

THE CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF "SOFT POWER" IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

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ANNOTATION

The purpose of the article is to provide information about the main social media platforms of the Korean Wave in the Republic of Korea and to analyze them globally. Additionally, it aims to present data on the soft power strategy in cultural directions and index information.

Keywords: *Korean Wave, social media, education and cultural centers, Korean platforms, tourism.*

ANNOTATSIYA

Maqolaning maqsadi Koreya Respublikasining Kareya to'liqini asosiy ijtimoiy media platformalari haqida ma'lumotlar berish va ularning global tahlillari ko'rib chiqish. Shu bilan birga madaniy yo'nalishlarda yumshoq kuch olmili va indeks ma'lumotlari ko'rsatishdan iborat.

Kalit so'zlar: *koreya to'liqini, ijtimoiy media, ta'lim va madaniy markazlar, koreya platformalari, turizm.*

АННОТАЦИЯ

Цель статьи – предоставить информацию об основных платформах социальных медиа Корейской волны в Республике Корея и провести их глобальный анализ. Кроме того, она направлена на представление данных о стратегии мягкой силы в культурных направлениях и индексной информации.

Ключевые слова: *Корейская волна, социальные медиа, образовательные и культурные центры, корейские платформы, туризм.*

INTRODUCTION

The successful implementation of a state's soft power policy largely depends on the activities of its institutions. Cultural and artistic organizations, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and diplomatic missions play a crucial role in this process. For instance, through cultural institutions, a state promotes its national values, while educational institutions attract foreign students, enhancing the country's prestige.

In South Korea, the government plays a key role in managing and coordinating this process. The Korea Tourism Organization, the Ministry of Culture, and foreign education programs serve as the primary tools of the country's soft power policy. These institutions are dedicated to promoting the nation's cultural wealth and intellectual potential on a global scale.

In recent years, political scientists in Seoul have started utilizing the concept of "soft power" and have found it to be an attractive instrument of foreign policy. After the Korean War ended, South Korea initially focused on strengthening its "hard power"—building a strong military to counter North Korea and fostering economic growth to lift the country out of poverty. However, with rapid economic development, consolidated democracy, and reconciliation efforts with the North, South Korea now views the world from a broader perspective beyond its small peninsula.

For political entrepreneurs seeking the best way to enhance their country's international reputation, Joseph Nye's famous concept of "soft power" is defined as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment." Academic discussions have now moved beyond theoretical considerations to more practical and complex questions, particularly regarding how South Korea's diplomacy should integrate the soft power approach following the inauguration* of the Lee Myung-bak administration. The government established the Presidential Council on Nation Branding by incorporating the marketing concept of "branding" into soft power in January 2009¹.

Korean Wave, Social Media Platforms, and Global Analysis

Strategists in Korea recognize the advantages of "soft power" in achieving two key objectives. One of them is to strengthen the country's international political and diplomatic influence, which remains relatively weak compared to its hard power. From an economic perspective, South Korea ranks as the world's third-largest economy, and its overall military strength is ranked twelfth globally. Many American experts consider South Korea to be one of the most reliable military allies. While acknowledging the country's hard power, more Koreans are beginning to recognize the gaps in their nation's soft power.

Another goal is to find an alternative source of power within soft power that will increase South Korea's "footprint" both in the region and globally. The measurement of such influence should account for the fact that, as a middle power, Korea can never realistically compete with major regional powers like China and Japan. Nevertheless,

¹ Образование Как Инструмент «Мягкой Силы» Республики Корея (Начало XXI Века)/ Метелева/Екатеринбург 2021 43-36с

*A solemn ceremony held in connection with the assumption of the highest office by the head of state.

utilizing "soft power" can serve as a pathway to greater regional and even global influence. The success of the Korean cultural wave (Hallyu), which is spread through television dramas and other forms of mass culture, has reinforced this new way of thinking.

"Hallyu" or the "Korean Wave" (Korean: 한류, Hallyu) first emerged after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and China in 1992. Between 1992 and 1997, numerous Korean films and television shows were broadcast on Chinese television. In 1997, the "Seoul Music Agency" program was aired in Beijing, making Korean dance music particularly popular among the youth. When discussing the success of Korean pop culture, the term "Hallyu" or "Korean Wave" is widely used in Korean media.

