

# South Korea's National Role Conceptions in its Foreign Policy Towards European Countries

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## **Abstract**

South Korea's leaders are constantly representing Korea around the world and building new diplomatic relationships to enhance its influence internationally. Nowadays the country's ambitions for diplomacy reach further away from neighbouring countries and into distant regions. This thesis is interested in the relationship between South Korea and European countries, focusing on the way that Korea chooses to present itself to them. In order to find out what national role conceptions South Korea takes on in its communication with Europe, the thesis conducts content analysis on sources from three levels of government – the president, the Foreign Ministry and the embassies. It is known that the relationship between Korea and Europe is largely economy oriented, however the thesis found that Korea also identifies itself in terms of defence and territorial issues, cultural issues as well as shared values. As to the levels of government, it was found that the president is more focused on defence/territorial issues, while the Foreign Ministry emphasizes economic cooperation and embassies identify more with the cultural powerhouse role conception. It was also found that Korea presents itself a developer and cultural powerhouse to Eastern European countries, but as a regional protector to Western European countries.

**Keywords:** South Korea, Europe, Foreign policy, National role conceptions, Diplomacy, Content analysis

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## **Abbreviations and notes on language**

**EU** – European Union

**MOFA** – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Cheong Wa Dae** – South Korean Presidential office. Romanised according to source materials.

Korean names are written placing the last name first and are romanised according to source materials.

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# **1 Introduction**

South Korea's position in world politics has changed dramatically the last 50 years, as it went from being one of the poorest countries to becoming an Asian tiger with a rapidly growing economy. In recent years it has even found its way into people's homes across the world in the form of popular culture. As its position as a country has changed, so has the role that they play in the international system, making the country an important partner for many. While public attention is often gathered around Korea's relationship with its neighbouring countries, with whom they have significant historical ties as well as political arguments, nowadays Korea has bilateral relations with many other regions and seeks to further expand diplomatic horizons all over the world. Europe is one of the key regions that South Korea is interested in developing a bilateral relationship with.

Expanding diplomatic horizons through diversification of diplomacy and enhancing Korea's role in the international community is one of the key goals of the foreign policy of Moon Jae In's time in office according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA 2018: 20). One of the ways to achieve these goals is to increase bilateral relations with Europe among other regions and in order to do so, the country has made more and more efforts to actively participate in the relationship. South Korea is one of only 10 strategic partners of the European Union, making it an important cooperation partner. Their relationship is largely based on economic partnership, as the European Union is a key trading partner and the largest cumulative investor for South Korea (MOFA 2020) and they even have a bilateral Free Trade Agreement in place, as stated on the site of European External Action Service (EEAS 2016). Nevertheless, as the scope of South Korean foreign policy widens, other themes have also become prominent in the relationship between Korea and Europe. Public attention towards South Korea has been gathered mainly around two topics, first of which is the relationship with North Korea that gives the whole world a nuclear scare every once in a while. The second prominent topic is South Korea's success in popular culture, which has been incorporated in its official approach to foreign policy in the form of public diplomacy (MOFA).

As South Korea's interest in the European region grows, so does the importance of the foreign policy and diplomatic relations between the two. According to Holsti (1970) as well as Wish (1980), foreign policy decisions are largely shaped by the national role conceptions that the country exhibits in terms of how it defines the country's roles and priorities internationally. Thus, this thesis is interested in looking into what kind of role conceptions

Korea has of itself in its exchanges with European countries as this illustrates the reasoning and directions behind the country's foreign policy and helps understand the relationship between the two.

### **1.1 Research question and research design**

When looking at the bilateral relationship between countries and the related foreign policy, it can be seen that all of them have their own way of portraying the roles they take on. Analysing the way countries position themselves in the international sphere is essential to understanding their foreign policy and this is exactly what this thesis aspires to do, as the thesis is interested in exploring the relationship between European countries and South Korea. More specifically, it aims to analyse how Korea presents itself to different European countries. Thus, the main research question and sub-questions of this thesis are:

- ❖ What are South Korea's national role conceptions in their foreign policy towards European countries?
  - How do Korean national role conceptions vary within different levels of government?
  - How do the national role conceptions that Korea portrays differ within European regions?

As the aim of the thesis is to explore the way Korea constructs its international role, it is quite evident that the topic itself is constructivist at its core. According to Bryman (2012: 33) constructivism sees social phenomena as something that is continually accomplished through social interactions and is in a constant state of revision. From an epistemological point of view, the thesis is based on interpretivism, as it does not view empirical data as a natural fact, but rather as ideas interpreted by human actors (*ibid*: 28; 30). The thesis will be based on qualitative research methods, more specifically qualitative content analysis, which will be discussed further in the methods chapter.

### **1.2 Academic contribution**

The subject of South Korea's national role conceptions in their foreign policy has been relatively unexplored in terms of empirical analysis. While some general assumptions have been made about what kind of roles the country's representatives take on, the previous research is in need of additional data analysis. Nevertheless, as some general terms of Korea's roles have previously been determined, the usefulness of going over the general roles

is doubtful. Therefore, it is more relevant to look into roles that the country portrays towards specific regions. This is especially appropriate since in the original national role conceptions theory, Holsti (1970: 277) proposed that countries change their role conceptions depending on the audience. Therefore, this thesis aims to give insight into the relationship between the Republic of Korea and the European region. The thesis finds that South Korea's main role conceptions in its foreign policy towards Europe is mainly focused on economic and defence/territorial issues, but also exhibits a novel element of a soft power culture-related role. The findings of the thesis highlight the changing field of foreign policy analysis and the emergence of new roles.

