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ART AS A TOOL OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND THE PART OF CREATIVE INDUSTRY: CASE STUDY OF SOUTH KOREA

In the context of rapidly changing global political and economic dynamics, the study of the interplay between culture, communication, and global transformations is becoming increasingly relevant. In recent years, particular attention has been paid to issues related to cultural diplomacy and soft power as tools of state influence on the international stage. This article explores approaches to analyzing cultural diplomacy through the lens of contemporary theoretical and methodological frameworks, including concepts of cultural identity, intercultural dialogue, and globalization challenges.

The purpose of this study is to identify the specific features of cultural diplomacy in the context of transforming international relations and to assess its influence on shaping the image of a state in global public opinion. The article analyzes the mechanisms of cultural communication, the role of cultural institutions, and the interaction between official structures and civil society in promoting national cultural agendas.

The methodological foundation of this research is based on interdisciplinary approaches, including comparative analysis, discourse analysis, and case study methods. The study draws on both domestic and international sources, examining the experiences of various countries in the field of cultural diplomacy, including the activities of institutions such as the British Council, Goethe-Institut, and Institut Français, among others.

The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that the conclusions and recommendations developed by the authors can be used in the formulation of national cultural policy strategies, as well as in educational and analytical contexts. Furthermore, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of culture as a resource for sustainable development and intercultural dialogue.

Thus, the presented article contributes to the academic discourse on cultural diplomacy, highlighting its potential as an effective tool of international communication in the era of global transformations.

Key words: South Korea, museum studies, cultural diplomacy, creative industries, soft power.

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Өнер мәдени дипломатияның құралы және креативті индустрияның бір бөлігі ретінде: Оңтүстік Корея мысалында

Қазіргі уақытта жаһандық саяси-экономикалық жағдайдың жылдам өзгеруі мәдениет, коммуникация және жаһандық трансформациялар арасындағы өзара байланысты зерттеудің өзектілігін арттырып отыр. Соңғы жылдары мәдени дипломатия мен жұмсақ күш мәселелері, яғни мемлекеттердің халықаралық аренадағы ықпал ету құралдары ретінде қарастырылуы ерекше назарға алынуда. Осы мақалада мәдени дипломатияны заманауи теориялық-әдістемелік негіздер арқылы талдаудың тәсілдері қарастырылады. Атап айтқанда, мәдени сәйкестік, мәдениеттер диалогы және жаһандану сын-қатерлері сияқты ұғымдарға мән беріледі.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – халықаралық қатынастардың трансформациялану жағдайында мәдени дипломатияның ерекшеліктерін анықтау және оның мемлекет бейнесін халықаралық қоғамдастықтың санасында қалыптастыруға әсерін бағалау. Мақалада мәдени коммуникация механизмдері, мәдени мекемелердің рөлі, сондай-ақ ұлттық мәдени күн тәртібін ілгерілетуде ресми құрылымдар мен азаматтық қоғам арасындағы өзара әрекет талданады.

Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізі – салыстырмалы талдау, дискурстық талдау және кейс-стади сияқты пәнаралық тәсілдер. Жұмыста мәдени дипломатия саласындағы әртүрлі елдердің тәжірибесі, соның ішінде Британ кеңесі, Гёте институты, Француз институты сияқты ұйымдардың қызметі қарастырылған. Отандық және шетелдік дереккөздер пайдаланылған.

Зерттеудің практикалық маңызы – авторлар ұсынған қорытындылар мен ұсыныстар ұлттық мәдени саясат стратегияларын әзірлеуде, сондай-ақ білім беру және талдау салаларында пайдалануға болады. Сонымен қатар, бұл зерттеу мәдениетті орнықты даму мен халықтар арасындағы диалогтың маңызды ресурсы ретінде тереңірек түсінуге үлес қосады.

Осылайша, мақала мәдени дипломатия туралы ғылыми дискурстың дамуына үлес қосып, оны жаһандық өзгерістер дәуіріндегі тиімді халықаралық коммуникация құралы ретінде ашады.

Түйін сөздер: Оңтүстік Корея, мұражайтану, мәдени дипломатия, жасампаз индустриялар, жұмсақ күш.

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Искусство как инструмент культурной дипломатии и часть креативной индустрии: на примере Южной Кореи

В условиях стремительно меняющейся мировой политико-экономической обстановки актуальность исследования взаимосвязей между культурой, коммуникацией и глобальными трансформациями возрастает. Особое внимание в последние годы уделяется вопросам, связанным с культурной дипломатией и мягкой силой как инструментами влияния государств в международной арене. В данной статье рассматриваются подходы к анализу культурной дипломатии сквозь призму современных теоретико-методологических рамок, включая концепты культурной идентичности, диалога культур и глобализационных вызовов.