In 2009, Joseph Nye described this phenomenon as follows: *"...By the late 1990s, the rise of 'Hallyu' or the 'Korean Wave' began—boosting the popularity of all things Korean, from fashion and cinema to music and cuisine... As a result, South Korea started developing a foreign policy that enabled it to play a significant role in international institutions and networks that are crucial to global governance."*²

The "Korean Wave" has also contributed to establishing diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and other nations. For instance, the Korea Foundation (KF; Korean: 한국국제교류재단, Korea Foundation for International Exchange) organizes various events such as Korean speech contests, lecture series on Korea, bilateral forums, and modernized performances of traditional Korean music. These initiatives continue to enhance Korea's cultural influence worldwide³.

Korea's Social Media Platforms and Global Analyses. Korea's social media platforms and their global impact can be observed in various fields. The analysis of Hallyu (Korean Wave) has already been mentioned above and remains popular today. South Korea's K-pop industry sets global trends on social media platforms. Groups like BTS and BLACKPINK lead in engaging global audiences through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The number of similar groups continues to rise. Korean companies and analysts monitor K-pop content consumption, tracking views, likes, and shares. New marketing strategies are developed based on trends. For example, BTS's song "*Dynamite*"⁴ set a record with over 100 million views in a single day. Korean dramas, such as *Squid Game*, attract

² Nye J. Public Diplomacy and Soft Power // The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 2008. №616 (94). P. 90.

³ Образование. Как Инструмент «Мягкой Силы» Республики Корея (Начало XXI Века)/ Метелева/Екатеринбург 2021 28-30с

⁴ From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia// [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynamite_\(BTS_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynamite_(BTS_song))

millions of viewers on platforms like Netflix. Audience responses are analyzed through international rating systems like IMDb (Internet Movie Database) and Rotten Tomatoes, as well as social media reviews. The Role of South Korean Tech Giants. KakaoTalk is the most popular messaging app in Korea and serves as a key platform for digital communication and advertising campaigns. Data collected via KakaoTalk is used to analyze user behavior. Other important platforms include Naver and Daum, which are local search engines actively used for collecting and analyzing social media data.

Tourism and Brand Analysis The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) promotes cultural and historical sites through Instagram and YouTube. Comments and reactions to posts and videos are analyzed. For instance, the *"Imagine Your Korea"* campaign features images and videos of tourist attractions that have been viewed millions of times. South Korean social media monitoring services, such as Socialbakers (an analytical tool for detailed social media statistics) and Hootsuite (a centralized platform for planning, publishing, and analyzing content across social media accounts), help analyze audience interests and reactions. **Studying International Audience Reactions** South Korean social media research firms analyze YouTube comments and Twitter trends to study international audience attitudes toward Korean culture. For example, geographic analysis of K-pop and K-drama trends identifies which countries have the largest audiences. TikTok videos are used to assess interest in Korean brands and products.

Government and Social Media Management This includes propaganda and soft power policies. The South Korean government enhances cultural diplomacy through social media to attract international audiences. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture actively use YouTube and Twitter. The effectiveness of social media campaigns for government organizations is measured using Google Analytics or local platforms.

Economic Impact through Social Media: E-commerce and Brand Promotion. South Korean cosmetic and technology products are promoted via social media. Companies like LG and Samsung develop new products based on social media advertisements and user feedback. Korean cosmetic brands such as Innisfree and Laneige showcase their products to a global audience via Instagram and TikTok. Current statistics indicate that Korean cosmetics are among the most preferred and widely purchased products worldwide.

Humanitarian and Social Campaigns. South Korea uses social media as a promotional tool for international donations and social campaigns. These initiatives

play a crucial role in attracting international audiences and creating a positive national image.

Soft Power vs. Hard Power. Compared to hard power, soft power is becoming increasingly dominant. The components of soft power are gaining global popularity, and Korea's success is significantly influencing its culture, boosting its economy, and strengthening diplomatic relations with other nations. Korea's soft power is mainly reflected in its cultural dimensions. This highlights the uniqueness of its culture, as Asian countries generally take a cautious approach to foreign policy. As a result, these countries are willing to share their distinctive cultures, which differ from Western culture⁵.

