Cultural Diplomacy Within the Library: The South Korean Model

Marian SUCIU & Octavia HULPOI
"Octavian Goga" County Library, Cluj-Napoca
Corresponding author emails: marian.suciu@bjc.ro, octavia.hulpoi@bjc.ro

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Abstract: This paper presents the importance of Korean cultural diplomacy, as an important soft power tool through which the Asian state consolidates the positive image of the Korean peninsula in the world. Similar to the soft power of the United States of America and Japan, the Republic of Korea also has an indirect and private cultural diplomacy enforced by K-Pop singers and Korean movie stars, and a direct cultural diplomacy financed by various agencies of the Korean government or even Korean universities. The "Korean Wave" phenomenon will be briefly introduced in the first part of the article. It appeared in East Asia in the 1990s and afterwards spread to the Middle East, North America and Europe. The influence of this private cultural diplomacy in Romania is discussed, as well as how Korean culture became more widespread with the help of three important Romanian universities. In the last part of the paper, we will concentrate on the way in which Korean cultural diplomacy influences Romanian public libraries. In order to better illustrate the spread of Korean culture in libraries we used the example provided by the "Petre Dulfu" County Library and "Octavian Goga" Cluj County Library. Although the Korean influence is only at the beginning in Romania, we see that the funding offered by Korean entities improve the Korean book resources in libraries, which assists the dedicated librarians in preparing better programs to promote Korea.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Korean Wave, Korean Corner, Korean Shelf, Public Libraries.

Citation suggestion: Suciu, Marian and Octavia Hulpoi. "Cultural Diplomacy Within the Library: The South Korean Model." *Transilvania*, no. 10 (2024): 51-57.
https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.10.06.

As public libraries "struggle to justify their existence in a world of 24/7 access increasingly evaluated by profit-based, commercial metrics"[1], it is of no surprise that the institutions and their librarians have to be in a continuous state of transformation so that they can remain relevant for the community in the new times, where access to information is usually a click away. Firstly, library buildings must be changed in order to accommodate readers in a "third space", a place in which the patrons can visit eagerly after work or school, but before going home, to relax, read, or develop. Secondly, the librarian needs to go beyond their traditional role of custodian of knowledge that stores and preserves physical and digital items and become either a cultural mediator or a life-long learning educator.

In this context of transformation, the patrons encounter specially arranged spaces within the libraries that introduce a foreign culture or the culture of a national minority. These spaces are called cultural corners or cultural windows. These cultural spaces were made possible through the funding of various agencies from the country of origin of the respective cultures or through the donation of patrons. For example, at the "Octavian Goga" Cluj County Library, there are: the American Corner; the Multicultural Hall with the Francophone Corner, the Hungarian Corner, the Polish Corner, the Ukrainian Corner

1. James K. Elmborg, "Libraries as the Spaces Between Us: Recognizing and Valuing the Third Space," *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, no. 4 (2011): 338.

and the Indian Corner; as well as the Korean and Japanese Shelf at the "Traian Brad" Branch. In these spaces, the patrons can find resources regarding a culture and enjoy nonformal educational activities. Therefore, through these spaces the patrons benefit from cultural diplomacy, which is developed by the foreign countries indirectly.

1. Cultural Diplomacy

In our opinion, the title of ambassador Cynthia P. Schneider's article, "Cultural Diplomacy: Hard to Define, But You'd Know It If You Saw It"[2], is the best way to define this concept because "[c]urrently, there is no academic consensus on its definition"[3]. A simple definition is offered by Milton C. Cummings, who explains that cultural diplomacy "refers to the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding"[4]. Another definition is offered by Arndt Richard, who affirms that cultural diplomacy "only exists when the governments pay attention to this complex field, try to make sense of the chaos, attempt to configure the chaos, and afterwards put it at the service of the 'national interest'"[5]. Therefore, we can say that cultural diplomacy is more a one-way street, which is used by the nations as a tool of soft power, i.e. "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. [As] [i]t arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies"[6].

