

Chapter 6

Soft Power in Colombian Foreign Policy. The Asia Pacific: A Light on the Horizon, a Lighthouse on the Other Side of the Ocean*

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Abstract: Colombia's international projection in the political field has been a primary focus of government projects since the twentieth century. The importance of creating a foreign policy initiative that supports the country's economic, political, and social development relies on its soft power to influence others' decisions through cultural, educational, or value attraction, including public diplomacy strategies learned from the experiences of South Korea. We conclude that Korea's achievements serve as a successful study tool to apply in other States.

Keywords: foreign policy; Colombia; South Korea; culture

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RELATIONS BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND SOUTH KOREA: AN ANALYSIS OF COLOMBIAN FOREIGN POLICY AS A GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

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Introduction

Currently, the Asia Pacific is a crucial area of study, given its significance and impact on economic dynamics, as well as its contributions to national development in countries like Colombia. Therefore, this will be addressed specifically regarding the spaces Colombia holds in organizations, alliances, and treaties agreed upon by Pacific countries, as well as its process to get involved in them. It is evident that there are ongoing processes to become part of some of these agreements, but it is essential to understand how experiences and initiatives aim to transform this region of the world not only into a development model but also into a space to utilize tools of soft power. However, during the research, diplomatic challenges were identified that require a broader perspective, particularly in a multicultural region like Asia, incorporating elements of Latin American diversity.

Additionally, the chapter describes and analyzes how Colombia is addressing the challenge of engaging with the Republic of Korea through soft power. The opportunities are plentiful, and the factors that foster a strong bond and create synergy are highly relevant in the pursuit of common interests. The history of both countries strengthens the bilateral relationship, and the contrasts outlined below are essential in shaping Colombia's development.

Overview of Colombian Foreign Policy: Foreign Policy as a Flag

The foreign policy of a State defines its attitude in the external context, which, among other aspects, seeks to determine how the country will be recognized in the complex landscape of the international system. Analyzing and identifying

the characteristics and properties of such foreign policy requires considering the involved actors, the instruments used, as well as the principles, channels, and priorities that define this policy. According to *Diccionario de la Diplomacia Moderna*, published by the Academia Diplomática Augusto Ramírez Ocampo (2021), the foreign policy is a set of activities and processes through which a State relates to other States and other subjects of international law (p. 271).

Indeed, if we look back at the first decades of the twentieth century, Marco Fidel Suárez, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1914–1917) and as president of Colombia (1918–1921), used the expression *Respice polum* to signify that we should look at the northern star, the pole star, referring to the United States. This expression would shape Colombia's international relations and foreign policy for much of that century, despite some exceptions and the influence that the United States had on the secession of Panama. President Suárez aimed to make the bilateral relations between the two States functional; thus, to secure revenue for our country, he formulated a policy centered on loyalty and alignment with the interests of the northern power (Borda, 2019).

Subsequently, these relations were ratified on June 19, 1922, during a meeting between Warren G. Harding, president of the United States, and Manuel Torres, who served as the official diplomatic representative in the capacity of business manager of Colombia in Washington. This meeting officially established diplomatic relations between the two countries (Goldberg, 2022). In 2022, a series of special programs commemorated the historical milestone of 200 years of these bilateral relations.

On the other hand, in a section of his book *Política Internacional de Colombia*, lawyer, political scientist, former congressman, and academic Benjamín Ardila Duarte reviews a period in the recent history of our country's foreign policy (1945–2015), which he calls "seventy years of Colombian diplomacy." This timeframe began with the end of World War II and the first term of President Alberto Lleras Camargo, encompassing each of the governing administrations, and concluded with the first term of President Juan Manuel Santos, a period of seven decades during which the marked influence of the *Respice polum* strategy became evident. With few exceptions, such as the administrations of Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966–1970), when relations with the Soviet Union were resumed, international relations diversified, and the end of the export monopoly began with the establishment of Pro-Export.

During the López Michelsen administration (1974–1978), Marco Fidel Suárez's *Respice polum* formula was tacitly disapproved, while *Respice similia* (look at your fellow man) was promoted. Likewise, Belisario Betancur's government (1982–1986) was noted for its openness to dialogue with guerrilla and insurgent groups. In several speeches, the president clearly distanced himself from the United States. Similarly, the foreign policy of Ernesto Samper Pizano's administration (1994–1998) focused on fostering regional integration and strengthening economic and cultural relations with the European Union (EU) and the Pacific Basin, while also being marked by a complex relationship with the U.S. government.