Indicators of Korea's Soft Power in the Cultural Sphere

The driving force behind the Korean Wave is the music industry, which is promoted by various Korean companies. The government has been utilizing this rapidly growing sector as a tool of soft power to establish its political influence on the international stage. Due to the growing interest in modern South Korean styles, Korean music is gradually becoming a subculture worldwide. The availability of digital content has enabled Korean music to reach an unprecedentedly vast audience, expanding its influence beyond traditional boundaries⁶.

According to the Global Soft Power Index 2020, a comprehensive study on soft power perceptions worldwide, South Korea ranked 14th⁷ with a score of 48.3.

Now, let's refer to the statistical data on the stock prices and market value of Korean entertainment companies⁸ in 2020. It is necessary to highlight the key companies that played a role in shaping South Korea's image through close cooperation with the government. Below, you can observe graphs showing the stock prices and market values of these companies in 2020. Stock price represents the market price of the shares, while market value (the current market price of shares multiplied by the total number of shares in circulation) is a better indicator of a company's overall worth. Prices are shown in Won (₩).

The Role of Digital Platforms in Soft Power. YouTube and other digital platforms serve as excellent tools of soft power not only for South Korea but for any country aiming to promote its image and values. Music videos are among the most-

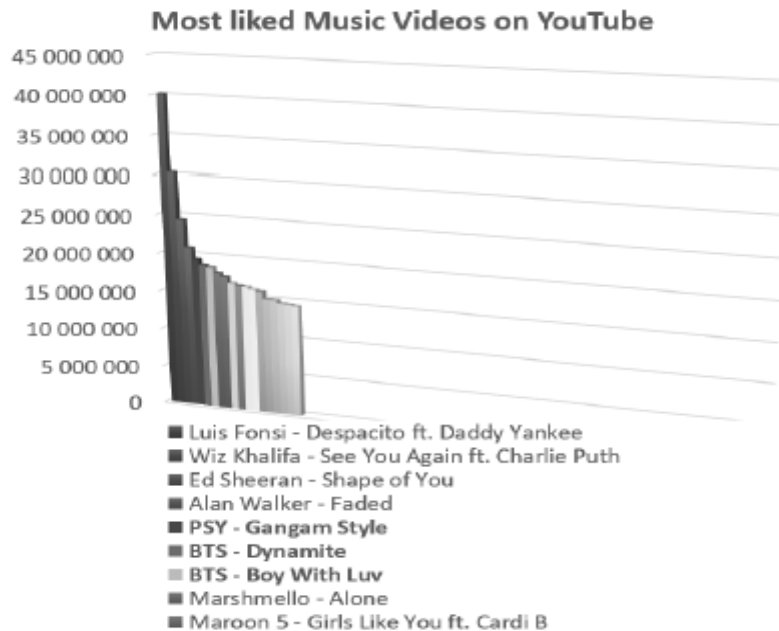
⁵ Lee S.J. South Korea's soft power diplomacy. Available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/136823/200908061729956.pdf> [Accessed 25/05/21].

⁶ Маркеева Д.В. Южнокорейская популярная музыка и ее влияние в мире // Молодой ученый. 2017. № 20. С. 258-260.

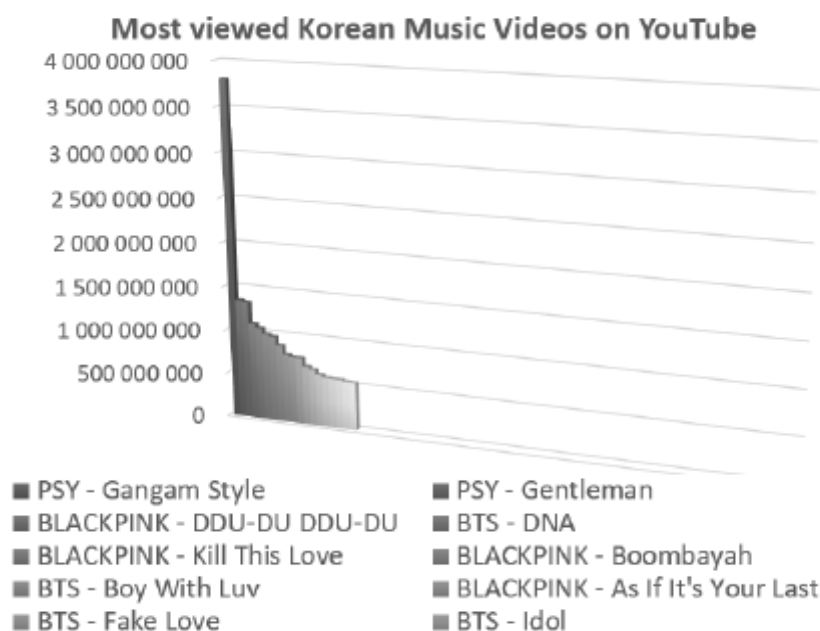
⁷ Global Soft Power Index 2020. URL: <https://brandirectory.com/globalsoftpower/download/brand-finance-global-soft-power-index-2020.pdf/>