Целью исследования является выявление особенностей функционирования культурной дипломатии в условиях трансформации международных отношений, а также определение степени её влияния на формирование образа государства в мировом общественном мнении. В рамках работы анализируются механизмы культурной коммуникации, роль культурных институтов, а также взаимодействие между официальными структурами и гражданским обществом в продвижении национальной культурной повестки.

Методологической основой исследования служат междисциплинарные подходы, включающие методы сравнительного анализа, дискурсивного анализа и кейс-стади. Используются как отечественные, так и зарубежные источники, охватывающие опыт различных стран в сфере культурной дипломатии, в том числе деятельность таких организаций, как Британский Совет, Институт Гёте, Французский институт и др.

Практическая значимость работы заключается в том, что выводы и предложения, сформулированные авторами, могут быть использованы при разработке стратегий государственной культурной политики, а также в образовательных и аналитических целях. Кроме того, исследование может способствовать более глубокому пониманию роли культуры как ресурса устойчивого развития и диалога между народами.

Таким образом, представленная статья делает вклад в развитие научного дискурса о культурной дипломатии, раскрывая её потенциал как эффективного инструмента международной коммуникации в эпоху глобальных изменений.

Ключевые слова: Южная Корея, музееведение, культурная дипломатия, креативные индустрии, мягкая сила.

Introduction

Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea, has emerged as a vibrant hub for artists, driven by the government's active development of the cultural sector. Currently, the primary trends in the art world are centered in this city, capturing global attention. According to the 2022 report from the Paradise Cultural Foundation, the trade volume generated by Korea's art sector exceeded one trillion Korean won (approximately \$782 million) and has shown consistent revenue growth each year (SNU Business School, Korea Arts Management Service, and

Paradise Cultural Foundation, 2022). Recent media reports indicate a significant increase in demand for the Korean arts industry, with the number of visitors to art festivals and fairs rising by 76% in 2022 compared to the previous year (Hwang, 2022). Additionally, revenue from fairs, exhibitions, and biennales during the first half of 2022 accounted for 58% of the total revenue for the entire year of 2021 (Hwang, 2022). The substantial development of the Korean art sector offers rich opportunities for academic research.

The present research endeavors to pursue the following interrelated objectives:

- To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the Korean art scene over the period from 2013 to 2023, identifying key shifts in institutional practices, aesthetic trends, and international engagement.

- To examine the multifaceted impact of Korea's cultural diplomacy strategies and the broader creative industry on the development and international positioning of the national art sector.

- To address the existing gap in academic and policy-oriented knowledge concerning the role of government support for the arts, particularly in the context of its deployment as a strategic tool for cultural diplomacy and the construction of national identity and image abroad.

- To investigate the dynamic transformation in the dissemination of Korean art through major institutional platforms such as museums, international art fairs, and auction houses, highlighting new modalities of cultural circulation and audience engagement.

- The central research questions guiding this inquiry include the following:

- In what ways has the role of Korean visual arts within the framework of cultural diplomacy and the creative industries evolved over the last decade?

What are the concrete and conceptual effects of sustained government support on the structure, output, and world reception of the Korean art sector since 2013?

How does contemporary Korean art participate in building and marketing the national brand, and to what extent does it help disperse Korean cultural values and aesthetics on the international level?

Preliminary findings highlight the rising strategic appeal of the South Korean government in the field of the visual arts as a political instrument and an economic opportunity. Since 2013, the internationalization of the Korean art scene and its institutionalization have vastly entered the policy agenda of the nation. This research wishes to contribute to both theoretical and practical by providing insights concerning cultural policy, soft power, and artistic production. Furthermore, it may serve as a comparative reference for scholars and policymakers seeking to adapt aspects of the Korean experience to the development of cultural diplomacy and creative industry strategies in other national contexts.

Methodology

This paper primarily focuses on visual arts, including paintings, ceramics, and sculpture, as well as the channels through which they are disseminat-

ed, such as museums, art fairs, and auction houses. "Art" is defined as "the product and practice of painting, sculpture, and printmaking" (Markowitz 1994, 55), and also as something that "demonstrates excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals" (Davies 2015, 375-384).

The research design adopted in this study follows a two-phase mixed-methods approach, integrating both theoretical inquiry and empirical investigation to ensure analytical depth and methodological rigor.

Beginning from the theoretical research, the case is thoroughly looked into with South Korea's being taken as a prototype for the whole process: intersection of cultural policy, making art, and international engagement. This epoch contains:

- Collecting and systematizing information from international media outlets, including well-known newspapers and niche online art forums. These sources provide critical reviews and reports on Korean art exhibitions, installations, and events held abroad, thus giving clues about the reception of Korean visual culture among the world.