However, as reliable evidence of the alignment of Colombian foreign policy with the United States over the past 70 years, we should highlight the formulation and development of the Alliance for Progress under the leadership of Alberto Lleras Camargo; the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR, according to its acronym in Spanish) and the replacement of the Pan-American Union with the OAS within the context of the ninth conference in Bogotá during the government of Mariano Ospina Pérez; the signing of a military treaty with the United States in 1952 and the participation of the Colombian Battalion in the Korean War during Laureano Gómez's administration; the strong alignment with the United States during the Cold War under President Lleras Camargo's second term; the fight against the Cuban revolution and the anti-communism of Guillermo León Valencia; the vigorous campaign against M-19 and the FARC, which significantly aligned the government of Julio Cesar Turbay with that of the United States; the inception of Plan Colombia during Andrés Pastrana's government; the implementation of the aforementioned Plan Colombia, the continuation of the free trade agreement (FTA) process, and the noticeable alignment of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's policy with the United States; and finally, the signing and performance of the FTA with the United States during President Juan Manuel Santos's administration (Ardila Duarte, 2017).

Following this brief overview of Colombian foreign policy development during the latter half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, we can identify, in general terms, the dynamics, trends, and elements of diplomatic missions as a State, within a context characterized by complex interdependence.

To establish the characteristics and properties of Colombian foreign policy, we conducted a detailed review of the National Development Plan (PND, according to its acronym in Spanish) 2018–2022, titled "Pact for Colombia, Pact for Equity," led by the Government of Iván Duque Márquez, the current President. We were able to determine that there is adequate strategic alignment with the Institutional Strategic

Plan (PEI, according to its acronym in Spanish) “Responsible, Innovative and Constructive Foreign Policy” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinExt) regarding the scope of goals, the achievement of objectives, and the formulation of principles and guidelines for Colombian foreign policy.

The 2018–2022 PND constitutes the roadmap developed by the National Government for implementing plans, programs, and projects aimed at achieving the goals and objectives outlined at the start of the four-year period. For this purpose, five lines of action have been established, one of which is called “Colombia in the Global Scene,” pertaining to foreign policy. To execute this line of action, six strategies have been proposed, one of which is outlined below. It emphasizes the use of soft power as a fundamental element in reaching these objectives.

We will design and implement a long-term strategy that leverages Colombia's soft power resources, strengthening the country's external action capabilities, promoting its identity and culture globally, and innovatively projecting national interests in new scenarios and with new international interlocutors. (DNP, 2018, p. 26)

Similarly, and continuing with the strategic alignment with the PND, which corresponds to the Integrated Planning and Management model, MinExt employed a strategy in its PEI that it would develop through seven actions. The second of them is the one looking to strengthen and promote national interests through diversified bilateral relations, both in geographical and thematic terms, and the creation of a new public diplomacy policy that enables us to spread Colombia's soft power before traditional and non-traditional actors (Cancillería, 2018, p. 1).

In this way, we can see that both the PND and MinExt's PEI discuss the use of *soft power* as a tool in Colombian foreign policy. This encourages us to examine, based on international relations theories, what this power entails.

Colombian Foreign Policy and Soft Power: Public Diplomacy Conveying Its International Projection

To delimit the issue, we will focus on the time frame between 2007 and 2010—which corresponds to the second term of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, 2018—which marks the end of the two administrations of President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón—and,

finally, 2018–2021—which represents the first three years of the government of Iván Duque Márquez, the current president. This analysis is based on a documentary review of the management reports submitted annually by MinExt.

To achieve this, we propose an analysis of the recent history of Colombian foreign policy, focusing on the objectives outlined in the PEI of MinExt. This will be contrasted with the management reports issued by the same entity year after year, while also seeking strategic alignment with the goals set forth in the PND for each of the last three government periods.