### **1.3 Disposition**

This paper consists of four main parts. The first chapter is the introduction and aims to give a general overview of the thesis topic, as well as to introduce the research questions and the academic contribution. The second chapter is focused on the literature review and theoretical background, as it introduces the specifics of role theory, looks into some deductive role conceptions that will be used in analysis and further introduces the relationship between Korea and Europe. The third chapter will focus on the methods used in the thesis, more specifically data selection and analysis as well as ethical considerations. The fourth part of the thesis presents empirical findings from the analysis and shows that South Korea takes on a wide variety of national role conceptions in its discourse with Europe. The empirical findings chapter also has sub-chapters focusing on how Korean national role conception varies within different levels of the government and how national role conceptions that Korea portrays differ within European regions. The paper ends with a conclusion on the results.

## **2 Theory and literature review**

This chapter aims to give an overview of the topics and theories relevant to this thesis. Namely, the first sub-chapter will introduce role theory and how it is used in international relations research, as well as give an overview of the main national role conceptions that emerge from relevant literature. This will be followed by an explanation of how understandings of foreign policy research have changed over the years and how soft power has gained increasing amounts of attention in scholarly literature. Then, previous articles discussing South Korean role conceptions will be discussed. The second half of the literature review will focus on giving background information on South Korea, providing a historical background and an introduction to their political system as well as foreign policy. Lastly the relationship between South Korea and Europe will be discussed.

### **2.1 Introduction to role theory**

The theoretical basis for this thesis is role theory as it is used in foreign policy analysis, however role theory actually has its roots in sociology, social psychology and anthropology (Breuning 2019: 2). The rise of role theory started with the emergence of the idea that individual behaviour might be moulded to fit to the expectations of others. For example, it was researched, how people fit into sexual or kinship roles, cultural roles and even small group dynamics (Holsti 1970: 236-237). These approaches can broadly be categorized into structural role theory, which emphasizes being born into specific roles, and symbolic interactionism, where it's believed that humans interpret and reinvent their roles (Breuning 2019: 2).

In 1970, role theory officially found its way into behavioural political science with Kalevi Jaako Holsti's article "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy" published in *International Studies Quarterly*. This article will act as a fundamental theoretical framework, guiding the analysis of this thesis, as it explains and shows national role conceptions theory in foreign policy. While this work was the first record of national role conceptions, there had been political scientists who already touched on the subject of role, for example analysing legislators and their perceived roles at their jobs (Holsti 1970: 237). Holsti (*ibid*: 246), however, took the concept into analysing foreign policy, and stated: "*(...) role theory, transposed to the international context, offers a framework for describing national*

*role performance and role conceptions and for exploring the sources of those role conceptions.*”. Which in turn resulted in his analysis of the national role conceptions of different countries. National role conceptions are an important element in foreign policy analysis, as they can be used to explain typical patterns in foreign policies, and they provide a context for these decisions based on the understandings of policymakers (Wish 1980: 533).

## **2.2 Role theory in foreign policy analysis**

While the main interest of this thesis is the idea of national role conceptions, it is important to understand the general context of role theory as well. This includes ideas that are central to role theory in foreign policy analysis, such as understanding the concept of a role, as well as the different components of role theory.

As mentioned before, role theory is based on several elements, such as role performance, (national) role conceptions, role prescriptions and status (Holsti 1970: 240). National role performance is one of the key elements to role theory, Holsti (*ibid*: 245-246) defines it as: “(...) *the general foreign policy behaviour of governments. It includes patterns of attitudes, decisions, responses, functions and commitments toward other states. (...) these patterns or typical decisions can be called national roles.*”. Essentially, the national role performance is the collection of a state’s behaviours in its foreign policy, and thus, in a way, the most tangible result of the role enactment process.

Another key element of role theory is the status of the state. Holsti (*ibid*: 244) uses this element to give a rough indicator of a state’s ranking in the global system. Other role theorists have defined status as a location in the social structure and an indicator of power and social esteem (Wish 1980: 536). While it is not the main research interest in the field, it has been found that states that are more active in the international sphere, and have a higher status, such as major and middle powers, generally tend to take on more active roles (Holsti 1970: 283) which illustrates the importance of status in the development of national role conceptions and role performance.