Among the countries that managed to use, more or less effectively, cultural diplomacy as a tool of soft power, we can mention the United States of America, the People's Republic of China and Japan. The United States of America succeeded to "communicate the intangibles that make America great: individual freedom; justice and opportunity for all; diversity and tolerance"[7] mainly through the private sector, especially Hollywood movies and television series. Another component of the United States of America's cultural diplomacy is the programs developed through the American Centers and American Corners, which are important "places to learn about US culture and the values of American society"[8]. Another important state that developed strong cultural diplomacy is the People's Republic of China, through the Confucius Classrooms and Confucius Institute, which "is a non-profit public organization affiliated with China's Ministry of Education"[9]. Through this institute and the international channel CGTN, the Chinese state reinforced the multimillennial Chinese culture, but also their new humanitarian values. Last but not least important, Japan, through various institutions, promoted the traditional Japanese values and culture, but did not put an emphasis on the ultramodern side, such as Japanese Pop Music, "Haruki Murakami's literature, anime and otaku culture"[10], as these are not considered authentic Japanese culture. Although their modern culture is not promoted by the Japanese state, through the translation of manga (Japanese comic books) by various publishing houses around the world and the distribution of Japanese Pop Music by international musical channels and companies, private entities have contributed to Japanese cultural diplomacy.

2. The Korean Wave

The Korean Wave, also known as "Hallyu" in Korean, is the process through which Korean culture has spread "beginning in East Asia in 1990s and continuing more recently in the United States, Latin

2. Cynthia P. Scheneider, "Cultural Diplomacy: Hard to Define, But You'd Know It If You Saw It," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs,* no.1 (2006): 191.
3. Mariano Martin Zamorano, "Reframing Cultural Diplomacy: The Instrumentalization of Culture under the Soft Power Theory," *Cultural Unbound. Journal of Current Cultural Research*, no. 8 (2016): 180.
4. Milton C. Cummings, "Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey." *American for the Arts*, published on June 26, 2009. https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/MCCpaper.pdf.
5. Richard Arndtd, "¿Cultura o propaganda? Reflexiones sobre medio siglo de diplomacia cultural en Estados Unidos," *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior* 85 (2009): 31.
6. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics (*New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x.
7. Cynthia P. Schneider, "Diplomacy that Works: `Best Practices` in Cultural Diplomacy," *Interarts,* accessed on April 21, 2024, 2. https://interarts.net/descargas/interarts667.pdf.
8.Natália Goda and Michaela Čiefovaá, "Cultural Diplomacy of Selected Countries in a Comparative Perspective," *Folia Geographica*, no. 2 (2019): 178.
9. Ibid., 181.
10. Kazuo Ogoura, "Japan's Cultural Diplomacy, Past and Present," *Peace and Culture,* no.1 (2009): 52.

America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe"[11]. The term of Korean Wave "was coined by the Chinese mass media in 2001 responding to a rise in popularity of South Korean pop culture products and stars"[12]. Hallyu does not include only Korean pop music, although the "Korean wave music has become wildly popular [and] [t]he K-pop fandom is passionate to the point of obsessive"[13]. In truth, this wave encompasses movies and television series, manhwa (Korean comic books), literature, and so on. The Korean wave has spread all over the world, as information and entertainment are available at the click of a mouse or by the simple touch of a smartphone screen. Therefore, it is of no surprise that the Hallyu also influences Romanians, in general, and the Romanian younger generation, especially. According to Valentina Marinescu and Ecaterina Balica, in Romania, the Korean culture has entered through the distribution of Korean television series and Korean pop music by various television channels (TVR 1, TVR 2, National TV, N24 Plus, Euforia TV), the movies shown at the Transylvania International Film Festival, the cultural and language courses offered by universities and non-profit organizations, the events organized by the Embassy of South Korea and the shows presented by Korean theater groups at various events[14]. Because Korean productions are not widely distributed on television channels with a larger audience, such as PRO TV or Antena 1, and the Romanian public is not accustomed with reading manhwa in physical form, it can be argued that the Korean Wave is not a wave, "just a Korean breeze"[15], as is the case of Poland.