The Asia Pacific: A Light on the Horizon, a Lighthouse on the Other Side of the Ocean

The importance of a nation's projection to the world is reflected in its foreign policy, which aims to influence others in a way that secures, if not total support, then at least some contribution to its interests, even when these nations have no particular intention of reciprocating. Nevertheless, a common feature of all international relations is clear cooperation, even though, in most instances, it revolves around pursuing self-benefit while, whether intentionally or not, generating benefits for other countries involved in this action (Welsh & Nye, 2017). The level of development in countries directly correlates with the interests that support their *national objectives*, compelling each to align both their strategic and national policies with their available power instruments (Bartholomees, 2012). As a result, this is where tools or instruments, including soft power, come into play. The case of Colombia's projection to the Asia Pacific holds special significance due to its wide array of opportunities and extensive scope of action, considering that, for example, the Asian market is the most dynamic and shows the highest growth rates (Nhan, 2021). Therefore, this area of focus within foreign policy presents a critical challenge for the country.

Next, some participation actions by Colombia are analyzed in its vision for the Asia Pacific, demonstrating important challenges based on its intentions to be part of existing alliances or create new ones, which imply strategic initiatives for the Colombian State. These initiatives, to a large extent, require special attention and greater investment in both resources and focus for growth.

Initially, it is crucial to address the existence of the Colombian Pacific Cooperation Council (COLPECC, according to its acronym in Spanish), one of the

entities responsible for exploring and energizing Colombia's projections in this region of the world (Cancillería de Colombia, 2022). The Council was established in 1987 and has undergone updates to its bylaws and functions throughout its existence. Its primary aim is to serve as the country's representation agency in the Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (PECC). The PECC is a network of nations that seeks to promote trade and investment issues, primarily making proposals to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), an entity that should not be confused with it. In APEC, Colombia participates only in tourism, services, investment, and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) working groups, but is not a member of the organization. APEC emerged from an idea conceived by Japan and Australia for economic development. Among the Latin American countries that are part of the entity are Mexico, Chile, and Peru (Cancillería de Colombia, 2022).

Colombia may not have direct participation in APEC, but it is making significant strides in areas that can be seen as aspects of soft power.

Unfortunately, the forum finds it inconvenient to include more countries in its organization, as the most recent members joined in 1998 (APEC Secretariat, 2021). The significance of this alliance lies in the fact that, since its initial objective of economic integration, its purposes have expanded to cover issues related to climate change, food crises, technical cooperation, and other aspects of prosperity. The intention of cooperation—and especially direct participation—is grounded in cultural diversification, a strategy that a country like Colombia must adopt by contributing varied initiatives in the soft spectrum with reciprocal impact. It is evident that in an organization like APEC, notable cultural differences arise, but with the implementation of the fundamental principle of sharing the outcomes of agreements, these differences become advantageous to their contributors.

On the other hand, there is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an alliance of nations that aims to strengthen economic, social, cultural, and technological cooperation, among many other important aspects for its member nations (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). Although Colombia is not part of this entity, it has managed to have an ambassador since 2019. This represents a significant step in foreign policy, as this scope is visible through participatory diplomatic actions in alliance with a widely recognized multicultural foundation, rather than focusing on a single country, as is often the case. Furthermore, there is a willingness to cooperate among ASEAN members, as shown by their acceptance of Colombia's participation through a representative ambassador.

Likewise, concerning ASEAN and considering the concept of soft power, one of the main examples of its application is the “program of dissemination of Colombian culture through the teaching of Spanish” (Londoño, 2022), in which several member countries participate. Under the leadership of Colombian representatives with teaching expertise, in addition to the educational process, they promote Colombian tourist destinations and other cultural aspects of the country. In this exercise, there is not necessarily a direct influence on the countries of the alliance; however, a first door is opened to dissemination, within which a stepped link is established based on knowledge of the Colombian context. Here applies what Joseph S. Nye and David A. Welsh describe in saying that, many times, soft power is difficult, but, above all, slower to produce results (Welsh & Nye, 2017). Therefore, sharp strategic thinking is necessary when the vision relies on soft power, and the goals are considered within a timeline that encompasses long-term achievements.

