

An Exploration of Korean Discourses on Public Diplomacy

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There is great confusion over what constitutes public diplomacy (PD), who its actors are, and the relevance of non-state actors. In the Korean context, in addition to the general fuzziness of the concept, linguistic peculiarities of the terms gonggong and gongjung both of which refer to public, waegyo, which is interchangeably used for international affairs, foreign policy and diplomacy, and juche which is simultaneously used for actor and agent, add more layers of confusion. While the term PD in Korea is based almost entirely on Western conceptualization, these linguistic peculiarities prevent fruitful conversations among scholars and practitioners on PD. Against this background, this research note explores and addresses conceptual ambiguities that pertains to PD and the policy discourse on the topic, particularly on non-state PD in Korea. The paper draws on Korean government's PD-related policy documents and Diplomatic White Papers and all relevant academic articles found in Korean-language journals registered in the Korean Citation Index (KCI), which are analysed to gain an understanding of the PD-related policy discourse in Korea.

Keywords: public diplomacy, diplomacy, non-state actors, Korea

Introduction

There is some confusion over what constitutes public diplomacy (PD), who the PD actors are and the relevance of non-state actors to PD. Discussions in the literature and in policy circles refer to

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all kinds of transnational encounters of various actors as being PD. As these debates inform policy-making, the puzzle as to what constitutes PD and who the PD actors are needs to be cleared up.

In the South Korean (hereafter, Korea) context, in addition to the general fuzziness of the concept, linguistic peculiarities of the terms *gonggong* and *gongjung* both of which refer to public; *waegyo*, which is interchangeably used for international affairs, foreign policy and diplomacy; and *juche* which is simultaneously used for actor and agent, add more layers of confusion. Public diplomacy is a policy transferred from the Western countries, mainly the US. As such, in Korean official definitions of PD, there is overemphasis on Joseph Nye's seminal works on soft power and on the Cold War-minded objective of "winning hearts and minds of people" (C. Han, 2017; Ma, 2017; MOFA, 2013b, 2018; Park, 2017). While the term PD in Korea is based almost entirely on American conceptualization, these Korean linguistic peculiarities make debates on PD, and its subfields, in the policy and academic circles do not cross ways leaving the concept unconsolidated. If there are no consistent and clear conceptualizations, it would be impossible for scholars and practitioners alike to engage in fruitful conversations or contribute to and benefit from each other's efforts (Berman, 2013, p. 223).

With this in mind, this research note explores and addresses conceptual ambiguities that pertains to PD and the policy discourse on the topic, particularly on non-state PD in Korea. The paper draws on Korean government's PD-related policy documents and Diplomatic White Papers and all relevant academic articles found in Korean-language journals registered in the Korean Citation Index (KCI), which are analysed to gain an understanding of the PD-related policy discourse in Korea. The case of Korea is chosen because the conceptual ambiguity that presently surrounds non-state PD in this country has an impact on the current policy discourse on PD, particularly budget allocation to support non-state PD.

Public Diplomacy Context in Korea

The concept of PD has gone through an evolution in Korea (Ayhan, 2017, pp. 17-19). Throughout Korea's modern history, diplomacy's public dimension has placed an overwhelming amount of emphasis on cultural diplomacy (Ayhan, 2017, pp. 17-19). While similar practices were present particularly since the President Park Chung-Hee era, explicit reference to cultural diplomacy began under Kim Young-Sam's *segzehwa* (globalization) policy (Kang, 2015, p. 436). Consequently, Korea "officially launched" its PD policies and began using the concept in 2010 as a third pillar of diplomacy, according to Young-Sam Ma, the country's first Ambassador for Public Diplomacy (Ma, Song, & Moore, 2012, p. 1; see also MOFAT, 2010b). However, PD did not make its first appearance in yearly diplomatic white papers until 2012 when it was an independent title in the 2012 Diplomatic White Paper (MOFAT, 2012b, p. 228). Until the enactment of the Public Diplomacy Act in 2016, PD was still mainly understood in the context of cultural exchanges and the promotion of Korea's culture.