The last two elements of role theory in foreign policy are related to the perception of roles. First of these is the role conception of the ego (self), which according to Holsti (*ibid*: 245) includes: “(...) *the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional system.*”. This is the national role conception element that is central to this thesis, as this is

what is seen in foreign policy related speeches and publications released by government officials, where they express their ideas of ways in which the country should behave and be valued.. National role conceptions can stem from a variety of sources, such as geographical location, resources, traditional policies etc (*ibid*: 246). An analysis of a specific state's national role would mean determining recurring patterns in their understanding of "self" in terms of international relations and their perceived role in foreign policy. For example, states can fulfil the role of a mediator, if they prioritize conflict resolution (*ibid*). According to role theory, national roles are first and foremost based on decision makers' (foreign ministers, ambassadors etc.) perception of their own state (Breuning 2019: 2), meaning that the role of the state is highly dependent on the human factor and behavioural in its nature. The analysis of these role conceptions is the central piece of Holsti's work, but also the works of political scientists following his footsteps, as the key source of interest for role theory in foreign policy analysis is how the national role conceptions influence foreign policy decisions (Wish 1980; Holsti 1970; Breuning 2019). In this sense, this thesis takes on an approach more alike to Holsti's, as it explores the national role conceptions taken on for the country by government officials.

The second role perception is called the alter's role prescriptions. This encompasses the role prescriptions that come from external sources, such as the structure of the international system, world opinion, multilateral and bilateral treaties as well as traditions and expectations of states (Holsti 1970: 246). In her empirical analysis of role conceptions and foreign policy, Naomi Wish (1980: 534) said that Holsti largely ignored the influence of the alter component to the role performance and stressed the importance of national role conceptions instead. In this light, Holsti's approach can be seen as more symbolic and interactionist, while Wish paid more attention to the external sources of role conceptions and thus was more in line with the structuralist approach (Breuning 2019: 3-4).

### **2.2.1 Different role conceptions in research**

Since its emergence in foreign policy analysis, national role conceptions and role theory have been used to describe the role conceptions of different countries as well as the effects of them on their foreign policy. This started with Holsti's (1970) paper, where he identified 17 main national role conceptions (see Table 1) after using content analysis on a collection of foreign policy related speeches and papers. When looking at these 17 roles, it is clear that these original role conceptions are heavily centred on military themes, such as "regional protector"

and “mediator-integrator”, however he also lists “developer” and “example”, which can also be seen from an economic angle.

<b><i>ROLE CONCEPTION</i></b>	<b><i>EXPLANATION</i></b>
BASTION OF REVOLUTION-LIBERATOR	The country has a duty to lead a revolutionary movement abroad.
REGIONAL LEADER	Has special responsibilities within a region or sub-section.
REGIONAL PROTECTOR	Provides protection for adjacent regions.
ACTIVE INDEPENDENT	Shuns permanent military/ideological commitments, but actively engages with other countries.
LIBERATION SUPPORTER	Supports liberation, but isn't responsible for organizing it.
ANTI-IMPERIALIST AGENT	Sees imperialism as a serious threat and supports the struggle against it.
DEFENDER OF THE FAITH	Defends value systems from attack.
MEDIATOR-INTEGRATOR	Takes on tasks to reconcile conflicts between other states.
REGIONAL-SUBSYSTEM COLLABORATOR	Has far-reaching commitments in order to cooperate and build bigger communities or subsystems (for example the Communist movement).
DEVELOPER	Has a sense of duty to assist underdeveloped countries.
BRIDGE	Acts as a “translator” between different cultures.
FAITHFUL ALLY	The country makes a specific commitment to support another country's government.
INDEPENDENT	The country makes policy decisions based on its own interests and not those of another state..
EXAMPLE	Gains prestige and influence internationally by pursuing certain domestic policies.
INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT	Wishes to remain non-involved in international

	political matters, but still pursues cooperation, especially in fields related to economy and technology.
ISOLATE	Has a minimum number of external contacts.
PROTECTEE	Alludes to the responsibility of other states to defend them.

***Table 1: A collection of role conceptions by Holsti (1970: 260–271) listed from most to least active.***

Holsti's analysis comes up with several conclusions about national role conceptions. His findings suggest that countries often carry out more than one role in the international arena, and sometimes these roles might even be contradictory (Holsti 1970: 278). It is also important in the context of this paper that as a state has several different established roles in the international system, it means that they also have different roles within the system and in different regions (*ibid*: 277). Furthermore, he found that states that are more active in the international system (such as major and middle powers) tend to have more national role conceptions and take on more active roles (*ibid*: 283). He then concluded that national role conceptions are a fair indicator of involvement in foreign affairs (*ibid*: 288). His findings also guide the themes and hypotheses of this paper, as it is hypothesized that South Korea has more than one national role conception and it is assumed that South Korea has different national role conceptions with regards to its relations with Europe, as compared to the general international system.

Another author that looked at role theory in foreign policy analysis more generally was Naomi Wish (1970), who gave her own take on the usefulness of role conceptions and its links to role performance in international systems. The goal of her paper was to analyse the effects of national role conceptions on foreign policy and in the end, it was concluded that role conceptions do have a significant effect on the country's foreign policy in terms of longstanding patterns in behaviour (*ibid*: 547). As the method and framework of this paper are very concentrated on the effects of role conceptions on foreign policy, rather than determining the roles in the first place, this thesis will remain rooted in Holsti's interpretations of role conceptions. However, Wish's work does provide useful insight as she provided an alternative way of looking at things and also came to conclusions that are relevant to this thesis. Specifically, the thesis uses her classification of substantive problem

areas in order to understand the prevalent topics of the emerging role conceptions and uses her coding system to analyse the discovered role conceptions. In her paper, she used her own coding system to use in content analysis of policymakers' speeches, and evaluated them in terms of:

“(a) *Status*

(1) *The perception of dominance*

(2) *The size or level of the influence domain*

(b) *Motivational Orientation*

(1) *Individualistic motivations*

(2) *Competitive motivations*

(3) *The amount of change proposed*

(c) *Substantive Problem Areas*

(1) *Territorial/defence*

(2) *Ideological*

(3) *Political/diplomatic*

(4) *Universal value*

(5) *Economic”*

(Wish 1980: 540)

As mentioned before, Wish's approach was more structural, rather than symbolic interpretivist, as her roles were more rooted in the structure of the international system (Breuning 2019: 4). However, her findings did not significantly differ from those of Holsti's, showing a strong correlation between the national role conceptions of political leaders and the foreign policy behaviour of states (Wish 1980: 549).

### **2.3 The changing field of foreign policy and the emergence of soft power**

As mentioned before, early role conceptions in foreign policy were centred on the military might and perceptions of the state. Holsti's paper was written in 1970, when the world was divided by the cold war and wounds of conflicts, such as the Korean war or the Vietnam war were still fresh. At this time, it made sense for countries to put emphasis on their defence,

strategic alliances and “liberation” narratives. However, nowadays a variety of different forms of foreign policy have emerged. Specifically, there has been a rising interest in using soft power in international relations. The leading theory of soft power was initially written by Joseph Nye in 1990 and defined soft power as “(...) the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment.” (Nye 2008: 94). The assumption made in this thesis is that following the rapid rise in interest for Korean culture, the country has also started to define itself in culture-related roles. This assumption is further supported by the fact that Nye (*ibid*: 96) lists foreign policies as one of the main sources of soft power, as well as the idea that soft power rests on strategic communication by governments (*ibid*: 101) which can be viewed in terms of national role conceptions if the country takes on cultural roles.

#### **2.4 South Korean national role conceptions in other works**

In the original work of Holsti (1970: 294) South Korea was considered as a country to be analysed, but it was found that there is not enough data to prove the relevance of any role conceptions. However, it should be considered that since that time, South Korea has undergone significant societal, political and economic change. While the history and political system of South Korea will be discussed in further detail below, it can be said, that the country has now become a significant middle power (Karim 2018: 344). According to Holsti’s own theory, middle power countries carry a larger number of roles and are more inclined towards active roles. Thus, it would be reasonable to assume that South Korea’s national role conception has changed in line with its status in the international system. Over the years there have been several papers that discuss the national role conceptions of South Korea. It should be noted, however, that none of these papers provide a thorough empirical analysis and only give a general context of the roles South Korea has been taking on.

In 2018 Karim wrote about the way South Korea and Indonesia have used national role conception in order to pursue a middle-power status. The aim of this paper was to specifically link national role conceptions and the status-seeking behaviour of middle powers (Karim 2018: 343). It is evident, that this research is also based on Holsti’s approach, and the author identifies Korea as: “a regional balancer, an advocate of developmentalism and a bridge-builder” (*ibid*: 344). Another author that discussed a similar topic was Leif-Eric Easley (2012) who analysed middle power national identity based on South Korea and Vietnam. This article is more focused on national identity, rather than the country’s role in international politics.

However, it provides useful insights, suggesting that US-China geopolitics is a determining factor in the shaping of these countries' national identities. Lastly, Heike Hermanns (2013) wrote about national role conceptions in the "Global Korea" foreign policy strategy. Her paper was rather descriptive, recounting South Korean foreign policy initiatives. Based on that, the article analyses different aspects of South Korea's role, such as the economic, military and soft power roles, however it does not go into specific role conceptions or empirical analysis. Her notable statements include: South Korea's role as a client state of the US is in the past and its role has progressed to be more independent (*ibid*: 64), Korea is looking for respect as a nation with economic power (*ibid*: 65), there has been a shift in national role conceptions from hard power elements towards soft power themes, such as culture, values and ideas, especially hallyu (a term signifying the success of Korean pop culture) (*ibid*: 66; 75) and nowadays South Korea takes on more diverse roles in the international sphere (*ibid*: 67), furthermore, the country highlights its importance in promoting development, which highlights the conflicts between being a "global player" and looking out for its own economic interests (*ibid*: 73).

All in all, it can be seen that South Korean role conceptions have been discussed in quite general terms, only highlighting the directions of its changing roles. Furthermore, it has not been discussed what kind of various role conceptions Korea has in different international spheres. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to fill this gap by conducting a thorough content analysis to understand Korea's role conceptions in its foreign policy towards Europe and to compare this with the findings listed above.

## **2.5 Background of the relationship between South Korea and Europe**

As mentioned before, in the 1970s, South Korea was somewhat different to the economically prosperous nation that is known today. After surviving the Japanese occupation and the Korean war, South Korea began as a sovereign country in relative poverty and ruin (Tudor 2012: 21). Generally, South Korean foreign policies during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were very much focused on the survival of the state and taming the conflict with North Korea (Hermanns 2013: 64). However, since this time, much has changed in the country. As Korea has risen in the international system, this diverse history has led to a democratic turn in the country and with it a change in politics. Furthermore, this has influenced the roles the country plays in internationally, as its status within the system has changed.