Therefore, considering that only a few processes have been described within alliances related to the Pacific, it is evident that Colombia's engagement in such a vast area of the world is still in its construction phase. Consequently, advanced dynamics seek to consolidate with the potential to forge solid ties, as the effective use of cultural diplomacy tools, among others, reinforces national interests (Stolberg, 2008). However, factors attributed to the armed conflict in Colombia, a lack of focus on international policy distinct from that of the United States (Torres, 2021), and the resulting need for a deeper understanding of foreign relations regarding the Asia Pacific have significantly hindered this process.

For over 100 years, Colombia has sought to establish a network with the Pacific, stumbling at times but maintaining a strategic vision. In 1908, a friendship treaty was signed with Japan to establish trade and navigation relations (Sanmiguel, 2006). This relationship has evolved through various phases, and the policies of both countries have undergone transformations in response to shifts in their positions, particularly during pivotal periods such as World War II. Japan has a unique history regarding migrations to Latin American countries, which received Japanese citizens. Although some migration programs were initiated in the 1930s towards Colombia, the number of Japanese immigrants was not significant, unlike in Peru. Colombia and Japan maintain an active diplomatic and trade relationship, particularly benefiting from the import of finished technology and products, as well as the export of agricultural and mining products. Currently, over 80 Japanese companies have made direct investments in Colombia (Embajada de Japón, 2022).

The incorporation into the Asia-Pacific region has been more evident in other Latin American countries, which, prior to Colombia, have sought to create closer ties with that part of the world. Gloria Milena Torres affirms that, regarding the launch of Colombian diplomacy and other aspects, progress is negligible compared to Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. Therefore, she recommends a more proactive approach by the Colombian State for integration into the Pacific (Torres, 2021). Torres states that Colombian culture is more Western, which has, to a large extent, led it to view the Far East differently than other South American nations. Several studies affirm that the outlook toward the Pacific is to pursue development supported by a robust economy (Nhan, 2021). As will be discussed later, this presents an opportunity to learn from nations such as Korea, which have exemplified accelerated growth processes in their own region.

Another agreement to consider is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which was established based on the vision of some political leaders from both the Americas and Asia (Sistema de Información sobre Comercio Exterior [SICE], 2021). This agreement envisions integrating the extremes of the ocean, turning it into a communication channel rather than an obstacle. Despite geographical and cultural differences, this partnership aims for integrative goals, particularly in the field of international trade, and has undertaken various initiatives since 2002. Similar to other agreements previously described, Colombia is not a party to this partnership; however, it made a request for participation in 2010 (La República, 2018). To date, the integration has not been consolidated.

The TPP aims to eliminate tariffs on agricultural and textile products, among others, while also providing an opportunity for a cultural approach that can act as an additional ingredient to economic elements. The first step is to become a member of the partnership, enabling the utilization of “soft” resources that help achieve benefits supporting Colombian national interests. The core of most international agreements is economic, with their objectives focused on obtaining benefits aligned with the commercial capacities of the signatory countries. In the case of TPP, geopolitical issues are significant factors that currently influence the situation (Schott, 2021), as China holds substantial sway over the regional economy and is not a participant in this agreement. Conversely, it emerges as a competitor.

Moreover, the Pacific Alliance, comprising Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Colombia, has both commercial and developmental objectives. It also aims to serve as a platform for political coordination and global projection, with a particular emphasis on the Asia Pacific (Cancillería de Colombia, 2020). In this way, the alliance serves

as a supportive channel to establish connections and facilitate Colombia's involvement in the aforementioned treaties and agreements, for which it must provide justification to gain benefits and adopt models similar to those already in place in ASEAN, with a focus on teaching the Spanish language.

In this regard, a perception of cultural, artistic, moral, and other characteristic features must be achieved that produces an interest in comprehensive incorporation, so that the economy is not the end, but part of a whole general purpose (Freeman, 2005). The Pacific Alliance encompasses the harmonization of health measures, customs cooperation, shared embassies, and the integration of stock exchanges, among other objectives of common interest. As an association of nations, it aims to become an attractive partner for the countries of Asia, which we have previously mentioned are engaged in a highly dynamic economic development process.