⁸ Korean entertainment companies share prices and market values. Available at: <https://dbkpop.com/db/korean-entertainment-companies-2020-stock-prices-and-market-values> [Accessed 25/05/21].

watched content on YouTube, attracting new audiences not only to Korean music but also to Korean culture, language, and other aspects of life. The authors suggest presenting statistical data related to influence and impact through graphical representation, providing a clear visualization of how these companies contribute to South Korea’s soft power by engaging global audiences.

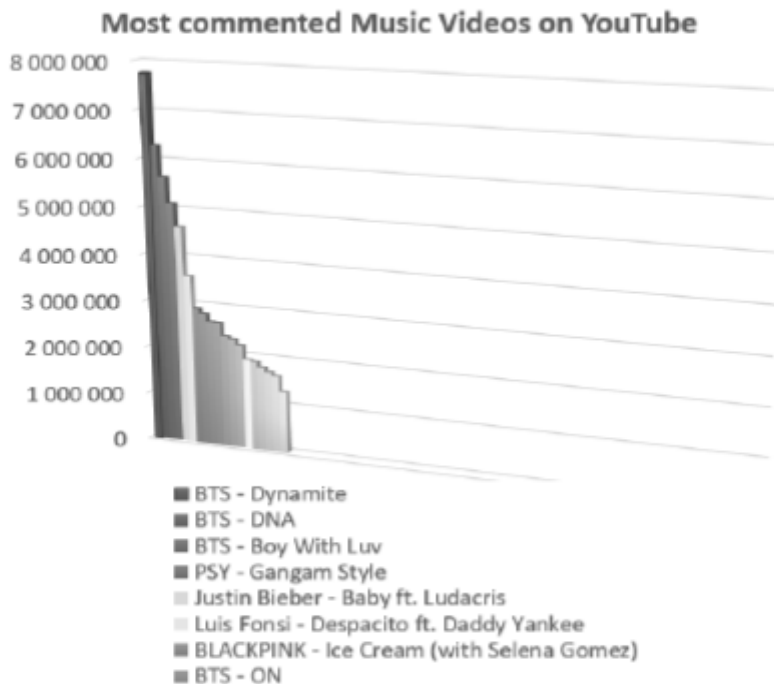


The first image depicts the most-watched groups. YouTube views support musical artists in trending across all platforms, allowing South Korea to promote its modern culture in the digital space⁹.



⁹ Distribution of K-pop views on YouTube worldwide. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1106704/south-korea-kpop-youtube-views-by-country/> [Accessed 25/05/21].

The second image shows the most-liked music videos, where Korean music is listed alongside other international artists¹⁰. Korean groups appear multiple times in the overall ranking, highlighting their popularity and their ability to compete with entertainment giants like those in the United States. Likes serve as a relative indicator of audience engagement, allowing for the measurement of listener preferences.



The third image focuses on user engagement in the comments section, which is clearly illustrated in the diagram. In this ranking, Korean music has significantly surpassed Western artists¹¹. Music videos evoke strong emotional reactions, both positive and negative, reflecting interactions among engaged audiences. This indicator also serves as a measure of Korea’s soft power.

South Korea’s Use of Social Media for Soft Power Promotion. South Korea has been effectively utilizing social media to promote its soft power, increase cultural and economic influence, and strategically expand its global impact. Social media analysis has become a crucial tool in measuring Korea’s influence on a global scale and in strategic planning. With the help of such analyses, Korea continues to strengthen its soft power diplomacy in the international arena and is expected to maintain its growth in this area.