The first literal reference to "public diplomacy" appears in the English-language version of the 2006 Diplomatic White Paper as a translation of *kukmin chamyŏ yŏllin waegyo* (citizen-

participated open diplomacy), which does not conceptualise PD as it is used today in the country, but rather defines it as “reflecting the opinion of ordinary people (citizens)” (MOFAT, 2006a, p. 205; 2006b, p. 203). In other words, public diplomacy was possibly the wrong translation for public affairs or democratization of foreign policy which referred to communicating with Korean constituents on issues of foreign policy. The term public diplomacy was also used in the 2007 Diplomatic White Paper in the same context, but was changed to “public outreach,” “communication with public,” and “public support for foreign policy” in later diplomatic white papers correcting this potential wrong translation (MOFA, 2013a, 2014, 2015a, 2016a, 2017d; MOFAT, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2011, 2012a).

Along a similar vein, the Moon Jae-In administration’s central concept of *kukmin waegyo* (people diplomacy or people-driven diplomacy) aims to consult with Korean public on matters of foreign policy. It brings back Roh Moo-Hyun administration’s term *kukmin chamyŏ yŏllin waegyo* (citizen-participated open diplomacy) to forefront again. The similarity in two concepts and particularly the use of the word “people” or *kukmin* reflect Moon Jae-In’s allegiance with his former boss, and former progressive president Roh Moo-Hyun’s people’s government (2003-2008).

The recently opened *Kukmin Waegyo* Center aims to facilitate two-way communication between Korean citizens and the government in the process of foreign policy decision-making (Kukmin Waegyo Sentŏ, 2018). Since the target audience is the Korean public, the Facebook page and documents of the Center are in Korean. The Moon Jae-In government promised that it would take into account the opinions of Korean public in matters of foreign affairs as well as domestic affairs. Moon was elected following a people’s revolution against the corruption scandal of the impeached president Park Geun-Hye. The Korean public showed discontent with how little consultation was made regarding the foreign policy decisions, particularly, on reconciliation with Japan on the issue of sex slaves (a.k.a. comfort women) and the deployment of THAAD in South Korea.

What makes the use of *kukmin waegyo* even more complicated is that, it simultaneously refers to the democratization of foreign policy by reflecting the public opinion on foreign policies, people-to-people exchanges between Korean people and foreigners, and human-centric security (Ayhan, 2017, pp. 23-24; Chŏngwadae, 2017, No: 96; Moon, 2017). All of these areas have something to do with foreign policies and people, but combining them in the same concept of *kukmin waegyo*, which is used in tandem with *gonggong waegyo* (public diplomacy) under Moon Jae-In administration, makes the concept a catch-all phrase and ambiguous for Korean diplomats and academics.

Studies on Chinese PD often mention the varying translations of the concept of PD into the Chinese language and the linguistic differences between these terms (D’Hooghe, 2008; Lee, Lee, Jeon, & Shin, 2012; Wang, 2008; Zappone, 2012). In Chinese-language articles on PD, *Gonggong waijiao* and *gongzong waijiao* are both used with slightly different meanings. *Gonggong* translates the word “public” as an adjective and refers to what is common, open and shared and is understood as being the opposite of private; whereas *gongzhong* translates the word “public” as a noun and

refers to the masses or a large group of people (Zappone, 2012, p. 11). On the one hand, some scholars prefer to use *gonggong* because *gongzhong* suggests the passivity of the target audiences. Those scholars who prefer *gongzhong* do so because both the start and end points of PD take the public into consideration and, thus, welcome the public's input (Qu Xing, "Gonggong Waijiao De Jingdian Hanyi Yu Zhongguo Tese," *Zhongguo waijiao* 2 (2001), p. 16, quoted in Zappone, 2012, p. 13). On the other hand, the term *minjian waijiao* is used to refer to people-to-people diplomacy, that is, "interactions between [the] people and civil societies of various countries" (D'Hooghe, 2008, pp. 39-40).

In Korea, the translations of the terms used to define the concept of PD are similar to those in China since they are borrowed from *hanja* (Chinese characters). Therefore, all three of the above Chinese translations are also used in Korean policy circles and academia, albeit slightly differently. A Korean-to-Korean dictionary explains *gonggong* as "something that relates extensively to the state and the members of the society" (see also Geumseong Chulpansa, 2001, p. 98; Kim, 2016; Naver, 2018a, p. 2), and *gongjung* as "'most people in the society'; 'people'; 'ordinary people'" (see also Geumseong Chulpansa, 2001, p. 106; Naver, 2018b).

