-19 tests conducted by one's own government, 15 experts in ten countries[7] answered '*no*' and six '*yes*' (as well as two answers of '*I don't know*'). This result suggests that in countries where public perceptions of own testing strategies were negative, South Korea's extensive testing was considered as providing a positive reference. This applies to the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and the UK.

In contrast to the generally positive perceptions of South Korea's extensive testing, the experts evaluated public perceptions of its comprehensive tracking and tracing less positively. Only five experts – the Czech (2), Romania (1), Spain (1), and the UK (1) – rated perceptions of the tracking and tracing strategies (very) positive – compared to the 19 positive answers regarding the extensive testing (Table and Figure 2). The majority (10) answered that the perceptions were neither positive nor negative (*i.e.* neutral) in this area of pandemic management, while two (the Netherlands and Poland) gave negative assessments.

Qualitative comments by the experts provide two alternative explanations for this low level of public perceptions of South Korea's tracking and tracing strategy. One is unawareness or no interest in South Korea's approach in their countries. This applies to Denmark, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and the UK. The other is public concerns about privacy protection as the implementation of comprehensive tracking and tracing requires the utilization of personal data collected through mobile phones and digital applications. In South Korea, private data collection became legalized aftermath of MERS-epidemic in 2015 by amending the Infectious Disease Control and Prevention Act (IDCPA). Privacy concerns were expressed by experts in Finland, France, and Spain, among others. In fact, perceptions of comprehensive tracking and tracing reveal conflicts in deciding between public good (public health) and individual rights (privacy protection), and the mixed assessments of South Korea's approach mirror such conflicts in values. In the following section, we further investigate public

Sweden and the UK. In the Czech Republic, France, and Sweden, however, the experts provided conflicting evaluation: *i.e.* one answer of '*yes*' and the other '*no*'.

[7] The Czech, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. In France and Sweden, however, the experts provided conflicting evaluation: *i.e.* one answer of '*yes*' and the other '*no*'.

TABLE 4
DO SOUTH KOREA'S TRACKING AND TRACING MEASURES RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT PRIVACY PROTECTION?

Answer	No.	Ratio	Countries
Yes	11	47.83%	Finland (1), France (2), Germany (1), Italy (1), Netherlands (1), Poland (2), Spain (1), Sweden (1), UK (1)
No	4	17.39%	Czech (1), Portugal (1), Slovakia (1), Spain (1)
I don't know	8	34.78%	Austria (1), Czech (1), Denmark (1), Lithuania (1), Romania (2), Sweden (1), UK (1)

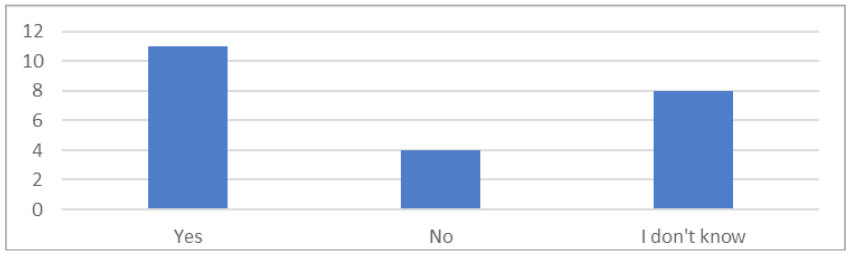

FIGURE 4
DO SOUTH KOREA'S TRACKING AND TRACING MEASURES RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT PRIVACY PROTECTION?

concerns about privacy protection that arise in South Korea's pandemic management.

B. Concerns about Privacy Protection

As a follow-up question in the domain of South Korea's comprehensive tracking and tracing approach, the experts were further asked to answer whether the tracking and tracing measures raised concerns about privacy protection in their respective countries. This question was aimed to identify if Europeans considered South Korea's tracking and tracing strategy as potentially scarifying individual rights for common interest. 11 experts in nine countries agreed that such an approach triggered privacy concerns in their countries, while four disagree (Table 4). A relatively high share of the experts seemed unaware of this issue as they answered, '*I don't know*' (eight out of 23, *i.e.* 35 percent). As listed in Table 4, the experts in Central and Northern European countries tended to express concerns about privacy violation that the tracking and tracing strategy may prompt.

