

Hyundai, Hallyu and Hybridity: South Korea and Asia After the Cold War

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Abstract

This paper draws from Katzenstein's (1996) hypothesis that identities or 'varying constructions of nation and statehood' (p. 46) play a role in state interactions. South Korea's hosting of both the Asian and Olympic Games in the 1980s marked the beginnings of greater international visibility of the country. This was supported by chaebol-led industrialization and aggressive soft-power internationalization through the promotion of the 'Korean Wave' and English language learning the time period directly following the end of the Cold War (1990s-2000s). It was then that a significant change in ROK's relations with India was observed, despite previous bilateral relations between the two states being relatively limited. Drawing largely from primary sources such as newspapers, statistics and official documents focusing on three variables in the ROK's relation to India: economic (Hyundai), cultural (Hallyu) and social (Hybridity), the paper employs qualitative process tracing to explore the likelihood that ROK's bilateral relationship with India possesses behavioral indicators that South Korea has assumed a role as a force for increased cooperation and mutual recognition in and between Asian countries in the post-Cold War world. For these purposes, Cooper's (1997) and Jordaan's (2003) analytical frameworks proposed for 'middle powers' will be employed.

Keywords: Middle power, South Korea, India, Inter-Asian Relations, Soft power

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1. Problematizing Material Perspectives on ROK

In Katzenstein's *The Cultures of National Security* (1996), the role of identities is described as a 'shorthand label for varying constructions of nation- and statehood' (p. 46). One of the purposes of this line of narrative and qualitative inquiry is the inability of traditional IR theories such as neorealism and neoliberalism to explain the end of the Cold War (Ibid.), and in the Asian region, the emergence of a new and more powerful role for China, and the emergence of conflicts in the developing world. It was due to this apparent weakness in the predictive capacity of international relations theory that the incorporation of more ideational as opposed to positivist factors guiding state behaviour became a necessity. Katzenstein (1996), however, does not claim that material factors are unimportant in terms of state interaction. Instead, he draws on empirical evidence for alternate explanations of state behaviour that are more 'sociological' in nature, such as norms and culture. A norm here is defined broadly as 'collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity,' (p.46) and culture as 'a broad label that denotes collective models of nation-state authority or identity, carried by custom or law' that 'refers to both a set of evaluative standards (such as norms and values) and a set of cognitive standards (such as rules and models) that define what social actors exist in a system, how they operate, and how they relate to one another' (p.47).

This paper will focus on the behavior of states in Asia after the Cold War. It emphasizes on the emergence of middle power dimensions in the ROK's relations with India. It is postulated that the relations between the ROK and India indicate both their desires to satisfy the structural and behavioral aspects of middle powers while at the same time creating interactional bases for inter-Asian networking. While leverage with India could have created an additional mode of communication between South Korea and North Korea during the Cold War, yet very few advances were made politically, even when South Korea began a dialogue with the Soviet Union in the 1980s (Hakjoo, 1997). It was only after India's economic reforms in the early 1990s that South Korea began increasing its economic and cultural engagement with the country, which reached peaks in the early 2000's (see Figure 1 and Heo & Roehrig, 2014, p. 138). From nearly \$1.5 billion worth of bilateral trade between both states in 1994, the amount grew to an estimated \$17.2 billion in 2011, with noticeable growth in trade of coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuel, as well as middle to low technologies (OECD, 1994-2011).



Figure 1

The rise of trade in the early 2000s corresponded with a general rise in trade with other states, including the three largest economies in the world: China, the US and Japan (OECD, 1994-2011), with imports from China and Japan superceding US imports in the early 2000s. However, the data on trade between Middle Powers from the 15-year time period reveals that India became an increasingly attractive market for South Korean goods, overtaking other Middle Powers such as Australia and Canada in 2004, and Germany in 2010 (see Figure 2). Similar successes, however, have yet to be made with the amount of Indian imports into South Korea, where it falls behind Australia, Germany and Russia (see Figure 3).