Digital Technologies and Soft Power. Digital platforms have become a key tool for nations to establish their presence on a global scale. Countries use social media and other digital tools to promote their values. For example, the United Kingdom’s

¹⁰ Most liked music videos. URL: https://kworb.net/youtube/topvideos_likes.html [Accessed 25/05/21].

¹¹ Most commented music videos. Available at: https://kworb.net/youtube/topvideos_comments.html [Accessed 25/05/21].

"Visit Britain" tourism platform and Japan's digital campaigns promoting anime and technological innovations serve as prime examples.

South Korea has also developed several digital platforms to enhance and promote tourism. These platforms not only showcase the country's historical, cultural, and natural heritage to an international audience but also provide convenient services for tourists. Tourism should be emphasized as a major component of South Korea's soft power. Each year, more than 10 million tourists visit South Korea, which is a significant figure compared to its 50 million population. The annual tourism flow has been increasing by approximately 14%, driven by a positive national image, minimal bureaucratic barriers, and well-developed tourist clusters and recreational infrastructure¹².

-Tourism Industry Statistics. In 2019, South Korea welcomed 17.5 million international tourists, demonstrating its tourism sector's success before the pandemic.

South Korea Tourism Statistics (2020-2024)

Year	Tourism Revenue (Billion USD)	Number of International Visitors (Million)	Remarks
2020	10.2	Unknown	Tourism revenue dropped by 86% due to the COVID-19 pandemic ¹³ .
2021	11.43	Unknown	Tourism revenue slightly recovered.
2022	11.8	Unknown	Tourism revenue grew slowly.
2023	15	11	The number of international visitors increased by 245% compared to 2020 ¹⁴ .
2024 (First Half)	15 (8.3% increase) ¹⁵	Unknown	25.4% lower than in 2019 ¹⁶ .

¹² Specialized agency of the United Nations World Tourism Organization UNWTO.

URL: <http://media.unwto.org/ru/press-release/2013%E2%80%9305%E2%80%9315/> (дата обращения 08.03.2017).

¹³ World Travels and Tourism Council, South Korea's Travel & Tourism Sector Set to Reach New Heights in 2024 <https://wttc.org/news-article/south-koreas-travel-and-tourism-sector-set-to-reach-new-heights-in-2024#:~:text=Julia%20Simpson%2C%20WTTC%20President%20&%20CEO,5%25%20of%20the%20national%20economy.>

Invest Korea Global Tourism Market Trendson Track to Recovery <https://www.investkorea.org/ik-en/cntnts/i-322/web.do>

¹⁴ Statista, Average spending of a foreign visitor in South Korea in 2023, by category <https://www.statista.com/statistics/804794/south-korea-foreign-visitor-average-spending-by-category/#:~:text=2022.>

¹⁵ Yanolja Research Brief Vol.2 2024.09 Inbound & Outbound Tourism in S. Korea in the 2024 H1 <https://www.yanolja-research.com/common/fileDown?type=1&number=142&name=pdf> September 4, 2024

¹⁶ Road Genius, South Korea Tourism Statistics [https://roadgenius.com/statistics/tourism/south-korea/#:~:text=How%20much%20do%20tourists%20spend,in%202021%20to%20\\$11.43%20million.](https://roadgenius.com/statistics/tourism/south-korea/#:~:text=How%20much%20do%20tourists%20spend,in%202021%20to%20$11.43%20million.)

Tourist Attractions Statistics. Gyeongbokgung Palace¹⁷ and Jeju Island¹⁸ are among the most visited destinations in South Korea. Apart from these, the country offers a vast number of other tourist attractions that draw visitors. Tourism Revenue. South Korea's tourism sector is a significant component of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), generating billions of dollars annually. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), South Korea's total tourism revenue in 2019 amounted to ₩10 trillion. In 2022, the country's tourism revenue reached ₩7.7 trillion, accounting for 7.6% of its total GDP¹⁹.

Technology and Soft Power Growth. While technology initially drove the country's global presence, pop culture has taken the lead in expanding South Korea's soft power. The country is developing rapidly, accumulating soft power assets at an unprecedented pace—similar to its post-war economic transformation.