As teenagers listen to Korean music, they become fascinated by the way in which Korean musical bands, such as BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan) or BigBang, promote their culture through music, and want to better understand them. Therefore, many of the teenage fans around the world "started to learn Korean as an impact of watching BTS music videos that they wanted to understand better"[16].

3. Korean Cultural Diplomacy

After the difficult periods of the Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953), the Republic of Korea, under President Park Chunge-hee (1961-1979), focused more on the economic development and industrialization of the country. At the same time, the government made some attempts to promote the national culture through international artistic events, such as the world-wide performances of traditional art forms put on by the Korea Gugak Center from 1964 to 1979. Moreover, the quality of the movie industry had improved, being less harshly censored by the government than the television channels, which had "drawn favorable attention abroad"[17]. By 1993, South Korea had its first civilian president, Kim Young-sam, and the country changed its development policy by adopting the globalization trend (segyehwa). Therefore, in 1997, the Ministry of Culture and Sports implemented the promotion of the *Top Ten Symbols of Korean Culture*: the hanbok (Korean traditional clothing), Hangeul (the Korean Alphabet), Kimchi and Bulgogi (traditional foods), Bulguksa and Sukgulam (Buddhist temples), Taekwondo (a Korean traditional martial art), Koryeo Insam (Ginseng), the traditional mask dance, Jongmyo (the Royal Ancestral Shrine), Seollak Mountain and Korean artists of international caliber[18]. Under President Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008), it was decided to broaden the national cultural symbols to the "100 national (minjok) cultural symbols encompassing both

11. Sue Jin Lee, "The Korean Wave: The Seoul of Asia," *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 2 (2011): 85.

12. Keehyeung Lee, "Mapping Out the Cultural Politics of the Korean Wave in Contemporary South Korea," in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Beng Huat Chua and Koichi Iwabuichi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 176.

13. Brendan Canavan, *Contemporary Consumption, Consumers and Marketing: Cases from Generation Y and Z,* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 17.

14. Valentina Marinescu and Ecaterina Balica. "Audience Perceptions and Representations of Korea: The Romanian Experience," in *The Global Impact of South Korean Popular Culture. Hallyu Unbound*, ed. Valentina Marinescu (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 90–92.

15. Emilia Szalkowska, "No Wave, just a Korean breeze in Poland," in *Korean Wave*, ed. The Korean Herald (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2008), 194.

16. Rozália Klára Bakó, "Global Stars on Local Screens: BTS and Its 'Army'," *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Communication,* no. 7 (2020): 159.

17. James Wade, "Korea's Film World: History and Trends," in *Korean Dance, Theater and Cinema,* ed. Korean National Commission for UNESCO (Seoul: Si-sa-yong-o-sa Publishers, 1983), 199.

18. Hyungseok Kang, "Contemporary Cultural Diplomacy in South Korea: Explicit and Implicit Approaches," *International Journal of Cultural Policy,* no. 4 (2015): 435–437.

traditional and modern culture"[19]. Furthermore, during the same presidential mandate, a new cultural policy framework, *Creative Korea,* was devised which meant that the Korean economy would orient itself more towards the content industry and less on the production industries. This new policy led to the creation of non-governmental cultural organizations such as the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), Korea Foundation for Cultural Industries Exchange (KOFICE), and the program expansion of the Korea Foundation, which is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All these non-governmental organizations have as a main goal the expansion of the Korean Wave throughout the world[20]. Among these agencies, the Korea Foundation is the most known, as it has a dedicated program towards the development of the Korean language courses in universities, improving the Korean book funds in libraries, expanding the Korean exhibitions in various museums, and helping movies and performative arts be exposed to the rest world.