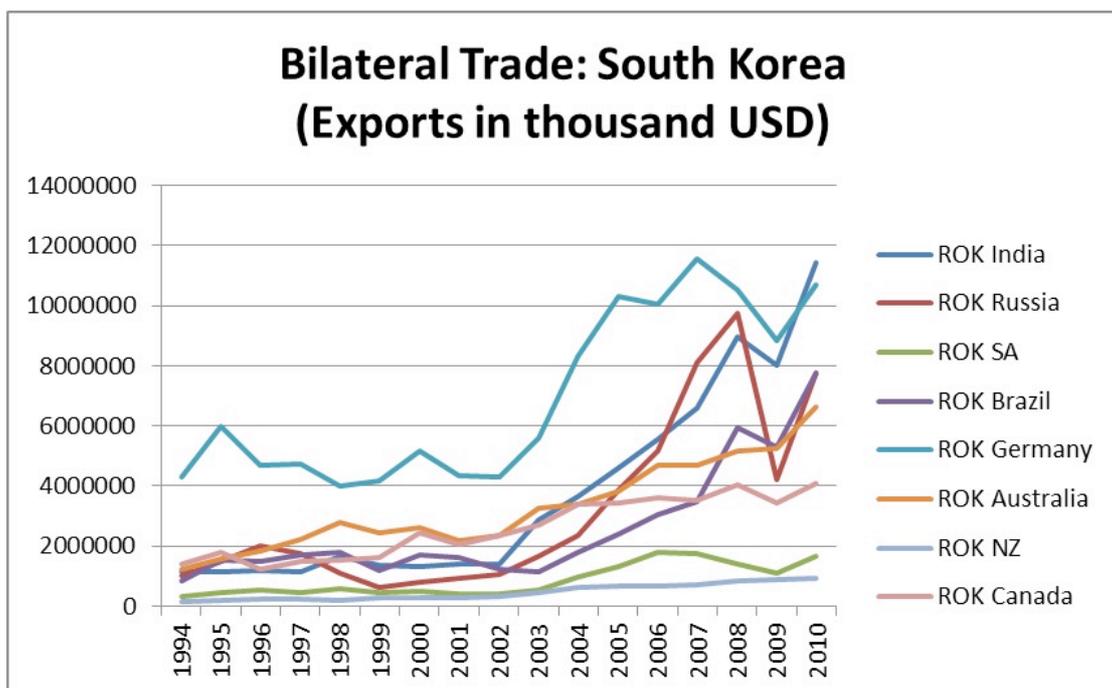


Figure 2

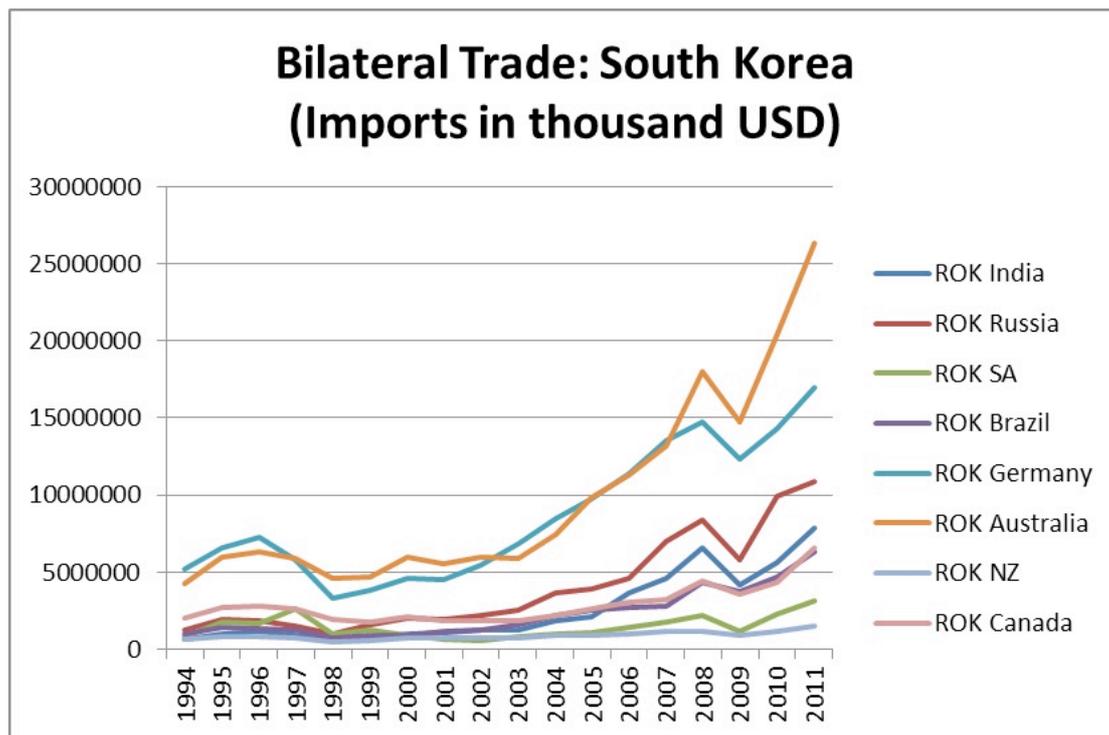


Figure 3

In this light, the increasing relevance of the economic and political contributions of BRICS and NICs necessitate a break with theory that characterizes middle powers as non-reformist, traditionally liberal-democratic states that are non-periphery. Jordaan (2003) developed a set of determinants for distinguishing traditional powers from ‘emerging’ middle powers, which apply widely to the situational context in which countries like BRICS and Turkey arose. However, while this analysis rightly drew attention to the classification problems inherent in the task of identifying middle powers, a concrete analytical framework necessitates further nuance. Huelsz (2009) proposes that emerging middle powers are to be analyzed according to five factors that incorporate both structural and behavioral features, namely, 1) a clear view of an international identity (p.67), 2) the presence of different structural contexts compared to industrialized economies (p. 68), 3) the emphasis on different global agenda in comparison to traditional middle powers (p. 69), and 4) recognition as ‘regional’ powers. (p.70)’

In light of this, I would like to address the following questions in terms of an interactionist and behavioral viewpoint.

- a. What kind of middle power behavioral factors, if any, appear in South Korea’s foreign policy?
- b. How have the ROK’s perceived needs distinguished its relationship with India?

2. South Korea and the post-Cold War order

It was at the juncture of the post-Cold War world that it became necessary for Asian states to consider the geopolitical direction of the new world and their corresponding ‘identities’. All previous entanglements of democratically aligned countries as

balancers or proxy states against communism were faced with the need to reformulate their relational identities with respect to the obvious candidate for a regional great power, China. The seeking and reformulating of identities in a post-Cold War landscape is likely to be a continuous process in Asia and the world. Particularly, South Korea has been very much intent on extending its international image through the use of cultural technology, which Japan has effectively employed, the progressive views of a large young demographic, and the competitive nature of learning English present in China, South Korea and Japan (EF EPI, 2013).