- A deep inquiry into the annual industrial surveys issued by the Korean Art Management Service from 2013 to 2021, as these reports set a base with intense detail metrics concerning structural development, economic performance, and policy-channelled transformations within the Korean art world for almost one decade.

The second phase of the research is grounded in qualitative empirical inquiry and involves conducting semi-structured interviews with professionals who possess expert knowledge in Korean art, creative industries, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding. Three interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

- Expert One: A distinguished scholar in Korean studies, holding a PhD in Art History. This expert is the author of several monographs and academic publications on Korean art history and is also actively engaged in public intellectual discourse through lectures and cultural outreach.

- Expert Two: A researcher and practitioner with the academic title of Candidate of Art History and membership in the Moscow Union of Artists. Their work spans the fields of visual communication, design theory, and territorial branding, with publications addressing contemporary media, visual semiotics, and the cultural dimensions of mass communication.

- Expert Three: An associate professor affiliated with the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs, whose scholarly contributions focus on public and cultural diplomacy, educational di-

plomacy, intangible cultural heritage, and strategies of national image-making and branding in international relations.

This dual-method design allows for a comprehensive and multifaceted examination of the research topic by triangulating theoretical frameworks with lived expertise and institutional perspectives.

Approaches to theorizing

For the theoretical framework, this paper employs the concepts of Soft Power, Cultural Diplomacy, Nation Branding, and Communication Theory. Korea effectively utilizes cultural diplomacy and soft power to shape its national brand. According to Simon Anholt, a strong product-encompassing business, culture, education, and more—originating from a well-regarded country serves as a key investment that shapes its national brand (Anholt, 2011). The arts are a vital indicator for assessing nation branding, as they are reflected in the “Culture and Heritage” dimension of the hexagon presented by Anholt. This cultural dimension includes parameters such as cultural exchanges, demand for cultural products, art sales, and the overall dissemination and appeal of cultural tools (Nömm, 2006). Therefore, the effectiveness of visual arts as a component of Korea’s national brand will be evaluated using these indicators.

Communication Theory serves as the foundation for examining cultural messages within museum studies. Museums play a crucial role in translating information about a society’s history and traditions while engaging a broader audience. They function as communicators and can be viewed as tools for employment and political engagement (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, 9-31). Hooper-Greenhill suggests that communication should be understood as a culture, defined by Raymond Williams as a part of “social life that constructs meanings” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, 21). The author argues that museums, as communicators, shape public perceptions and are essential for audience engagement in the contemporary world.

Horta further developed the idea of studying museum communication through a semiotic lens. He demonstrated that museums equip visitors with the necessary tools to engage in the learning process and appreciate culture. Thus, museums and other cultural institutions are not merely educational spaces; they also serve as venues for social interaction facilitated by communication, which occurs through accompanying texts, curator presentations,

the overall atmosphere, and visitors’ openness to information (Horta, 2015).

Horta also stressed that in order to fully understand the communication and semiotics of museums, it is necessary to consider them in the context of social, political and economic processes. Communication theory is closely intertwined with issues of cultural diplomacy and national branding, therefore it underlies the formation of cultural narratives in the international arena. In this context, art, as an element of the creative industry, plays a key role in shaping a unique national image and translating meanings, which is crucial for the successful promotion of the country’s image in the international arena.

The interplay of cultural diplomacy and branding is, in this view, bound closely to communication theory, as the intertwining of all three yields a more effective analysis of national images and strategies.

With cultural diplomacy and national branding standing at the conceptual core of this study, these are interconnects of the mass communication field. They certainly depend on the media for strategic dissemination of cultural narratives and symbolic images, which shape perception and create national images. Thus, the practice of cultural communication theory in the study of visual art under cultural diplomacy and creative economy is a beneficial analytical tool for allowing a more ingrained analysis of the functions of artistic expression as a form of communication in the international arena. Integrating the theoretical viewpoint not only enriches the spectrum of interpretation offered by the study but also provides fresh opportunities for further inquiry into the cultural products, such as visual arts, in producing soft power, negotiating cultural identities, and mobilizing national values across space and culture. This in turn enables the research to share in some of the symbolic-linguistic grounding of Korean art today at the global level instead of solely institutional, economic, or market-based analyses.

Korean Art’s Evolution and Spread Throughout the Creative Industries

This study uses data from the Korean Art Management Service’s (KAMS) annual surveys, which are made publicly available on the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism’s (MCST) official website, to examine the structural and economic changes that have occurred in the Korean art market over the last ten years. These surveys offer a trustworthy and consistent summary of the major variables influencing the national art scene.

Art galleries, auction houses, and art fairs are the three main institutional categories that are the focus of this analysis in the Korean art industry. The following qualitative and quantitative indicators were looked at for each category: Indicators of audience engagement and public interest include the number of operating institutions, which reflects structural expansion or contraction; the number of employees, which serves as a proxy for the sector's professionalization and labor capacity; the number of visitors (excluding auction houses, where such data is typically unavailable); the total value of artworks sold, which measures market vitality and investment activity; and the total number of artworks sold, which provides insight into the volume and circulation of artistic production.