Official Korean-language documents, the media, and most academic articles translate PD as *gonggong waegyo* (*gonggong waijiao* in Chinese, 공공외교 - 公共外交). The Public Diplomacy Act of Korea, which was enacted in 2016, is also called The *Gonggong Waegyo* Act. Some scholars prefer the alternative term, *gongjung waegyo* (*gongzhong waijiao* in Chinese, 공중외교 - 公衆外交) because they are not happy with the translation of public to *gonggong*, which implies a public sector agency, when it actually means the people.

In the introduction of a recent book outsourced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Cho and Han (2016, pp. 21-22) explain that the political scientists and the communication scholars involved in the book project advocated for different translations and definitions of PD.² Political scientists claim that the word "public" should be translated to *gonggong* as it implies the subject of the public initiative, which is the state. However, communication scholars argue that "public" should be translated to *gongjung* as it implies foreign people. The book adopted the political scientists' definition and suggests that non-state actors' activities that resemble PD should be called *mingan waegyo* (*minjian waijiao* in Chinese, 민간외교 - 民間外交), that is, private (or people-to-people) diplomacy, which is the more common usage in the Korean literature and policy circles. Along a similar vein, Han In-Hee (2013, p. 283) suggests that governments are the only actors of *gonggong waegyo*. He notes that while, recently, international people-to-people exchanges have significantly increased, these exchanges should be regarded as *mingan waegyo*, and not as *gonggong waegyo*, because they are not organised by governments but rather "from the perspective of a more comprehensive definition of diplomacy."

² It is important to note that this book was sanctioned by the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be used as an evaluation guide for official PD activities. (Cho, 2016, p. 10; see also MOFA, 2017b, p. 19).

Against this background, in Korea, all non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are subject to the MOFA's supervision are called *mingan waegyo* organisations, or “diplomatic NGOs.”³ Being subject to MOFA supervision means that these NGOs have objectives and activities that are parallel to those of MOFA, which also inspects and approves these objectives and activities. Korean law designated *mingan waegyo* organisations as early as 1962. The act that regulated government support of *mingan waegyo* organisations, defined these organisations as those which are founded with the aim to 1) promote friendship with people of specific foreign countries; 2) strengthen relations with and increase understanding of specific international organisations; and 3) conduct research on international law or international relations (“Mingan Waegyo Danche Bojogeum Bugyujǒng,” 1962). The law has been amended since then, but the term *mingan waegyo* is still commonly used in the same context.

MOFA and the Korea Foundation (KF) operate a portal dedicated to *mingan waegyo* organisations, titled People-to-People Diplomacy Community.⁴ As of May 2017, this portal had registered 687 NGOs as *mingan waegyo* organisations.⁵ The portal classifies these organisations according to their main fields of operation: promoting friendship (114); development cooperation (149); international solidarity (31); culture and arts (86); academic research (89); overseas Koreans (30), businesses (3); and other (185) (MOFA, 2017c). In 2011, the Korea Foundation undertook a study on these organisations, which is so far the only one of its kind and shows that 15% of the activities of these organisations were in the field of people-to-people exchanges, 9% were in arts, culture and sports exchanges, and 44% were involved in relief and development (Korea Foundation & Korea NPO Community, 2011, pp. 18-19).

In addition, Korean Ambassador for PD, Enna Park, argues that the “most important actors of public diplomacy” are “our people” and “people-to-people diplomacy” is PD (Park, 2017). Similarly, on Korea's official PD website,⁶ there are two presentations that define PD actors as government and private (individuals, non-profits and private sector); one prepared by Young-Sam Ma, Korea's first Ambassador for Public Diplomacy, and the other by Chung-Hee Han, the former director of the Cultural Diplomacy Bureau (C. Han, 2017; Ma, 2017).

³ Korea Foundation and MOFA's various translations put *mingan waegyo* organizations as “diplomatic NGOs,” “Civilian Diplomacy Organization” and “Private Diplomacy Organization” (Korea Foundation, 2015; Korea Foundation & Korea NPO Community, 2011; “Mingan Waegyo Danche Bojogeum Bugyujeong Gaejeongnyeong,” 1962; MOFA, 1996; 2015a, p. 370; 2016a, p. 364).

⁴ The website of the portal is www.p2pdc.or.kr.