3.1. Korean Cultural Diplomacy and Romanian Universities

As the "Korean Breeze" has prompted more and more Romanians to be interested not only in K-Pop music and Korean movies, but also Korean culture and literature, new Korean spaces were opened in Romanian universities to sustain the development of the Korean culture. The Korean program at Babeș-Bolyai University began in 1997, when, with the help of KOICA and Korean volunteer instructors, language courses were offered at the Faculty of Letters. Starting with 2005, with the funding of the Korea Foundation, Park Youngsuk arrived at the Cluj-Napoca university and breathed new life into the program. As the Korean language courses attracted more and more people, the Korean Cultural Center was opened in 2007 in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. The Center was meant to sustain the new Korean language and literature program and promote Korean culture more effectively in the Romanian community, as the space previously occupied in the Faculty of Letters was limited[21]. The Korean Cultural Center managed to attract more young adults and teenagers with their current collection of 2,000 books, which led to the creation of a Korean Corner in the Library of the Faculty of Letters in November 2023, through a collaborative effort involving the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, "the Embassy of South Korea, Babeș-Bolyai University, [the] Korea Foundation, but also being sponsored by the local Asian food store, Taste of Asia"[22]. This is the third Korean Corner opened in a Romanian University.

The Romanian-Korean Studies Center "was established in December 2011 at the Romanian-American University (RAU), being part of [the] Department of Asian Studies"[23] and rapidly became an important cultural center, where students could learn about the Korean language and culture "both onsite and [in an] online format"[24]. Moreover, since 2016, the Romanian-Korean Studies Center is a site for the Testing of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK). As the center offers more and more courses, it is of no surprise that the first Korean Corner in Romania was opened at this location in May 2021. During the opening of the Korean Corner, the participants were witness to "eye-catching performances and events – from Samulnori, a traditional musical performance, to modern-day K-Pop dances, as well as a special exhibition"[25]. Another important Korean Corner was opened in November 2022 at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures of Bucharest University. The Korean Section was established at Bucharest University in 2005 and offers both an undergraduate BA program and graduate studies

19. Ibid., 437.
20. Ibid., 440–442.
21. Youngsuk Park, "Korean Studies at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania," *Journal of Korean Studies,* vol. 10 (2009): 96-102.
22. Ramona Ștefania Tulug, "Inauguration of Korean Corner at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania," *Honorary Reporters,* last modified November 22, 2023. https://honoraryreporters.korea.net/board/detail.do?articlecate=1&board_no=16189&tpln=1.
23. Oana Vasiliu, "Diana Peca, the Romanian-Korean Studies Center: I think that any close encounter with another culture is opening new doors and perspectives," *Business Review,* last modified June 12, 2023, https://business-review.eu/profiles1/interviews-interviews/diana-peca-the-romanian-korean-studies-center-247166.
24. Ibid.
25. "Korean Corner – Grand Opening," *Romanian Journal,* last modified May 20, 2021. https://www.romaniajournal.ro/spare-time/korea-corner-grand-opening.

through the Masters of East Asian Studies[26]. Furthermore, the King Sejong Institute, a Korean teaching institute funded by the government of the Republic of Korea, was opened in 2020 at Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University[27]. Since its inauguration, the King Sejong Institute has regularly organized Korean language and culture classes, while also focusing on traditional Korean music and teaching Korean musical instruments.