In addition, several Latin American countries have expressed interest in joining the Pacific Alliance, including Panama, Costa Rica, and Ecuador. This means that, as Patti Londoño (2022) states, the entrance channel is strengthened when multiple entities collaborate to join a major conglomerate. If it is possible to unite sports, educational, gastronomic, and other initiatives beyond the cultures of Latin American countries, which share certain similarities, a greater attraction from the Asia-Pacific can be achieved, leading to much stronger ties. The experience of teaching the Spanish language, along with music, dances, and other expressions shared around the world, as narrated by Patti Londoño while serving as vice chancellor, presents clear opportunities for cultural promotion that undoubtedly carry the component of soft power.

Considering Colombia's involvement in APEC, ASEAN, TPP, and the Pacific Alliance, among other initiatives, it can be said that there have been times when the vision was clear; however, important challenges still remain. Initiatives have been presented that impact these approaches, but, as is often the case in a democracy, changes in government bring different strategies that should maintain the State's vision, because national interests do not adhere to a single approach, but rather to all resources—soft, in this case—that must be used strategically. Therefore, examining the approach to Asian nations with which there is a friendship based on gratitude, such as the Republic of Korea, is a valuable issue to analyze and discuss.

The Soft Power of Colombia and Korea: A Spearhead for Strengthening Bilateral Relations

To understand the projection of Colombian soft power toward a country like Korea, it is necessary to note that the nation with which it intends to strengthen bilateral relations effectively applies this type of power in a highly efficient manner (Valieva, 2018). However, before that, it is worth describing aspects of the Korean development process to gain a general perspective, which is still important in order to have the Korean model as an example. This model serves as a framework of discipline, culture, and education, among other elements, that ultimately become key components of soft power.

Accordingly, the rise of Park Yung-hee to power stands out after several years following the signing of the armistice that ended hostilities between North Korea and South Korea in 1953 (Oberdorfer, 2001). At that time, a period of development began that the world would later qualify as "The Miracle on the Han River" (ROK Center for Korean Studies, 2019), during which South Korea achieved in sixty years what others have not accomplished in two hundred years. During this period, despite being a dictatorship, it was marked by an emphasis on industry and, generally, a global vision for the Korean nation. Over the years, state leadership evolved until it solidified into a democracy and reached a level of development that became evident with the hosting of the 1988 Olympic Games (Oberdorfer, 2001), an event where the world witnessed a formidable country "resurfaced from the ashes," as General Álvaro Valencia Tovar described in a book with this title ten years before those sports competitions (Valencia, 1977).

Currently, this vision of Korean development is further demonstrated by the presence of companies such as Samsung, LG, Kia, Hyundai, and others, which, due to their innovative policies and their focus on producing consumer and primary goods, differ significantly from those in Colombia (Cruz, 2014). Expanding technological incorporation in nearly all aspects of development in Colombia is a challenge that emerges as a key element against the capabilities in which Korea has remained at the forefront, exemplarily holding a leading position on a global scale. Technological learning and the creation of large companies contribute to economic success (Hernández, 2009), and the robustness of the economy supports regional and global influence softly and distinctly from the precepts of the realist school in international relations. It is clear that rich countries are often

viewed as potential benefactors, although not always disinterested, due to their ability to provide support in various fields that contribute to the interests of the nation receiving it.

Additionally, the cultural and artistic dimensions that have reached the world through gastronomy, soap operas, K-pop, and other expressions clearly illustrate the subject of study, defined as soft power (Sinivas, 2021). Furthermore, in the process of promoting culture, Korea experienced what is referred to as the *Korean Wave*, or *Hallyu*, which began amid unification challenges with North Korea but gained a global presence (Valieva, 2018).

Thus, observing a country that, in four decades, transitioned from supporting its fragile rural economy to becoming an industrialized nation is an important subject of analysis, owing to its influence and competitive standing among other developed countries. This influence is evident in the level of development already described, as well as in the soft power elements it has exerted for more than 20 years. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider what reciprocal vision exists from Colombia to attract power from the Republic of Korea, given Joseph Nye's assertion that soft power is not easy to wield, and that the results do not always materialize quickly (Nye, 2011). Consequently, in addition to requiring integration into a strategy, a long timeline demanding patience must be established. In any case, Colombia possesses elements of soft power that can be leveraged, which, in a certain way, has drawn the world's attention to the country.