Similarly, both Japan and China, and also ASEAN, have formed relationships based upon increasing domestic economic development and the promotion of economic exchange, skirting hard power issues in security while including non-traditional security, economic development and peace in bilateral and multilateral goals (Katsumata, 2003, p. 104). Structurally, it is clear that South Korea fulfils traditional criteria for middle powers: apart from its large population, it possesses a high degree of military spending, and is one of the largest economies in the world. Moreover, South Korea is a member of a significant number of international organizations included but not limited to ASEAN +3, the G20, APEC and the IAEA. Perhaps the most notable achievement in the last two decades is South Korea's membership in the OECD and DAP - thus far, it is only country to have entered both organizations as a result of its successful transition from a developing to developed country and from an aid recipient to an aid donor. The structural capabilities of the ROK have brought up legitimate questions about how the country views its identity due to the break-up of the bipolar system into one whose unipolarity has come under scrutiny (see Waltz, 2004).

Historically, with the ROK's industrialization picking up in the eighties and being only relatively recently democratic in 1987, South Korea arose from decidedly different sets of circumstances than other middle powers, and did not present an easy fit with Cooper's three waves of middle power diplomacy, the first wave consisting of non-aligned states, the second with critics of Western norms in the seventies and eighties, and the third with agricultural niche diplomacy and regionally powerful states (1997, pp. 13-18). Jordaan's (2003) distinction between 'emerging' and traditional powers have raised questions as to the degree to which South Korea's is an 'emerging' middle power, as Robertson (2007, 151) asserts: South Korea is moving towards a status-quo-preserving foreign policy characteristic of 'traditional' middle powers such as Australia and Canada. According to his analysis, South Korea's ability to assert its capacity as a Middle Power in the field of security is diminished, particularly because of the challenge of stimulating third-party involvement with North Korea (Robertson, 2007, p. 161). The case of South Korea thus appears to be somewhat a maverick for theories of both emerging and traditional middle powers, regardless of how these are defined, particularly because of disagreement as to the behavioral characteristics middle powers and the simplification of situational and cultural contexts of states to uphold parsimony.