A more accurate understanding of how the Korean art sector has changed in tandem with more general developments in the creative industries is made possible by the study's systematic review of these variables over a ten-year period, which reveals patterns of growth, stagnation, or decline. Furthermore, a more nuanced evaluation of the art's varying popularity in Korea and its economic importance in both domestic and international contexts is made possible by this longitudinal analysis.

Art Galleries. Examination of the field of Art Galleries from 2013-2021 shows substantial growth from 432 to 598 galleries (Korea Arts Management Service, 2014-2022). Galleries gained 73.64% in workforce from 1,151 to 1,563 employees (Korea Arts Management Service, 2014-2022). In the first instance, from a yearly visitor count of 2,002,191 visitors in 2013 the next year saw the visitor count drop to 1,237,853 visitors (Korea Arts Management Service, 2016). However, by 2021, visitor numbers rebounded to 1,562,637, the highest since 2016. The volume of artworks sold surged by 42.83%, increasing from 9,869 to 23,042 works sold (Korea Arts Management Service, 2014-2022). Sales revenue also rose significantly, from \$143,941.69 to \$232,539.87 (Korea Arts Management Service, 2014-2022). In 2013, foreign buyers accounted for 14.7% of sales (Korea Arts Management Service, 2020), while in 2021, they represented 8.8%, with foreign commercial organizations contributing an additional 1.7% (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023).

Auction Houses. Statistics regarding Korean auction houses reveal that the number of auction houses remained stable at 11 from 2013 to 2021, although it fluctuated in previous years (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023). Over the decade, the number of employees in auction houses increased by 39.62% (Korea Arts Management Service, 2014-2022). The number of artworks sold reached 26,000 in 2021, marking a 62.83% increase from 2013. Despite a temporary decline in revenue from 2019 to 2020, total sales value rose from \$43,822 in 2013 (Korea Arts Management Service, 2020) to \$250,477 in 2021 (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023), representing an 82.5% increase over the nine-year period. In 2013, foreign clients constituted 36.4% of auction house clientele, ranking fifth (Korea Arts Management Service, 2020), while in 2021, individual foreign buyers moved up to third place with 12.0% (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023).

Art Fairs. The statistics on art fairs in Korea indicate a rise in the number of domestic art fairs from 35 to 65, despite a decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023). The number of employees in this sector increased by 31.12%, from 234 to 752, creating more job opportunities. Annual visitor numbers ranged from 700,000 to 950,000, with 2021 recording 774,000 visitors, surpassing pre-COVID figures. The peak attendance was in 2016, with 942,000 visitors (Korea Arts Management Service, 2017). In 2021, 54,000 artworks were sold, reflecting a 28.45% increase compared to 15,373 works sold in 2013 (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023). Sales revenue rose from \$49,102 in 2013 (Korea Arts Management Service, 2020) to \$139,843 in 2021, the highest in nine years and a 64.89% increase over 2013 (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023). Although visitor numbers in 2013 were higher than in 2021, the total profit from sold artworks was greater in 2021.

In the last ten years, the Korean art market has noticeably revived: more galleries have opened, there have been more auctions and art fairs. All this indicates a growing interest in art and the fact that this sector has serious economic potential, including its shadow part. This dynamic shows that the art market in Korea is becoming an increasingly important part of not only the cultural, but also the economic life of the country.