⁵ In 2013, the law regarding NGOs' approval and supervision changed and NGOs are no longer registered with MOFA, but with local governments. Even though these post-2013 NGOs do similar activities to those of pre-2013 NGOs, they are not registered as *mingan waegyo* organisations simply because these NGOs are not directly approved and registered by MOFA. Therefore, the term *mingan waegyo* became very technical and lost its analytical and practical value even more.

⁶ www.publicdiplomacy.go.kr

The most recent official definition of PD in Korea is found in the Public Diplomacy Act, which lays it out as “diplomatic activities through which the State promotes foreign nationals’ understanding of and enhance confidence in the Republic of Korea directly or in cooperation with local governments or the private sector based on culture, knowledge, policies, etc.” in order to improve the image and prestige of Korea globally “by forming foundations to strengthen public diplomacy and enhance the efficiency thereof by providing for matters necessary for public diplomatic activities” (“Gonggong Waegyo Bŏp”, 2016). This definition of PD, which stems from the Western or rather American origins of the term, rules out non-state actors as PD actors.

There is clear conceptual difference in using the term *waegyo* for matters of foreign policy and diplomacy, i.e. “means by which such policies are implemented” (see also Clinton, 2011; Hocking & Lee, 2011, p. 659; Nicolson, 1988, p. 3). In Korea, traditionally *waegyo* can loosely imply international affairs or foreign policy in addition to *diplomacy* in its strictly analytical meaning, while it has been used interchangeably to refer to all of them. Despite the use of the same term, *waegyo*, for disparate activities, it is difficult to find organic connection between them to suggest a coherent PD strategy in Korea until 2010s. Furthermore, the use of the term *mingan waegyo* by state agencies and scholars in Korea does not mean that non-state actors are recognized as independent diplomatic actors. In other words, the prevalent usage of *mingan waegyo* in Korean discourse often refers to NGOs’ and Korean people’s transnational activities without clear analytic boundaries that would justify it as a (public) diplomatic activity.

Juche is another word that potentially leads to confusion as it can mean either actor or agent. For example, in her presentation on PD in the Korean language, Korea’s Ambassador for Public Diplomacy, Enna Park, uses both the Korean term *juche* and the English term “actor” to refer to the Korean people’s role in PD (Park, 2017). However, when explaining Korea’s “Participatory PD by Citizens” projects, the Korean version of the 2016 Diplomatic White Paper uses the word *juche* for Korean citizens, whereas the English version is translated as “Korean citizens assume a leading role in PD” (MOFA, 2015a, p. 362; see also MOFA, 2015b, p. 338; 2016a, p. 359; 2016b, p. 332; MOFAT, 2010b, pp. 15, 27). The role of citizens or non-state actors or agents in PD is almost uncontested in the English-language PD literature (Ayhan, 2019). Nevertheless, the issue of being an actor going one step further from being an agent must be more clearly addressed so as to avoid confusion in the Korean-language due to the ambiguous nature of the term *juche*.

Ayhan’s (2019) appraisal of the English-language PD literature suggests that 59% of the articles follow implicitly or explicitly state-centric definitions of PD, while 41% treat non-state actors as PD actors. For the purposes of this study, all Korean-language academic articles (70 articles as of 11 August 2017) on PD in KCI-registered journals in the Korean language were analysed to see how PD is conceptualised in Korean academia.⁷ Thirteen articles were left out due to the lack of a clear definition of PD. Of the remaining 57 articles, only 19% follow state-centric definitions of PD, while 81% include non-state actors as PD actors. However, these studies

⁷ That is, all KCI-indexed articles that have public diplomacy, *gonggong waegyo* or *gongjung waegyo*, in their titles, abstracts or keywords.

fail to suggest what qualifies as non-state PD and which non-state actors are PD actors and under which conditions.

