

Adenauer Young Researcher's Report

The Forgotten Element of Philippine Foreign Policy: Cultural Diplomacy through Music and Television

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About the Publication

The **Adenauer Young Researcher's Report** is a series of short articles and opinion pieces on the state of Philippine politics and democracy from the perspective of the youth.

The publication aims to foster political participation and cultural exchange among the Filipino and German youth by providing them a platform to publish their own research work, opinion piece, or commentary containing their intellectual perspectives on issues related to the Philippines.

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The Forgotten Element of Philippine Foreign Policy: Cultural Diplomacy through Music and Television

Lara Estelle Filgueras

Cultural diplomacy is a vast and complex concept. According to the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, it is “a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond; Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society.”¹ Cultural diplomacy is often used interchangeably with soft power. However, these are two different concepts, although closely related and aligned with one another.

The dictionary definition of the term soft power is that it is “the ability to achieve one’s goal without force, esp by diplomacy, persuasion, etc.”² According to research by the University of Edinburgh, “a state’s soft power has a statistically significant impact on foreign direct investments, overseas student recruitment, tourism, and international influence in fora like the UN General Assembly.” The researchers also assessed “various forms of soft power” – including cultural institutions such as the British Council and the Goethe-Institut. The results show that the parent state of the cultural institution benefits from having more of these institutions in more countries, demonstrated by an increase in foreign direct investments and international students in the parent country.³ Soft power also encompasses the role of the citizens and non-governmental organizations in sectors such as economics, politics, and culture. Thus, in a sense, cultural diplomacy is one of the means to achieve soft power.

There are many avenues for cultural diplomacy, such as art, food, fashion, architecture, entertainment, and music. With the globalized world reinforced by rapid progress in communication and information technology, people, especially governments, saw the growing value of culture as a positive tool to highlight relations and

similarities with others and as a way of connecting with the rest of the world with concrete benefits. This is evidenced by our East Asian neighbors, Japan and South Korea, whose thriving entertainment and music sectors are a vital pillar of their growing influence on the global stage.



Image via Flickr/Joel Muniz

Cultural Diplomacy at Work: Lessons from South Korea and Japan

South Korea is one of the most renowned countries for this generation, garnering attention for its addictive music and riveting dramas. For example, K-pop, or Korean Popular Music, has been a global phenomenon for at least two decades. This success is best demonstrated by the K-pop boy group BTS, whose popularity took the world by storm.

It is incredibly remarkable how BTS managed not only to be a big influence in the entertainment sector but also in the tourism, economic, cultural, and political sectors of South Korea. It is noticeable that South Korean culture plays a prominent role in BTS' craft, and the group can also be considered instrumental in promoting Korean food, fashion, brands, and even tourism. According to the Hyundai Research Institute, BTS is bringing approximately US\$5 billion to the South Korean economy each year.⁴

Their popularity also enabled BTS to involve themselves in some rather political work. After garnering attention from the West and breaking

through the US music industry, the group cooperated with UNICEF in 2017 for the "love yourself" campaign to fight against violence and neglect and promote self-esteem worldwide.⁵ This opened the doors for the Korean government who saw BTS as a powerful agent in promoting the country through cultural diplomacy. In this regard, former South Korean President Moon Jae-In appointed BTS as special envoys for future generations and culture in 2021. This role carried official duties such as accompanying the South Korean president on his visits to the United States and even representing him in some events.⁶ According to the Korean Government, the presence of BTS will "serve as a meaningful opportunity to expand communication with future generations around the world and draw their sympathy on major international issues."⁷ In 2022, BTS also performed a free concert in the province of Busan to support South Korea's World Expo 2030 Bid.⁸

These examples show how the South Korean government saw the significant impact and influence of the so-called "BTS Effect" and, by extension, the "Hallyu Effect" or the Korean Wave in promoting South Korea and its interests on the world stage. In the economic aspect alone, a report stated that the Korean Wave managed to garner over US\$12.3 billion towards South Korea's economy in 2019.⁹

Another prominent example of successful cultural diplomacy through entertainment is Japan's anime. The Japanese government has been implementing industrial promotion initiatives for the anime industry since the year 2000, following the recession period of Japan's economy. These initiatives were intended to promote anime globally, advance the technology to develop better quality anime, cater to a broader audience, and eliminate the inherent problems of the industry, such as a weak financial base of production companies and the lack of animators.¹⁰ The deliberate approach proved to be successful and resulted in a consistent market and profit for anime. In 2021, Japan generated a total revenue of US\$8.9 billion, primarily driven by overseas viewing and merchandising related to anime. Given this context, it is understandable

that Japan continues to invest in the digital arts and has integrated it into its culture. To support the industry further, the “Cool Japan” fund, a US\$500 million investment fund, was launched in 2013 to help Japanese firms promote their culture abroad.¹¹

Toward a Globally Recognized Filipino Culture

The examples of Japan and South Korea prove that it is more than possible to use cultural diplomacy to help the country achieve soft power, promote its culture and history, and gain economic growth and international influence. Unfortunately, cultural diplomacy does not seem to be a priority for the Philippines.