In subsequent questions, the experts were asked to select types of privacy concerns observed in their countries with respect to South Korea's tracking and tracing strategy: legality of the approach, concerns expressed by the general population, technical challenges, and political opposition. 13 experts in 11 countries emphasized concerns raised by the general population because South Korea's comprehensive tracking and tracing measures were seen as violating individual freedom (Table and Figure 5). Among these 13 experts, ten added that South Korea's approach also caused legal concerns in their countries, as such measures may be incompatible with the domestic institutions (France) and infringe civil liberty (Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden). Additionally, the expert from Finland explained that South Korea's approach was perceived as increasing risks of data misuse and discrimination against patients. Besides, five experts in Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK addressed political opposition to South

TABLE 5

TYPES OF CONCERNS REGARDING PRIVACY PROTECTION

Type	No.	Countries
Legal Issue	10	Finland (1), France (1), Germany (1), Italy (1), Netherlands (1), Poland (2), Spain (1), Sweden (1), UK (1)
Concerns from the Population	13	Czech (1), Finland (1), France (2), Germany (1), Italy (1), Netherlands (1), Poland (2), Romania (1), Spain (1), Sweden (1), UK (1)
Political Opposition	5	Italy (1), Poland (1), Spain (1), Sweden (1), UK (1)
Technical Challenges	5	Germany (1), Italy (1), Netherlands (1), Poland (1), Sweden (1)
No Concerns Listed	5	Austria (1), Denmark (1), Lithuania (1), Portugal (1), Slovakia (1)

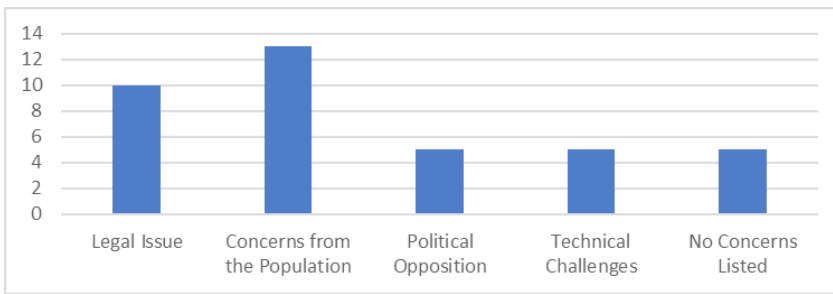

FIGURE 5

TYPES OF CONCERNS REGARDING PRIVACY PROTECTION

Korea's tracking and tracing approach.

The other type of concerns expressed is technical challenges in adopting the South Korean model that was addressed by experts in five countries: Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden. They described challenges such as: difficulties in developing secure applications (Germany), the lack of efficient data collection and analysis systems (Poland), and the lack of capacity to build testing and tracking and tracing applications (Netherlands). These answers hint that South Korea's comprehensive tracking and tracing is viewed in Europe not only as infringement of privacy but also as overwhelming technologies. As to shed light on this issue in more detail, we discuss the perceptions of South Korea's technological utilization in fighting Covid-19 in the following section.

C. Perceptions of South Korea's Digital Technology

The majority of the experts (16 out of 23 in 12 countries) answered that South Korea's innovative technological solutions were perceived important for the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic (Table and Figure 6). The countries whose experts rated the high level of perceived importance include not only countries which provided positive overall assessments above, but also France and the Netherlands, in which their experts reserved from positive evaluation of the previous questions. Seven experts regarded the level of the importance modest (*neutral*) and none of the experts gave negative evaluation. This result reflects a high level of recognition in Europe for the role of South Korea's technological utilization.

Moreover, 15 experts in 12 countries answered that adopting a digitalization approach similar to South Korea's was discussed in their countries: the Czech, Denmark, Finland, France (2), Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Slovakia, Spain (2), and the UK (2). The experts in Italy and Slovakia added that their governments were trying to develop applications and network systems for tracking and tracing that were comparable to South Korea's. However, the Italian expert expressed doubts about the utilization of such technological solutions in Italy due to public unawareness. In the Czech Republic, the level of technology required was seen as too advanced to adopt. In several other countries, South Korea's digitalized measures of tracking and tracing were not recommended given privacy concerns (Denmark, France, and

Table 6
Perceived Importance of Technology in South Korea's Pandemic Management

Answer	No.	Ratio	Countries
Very important	6	26.09%	Czech (1), Netherlands (1), Poland (1), Romania (1), Spain (1), UK (1)
Important	10	43.48%	France (2), Germany (1), Italy (1), Lithuania (1), Poland (1), Romania (1), Slovakia (1), Spain (1), Sweden (1)
Neutral	7	30.43%	Austria (1), Czech (1), Denmark (1), Finland (1), Portugal (1), Sweden (1), UK (1)
Not very important	0	0%	
Unimportant	0	0%	