From all the indicators of middle power behavior, it is perhaps the influence of South Korea on the region that is most contentious. Imputing South Korea as a 'regional power' is likely to raise questions about relative military power, or to quote from Shim (2009), it being a 'shrimp amongst whales'. South Korea's ability to mediate, as well as instigate changes in behavior from great powers is predicated on the

concerned parties recognizing ROK's ability to do so, as well as its relative position considering a large number of 'middle' powers in its immediate vicinity. It thus appears that South Korea is more likely to use soft power, networks and multilateral bodies and its growing soft power to be able to assert its ideational influence in the region. One of the ways it can achieve this is by exploring regional multilateralism and network-building, as Lee (2012) suggests. This, however, presents many challenges considering historical developments in Asia that impeded multilateralism, particularly in security (Hemmer and Katzenstein, 2002). However, if regional and multilateral initiatives of middle powers are to be successful, they can be greatly facilitated if Asian countries perceive each other as having a common set of assumptions guiding co-operation, including cultural sensitivities and a regional outlook, as Pillai (1995) recommended for India's immersion in the ASEAN trade network where China has a secure cultural foothold.

3. The Multilateral Turn: Korea's view of itself

In recent decades it has become increasingly clear that South Korea views itself as a 'middle power', expressed in a keynote speech made in 2013 by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Kyou Hyun at an International Conference on the Role of Middle Powers in the 21st Century hosted by the Korean Association of International Studies and the Korea Foundation, where he stressed that the Park administration pursues 'Middle Power Diplomacy' as one of its diplomatic objectives. South Korea also appears to be recognized by various states and international organizations as a 'middle power': the country was one of the states by Brookings and the International Forum for Democratic Studies chosen for a conference on the Foreign Policies of Emerging Market-Democracies in 2011, which included India, Brazil, Turkey, South Africa and Indonesia.

The articulation of foreign policy goals of South Korea in the last two decades has evolved in terms of how it sees itself in a regional perspective. In Kim Young Sam's keynote speech during the 26th Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC) Meeting in May 1993, he called for a multilateral security dialogue in Northeast Asia, stressing on sovereignty, non-aggression, non-intervention, peaceful resolution and coexistence as norms to guide regional co-operation (quoted in Lim, 2009). This trend continued through Kim Dae-Jung's support of ASEAN +3 during his term, and Roh Moo Hyun's calls for increased North-East Asian cooperation (The *'Peace & Prosperity Policy'*) (Heiskanen, 2003, p. 1). With successive administrations, these foreign policy approaches grew larger in scope with calls for a 'New Asian Initiative' in 2009 by President Lee Myung-Bak which also coincided with the Middle power diplomacy, or *jung gyun guk*, as an explicitly stated foreign policy goal (Lee 2012, 14), then President Park's 'Eurasianism', which drew attention to the potentials in Central Asia and Russia. But while these foreign policy thrusts reflect a desire for networking, it is important to note that South Korea has not always assumed the posturing associated with traditional middle or great powers. The ROK's reluctance to assume the position of Australia and Canada in the importance of spreading democracies, its non-Annex I status on the Kyoto Protocol, and its history of technology-sharing, partially satisfies Huelsz's (2009) criteria of states that have a different view of global order than traditional middle powers. This behavior appears to provide evidence that South Korea is comfortable with a status quo that does not require greater responsibilities other than in selected issue areas, paving the way not only for 'niche' diplomacy but

also for a establishing formal and informal networks amongst other middle powers, and regional states in particular rather than aspiring to great power status. Robertson (2007) has seen this to be evidence of a status-quo-maintaining power, but it can similarly be argued that South Korea treats its middle power status flexibly, maneuvering between the preservation of the status quo and its reluctance to engage in the struggle for democracies and freedom across the world, as is characteristic of fourth-wave middle power states.