From this, writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, singers like Shakira, actresses like Sofia Vergara, Colombian coffee, especially with the Juan Valdez brand, soccer players, and other athletes with international achievements are identified as elements of Colombian soft power. A highly disciplined country with customs influenced by Confucianism (Chen, 2021) may be attracted to Colombia, without implying that aspects similar to those of Koreans are the primary source of interest. The concept of soft power is not solely about attraction, but also about influence (Nye, 2011), and this should be considered in the specific case of Korea, where the high standard of living is contrasted with Latin American cultural diversity. While many needs are met in Korea, factors related to the personal fulfillment of its inhabitants, such as entertainment, musical enjoyment, and the variety of leisure options, may be lacking; this could create opportunities for soft power to emerge within what is seemingly a developed but perhaps routine lifestyle.

However, differing visions as a nation can create a separation of interests, which ultimately undermines the effective exercise of power. The primary purpose is to ensure that, in addition to the economy, when a strong and developed ally is needed,

there is a friend willing to lend support after relationships have been strengthened through determined efforts. Korea's gratitude toward Colombia already enhances their friendship, but sharing other interests related to democracy, such as human rights and education, can significantly contribute to the challenges involved in pursuing common goals. This can be described as the *creation of interdependence*, as outlined by Paul Wilkinson, whereby hard power becomes less relevant and non-state institutions and entities play a crucial role in international relations (Wilkinson, 2007). In this context, numerous private, educational, and cultural organizations can facilitate scenarios where Korea and Colombia share common interests. Thus, a broad perspective of strong interdependent ties can be established.

For example, according to MappingWords, Colombians tend to steer conversations toward the positive aspects of their country, while Koreans often take their country's development for granted. It is mentioned that Colombians have the ability to turn a discussion about the violence in their country into one about the place that makes the best and most delicious empanadas (Sarah, 2017). Additionally, the environments surrounding coffee shops with older people in Colombia are less rigid than those in Korea, creating interesting learning spaces, despite the fact that *soju* also fosters recreational environments among Koreans. Nonetheless, despite the significant cultural differences, there is an opportunity to create something new, complementary, and beneficial for both cultures.

Another example, but in the opposite direction, is taekwondo, which, with its numerous schools in Colombia, has transmitted positive aspects of Korean discipline among its practitioners, such as not smoking, not swearing, not eating or drinking during training, bowing to the flag (Secretaría de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte, 2022), and other rules that contribute to the development of good habits and education among those who practice the sport. Analyzing cultural contrasts poses a challenge that can be leveraged in exchanges that enhance international relations. In Colombia and Korea, many advocate for an examination of such contrasts to create interdependence, as Wilkinson notes. The same Confucian culture has made the rigidity of family relations very pronounced (Chen, 2021), avoiding disrespect and cultivating habits of connection between generations, which may be a contribution from the perspective of Latin Americans.

However, soft power remains a form of power, serving as a means to achieve results (Nye, 2011), with the creation of interdependence mentioned earlier being a part of this. Initiatives harnessing this type of power must be built on credibility, and establishing this credibility poses a significant challenge for nations that need

to utilize all available resources to ensure their soft tools are both dependable and, most importantly, appealing. It has already been pointed out that its benefits become apparent over the long term, with an example being that the emergence of Colombian cyclists among the world's best did not happen overnight. Given this level of achievement, what proposals exist from Colombia to capture the attention of the many Koreans who have embraced that sport as a regular form of exercise? Many other questions also arise in the realms of culture and sports. Furthermore, to gain external credibility, it must become entrenched within the country. "Colombia needs to believe it," says Simón Borrero (2019), because the "we cannot" mentality is the first barrier to surpass in attaining international success. It is crucial to have national examples that are not only viewed as models but also as opportunities for others to grow through an alliance with Colombia. Thus, we must first believe it, and from there, as Nye indicates, establish the credibility that soft power requires to be truly influential.

On the other hand, Nye also states that soft power is a dance that requires partners. One of the experiences that Colombia is having with the Pacific Alliance is entering a bloc with Chile, Peru, and Mexico across various fronts concerning the Asia-Pacific countries. Patti Londoño highlights this, referring to the benefits that this alliance brings to the countries that are part of it, particularly the advantage of being part of a group rather than operating independently (Londoño, 2022). These four countries share common elements that contribute to what is considered soft power.