Besides its status as a technological hub, diplomatic authority, hosting international summits (including the 2010 G20 Summit in Seoul), and successfully promoting the "Made in Korea" brand, South Korea takes pride in its free elections, democracy, and freedom of speech. Given the country's geopolitical position, these values should not be taken for granted.

International Student Mobility and Soft Power. The OECD predicts that by 2025, at least 8 million students will be studying abroad, a significant increase from 2 million in 1998. The rise in international students positively impacts host countries in multiple ways.

- Cultural Exchange: International students foster cross-cultural interactions on university campuses.

- Economic Contribution: They contribute to local economies.

- Labor Market Impact: Many fill labor shortages and, if they stay post-graduation, become highly skilled workers.

The Strategic Use of Student Mobility. Beyond these tangible benefits, it is crucial to recognize the strategic advantages for both sending and receiving countries. While this topic is rarely discussed, countries leverage student mobility to advance national goals. China serves as a strong example, actively promoting international education as a means of achieving national interests through soft power. Host countries benefit from international students not just through their education but also

¹⁷ Gyeongbokgung Palace Cultural landmark in Seoul, South Korea
https://www.google.com/search?q=Gyeongbokgung&oq=Gyeongbokgung+&gs_lcrp

¹⁸ Jeju-do Province of South Korea
https://www.google.com/search?q=jeju+island&sca_esv=11ba3ebaab0f6e07&sxsrf=ADLYWIJ7Yi9e3W3xfLg57QRLHwzHWKys2Q%3A1737553756455&ei=XPeOZ_m5G9LRwPAP0siz

¹⁹ Road Genius South Korea Tourism Statistics https://roadgenius.com/statistics/tourism/south-korea/#How_much_revenue_does_South_Korea_make_in_tourism Page last updated: 19 November 2024

through their exposure to local culture and their eventual understanding of the host nation's soft power influence.

Culture and Education as Pillars of Soft Power. Culture and education are becoming the most effective tools of soft power. Compared to hard power, which relies on military force and coercion, soft power focuses on shaping global narratives, influencing policies, and attracting international cooperation. Thus, beyond using military force or economic sanctions to induce change in other countries, shaping the global policy agenda and attracting global interest are essential aspects of soft power.

CONCLUSION

The processes of globalization have stimulated the development of soft power policies, which, in turn, weaken the political, economic, cultural, and legal self-sufficiency of nation-states, transforming them into components of a structured global space.

The successful experience of political modernization and democratic transition serves as a crucial tool for achieving global leadership. Unfortunately, South Korea's public diplomacy is currently placing excessive emphasis on cultural diplomacy, without fully utilizing the potential of other soft power resources, such as cyber diplomacy, aid diplomacy, and media diplomacy. In general, rather than attempting to establish a dialogue between different political cultures, the state aims to influence the economic situation in the Asia-Pacific region (APR).

The development of soft power as a political resource appears to be an effective strategy for strengthening the loyalty of South Korea's neighboring states and successfully competing with China and Japan's aspirations for regional leadership. The South Korean government should work on forming more consistent political relations with neighboring countries.

Overall, South Korea's low level of political activity can be attributed to the peculiarities of regional culture—Asian countries, in general, tend to approach politics and foreign relations with caution and restraint. Consequently, the only aspect they are willing to share openly is their traditional culture, which stands out for its uniqueness and striking difference from Western culture.

Shifting Global Leadership Dynamics. In today's world, global leadership is increasingly determined by a state's ability to assist the development of its neighbors or competitors. Additionally, during this transitional period of the global political system, states are forced to compete for the right to define the regulatory and value-based components of the modern world order. One of the key trends of the new millennium is the competition between different values and models of national and socio-economic development. Today, such leadership is impossible without the rapid

development of human capital, which serves as the foundation for creating a knowledge-based economy.

As a result, many ambitious developing countries seeking to adopt an innovative economic model place great emphasis on modernizing and internationalizing their national education systems.

Education as a Strategic Soft Power Tool. Only an advanced education system, capable of meeting the demands of a high-tech, innovation-driven economy and integrating into the global academic and scientific space, can become a key competitive advantage for a modern state in the “global competition for minds”. Such an education system will also have the capacity to attract the most talented international students. Providing educational opportunities for foreign students remains one of the most powerful tools of a nation's soft power, as it fosters long-term cultural and political influence while strengthening a country's global intellectual presence.

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