With the environment of the ROK being prohibitive of asserting overt military power, a manner by which the ROK can assert its international identity and regional status is by cultural flows. Cultural globalization can be broadly classified ‘a process whereby information, commodities and images that have been produced in one part of the world enter into a global flow that tends to ‘flatten out’ cultural differences between nations, regions and individuals (Heywood, 2011, p. 147).’ The acceptance of other states of the roles of middle power mediation will depend on trust-building on different platforms, including culture. South Korea’s international identity is reflected in domestic trends that project the international into the local. A widely-cited example is the popularity of Korean music and media, collectively known as Hallyu or the Korean Wave. The participation of Western producers and distributors K-Pop is a testament to both inward and outward flows of cultural globalization. It is a product of international origins that began gaining popularity in Taiwan in the mid-1990s and onwards to Japan, South-East Asia and Latin America (Park, 2013, p. 6) and consolidating a wide diversity of soft power avenues. Various theories surrounding the popularity of the ‘Korean wave’ have pointed towards it being a sign of either the internationalization of Korean culture, the displacement of Japan as a centre of culture in Asia, the creation of an Asian bloc and the triumph of a commodified culture in the guise of neoliberalism or at the very least, a feeling of common-ness (see Cho, 2005, p. 155), which reveals complex layers of soft power diplomacy that are felt regionally.

Emphasizing Huelsz’s (2009) second point, which attempts to differentiate the structural origins of traditional and emerging powers, South Korea’s history reveals that the diffusion of democratic norms and the rapid changes since the late 1980s are not only indicative of authoritarian structural origins, but also manifested societal changes, particularly a generational divide. Robertson (2007) has asserted the role of constitutive elements (p.162) on South Korea’s role as a traditional middle power, however, it is these same constitutive elements that may make the case for a slower internationalization on the ‘constitutive’ or domestic level than is presumed. Rather than being both staunchly internationalist and democratic, South Korea’s show of economic prosperity and democratic institutions masks a relatively recent history of ethnocentrist thought and a reluctance to promote democratic norms in the region, presumably due to a perceived backlash from North Korea.

The Japanese occupation of Korea was met with an intense ethnic nationalism known as *daniminjok*, which Shin (2006) argues persists and exists in various forms in modern Korean society, and has succinctly informed behaviour towards foreigners. In the North, ethnic nationalism has evolved into a state ideology (*Juche*), while in South Korea, tension remains between the preservation of this ethnic character and adherence to a traditional hierarchical structure present in both the government and the chaebol, and an attitude of openness and less rigid organizational structures. Conversely, South Korea’s opening to the world entailed an interest of ‘the world’ in

Korea, reflected in the increase of foreign students, migrants and 'fandoms' that accompany K-Pop bands.

The *hybridity* of South Korea within its own context draws attention to the third point of Huelsz's (2009) framework, as this covers the pursuit of certain issue areas, particularly those that are not pursued by traditional middle powers. Green energy appears to be a potential niche role, as some other non-Annex I powers are practicing, and due to investments to be made in green energy, these countries are likely to continue promoting economic growth and are not voluntarily submitting themselves standards set for 'developed countries' (see Leal-Arcas 2013, p.19). The reasons for, the areas in which and with whom South Korea chooses to establish bilateral relations will be a method by which its 'distinctiveness' and the pursuit of particularistic national interests beyond the scope of multilateral agreements will come to light. Its relationship with India, an NIC within the Asian region yet a potential middle power in its own right, may reveal what South Korea's future goals hold.

4. India: A partner in culture, economics and security

The changing identity of the ROK can be particularly seen in the relationship with India, which maintained somewhat limited relations with both countries during the Cold War. Reports reveal that Korean President Park Geun-Hye has been continuing the regional outlook as stated previously by promoting a 'Eurasian' policy (Hyun 2013) while the 'Looking East' policy has figured highly in India's approach to East Asia and inter-Asian cooperation (Strachan et al., 2009, p. 13). The relation has expanded rapidly in scope, from plans to create ASEAN +6, cultural exchange (Bollywood and K-Pop) and heightened economic trade, including trade in services, such as Indian English teachers in a competitive market for English teachers in South Korea.

India and South Korea both fulfill the demographic, economic and military capabilities to easily lend credence to them being middle powers based on structural indicators. Brewster (2010) enumerates several arguments for why cooperation between South Korea and India is beneficial. He suggests that this relationship may have strengthened over the 1990s due to the the Asian financial crisis and insecurity due to trade in missile technology facilitated by China, North Korea and Pakistan. While not yet surpassing China and a number of Gulf States, South Korea configures in the top twenty of India's importers and export markets (Ministry of Commerce and Industry India, 2013). However, as noted in the introduction, there are considerable differences in the economies of South and East Asian states that have hampered FTA discussions. Specifically, India's relationship with South Korea has seen difficulties with a one-sided volume of trade (see Graph 3 above).