### **2.5.1 South Korean political system**

South Korea, officially called the Republic of Korea, has a political system built up on three branches of government. The head of the republic is the president, who represents the executive branch and is elected for one five-year term (Tudor 2012). The constitution vests the president with considerable power, making Korea an example of “imperial presidency” as the country is largely led by the president (Bae & Park 2017). The legislative power is held by the parliament that is elected for four years and the judiciary branch is represented by a system of courts (South Korean Government’s official web portal A). Since 2017 the country is led by President Moon Jae In from the Democratic/Minjoo party. In South Korean politics there are currently two main parties that together make up over 90% of the parliament – the Democratic Party of Korea and the People Power Party (The National Assembly of the Republic of Korea 2021).

When it comes to international relations, South Korea has diplomatic relations with 191 countries and has 115 resident embassies, 5 permanent missions, and 46 consulate generals among them. They have also opened a number of Korean cultural centres, trying to promote South Korean culture. Furthermore, the country is also a member of many international organizations like OECD, UNESCO, WHO and others (South Korean Government’s official web portal B).

### **2.5.2 South Korean foreign policy towards Europe**

While South Korean foreign policy can more often be linked to countries that they have historical ties with, such as China, Japan and USA, Korea has expanded their reach and

nowadays has important bilateral relations with many countries. One region that has gained increasing importance in South Korea's foreign policy is Europe, including both countries inside and outside the European Union. The area for analysis for this paper is Europe more generally, because South Korea doesn't tend to differentiate between the EU and other European countries, and mostly groups them together in official documents. South Korea and the EU are said to share the same commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and a market economy despite the vast geographical difference. Thus, the two have established a strong bilateral relationship including political, trade and security agreements. Furthermore, South Korea is one of the only 10 strategic partners of the EU (EEAS 2016).

Korea's relationship with the European Union is largely an economic one, as the two are important trading partners. For example, since 1962 the European Union has been cumulatively the largest foreign investor in The Republic of Korea (MOFA 2020). Additionally, in 2015 a free trade agreement between South Korea and the EU was implemented. Among other things, this agreement ensures market access and investment opportunities for Korean businesses in the EU as well as the other way around (EEAS 2016). Thus, it is important for South Korea to facilitate good economic as well as political relations with countries in Europe.

In the political sphere, South Korea and Europe have cooperated in bilateral, regional, as well as global issues. According to The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA 2020) their cooperation is based on similar values of democracy, free trade, human rights and the rule of law, that has allowed to build a strong relationship between the two. In 2014 South Korea and The European Union signed a mutual framework agreement that covered various political issues, including "inter alia human rights, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, combating terrorism, the fight against corruption and organized crime, trade, migration, environment, energy, climate change, transport, science and technology, employment and social affairs, education, agriculture, development assistance and culture" (EEAS 2016). It is thus reasonable to expect that at least some of these topics would show up in the different national role conceptions that will emerge from the analysis of South Korean foreign policy materials directed towards Europe.

The Diplomatic White Paper (MOFA 2019) from 2019 gives a general overview of the directions that South Korean foreign policy is going in. Specifically, it highlights the importance of inter-Korean relations and managing in times of uncertainty. The paper also states that South Korean foreign policy goals are making progress in the peace process on the

Korean Peninsula, strengthening cooperation with its four neighbouring countries, expanding its diplomatic horizon through diversification, enhancing Korea's role and national prestige in the international community and conducting diplomacy together with the people (*ibid*: 23). With regards to European countries, the publication relays the significance of summit diplomacy, ministerial diplomacy and prime minister diplomacy (*ibid*), which highlights the importance of different levels of government in foreign policy.

The way that the communication between South Korea and Europe is structured gives a general understanding of the topics of interest in their relationship. This in turn gives reasonable cause to think that the national role conceptions of South Korea would be rooted in the established dialogue with Europe. When looking at the previously described agreements, it could be assumed that South Korea would portray itself to Europe in terms of its economic success and the bilateral economic relationship, as they are described mostly as very important trading partners, which is also emphasised by the Free Trade Agreement established in 2015 (EEAS 2016). Furthermore, other highlighted issues might result in Korea presenting itself as a climate-aware and technologically advanced country. Similar values in democracy, human rights and the rule of law (MOFA 2019) are also likely to make an appearance in South Korea's self-image. While cultural cooperation is mentioned, Korea's success in popular culture is a relatively untouched topic in the general descriptions of the bilateral relationship, as it is perhaps more of a personal issue rather than a bilateral one and as such is likely to be mentioned more in more personal addresses rather than official documents.

### **3 Methodology**

This chapter aims to give an overview of the data collection and analysis methods to be used in the thesis, furthermore it explores the limitations and advantages of the chosen methods. For this purpose, the chapter will be structured as follows: firstly, the paper will introduce what kind of data will be used in the thesis. Then, the data collection and analysis method will be elaborated. After that, there will be an analysis on why this data and method were chosen and lastly, ethical considerations and risks will be discussed.