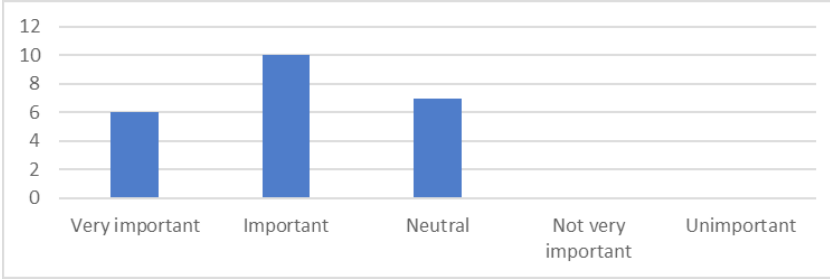

Figure 6
Perceived Importance of Technology in South Korea's Pandemic Management

the UK) and the perceived overuse of technology (Denmark).

As such, South Korea's technological utilization for the pandemic management is well-recognized in Europe in general, but, at the same time, a considerable number of European countries exhibit reluctance to adopt the South Korean model because of: (i) concerns about privacy protection and (ii) technological challenges and unawareness.

D. Perceptions of Wearing a Face Mask

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, perceptions of wearing a face mask (that was previously uncommon in Europe and often seen as practice in Asia) have changed and it is now recommended in many European countries as a means of contracting the spread of the virus (Die Zeit, 02. April 2020). In this survey, 18 Korea experts agreed on the recent change in public perceptions of wearing a face mask in their 14 countries: Austria, Czech (2), France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania,

Table 7
Perceptions of Wearing a Face Mask in South Korea as a Response to Covid-19

Answer	No.	Ratio	Countries
Very positive	9	39.13%	Czech (1), Poland (2), Portugal (1), Romania (1), Spain (2), Sweden (1), UK (1)
Positive	8	34.78%	Czech (1), France (2), Germany (1), Lithuania (1), Romania (1), Slovakia (1), Sweden (1)
Neutral	5	21.74%	Austria (1), Denmark (1), Finland (1), Italy (1), UK (1)
Negative	0	0%	
Very negative	1	4.35%	Netherlands (1)

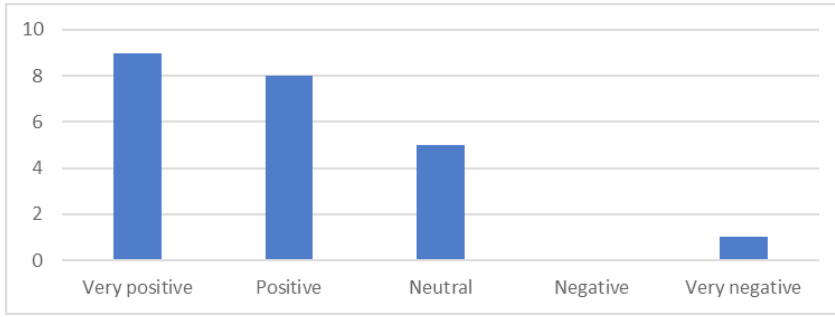

Figure 7
Perceptions of Wearing a Face Mask in South Korea as a Response to Covid-19

the Netherlands, Poland (2), Portugal, Romania (2), Slovakia, Spain (2), Sweden, and the UK. Most experts found the change positive as wearing a face mask was perceived as a necessary step of precaution[8], except the one in the Netherlands who reported a negative change. Furthermore, 17 experts in 15 countries evaluated public perceptions of wearing a face mask practiced in South Korea positively (Table and Figure 7).

Among the various areas of South Korea's responses to the Covid-19

[8] While providing positive evaluation, the experts in Italy and the UK were cautious about this change because public perceptions might be guided by misunderstanding about the usage of face masks (*i.e.* as a means of protecting oneself instead of others). Also, the expert in Slovakia pointed out that it was still too early to determine changes in perceptions of face masks.

pandemic surveyed in this paper, perceptions of wearing a face mask disclose differences in cultural practice between Korea and European countries. The positive finding highlighted in this section implies that cultural perceptions – which are usually rooted in daily practice – can be changed in a short term, especially when society faces a crisis. This implies that South Korea's successful pandemic management can enable the country to update and improve its image in other countries, which has been shaped, in part, based on cultural differences or biases.