There is a stark difference between the English-language articles on PD and the Korean-language ones, regarding the place of non-state actors in PD. Two possible explanations for this discrepancy are, first, that this result might suggest that Korean PD is less state-centric and more welcoming toward the participation of non-state actors. However, this is not the case as can be understood from Korea's official definition of PD in Public Diplomacy Act quoted above. In an edited volume on Asian PD, Melissen (2013, p. 442) rightly concludes that in East Asia, including Korea, PD is quite state-centric. The Korean MOFA also addressed this issue in the recently passed Public Diplomacy Act, and in the First Basic Plan on Public Diplomacy (2017-2021), which was adapted following the Act, and aims to increase collaboration with and support of non-state actors and citizens (Ayhan, 2016; "Gonggong Waegyo Bōp", 2016; MOFA, 2017b). However, even currently, the official discourse suggests that non-state actors and citizens are seen only as potential partners in state-centric PD, rather than being regarded as independent PD actors. For civilian efforts to be considered PD, government direction in the above-cited official documents implicitly assumes government coordination or direction of these civilian efforts.⁸ More explicitly, the recently passed Public Diplomacy Act suggests that the government is the only PD actor, while local governments, civil-society organisations, the private sector and citizens are potential partners in state-centric PD (see also Ayhan, 2016; Ayhan, 2017; 2016b). The most recent Korean diplomatic white papers also discuss public participation in PD but only in the context of government-initiated programs (MOFA, 2013a, 2014, 2015a, 2016a, 2017d). Furthermore, implementers of independent transnational exchanges are asked "to consult with the Foreign Ministry" for effective PD outcomes because of "the possibility of the insensitivity toward other cultures and religions undermining the potential value of PD and causing concern for [the] safety of Korean nationals" (see also Gang, 2017; MOFA, 2017a).

An exception to this implicit assumption of the controlled and coordinated participation of non-state actors and citizens, in PD in Korea, is found in the First Basic Plan on Public Diplomacy (2017-2021), which explicitly mentions "independent public diplomacy activities of [non-state actors] through exchanges with foreigners in the fields of culture, [the] arts, sports and academia" in addition to "citizen-participated public diplomacy" and "public diplomacy activities outsourced to" non-state actors (MOFA, 2017b, p. 19). However, independent PD activities are not further elaborated, leaving the term PD as ambiguous in that document as well.

A second and alternative explanation for the discrepancy between English- and Korean-language accounts on the place of non-state actors in PD is the conceptual ambiguity that comes with contextual and translation differences. This apparent ambiguity and lack of analytical coherence surrounding PD in Korea needs to be addressed. While the term PD in Korea is based almost entirely on Western conceptualization, the alternative meanings of *diplomacy* as

⁸ One example of such programs is "All Citizens are Public Diplomats." See www.publicdiplomacy.go.kr for more on this program.

international affairs or foreign policy such as used in *mingan waegyo* or *kukmin waegyo*, alternative translations of public as *gonggong* or *gongjung*, and double meaning of *juche* as agent and actor make debates on PD, and its subfields, in the policy and academic circles do not cross ways to have a meaningful consensus regarding what constitutes PD.

A significant reason for such conceptual ambiguity in Korea is that the conceptualization of PD, and non-state actors' role in it, could not catch up with the quick evolution of PD practice in the country. From early 2000s, there have been stark changes in PD-related policies including the place of non-state actors in them in line with the recent trends in the field, also known as "new public diplomacy" (Melissen, 2005). On the one hand, MOFA was busy with learning and transferring up-to-date PD policies from abroad and putting them into practice rather than spending scarce time and efforts on the analytical soundness of the concepts. On the other hand, Korean academia was neither able to catch up with the recent debates on PD in the English-language literature nor with the most recent policy updates in Korea.

Although a late-comer in the game, Korea quickly adapted to the newest trends in the realm of PD. As the practice evolved relatively quite quickly, the conceptualization of PD and particularly the role of non-state actors in it lagged behind. This led to conceptual ambiguity in the Korean policy context, while the practice of non-state PD has already moved beyond infant stage.

This research note pointed out the discrepancies and confusions in Korean public diplomacy discourse, particularly in transferring and translating concepts from English to Korean language. Future studies can evaluate the process of Korean public diplomacy, including its framing of problems, framing of how public diplomacy activities are assumed to address these problems, methods taken into account in these activities and expected outcomes and impact of public diplomacy. More importantly, researchers can uncover and make sense of how Korean practitioners envision public diplomacy activities to contribute to achievement of the country's foreign policy objectives, providing insights and "practical hunches" (Pouliot, 2008, p. 261) of practitioners' logic (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 86-87). Furthermore, more ambitious researchers can aim to make structured and focused comparisons (George & Bennett, 2005) between Korean public diplomacy practice and other comparable countries, for example other G20 countries.

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