#### **3.1 Data selection**

The empirical data used for this thesis is derived from official documents that have in one way or another been produced by South Korean government agencies. All of the used data is from online sources, specifically government sites and yearbooks, where they gather the most important information about Korean foreign relations. In order to portray the most cohesive image of South Korean foreign policy, this paper uses sources starting from 2017 to 2021. This timeframe was chosen, as Moon Jae In was elected president in 2017, which marks the change of government and provides the paper with a cohesive set of foreign policy incentives that has not been changed by the election of a new president.

For this thesis, the scope of analysis was not limited to the European Union, but all European countries that came up in the foreign ministry's yearly white paper under the chapter for European countries, as well as the list of European countries and cities that South Korea has an embassy in. While it could also be beneficial to analyse the country's diplomacy towards the European Union, it was found that the chosen approach is better for framing the research in a way that accurately portrays the country's own understandings of Europe and its foreign policy towards the region. In order to answer the sub-question "how do the national role conceptions that Korea portrays differ within European regions?", it was also necessary to sort the chosen countries into regions. For this, the United Nations geographical regions were used (UNstats). This list has defined 4 regions that will be used in analysis: Western, Eastern, Southern and Northern Europe. Countries that were considered Europe by the Korean officials, but not by the United Nations definition were excluded from this level of analysis.

All in all, the analysis used 49 different sources, all of which were analysed and coded. These files will be listed in more detail below. Different parts of the documents were separated by

the European countries that they related to, which resulted in around 160 sections that were then analysed. A total of 38 countries were included in the thesis, as well as three cases that were aimed at a more general European audience. The countries that came up in the analysis were France, Germany, Denmark, Spain, United Kingdom, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Vatican, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Romania, Italy, Netherlands, Turkey, Belgium, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Switzerland, Estonia, Lithuania, Portugal, Serbia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Slovenia and Ukraine. It should also be noted that not all countries had an equal number of sections, for example, a total of 12 sections were aimed towards France, while some countries only had one.

The first sources for empirical data are publications provided by Korean embassies, embassy branches and permanent missions in different European countries. The most comparable publications are embassy greetings that every single embassy has provided and that usually give a general overview of the relationship between the two countries. As mentioned above, the analysis looks into all the embassies listed under Europe in the Korean embassy list (found for example on the site of the Korean Embassy in Austria), which resulted in a total of 39 greetings being analysed.

In order to understand the point of view of the foreign ministry, the thesis will also analyse diplomatic white papers and speeches made by foreign ministry officials, focusing on parts that directly relate to Korea's relationship with European countries. For this purpose, the analysis looked into chapters about Korea's relationship with Europe in Diplomatic White Papers from 2018, 2019 and 2020. Additionally, the Foreign Ministry website had provided 4 speeches in English, which were also used in the thesis.

Lastly, the thesis analysed relevant speeches by Moon Jae In to understand the point of view of the president. Every year, selected speeches by the president are translated and published in a yearbook. This thesis looks into selected speeches of 2020, 2019 and 2018. As with the Foreign Ministry, the President's website was also searched for more relevant speeches, however no relevant speeches were found.

### **3.2 Data collection and analysis**

The chosen method for data analysis in this thesis is qualitative content analysis. As the aim of the thesis is to understand the content of South Korean government publications, especially regarding how they perceive their national role in foreign policy, it is important to analyse the

texts systematically. For this purpose, content analysis provides an opportunity to quantify the content of the analysed text and organize it into systematically predetermined categories (Bryman 2012: 290). In order to create codes and systematically analyse the texts, the thesis will be using a software program called NVIVO. In order to characterise the significance of each role conception, this thesis also show how many times the roles were found in analysed texts, as this was the approach taken by Holsti (1970: 274). However, the results should be interpreted in a qualitative manner and only to compare the impact of the themes.

In order to look into how South Korea presents itself to European countries, the texts will be coded based on subjects and themes related to South Korea's national role conceptions. So as to give the most accurate representation of Korea's roles, the analysis uses both inductive and deductive coding. The deductive codes will be derived from previous literature on the subject, specifically the theoretical basis of this thesis – Holsti's (1970) article "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy". For example, as he discusses the role of the mediator for countries that promote conflict resolution, which would in the context of this work result in the code "mediator". However, it was found that Holsti's roles do not provide an accurate representation of all the themes emerging from the texts. Therefore, additional inductive coding was done during the reading process.

Holsti's role conceptions were discovered throughout the analysed papers and greetings by all parties – Embassies, the President, as well as the Foreign Ministry. Filtering out the roles that had no relevance, the following codes were kept for analysis: (1) protectee (2) regional protector (3) developer (4) example (5) active independent and (6) bridge. While the coding was based on Holsti's original definitions of these codes, it is important to note how they were viewed in the context of South Korean foreign policy.

- The code "protectee" was used in instances when it was said that other countries should also cooperate or support Korea in resolving the issue on the Korean peninsula. Working together or cooperating was coded as "protectee" because it alludes to seeking support from other countries. This code also developed a specific inductive sub-code – "receiver of military support", which was used for memories of the Korean war and how different European countries contributed with military and medical aid.
- "Regional protector" was used in instances when Korea's role as a resolver or the conflict on the Korean peninsula, especially instances when South Korea has contributed to peace in the region.