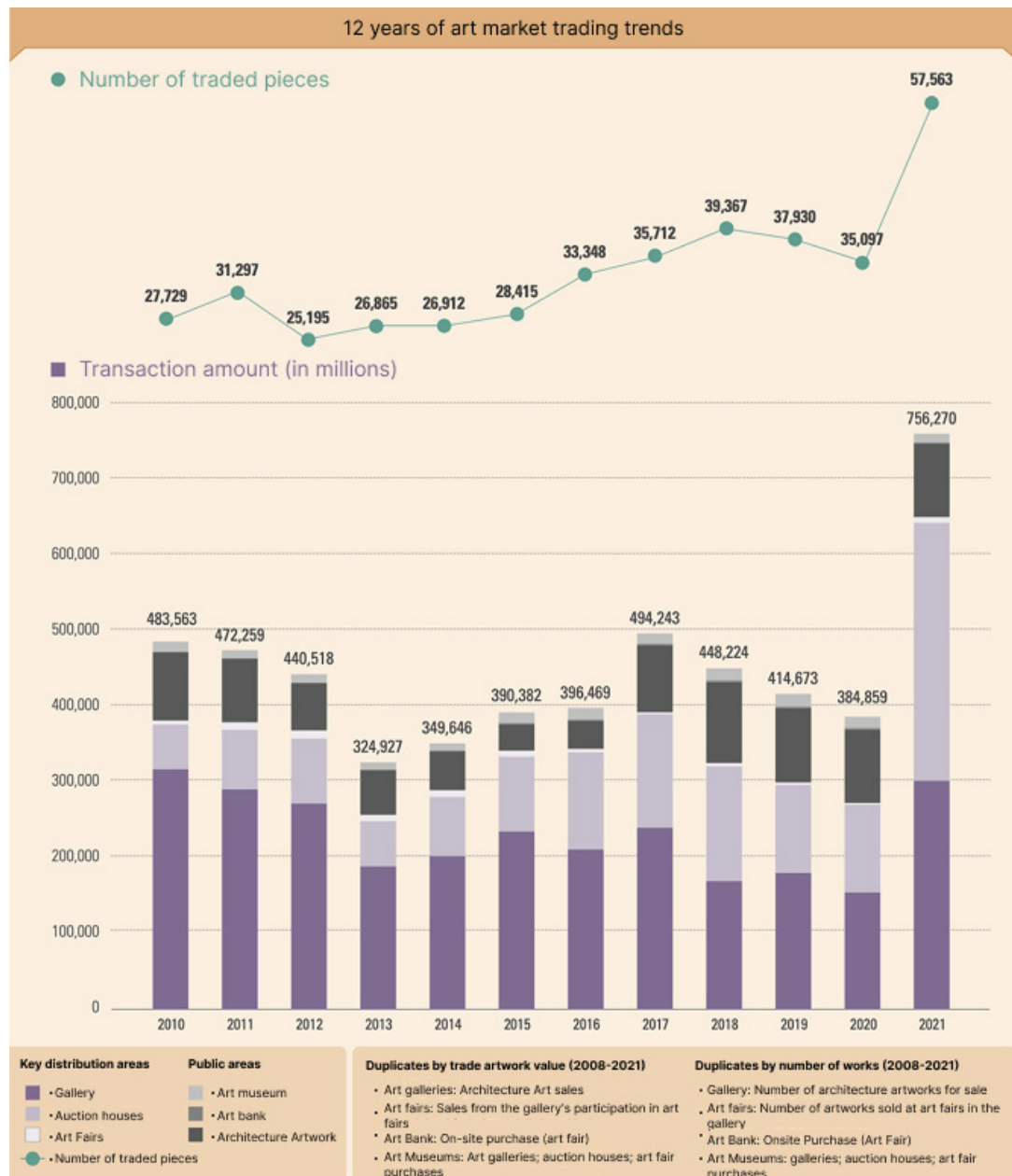


Figure 1 – Trends in the volume of transactions on the art market over 12 years
Source: Korea Art Management Survey; 2023, Korea Arts Management Service, 2023

Korean Art Management Service (KAMS) – through the 2022 annual survey, an annual survey of the year 2021, finds two indicators which summarize the many strides made in the art market of Korea from 2013-2021, and that cement the growth that was both qualitative and quantitative and reflected structural changes in the art market and its development, informed by overall evolution of the art market in a constantly shifting cultural, economic, and policy environment. The first graph illustrates a remarkable increase in the total number

of transactions, which more than doubled, rising by 53.33% (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023, 2). The second graph presents the overall transaction sum, revealing that in 2013, art galleries dominated the trade, generating 188,123 million won (approximately \$136,482), followed by auction houses at 59,216 million won (\$42,956), and art fairs at 8,407 million won (\$6,097). The total transaction sum for 2013 amounted to 255,746 million won (approximately \$185,358) (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023, 2).

By the end of 2021, trade channel indicators revealed a marked increase in the total value of art transactions within South Korea, signaling a period of accelerated growth in the national art market. According to data from the KAMS 2022 survey, art galleries reported total sales of 300.772 billion KRW (approximately \$218.1 million USD), while auction houses experienced a dramatic 82.5% year-on-year increase, reaching 338.463 billion KRW (approximately \$245.4 million USD). Collectively, these figures contributed to a total transaction volume of 646.545 billion KRW (approximately \$469 million USD) for the year 2021 (Korea Arts Management Service, 2023, 2). Overall, the art industry in Korea reached its highest point in a 12-year history since 2013, indicating robust job creation, active cultural dissemination, and increased investment in the arts sector, positioning it as a vital component of the creative industries.