Currently, there are three pillars of Philippine Foreign Policy, which are:

- 1) the preservation and enhancement of national security,
- 2) the promotion and attainment of economic security, and
- 3) the protection of the rights and the promotion of the welfare and interests of all Filipinos overseas.

These three pillars trace their roots to the administration of former President Fidel V. Ramos and his Foreign Secretary Domingo L. Siazon Jr., who spoke of these pillars before the Philippine Ambassadors Association in 1995.¹²

However, unbeknownst to many, the Ramos administration also attempted to add a fourth pillar of Philippine foreign policy: “(4) projecting a positive and accurate image of the Philippines abroad.” Former Foreign Secretary Siazon explained that “this media-based strategy is also part of our economic diplomacy. By convincing opinion leaders that the Philippines is a stable and investment-friendly site, the government is able to fan out messages to a larger, wider public.”¹³ It can be said that this fourth foreign policy pillar falls under the realm of cultural diplomacy. However, succeeding presidential administrations dropped the fourth pillar due to the claim that this pillar would eventually come out as a result of the first three pillars being done correctly and properly.¹⁴

The intention of the Ramos administration to include image branding would have been a great opportunity for the Philippines to showcase and develop its cultural diplomacy and soft power. Both Japan and South Korea made it evident that investing in the arts and entertainment can be a strong strategy to garner economic growth and a substantial influence in the globalized world. These tools aided them in achieving their current status as economic and cultural powers.

The Philippines could have been riding that bandwagon with South Korea and Japan, and much can be said about the popularity of Filipino dramas and even music. For example, the 2000s Filipino TV drama *Pangako Sa'yo*, starring actors Jericho Rosales and Kristine Hermosa, made noise in 14 countries, including China, Malaysia, and even as far as Kenya. A more recent TV drama in 2016, *Dolce Amore*, starring Enrique Gil and Liza Soberano, aired in countries such as Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia (with a dubbed version), and parts of Africa. *Wildflower*, starring Maja Salvador in 2017, also became popular in Africa, particularly in Kenya.



Pangako Sa'yo

Image via ABS-CBN

More recently, the Philippines is also becoming known for P-Pop or Pinoy Pop, a contemporary pop music genre that blossomed from OPM (Original Pilipino Music). Leading the pack is the most popular P-Pop group of today's generation, SB19. The all-Filipino boy group holds the distinction as the first Southeast Asian group to be nominated in the prestigious Billboard Music Awards.

These examples show that the Philippines has so much to offer, particularly in the entertainment sector. However, nothing comes without its challenges. In particular, the idea that culture

can drive national interest, economic growth, and global influence is not prevalent in the Philippines. Mary Liza B. Diño, former Chairperson of the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), stated that what it takes for a country to be a global production hub are the following:

- 1) Structure (film-related policies and enabling laws);
- 2) Financial incentives (funding and rebates for the service structure and content creation);
- 3) Skilled workers (technical crew, both above the line and below the line);
- 4) Infrastructure (sound stages, equipment, special facilities such as post-production services, effects, etc.); and
- 5) Private investments (film financing services, venture capital investments, and financial bonds).¹⁵

There is a potential in the Philippines film, media, and arts sector that is yet to be recognized and ventured into, but it needs considerable investments. Setting allocations to cultural-historical developments in the country, investing in the entertainment sector, protecting the country's artists, allowing avenues for such products and services to be recognized,