E. Covid-19 Pandemic and South Korea's Public Image in Europe

As the final focus of the survey, the experts appraised public perceptions of South Korea as a whole that may have changed recently during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. This question was inquired to identify whether the positive recognitions South Korea received for its pandemic management can be transformed to improving its image in general. As presented in Table and Figure 8, 13 experts in 12 countries reported positive changes in South Korea's public images in their countries, while nine respondents in seven countries found no change in this respect. Only one answered that South Korea's image has been worsen during this period – the expert in the Netherlands who expressed throughout the survey that the public perceived South Korea's pandemic management as part of authoritarian culture.

Among those who provided positive evaluation, five experts in Poland, Portugal, Romania, and the UK (2) reported '*very positive changes*' in public perceptions of South Korea. In particular, both experts in the UK described that South Korea appeared in the media as one of a few successful countries in the pandemic management. The expert in Poland emphasized South Korea as having efficient organization and the application of innovative measures to deal with the crisis. In addition, eight experts rated '*positive changes*' and among them, one in Finland explained that South Korea was more often and positively mentioned in the media during this pandemic crisis, especially after launching close cooperation in conducting Covid-19 testing between the two countries.

On the other hand, nine experts in seven countries estimated no change in public perceptions of South Korea. The experts in Slovakia and Sweden clarified that South Korea's image had already been positive and remained positive during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the other experts in Austria and Denmark reported

Table 8
Recent Changes in Perceptions on South Korea

Very Positive Change	Positive Change	No Change	Negative Change	Very Negative Change
Poland (1), Portugal (1), Romania (1), UK (2)	Finland (1), France (1), Germany (1), Italy (1), Lithuania (1), Poland (1), Romania (1), Spain (1)	Austria (1), Czech (2), Denmark (1), France (1), Slovakia (1), Spain (1), Sweden (2)	Netherlands (1)	
5	8	9	1	0

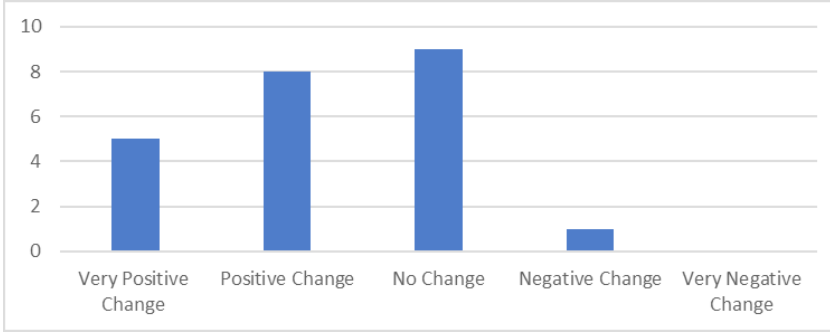

Figure 8
Recent Changes in Perceptions on South Korea

no change in South Korea's image because of no interest there.

Overall, the evidence of positively changing perceptions of South Korea documented in this survey supports the country's successful pandemic management as an instrument of public diplomacy to improve its image in Europe – which gives a green light to South Korea's current efforts to enhance its soft power (Ayhan 2016).

IV. Conclusion

This paper has examined the European perceptions of South Korea's recent Covid-19 pandemic management. The results of the expert survey show that the majority of the Korea experts evaluated the public perceptions of South Korea's pandemic management overall positively – in particular, the government's extensive testing, innovative technology

application, and face masks were well-recognized. Furthermore, the majority of experts noted that South Korea has improved its public image in Europe alongside its pandemic management. Notwithstanding the largely positive reception, experts were divided when it came to the comprehensive tracking and tracing method implemented by the government. Roughly half of the respondents answered that such a tracking and tracing approach triggered worries about privacy protection which might conflict with the respective country's existing laws and public interest.

In interpreting the results, one should be noted that the survey is not without its limitations. First, as discussed earlier, the sample size is not large enough to generalize the findings and we were not able to include a full set of European countries in the survey as experts in several countries did not respond. Second, we should keep in mind that Covid-19 is an ongoing problem and therefore, it might be too early to tell whether and how public perceptions will shift. The limitations of the paper necessitate extended follow-up studies when more observations are readily available in the future.