Contribution to Cultural Diplomacy and Nation Branding. The arts play a crucial role in cultural diplomacy by facilitating a communication process through which recipients gain insights about a country via its artworks. The Korean government is exhibiting domestic artworks in foreign museums to boost the international recognition and promotion of Korea. One area the state and large corporations (i.e. chaebols) focused on promoting Korea, was the distribution of Korean art. The availability of Korean art in international auctions and exhibits is a key benchmark for the increasing international popularity of Korean artists and their work. For example, In 2019, Korean works were exhibited only in Hong Kong. In 2020, Korean works were exhibited in Tokyo, New York, and London, (among others). In 2020, there were also 69 solo exhibits and 93 group exhibits featuring Korean artists (A Team, 2022).

Korean chaebols have almost always provided significant support in getting Korean artists' work around the globe. Notable examples that illustrate the growing institutional and corporate investment in the promotion and dissemination of Korean art include several high-profile initiatives and partnerships.

The Samsung Leeum Museum of Art, located in Seoul, stands as a prominent cultural institution that houses an extensive collection spanning both traditional Korean artworks and contemporary pieces, thereby serving as a vital bridge between Korea's artistic heritage and its modern creative expression.

In the international arena, Korean corporations have increasingly positioned themselves as patrons of cultural diplomacy. For instance, in 2017, Amore-Pacific, a leading South Korean beauty and cosmet-

ics conglomerate, made a significant donation of \$667,000 to the British Museum to support the acquisition of Korean artworks. Similarly, major domestic retailers such as Shinsegae and the CJ Group have emerged as important actors in the global art ecosystem, actively investing in the international promotion of Korean cultural assets (Chow, 2022).

One of the most striking examples of effective cultural cooperation was the long-term partnership between Hyundai Motor Company and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), which began in 2013. Thanks to this alliance, significant projects have been implemented, such as the scholarship program "Art + Technology and Korean Art" and the large-scale exhibition "Beyond: the Art of Korean Writing" in 2019 (Chow, 2022). As LACMA CEO Michael Govan noted, South Korea today is perceived not just as a cultural brand, but as a source of deep knowledge and artistic dialogue. This was greatly facilitated by the high quality and growing international recognition of Korean art. Such initiatives demonstrate that Korean art has become an important tool for cultural diplomacy and global engagement. Through them, Korea not only forms its national image, but also shares its cultural heritage, creating an educational and awareness-raising platform on the world stage.

This approach helps cultivate a positive image of Korea, even among those with limited knowledge of the country. Research indicates that exposure to a nation's cultural products fosters a favorable perception of that nation (Shapkin and Varpahovskis, 2024, 73).

Another avenue for enhancing cultural diplomacy is through collaborations with renowned European and American brands at Korean art exhibitions. For example, Chanel participated in one of the largest Asian art fairs in Korea, FRIEZE, while Bottega Veneta collaborated with Korean artist Kang Seokyeong for an exhibition at the Leeum Museum of Art (Kim, 2023).

Fellowship Programs also play a vital role in supporting cultural diplomacy. The National Museum of Korea (NMK) has played a pivotal role in advancing the global visibility of Korean culture by initiating programs that support both Korean studies and museum-related academic and curatorial practices abroad.

In 2022, the National Museum of Korea (NMK), following its strategy of cultural diplomacy and strengthening international relations, launched the "Overseas Korean Gallery Support Program", an initiative aimed at promoting Korean art on the world stage ("2022 National Museum of Korea (NMK)

Supports Overseas Korean Galleries”, 2022). The main goal of the program is to expand the presence of Korean culture in museums and galleries around the world by strengthening institutional partnerships, providing curatorial and financial assistance for the creation or development of Korean exhibitions, as well as stimulating scientific exchange in the field of Korean art and museology. Through this initiative, NMK highlights its broader mission to promote a deep and multi-layered understanding of Korea’s cultural and historical heritage in a global context.

The Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) and the Korea Foundation have significantly contributed to maintaining a consistent presence of Korean arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Observers note that this presence serves not only cultural purposes but also political ones, as Korean sections in Asian art displays are often overshadowed by Chinese and Japanese representations. Thus, there is a pressing need to enhance the visibility of Korean culture to international audiences (Dobrzynski, 2016). Consequently, Korea is clearly intent on establishing its presence on the global art scene through direct engagement with major international galleries.

Government support for the creative industry in South Korea

During the reign of President Park Geun-hye (2013-2017), the cultural and creative industries took a central place in the national development strategy, which marked an important turning point in recognizing them as key drivers of economic growth. This approach meant a departure from traditional models and a transition to a new economic paradigm based on the use of cultural capital, technological innovations and the creative potential of the country.

A key step in the implementation of this course was the adoption in 2013 of the “Action Plan for the Creative Economy and measures to create an ecosystem of the creative economy.” This strategic document provided for the comprehensive integration of Korean cultural values with advanced technologies and modern communication platforms. Its main goal was to stimulate entrepreneurship, create new jobs and increase the country’s global competitiveness.