3.2. Korean Cultural Diplomacy in Romanian Public Libraries

When talking of Korean cultural diplomacy in Romanian public libraries, we can discover two major ways in which the Korean influence has entered these spaces. On one hand, we have the case of the "Petre Dulfu" County Library, which managed to ensure a donation of documents from Kangnam University. On the other hand, we have the Korean Shelf at the "Octavian Goga" Cluj County Library, created from books initially donated by the Korea Foundation and expanded through the continuous winning of new grants of books from the same organization. The first contact of the "Petre Dulfu" County Library with the Korean culture was between 2 and 28 November 2007 when, through the mediation of professor Youngsuk Park from the Korean Cultural Center of Babeș-Bolyai University and with the help of the South Korean Embassy, the Jiwon Park Yangjun Calligraphy Exhibition was organized at the library in Baia Mare[28]. After only 4 years, on 29 June 2011, the Korean Corner of the "Petre Dulfu" County Library was inaugurated in the presence of the president of Kangnam University, Ph.D. Shinil Yoon, and the general director of the library, Ph.D. Teodor Ardelean. The Korean Corner in Baia Mare has 833 documents, the majority of which are books for learning Korean, but there are also books on Korean culture and history, Korean literature and even some Korean movies and television series. Furthermore, the charm of this Korean Corner is given by "the traditional South Korean costume, hanbok, a number of ritual drums, some Korean masks and a traditional painting scroll"[29]. Unfortunately, there were no recent workshops or events related to Korean culture organized at the library, despite the fact that such programs could shine a brighter spotlight on the collection and increase the interest of children and teenagers in this small, but diverse collection.

In July 2019, long before the development of the Korean Shelf, a librarian specialized in Asian languages initiated a summer workshop, "Asian Wisdom", at the "Traian Brad" Branch of the "Octavian Goga" Cluj County Library. During the period of this activity, children and teenagers learned about Asian cultures and were taught the Korean alphabet. In September 2019, the same librarian organized the "Club of Asian Strategy Games"[30], which took place both at the "Traian Brad" Branch and the Multicultural Room within the headquarters of the "Octavian Goga" Cluj County Library. Moreover, starting with the summer of 2020, the librarian specialized in Asian languages initiated the summer-vacation workshop on the Korean language, named "Discover Korea!", wherein approximately 12 children managed to learn the Korean alphabet and some introductory notions. During the following summer, the workshop was repeated, and this time 20 children were eager to learn the Korean language and the Asian games presented.

At the end of November 2021, the librarians at the "Traian Brad" Branch managed to organize a Korean Shelf with a fund of approximately 90 documents on the premises, the majority of the books bearing the stamp of the Korea Foundation coming from the Reading Room collection of the headquarters. This fund is composed of volumes of Korean literature (in English and Romanian), books on Korean history and society, autobiographies of fugitives from North Korea and the works of Kim Il-sung, the first North Korean leader. This collection is meant to further the development of the teenagers who

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26. "The Opening of Korea Corner at University of Bucharest and Award for Contribution to Hangeul (Korean Language) Development," *Nine O'Clock,* last modified November 25, 2022, https://nineoclock.ro/2022/11/25/the-opening-of-korea-corner-at-university-of-bucharest-and-award-for-contribution-to-hangeul-korean-language-development/.
27. "Inaugurarea Institutului King Sejong din București, care va funcționa sub tutela Universității Creștine Dimitrie Cantemir", *Economistul,* last modified September 9, 2020, https://www.economistul.ro/stiri-si-analize-business/inaugurarea-institutului-king-sejong-din-bucuresti-care-va-functiona-sub-tutela-universitatii-crestine-dimitrie-cantemir-19159/.
28. Park, "Korean Studies at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania," 103.
29. Vlăduț Burde, "Oaza de înțelepciune coreeană din Baia Mare," *Bibliotheca Septentrionalis. Revista Bibliotecii Județene "Petre Dulfu" Baia Mare,* no. 2 (2014): 10.
30. Among the Asian strategy games that the teenagers learned, I would mention Hasami shōgi, a variant of Shōgi (Japanese Chess), Hanafuda (Flower Cards), Xiàngqí (Chinese Chess) and Janggi (Korean Chess).

participate in the activities on the Korean culture and language and want to further their study about the Korean society. Therefore, after the Korean Shelf was inaugurated, the "Discover Korea!" program was transformed from a summer program into a year-round activity.