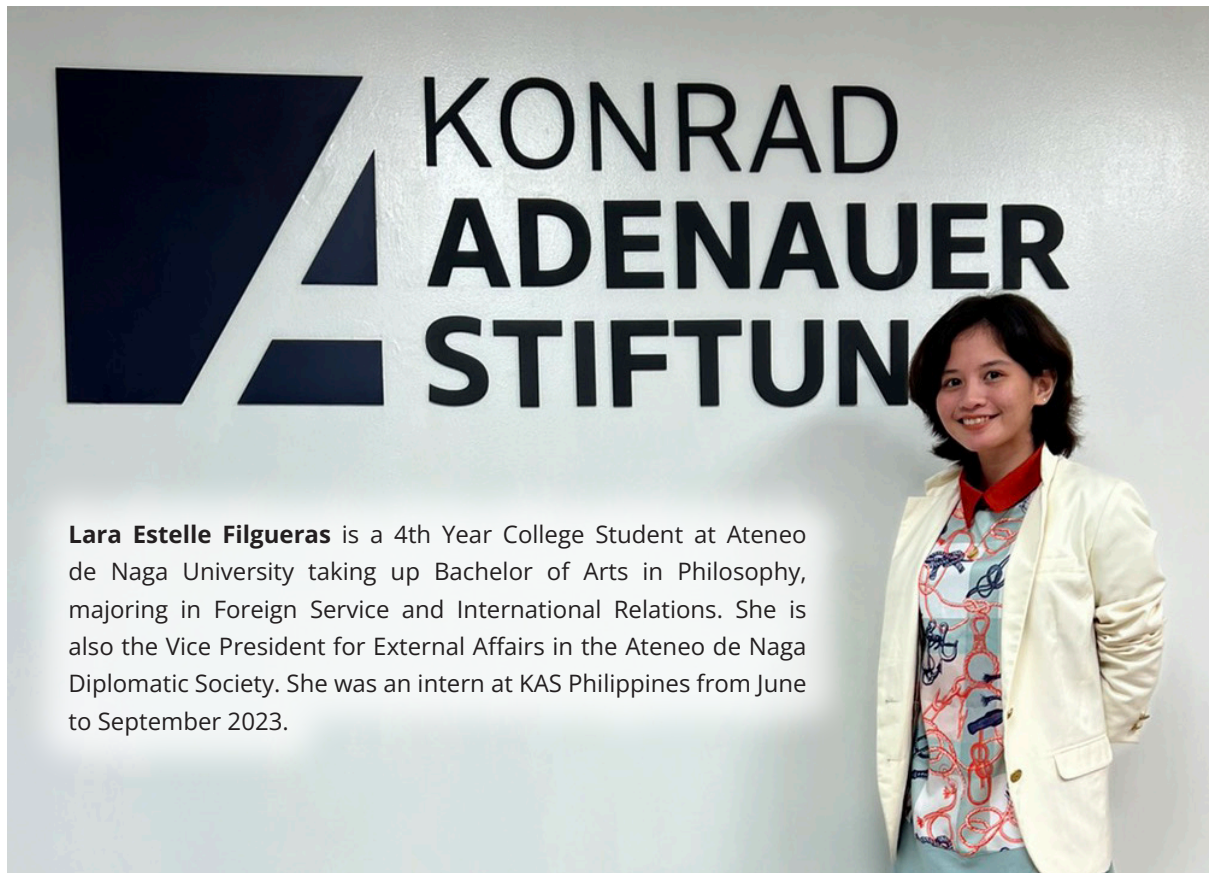
and developing programs that will aid and develop the sector more are all needed interventions. The government could also look into partnering with the local entertainment industry to create a strategic plan on developing the country's cultural diplomacy and soft power through music and television. However, it remains a bleak vision because in the 2023 budget, for example, the National Commission for Culture and Arts only received a PHP 25.1 million allocation fund – an 83% budget cut from 2022's budget of P156.2-M.¹⁶

As a young Filipino consuming the goods, products, and culture of other countries such as Japan and South Korea, there is a certain ache in not being able to see Filipino culture and entertainment more in global mainstream media. The world has become closer and more integrated due to globalization. Within this context, cultural diplomacy becomes even more important and relevant than ever, and our examples show that the Philippines can utilize these opportunities to define the Filipino identity to the rest of the world, not because we want to cover traces of corruption or human rights issues, but rather to showcase that Filipinos are world-class.

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KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU). As co-founder of the CDU and the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) united Christian-social, conservative and liberal traditions. His name is synonymous with the democratic reconstruction of Germany, the firm alignment of foreign policy with the trans-Atlantic community of values, the vision of a unified Europe and an orientation towards the social market economy. His intellectual heritage continues to serve both as our aim as well as our obligation today.

KAS has been active in the Philippines since 1964. It is the oldest KAS Office in Asia. Ever since 1998, the main activities of the KAS in the Philippines have focused on the social market economy, institutional and political reform, and peace and development in Mindanao. In recent years, KAS Philippines' activities have expanded towards youth empowerment, foreign relations, security, and innovation.

We cooperate with governmental institutions, political parties, civil society organizations, experts, and key stakeholders, building strong partnerships along the way. Together with our partners we make a contribution to the creation of an international order that enables every country to develop in freedom and under its own responsibility.

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