Nonetheless, the Europeans' overall positive acknowledgement of South Korea's pandemic management offers policy implications on the country's public diplomacy. In recent years, South Korea's entertainment and popular culture, known as the Korean Wave, has drawn interest and attention abroad. Accordingly, South Korea has seen a steady increase in its soft power ranking, moving from 22nd in 2016 to 19th in 2019 (McClory 2019). In addition to its cultural influences, the finding that South Korea is being recognized as a model case in managing a global pandemic like Covid-19 is apt to shed positive light on its hitherto underrecognized transparency and responsiveness of governance. Together with the latest contributions of the Korean Wave, its Covid-19 pandemic management is expected to be a potential boost to the South Korea's ongoing efforts of promoting public diplomacy.

(Received 8 October, 2020; Accepted 8 October 2020)

References

Ayhan, Kadir. *Korea's Public Diplomacy*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea and Hangang Network for Academic and Cultural Exchanges: Seoul, 2016.

BBC. *Coronavirus: South Korea Reports Lowest Number of New Cases in Four Weeks.* (March 23, 2020), London.

Die Tageszeitung (TAZ). *Coronavirus in Südkorea: Virus versus Rechtsstaat*. (February 27, 2020), Berlin.

_____. *Wahlen in Südkorea – Vorbild für die USA*. (April 21, 2020), Berlin.

Die Zeit. *Atemschutzmasken: Im Angesicht des Virus.* (April 02, 2020), Hamburg.

Diplomat. *A Democratic Response to Coronavirus: Lessons from South Korea.* (March 30, 2020), Tokyo.

Deutsche Welle (DW) News. *World in Progress: South Korea's Approach to Dealing with Coronavirus*. (March 18, 2020), Bonn.

Handelblatt. *Was Deutschland im Kampf gegen das Coronavirus von Südkorea und Taiwan lernen kann*. (March 15, 2020), Duesseldorf.

Hankook Ilbo. '대한민국 국민인 게 자랑스럽다' 12%p 늘어난 80%. 코로나 대응이 긍정 영향. (May 15, 2020), Seoul.

McClory, Jonathan. The Soft Power 30–A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019. Washington, Portland, 2019.

Ministry of Health and Welfare of the Republic of Korea. Covid-19 Statistics (http://ncov.mohw.go.kr/bdBoardList_Real.do/) (retrieved on 19. May. 2020).

Rodger, Joseph Lee and W. Alan Nicewander. Thirteen Ways to Look at the Correlation Coefficient. *The American Statistician* 42 (1988): 59-66.

Süddeutsche Zeitung. *Interview am Morgen: Corona in Südkorea.* (April 23, 2020), Munich.

The Guardian. *South Korea Took Rapid, Intrusive Measures against Covid-19: and They Worked.* (March 20, 2020), London.

Appendix A: List of Countries Surveyed

Country	Number of Experts Surveyed
Austria	1
Czech Republic	2
Denmark	1
Finland	1
France	2
Germany	1
Italy	1
Lithuania	1
Netherlands	1
Poland	2
Portugal	1
Romania	2
Slovakia	1
Spain	2
Sweden	2
United Kingdom	2
16 countries	23 experts

Appendix B: Binary Correlation Matrix

	Overall	Testing	Lesson	Tracking	Tech	Mask	Korea
Overall	1.0000						
Testing	0.9389	1.0000					
Lesson	0.5723	0.5373	1.0000				
Tracking	0.3996	0.4902	0.1986	1.0000			
Tech	0.1951	0.0271	0.4377	-0.1053	1.0000		
Mask	0.5840	0.5483	0.5316	0.2938	0.3232	1.0000	
Korea	0.6104	0.6350	0.5676	0.1776	0.1062	0.3637	1.0000

Note: Pears correlation coefficients are reported. Observation number N = 23
The variables correspond to the following tables: Overall (Table 1), Testing (Table 2), Lesson (Table 3), Tracking (Table 4), Tech (Table 6), Mask (Table 7), and Korea (Table 8).

Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire

Survey on South Korea's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

This survey aims to probe how Korea experts in Europe evaluate public attitudes and perceptions towards Korea's Covid-19 governance. The respective questions therefore primarily address individual elements of South Korea's response strategy. Of particular importance is the potential conflict between pandemic management and individual privacy (data protection). The survey was developed by a team of researchers of the "Korea-Europe Program at the Institute of Korean Studies, Freie Universität Berlin and is directed by Prof. Dr LEE Eun-Jeung. The survey is for academic purposes only. Participation in the survey is voluntary and anonymous. The data collected does not allow any conclusions to be drawn about responding individuals. The questionnaires are viewed and evaluated exclusively by the responsible research team at the Institute of Korean Studies at Freie Universität Berlin, who aggregate the results. The collected data will be treated strictly confidential. All individual details will be deleted after evaluation of the data. Only the aggregated data will be published. The collected data will not be forwarded to third parties.