Thus, the state policy in the field of culture and creative industries during this period acquired a systematic and proactive character, contributing to strengthening the role of art and innovation as

integral elements of the national economy and the global image of South Korea.

By embedding the arts within the broader logic of economic planning, the Park administration redefined the role of culture – from a soft power tool alone to a strategic sector with tangible economic outcomes, aligning cultural production with stated goals for innovation and sustainable development. This initiative sought to enhance the country’s global capabilities by fostering technological advancements alongside cultural development and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. As a result of these efforts, Korea ranked first in the Bloomberg Innovation Index in both 2015 and 2017 (Coy, n.d.).

In 2013, the Framework Act on Culture was enacted, which included provisions for cultural promotion, support for creators, and the assurance of citizens’ cultural rights. Notably, Article 8 of this act (Korea Law Translation Center, 2013) mandates that the government publish a “fundamental plan” for promoting Korean culture every five years.

The subsequent Moon Jae-in administration (2017-2022) recognized the cultural sector’s potential as a tool for attracting tourism and emphasized the need for regulations governing the art trade (Kim, 2021, 105). In 2018, the administration of President Moon Jae-in launched the policy initiative “Culture Vision 2030 – Culture with People,” which emphasized cultural diversity, artistic autonomy, and creativity as foundational principles for Korea’s cultural development.

Concurrently, the Seoul Metropolitan Government introduced the “Artist Life Stabilization Fund Support,” providing annual financial assistance to artists adversely affected by the cancellation of cultural events. Further reinforcing support during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government implemented the “Emergency Support for Artists Affected by COVID-19” program, which offered vital aid to artists facing economic hardships (World Cities Culture Forum, n.d.).

This program also funded numerous online artistic initiatives, creating a more sustainable environment for the art industry and benefiting over 10,000 artists in Seoul.

The onset of the pandemic in 2020 prompted many Korean museums to shift toward digital platforms to maintain public engagement. This transition was characterized by the introduction of English subtitles in video lectures and virtual exhibition tours, significantly enhancing accessibility for a global audience (Park, 2020). To further support artists and institutions during this period, the gov-

ernment launched educational programs focused on facilitating the digital publication of artworks, alongside initiatives aimed at boosting ticket sales through discounts and financing for public art projects designed to offset financial losses experienced by artists (Chang, 2020).

Looking ahead, the business plan for 2023-2024 demonstrates the comprehensive efforts of the South Korean government to promote K-culture on the world stage, with special attention being paid to art as the “driving force of new K-culture” (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, New York).

Among the key measures are reducing ticket prices for cultural events, developing new strategies for the global dissemination of Korean culture, intensifying international cultural exchanges, and using cultural projects to solve social problems. An important place in the plan is the support of youth initiatives and the integration of artificial intelligence technologies into the cultural sphere.

Special attention is paid to the support of small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the field of culture and art. They are provided with measures to reduce credit rates and simplify procedures related to copyright registration, which is aimed at stimulating entrepreneurial activity and strengthening the creative sector.

Thus, the plan reflects South Korea’s desire not only to maintain its leadership in the field of cultural exports, but also to make culture an instrument for sustainable development and social progress.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea actively contributes to cultural diplomacy by organizing exhibitions within Korean diplomatic missions worldwide, showcasing Korean artworks in embassies and Korean Cultural Centers to reinforce the visibility of Korean art as a national brand (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, n.d.).

Fiscal commitment to cultural development is demonstrated by the consistent increase in the annual budget for cultural events and creative content. For 2024, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) planned a budget increase of 3.17% compared to the previous year, including a dedicated allocation of 4.7 billion won (approximately \$3.42 million USD) to promote Korean art abroad (A Team, 2023).

In 2023, as a result of negotiations between the Korean Art Management Service and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST), a law on the promotion of Art was adopted. This regulatory act was an important step towards the institutionalization of the art industry, providing legal protection for the intellectual property of artists and consolidat-

ing art as an integral part of the country’s cultural policy (A Team, 2023).

It is also worth emphasizing that the Government’s growing attention to the development of culture, accompanied by active legislative initiatives and support for creative professionals, has produced tangible results. Over the past decade, the number of museums, art fairs and cultural events in the country has increased significantly, and the employment rate in this sector has increased significantly.

Such measures not only strengthen the cultural rights of citizens, but also contribute to the wider dissemination of art in various regions of the country. The increased accessibility of cultural initiatives has led to an increase in the number of visitors and an expansion of the international audience. As a result, art increasingly confidently occupies the position of one of the priorities of state policy and is perceived as a valuable resource for social and economic development.

Interview results

Three expert interviews confirmed the key points of the theoretical analysis, highlighting the gradual evolution of Korean cultural diplomacy and the strengthening of its role as a “Cultural Center” (in the words of the third expert). However, despite the expanding cultural influence, experts noted that its direct impact on political dynamics remains difficult to pinpoint.