In addition, both countries exhibit 'emerging' power ideational behavior in their hesitance to promote democracies, despite being democracies on their own as well as adapt different standards to addressing the Kyoto Protocol. Their unwillingness to do so (Foreign Policy at Brookings & Forum, 2011) indicates that they are not particularly strong agents of power for reforms in their region, but the success of Korean music and dramas with both Eastern and Western elements and the success of democracy are possible avenues for an alternative model for uniting middle powers. The economy, or 'Hyundai', has long served as the strongest basis for bilateral

relations between the two countries. Korean car manufacturers prospered in India even before the Asian crisis, although this preliminary start has since expanded to more industries which have strategically targeted the strengths of both countries. One of the areas where South Korea and India have been expanding their capabilities is nuclear energy (OECD, 1994-2011), where South Korea has been trying to gain a reputation as a nuclear supplier, having been granted a contract by the UAE to build nuclear facilities. India, a non-signatory country to the NPT, has also been signing numerous agreements for the development of nuclear energy, one of which was signed with South Korea in 2011.

The issues of bilateral cooperation between India and South Korea are more closely related to Huelsz's (2009) last two points of analysis, or developing niche areas of cooperation and strengthening a regional orientation. South Korea and India have signed numerous bilateral agreements in recent years, including Memoranda of Understanding on space research, a cultural exchange programme for the years 2014-2017, cyber security, broadcasting and ICT (Embassy of in India in Seoul, n.d.). An area of cooperation that links the socio-cultural with the economy is President Park's vision of a 'creative economy' (Asia Pacific Global Research Group, 2012), which combines aspects of culture with technology. ROK, like Japan, has utilized technological platforms through which it gains not only culturally, by enabling users to access a wide variety of digital media, but also by establishing the association of electronics with a particular country, a venue for considerable soft power. Going beyond the stable foundations built by car manufacturing and infrastructure co-operation, the nature of technological co-operation has expanded rapidly in the last ten years.

These various new communication technologies, smartphones, PCs, laptops, tablets, TVs and similar consumer electronics are embedded in globalization and its ability to reach the masses. This is evidenced in this case by the spread of cellphones, which are beginning to propagate rapidly in India regardless of social class, which reveals the hybridity present in many emerging middle countries: despite being outwardly democratic and exhibiting middle power behavior, India is still beset by inequality and non-inclusive growth. Despite the levels of poverty in India, around 904.56 million people have cellphones, and with that, access to network-based money transfer and educational tools (Telecom Authority of India, 2013). The attainment of marginalized sectors of electronic goods and internet connection symbolizes the gradual dissociation of social class with electronics, as cellphones become more affordable. The transformative effect of accessible technology, that allows access to educational, cultural and social tools, cannot be underestimated in India particularly, where both industrialization and accessibility to education are drivers of economy and alleviating social inequalities. The ROK's IT cooperation with India, with ROK providing the hardware and India providing the software (Kim, 2013) has thus the potential for creating both technological and educational partnerships (such as potentials for rural education described in Dinesha & Agrawal, 2011, p. 54). Furthermore, this signals the first and third points of Huelsz's framework, in that any cooperation between the two countries is unlikely to take on a moralizing narrative, instead, identities are being formed upon the recognition of mutually beneficial 'niche' areas.

In terms of the cultural 'wave', or *Hallyu*, increasing linkages with India may not necessarily be an indicator of a budding 'Asian' identity, although indicators may point in a positive direction. Interestingly, the Indian ambassador's message to South Korea certainly indicates that 2000 years of shared Buddhist roots are not insignificant. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once said of the relationship: "Links between India and Korea go back thousands of years. Lord Buddha's abiding message of peace resonates among both our peoples," (Singh, quoted in PTI 2012).