Furthermore, there are benefits beyond the economic ones: the ties of friendship and FTAs imply commitments with stable countries. Logically, a signatory, aiming to gain advantages from a commercial partner, may contribute in various ways to help consolidate stability over time. For instance, if Colombia and Mexico help many Koreans improve their soccer skills through school agreements, and due to the international fame of their players, the Asian country gets attracted to these countries, then when an "educational-sports" need arises in the opposite direction, the potential for cooperation would be more feasible.

Another aspect of soft power relates to education. A well-developed education system fosters the innovation and technological needs of a productive economy (Amiberk & Ydyrys, 2014), alongside other advantages that enable a society to achieve the status of an "educated society" and become a benchmark for others who are drawn to and desire to emulate these traits. In this context, education is a resource that Korea possesses, and by allowing Colombians to study in Korea, a dual benefit arises. When a Colombian studies in another country, they become a Trojan

horse in the best sense of the word, as they have the opportunity to promote their values, traditions, culture, and tourism, among others, to their classmates.

This work, which is naturally associated with embassies, takes place spontaneously at the university in a more informal, yet persistent and close manner, due to the permanent coexistence of students with their host classmates. Currently, there are several scholarship programs for Colombians offered by the Korean government in a broad and generous manner. Among them, the Global Korea Scholarship awards more than a thousand scholarships per year (Becas y Convocatorias, 2022). These opportunities serve as strategic nodes of soft power.

In summary, approaching a country with substantial technological and industrial development, which also has a diverse array of advanced soft power that has been built over decades, is no simple task. It requires prolonged and persistent effort. However, we must identify elements that Colombia already possesses and has nurtured throughout its history, especially in areas like culture, sports, and education. The key is to uncover opportunities for complementarity that aim to achieve shared interests and maintain high credibility.

We must demonstrate to the world that our cumbia and porro have connections to jazz, as *cumbieros* and jazz musicians traveled together from Barranquilla to La Dorada. Carlos Vives states this in the work *Reimaginando a Colombia*, which also includes the aforementioned excerpt by Simón Borrero that we must believe in ourselves (Vives, 2019). We need to demonstrate that vallenato has reached the world through musicians like Vives and has inspired people from every corner of the planet to dance, highlighting the cultural versatility that allows music, food, clothing, and other aspects of culture to intermingle. The ability to influence is in Colombia's hands. As previously mentioned, and citing the same work by McKinsey and Company, we must unite around Colombia's diverse culture and recognize its potential (McKinsey & Company, 2019).

Conclusion

In short, greater attention must be paid to international alliances, particularly in the Asia Pacific, given that progress has been slow and the processes related to soft power require time to achieve their objectives. Colombia is not a member of APEC or ASEAN; however, there are approaches that have yielded results, as described in this chapter, exemplified by the Ambassador's presence in ASEAN and

the teaching of the Spanish language, along with additional elements of tourism promotion, which are also evidence of soft power.

It is also worth noting that other Latin American countries have taken the lead; however, Colombia can leverage these experiences and undertake a process tailored to its own capabilities. Additionally, the alliances that must be exploited are those with Mexico, Peru, and Chile—those of the Pacific—to form a bloc not only with a commercial vision, but also with cultural and sports dimensions.

On the use of soft power with Korea, the challenge lies in competing with a developed, industrialized, and experienced country in the exercise of such power. However, despite this, there are several opportunities arising from the contrast of cultures and traditions. Colombian diversity, gastronomy, sports, and leisure activities are elements to be leveraged, as they are considered tools of soft power that must be strategically utilized. Education is another interesting factor, as many Colombians study in Korea, thanks to the facilities that the government of that country provides. The opportunity to penetrate the Korean market by promoting Colombian soft power is very wide.

Ultimately, credibility is a vital aspect of soft power. What Colombia has already achieved through talent, coffee, soccer, and cycling, along with music, lyrics, and art in various forms, can provide a foundational approach to Korea. Confidence in our own country fosters credibility, and perhaps this is the key to employing the intelligent strategy of soft power, which, beyond its definition, could be described as the power of influence without force. For Colombia, there should be no challenge in winning over others with its own charms.

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