- The code “developer” was used for two themes: 1) when concrete contributions to development were mentioned and 2) when South Korean investments in the other country were emphasized.
- “Example” was used for times when Korea’s success in different fields was emphasized and brought up as an example for others.
- The theme “active independent” is based on South Korea highlighting the fact that it is an active member of the international community. This theme is usually expressed in quite general terms.
- “Bridge” was used to signify the moments when South Korea was acting as an intermediary to North Korea and other countries.

In addition to Holsti’s role conceptions, the analysis uses 8 inductive role conceptions: (1) economic co-operator (2) advocate for peace, (3) cultural powerhouse and co-operator, (4) environmentally conscious country, (5) pioneer of technology and science, (6) human rights upholder, (7) upholder of democracy and (8) relatable struggler. As can be seen, these codes are not as oriented towards hard power and signify a more economy and ideology-based approach.

- The code “economic co-operator” demonstrates the willingness of South Korea to cooperate in economic fields. While a large part of the coded themes are very general, only mentioning economic cooperation, the code also includes historical economic ties, current situations and future plans.
- “Advocate for peace” expresses South Korea’s peace-loving nature, mostly towards resolving the issue of the Korean Peninsula in cooperation with others, but sometimes also in more general terms.
- “Cultural powerhouse” shows themes of South Korea emphasizing its cultural power in the form of music, movies, language etc. This code also contains references made to cultural cooperation and exchange as well as elements of tourism.
- The theme “environmentally conscious country” highlights the wish of South Korea to cooperate in solving environmental issues and the efforts they have already made. Thus, the texts promote the role conception of an environmentally conscious country.
- “Pioneer of technology and science” was used to identify themes related to technological and scientific achievements as well as cooperation.

- “Upholder of human rights” encompasses instances when human rights or cooperation in this field were talked about. Essentially this code emphasized South Korea’s role as an upholder of human rights as well as a country that strives towards equality.
- The theme “upholder of democracy” includes the times South Korean officials emphasized democratic values and South Korea’s democracy.
- “Relatable struggler” signifies the times when a similar history of struggle was brought up as a point of Korea relating to other countries or being closer.

### **3.3 Rationale behind the data selection and method**

As mentioned before, the thesis focuses on looking into official government documents. This is because data coming from these official documents provides an insight into the ideas that the Korean state promotes about itself aka it’s national role conceptions, which is essentially the goal of this research. Using second-party data would not result in understanding the state’s perception of Korea, as it would show the perceptions of for example the general public and the media and thus would not provide a satisfactory answer to the research question concerning Korea’s own understanding of its roles internationally.

To determine the suitability of these specific documents it is useful to consider Scott’s four criteria (Bryman 2012: 544). Firstly, it names the authenticity of the sources, a criterion which is generally accomplished by government papers. While it is possible to come across false government documents, the publications in this thesis will be taken straight from the official websites. Secondly there is the issue of credibility. As the aim of the thesis is not to discover the undeniable truth, but rather to see the perspective of the government, it can be said that the texts are free from significant error and distortion. The third criterion is representativeness, in regard to which different kinds of publications will be analysed to provide a typical picture of the understandings of their national role conceptions. While it would be possible to analyse sources from even more different levels of government, it is doubtful that this would be reasonable, as it would result in too many sources that are off-topic. The last criterion is whether or not the evidence is clear and comprehensible, and it can be said that the publications released by the government are quite high-quality and easily comprehensible.

When it comes to the data collection method, an alternative approach to qualitative content analysis could be taken here - discourse analysis. To argue for qualitative content analysis it should be noted that qualitative data analysis is the most popular research method when it

comes to analysing official state documents. This is because it provides an opportunity to look at underlying themes in the texts (Bryman 2012: 557). However, it is possible, that discourse analysis could also be a good method for the thesis, as it “emphasizes the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse” (*ibid*: 528) which is essentially what the Korean government is doing – creating a version of themselves in discourse. Nevertheless, discourse analysis is too focused on the language used in the materials, which makes it less suitable than content analysis, as the latter provides a wider basis for the analysis of recurring themes. All in all, the interest of this thesis is to analyse what is being said, not how it’s being said.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations and limitations**

The thesis has been conducted in accordance with The Swedish Research Council’s rules and guidelines. When it comes to ethical considerations, the thesis does not have many issue areas, as it does not aim to conduct interviews or any fieldwork that could somehow endanger other people. Rather, the thesis focuses on official documents that have already been published online and do not pose any ethical issues. Nevertheless, it should be said that there is a threat of misunderstanding Korean culture or being too western in the analysis, as the author of the thesis comes from a European country and studies in a European university. Furthermore, the original ideas of national role conceptions also come from western authors.

Additionally, there is an issue of a language barrier, as the author of the thesis does not speak sufficient Korean for the analysis of official documents. While the thesis topic does not require Korean-language sources, it could still be beneficial to read through them in order to better understand the context. Furthermore, embassy texts are often in the language of the country where the embassy is situated. While the author of the thesis has a good understanding of English, French and Slavic languages, other documents had to be translated using Google Translate. This application was also used to translate the latest Diplomatic White Paper and while the translation occasionally did not provide a very detailed translation, it still helped identify the prevailing themes, which was the goal of this analysis.