During 2022 and 2023, "Discover Korea!" attracted over 200 participants to its more than 70 activities. Additionally, at the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, we applied for 2 grants through the "Distribution of Korean Studies Resources" program offered by the Korea Foundation, through which we received 171 documents at the end of 2022. Furthermore, we submitted a new application within the same program in 2023 and we received 26 documents. These new stocks of documents refreshed the Korean shelf and helped the librarian with the development of new activities during the "Discover Korea!" workshops.

The "Discover Korea!" programs in 2023 and 2024 included not only learning the Korean alphabet, but also learning the grammar of the language and some hanja (the Chinese characters used in Korea). Furthermore, the cultural activities of this program are not just listening about Korean history and culture, but also painting traditional lamps, Korean masks (hahoetal) and drums; creating a traditional turtle ship, the traditional Korean hat (gat); painting and recreating the Korean peninsula puzzle map; playing traditional Korean[31] and Asian games[32], and Asian-themed board games[33]; reading manhwa; watching short history videos; using apps such as Iwitness when learning about the crimes committed by the Japanese during the occupation, and comparing them with the Holocaust, and so on.

Another innovative teaching approach that needs to be taken into account is the use of the 3D printer during the "Discover Korea!" workshops. This enabled the children to learn how to design a keychain with their name written in Hangeul, transform an image of the Korean map into a 3D model with the design program Tinkercad, or design their own Janggu drum, which could be personalized with a 3D pen after printing.

The "Traian Brad" Branch held special events, such as "With or without a mask" during the "Night of the Libraries" on 29th September 2023, when 10 children and teenagers painted a traditional Korean mask, the celebration of the "International Day of Theater" in March 2024, when 25 children from a neighboring school learned about traditional Asian masks and painted a Korean fan and mask. Furthermore, during the "Korean Culture Week" (4-9 December 2023), the Korean Department of Babeș-Bolyai University organized two workshops at the "Octavian Goga" Cluj County Library. The first workshop was organized at the "Traian Brad" Branch, and the children had the opportunity to create a traditional Korean painting. The second one was organized at the Multicultural Hall in the central building of the Cluj County Library and the professors offered a calligraphy workshop for children to write in Hangeul.

Although the initiative to promote the Korean language and culture at the "Traian Brad" Branch of the "Octavian Goga" Cluj County Library is rather new, through the development of the Korean Shelf and innovative Korean language and culture workshops, we try to attract more children and teenagers to embrace the diversity of this globalized world by learning a unique foreign language and reading from the small, but varied collection of Korean books, and therefore, deepening their knowledge of the Korean peninsula.

In conclusion, we can affirm that, although the spread of interest in the Korean culture and society is just beginning in Romania, the creation of Korean Corners within the universities that develop Korean studies programs, with the direct involvement of the Korean Embassy in Romania, and the development of Korean collections and Korean workshops at public libraries, such as the "Petre Dulfu" County Library and "Octavian Goga" Cluj County Library, helps the spread of Korean language and culture. Furthermore, through various programs, the Korean agencies, universities and government develop a Korean Cultural Diplomacy that sustains the efforts of universities and libraries to reach people interested in finding out more about Korea.

31. Among the Korean games used during the workshop I would mention Tuho (a Korean Pitch-Pot Game), Janggi (Korean Chess), Yutnori (Traditional Korean Boardgame), Jul-gonu (Strategic Korean Boardgame) and Hwatu (Korean Flower Card Game).

32. Among the Asian games used during the workshop I would mention Hasami shōgi, a variant of Shōgi (Japanese Chess), Xiàngqí (Chinese Chess), and Go.

33. Among the Asian theme boardgames used during the workshop I would mention Hanamikoji, Okiya, Takenoko, Samurai Sword, Lanterns, Hanabi and Niwa.

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