<1> Overall response of the South Korean government

- How would you rate the overall perception regarding the management of the South Korean government to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in your country?
  - Very positive
  - Positive
  - Neutral
  - Negative
  - Very negative
  - I don't know

  Space for additional remarks

<2> Perception of Individual Elements of South Korea's Response Strategy

South Korea implements extensive tests for Covid19 that provide

fast results and are also free. Therefore, the country has been able to test a larger share of the population than most other countries since the outbreak of Covid19. Currently, South Korea has a capacity of conducting more than 20,000 tests a day and the number of the total tests implemented has been aggregated to more than a half million since January this year.

- In your opinion, how is South Korea's approach of extensive testing perceived in your country – by the media, government, general public, etc.?
  - Very positive
  - Positive
  - Neutral
  - Negative
  - Very negative
  - I don't know

  Space for additional remarks

- In the public debate of your country, is South Korea's extensive testing strategy considered as providing lessons to your own country?
  - Yes
    - If yes, please specify
  - No
    - If no, please specify why
  - I don't know

  Space for additional remarks

- According to the expert debate in your country, did your government test early enough?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know

  Space for additional remarks

- According to the expert debate in your country, did your government test comprehensively enough?
  - Yes
  - No

- I don't know
Space for additional remarks

In line with an extensive testing strategy, South Korea also extensively tracked and traced people who had been tested positive for Covid-19. South Korea implements extensive tracking and tracing systems by utilizing anonymized data gathered through mobile phone, credit card, and hospital records. With this approach, the government is able to identify groups of people at risk who are exposure to Covid19 and share relevant information with them.

- In your opinion, how is South Korea's approach of comprehensive tracking and tracing perceived in your country – by the media, government, general public, etc.?
  - Very positive
  - Positive
  - Neutral
  - Negative
  - Very negative
  - I don't know
  Space for additional remarks

- Did the extensive tracking and tracing measures raise concerns about privacy protection in the debate on the evaluation of Korea's response strategy in the public and expert debate in your country?
  - No
  - Yes
  - I don't know
  Space for additional remarks

- If yes, what were the main concerns in the respective debate in your country?
  - legal issues
    · Yes
    · No
    · If yes, please specify
  Space for additional remarks

  - Technical challenges

· Yes
· No
· If yes, please specify
Space for additional remarks

- Concern of the people regarding their privacy rights
· Yes
· No
· If yes, please specify
Space for additional remarks

- Political opposition
· Yes
· No
· If yes, please specify
Space for additional remarks

- Others (please specify)
Space for additional remarks

<3> Further influencing factors on the evaluation of South Korea's response strategy

a. South Korea's Digitalization

• In the public and expert debate in your country, how was the importance of innovative technological solutions in South Korea's response strategy perceived?
- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Not very important
- Unimportant

• Did the public and expert debate in your country discuss if a similar digitalization approach (*e.g.* digitalized information sharing and tracking and tracing systems) could be available and adopted in your country?
- Yes
- If yes, please specify

- No

Space for additional remarks

b. Wearing a face mask for protection

- How do you evaluate perception about South Koreans' practice of wearing a face mask as a method of protection against Covid19 in your country?
  - Very positive
  - Positive
  - Neutral
  - Negative
  - Very negative

- Wearing a face mask was rather uncommon in many European countries in the past and it was often considered a 'Asian thing'. Do you think that the perception about wearing a face mask has changed recently with respect to fight against Covid-19?
  - Yes
    - If yes, specify whether the perception has changed more positively or negatively?
  - No

Space for additional remarks

<4> *Questions on possible change of South Korea's overall image following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic*

- Did the perception of South Korea change during the previous months?
  - Yes
  - No
- If yes, please specify how
  - Very positive
  - Positive
  - Neutral
  - Negative
  - Very negative

Space for additional remarks

<5> Demographic questions

Please specify your institutional affiliation
- Think tank
- University
- Civil society / NGO
- Government official
- International Organization
- Other
  · Please specify

Please specify your nationality place of residency
- Europe
  · Please specify
- Korea
  · Please specify your gender
- Female
- Male
- Other
  · Please specify your age
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older