The emergence of a new cultural niche

The first and second experts emphasized that over the past decade, Korea has been actively looking for alternative ways of cultural influence, realizing the inevitable decline in popularity of K-pop. According to the first expert, “Korea already understood that someday K-pop would come to an end.” This strategic foresight has allowed Seoul to refocus and strengthen its position as a sustainable creative hub with a growing global demand for cultural products.

The sharp growth of the art market in 2021

Particular attention was paid to the surge of activity in the fine arts market in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic weakened Beijing’s position as a regional art center, and Korea quickly occupied the vacant niche. The first expert noted that the country actively took advantage of the moment by resuming major international exhibitions immediately after the restrictions were lifted, thereby securing the status of a new center for contemporary art in the region.

Popularity factors

The first expert identified two key factors that

contributed to the growing interest in Korean art. Firstly, celebrities and influential figures such as BTS group leader Kim Namjoon played an important role, whose open support of Korean artists and participation in exhibitions inspired a young audience. Secondly, collectors have increased their attention to the works of young Korean artists, in which they see long-term investment potential.

Branding and image

The second and third experts pointed out that South Korea uses an integrated approach to national branding, combining tangible and intangible assets. High-quality products – from technology to cosmetics – are combined with the recognition of the country's expertise in these areas. This allows foreign visitors to get to know the positive image of Korea through its art in practice, enhancing their perception both at the image level and at the level of real experience.

Adapting the Korean experience

Discussing the possibilities of applying the Korean model in other countries, the second expert suggested that adapting strategies for organizing creative industries could help other countries bridge the gap between tangible and intangible cultural products. The integration of culture into everyday life and its connection with national branding is seen as a useful and reproducible example.

The third expert noted that the success of the Korean model is largely due to systemic government support. He stressed the importance of regularly updating the cultural strategy, including through structured five-year plans developed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST).

The Future of Visual Art

Although experts agreed that it is too early to consider visual art as the main element of a national brand, they noted positive trends and the potential for its development. The established institutional framework and growing international interest allow us to expect that fine arts will become an important component of Korea's cultural identity in the future.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the interviews confirmed South Korea's significant progress in the development and international integration of visual art. Despite the fact that the influence of this sector at the global level is still being formed, the trends of recent years indicate its steady growth and growing recognition. This creates the prerequisites for further strengthening the position of Korean art in the global cultural space.

Conclusion

From 2013 to 2023, the Korean visual arts sector underwent a remarkable transformation, becoming an important element of the country's cultural diplomacy and creative economy. Thanks to targeted government support, art has gradually taken its place at the center of the cultural agenda. However, despite the dynamic development, the influence of the sector in the international arena remains limited, especially in the context of national branding and the contribution of creative industries to the economy.

The last decade has been marked by a significant revision of cultural policy and an increase in public and international interest in Korean art. The Government has developed and implemented a number of strategies aimed at promoting culture both inside and outside the country. Art has received the status of one of the priority areas within the framework of the concept of "New Culture", which indicates a rethinking of its role in national development.

Statistics confirm these changes: the number of art galleries has increased, the audience has expanded, employment in the sector has increased, which together has led to an increase in sales and income. These indicators allow us to characterize the past period as productive for the popularization of Korean visual art.

An analysis of key policy initiatives shows that the state has played a crucial role in creating conditions for creative development and cultural exchange. The support of artists, the institutional recognition of art, and the promotion of international cooperation have helped strengthen the country's cultural infrastructure.

In terms of forming a national brand, Korean art has become part of a broader cultural promotion strategy. However, in terms of recognition, it is still inferior to other forms of Korean cultural exports, such as K-pop or cinema. The goal for the future is to raise the prestige of Korean fine art and consolidate it in the global cultural imagination as an expression of national identity.

The results of this study are particularly relevant in the context of the current stage of cultural policy development (2023) and open up promising areas for further research. As Korean art continues to gain weight, it is necessary to conduct a regular analysis of its contribution to social, cultural and economic processes, both in a national and international context.

The application of communication theory in the study of cultural diplomacy and national branding tools has proved to be productive. This theoretical

framework allows for a deeper understanding of how the country's image is shaped through visual art – in particular, through exhibitions in foreign museums. Further study of the semiotic aspect of art as a channel of intercultural communication and diplomacy is particularly promising.

Despite the progress made, the Korean visual arts sector still has many stages to go through on

its way to full-fledged international recognition. Its further development will depend on continued government support, a sound strategy for cultural promotion, and deep integration into global cultural and diplomatic processes. Only under these conditions will Korea be able to strengthen its position on the world cultural map, using art as an important tool of national influence and self-expression.

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Previously sent February 27, 2025.

Re-registered March 10, 2025.

Accepted May 30, 2025.