In addition, India established an Indian Cultural Center in South Korea in 2011, with a bust of Rabindarath Tagore unveiled in Seoul in the same year. Cultural exchange between South Korea and India has further been reflected in the unprecedented popularity of K-Dramas in the northeast of India, a traditionally separatist area, but also in other parts of India (Chitransh, 2012). Conversely, Sharukh Khan's was appointed a goodwill ambassador of South Korea in 2013 (Bagchi, 2013). This is supported by South Korea's high soft power ranking (McClory, 2013), a result of their increasing cultural impact on the world.

Another means by which the networking has strengthened is education. The employment of foreign English teachers in Korea has risen rapidly, revealing local hiring practices based on nation-based perceptions of 'native' English speakers (Barnes, 2014). The preferences of ROK schools thereby single out English teachers from developing countries as undesirable, effectively excluding qualified labourers from the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) labour market. The official response of the government towards countries negatively affected by perceptions of 'legitimate' native English language speakers came belatedly in the form of the offer of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) encompassing services, which was acceded to by India in 2009. The implicit inclusion of language in a trade agreement appears counterintuitive, even strange, as it appears that the government initiative required of the ROK to encourage affirmative action on local hiring practices despite already hefty investments in the English language. The English language is particularly strategic for other goals. Doordarshan and Arirang, which signed contracts in early 2014, are international news channels of both countries.

While the above-mentioned connections may appear to be superficial, they reveal interactions not explicitly taking place on an economic or security level. In connection to this, there appears to be a broad desire to strengthen cultural and economic ties within Asia itself. In line with proposed Middle Power behavior, South Korea has furthered its cooperation with India, primarily through technological exchange, free and multilateral trade agreements in the region, defence cooperation and a more flexible attitude towards nuclear needs (in contrast with Japan, for example). In addition, there is a need to reiterate other motivations for India towards greater engagement with Asia, which began to take a cultural turn in 2000 with a cultural and environmental Mekong-Ganges River Cooperation Project with Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. Similar movements of cultural cooperation are likely to be seen if India is indeed trying to find multiple channels to reach East Asia and for strengthening its dominance within Asia, as befits a 'regional' power.

As Hong (2007) implies, the linking of South, Southeast and East Asia with China and India at the centre is the key for an 'Asian century', with Middle Powers occupying crucial roles as mediators or negotiators between great powers and little

powers within the region. Trade indicators reveal increased movement of goods between China and the ROK (from roughly \$10.8 billion to \$217 billion from 1994 to 2011) and China and India (\$ 316 million in 1992 to \$65 billion in 2011) (OECD, 2011) in the last one and a half decades is indicative of the trade networks that are beginning to take root in Asia. Furthermore, negotiations are ongoing for RCPA, which would include Australia, India, and New Zealand in a trading bloc of primarily East Asian states.

5. Conclusion

From the above, it is likely that economic and cultural linkages within Asia will continue as both South and East Asia's interests converge in specific economic areas, while maintaining soft power networks throughout Asia. In an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious Asia, it is imaginable that modes of communication especially between South and East Asia will be of the utmost importance in political, economic and cultural bilateral or multilateral relationships. In this light, it is obvious why ROK's made numerous investments in the English language, and why culture has been a crucial accompaniment to economic exchange within the region and establishing the ROK's role as a middle power.

Known as an economic power with considerable soft power reserves, South Korea may very well be on its way to creating a 'creative' technological society beyond its own borders and within other countries in Asia, without being overtly seen as a rival to China nor as a country burdened by an imperial history, such as a Japan. India, on the other hand, will have to investigate its role in both the cultures of East and Southeast Asia if Asia is to move beyond the passivity of the ASEAN way and move towards creating common values or appeals to 'Asian-ness'.

It has been said that the diversity and history of conflict within Asia represents a challenge to solidarity. It is in this area where the appropriation of the tools of globalization represents opportunities rather than challenges. South Korea and India are two emerging economies and democracies that are likely to play significant roles in the Asian region in the future. With their investment in education, language training and technology, they are also poised to set the precedent for more cultural and technologically-based cooperation in the future. The ROK-India relationship furthermore presents a cross-regional platform for challenging the stiff lines of the 'Asian Values' argument – for while both countries are undoubtedly Asian and interested in economic cooperation, they appear to be more open towards co-operating with authoritarian states without having a vested interest in political regime change despite democratic backgrounds. Should this difference in governance become a future challenge to integration within Asia, the soft power of both the ROK and India should not be underestimated in presenting a mediator between Asian sets of values.

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