## **4 Empirical findings**

This chapter uses content analysis in order to identify prevalent role conception themes in South Korean foreign policy towards Europe. In order to do so, this part of the thesis presents the empirical findings collected by analysing sources from South Korean embassies, the President and the Foreign Ministry. The chapter is divided into three main sections, and a number of relevant subsections. The first section aims to answer the main research question of “what are South Korea’s national role conceptions in their foreign policy towards European countries?” by giving an overview of all the role conceptions that South Korea exhibits in its foreign policy towards Europe. The second section and its three subsections focus on the similarities and differences in role conceptions between the three analysed government levels. The chapter’s last section aims to research the way South Korean foreign policy uses different role conceptions in different parts of Europe.

#### 4.1 Overview of the main national role conceptions

National role conceptions	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of coding references	Number of items coded	Aggregate number of items coded
Economic co-operator	177	177	40	40
Holsti\\Protectee	113	128	12	17
<i>Holsti\\Protectee\\ Receiver of military support</i>	15	15	11	11
Advocate for peace	117	117	13	13
Cultural powerhouse and co-operator	82	82	38	38
Holsti\\Regional protector	54	54	7	7
Environmentally conscious country	52	52	11	11
Pioneer of technology and science	46	46	15	15
Holsti\\Active independent	32	32	12	12
Holsti\\Developer	31	31	14	14
Upholder of human rights	27	27	14	14
Upholder of democracy	23	23	12	12
Holsti\\Example	22	22	12	12
Holsti\\Bridge	18	18	6	6
Relatable struggler	16	16	13	13

***Table 2: National role conceptions of South Korea towards Europe***

The general findings of this research show that South Korea's role conceptions do not fit into the tightly framed role conceptions proposed by Holsti (1970). While some of his themes are still relevant in the case of modern day South Korean foreign policy, inductive roles also have a significant place in the way Korea presents itself. Namely, Holsti's roles mostly have relevance in subjects related to military related issues, especially issues that concern the conflict with North Korea. While some of his original role conceptions also portray a more economy and ideology-oriented approach, it was found that these themes are not enough to accurately represent modern day Korea's national role conceptions. Thus, the new inductive themes found in the analysis signify the emerging significance of economic, cultural and other subject areas. In order to simplify the data analysis and to help make conclusions, all of

the relevant role conceptions were divided into substantive problem areas, as suggested by Wish (1970: 540). The most common national role conceptions fit into categories of economic, territorial and defence issues, soft power themes and value-based issues, each represented by a different colour in Table 2.

Looking at the background of South Korea's and Europe's relationship it can be seen that the discovered role conceptions mostly fit into the way it is described. Specifically, it is emphasized that the two are important economic partners (EEAS 2016) and have signed several agreements to that effect. This is also very clearly evident in the role conception results, as Korea's most popular national role conception is that of the economic co-operator, meaning that Korea wishes to portray itself to Europe as a valuable economic partner. Another topic that is very emphasized in the materials is the territorial and defence issues that relate to the threat of North Korea. For obvious reasons it is a very important issue in South Korean foreign policy and cooperating with other countries to solve this problem is a priority for Korea. Although geographically at a distance, Korea also relies on Europe to solve the issue on the peninsula. Additionally, the texts showed that Korea often promotes the image of being a cultural powerhouse and emphasizes the success of the "Korean wave". While this might not be an important element of the official relationship between Europe and Korea, it is a part of Korea's self-identity as a country and this can be seen in the analysis as well. The element of similar values is also somewhat present in the roles, as Korea has presented itself as an environmentally conscious country, upholder of human rights as well as democracy showing that it is important for Korean officials to emphasize shared values with Europe, however these roles are surprisingly not very widespread. The five most popular role conceptions will now be discussed in the following subchapters.

#### **4.1.1 Economic co-operator**

The most common theme in South Korean foreign policy texts was economic cooperation with European countries. As the total number of references for this theme was 177, it can be seen that the economic co-operator role is quite a lot more prevalent than the other top 5 role conceptions. This theme was identified whenever South Korean officials expressed a wish to collaborate with target countries in order to achieve economic goals, such as increased trade, as well as to give an overview of already existing economic ties.

In order to understand the driving forces behind this role conception, it is useful to view it in terms of Naomi Wish's (1980: 540) coding system that was described in detail earlier in the thesis. It should however be mentioned that instead of using Wish's quantitative method here

her approach qualitatively and without percentage calculations in order to create a context for different role conceptions and to draw relevant conclusions.

Positioning itself as an economic co-operator, South Korea defines its status in terms of influence domain as bilateral, as it stresses the country's influence in the economic affairs of other countries, yet it does not claim to be a superpower. Furthermore, it does not perceive itself to have a particularly dominant role, but rather defines itself as an "equal status ally" or, in some cases, an example of economic success that should be followed (*ibid*: 537). The motivational orientation of South Korea as an economic co-operator suggests more cooperative and competitive motivations, rather than individualistic ones, and aims towards moderate change in cases where the potential for further economic cooperation is stressed (*ibid*: 538-539). This role conception is very well represented in the following statement made by the Korean ambassador to Italy:

*„Korea and Italy are two complementary economies with such high potential as to create effective synergies. Over the past two years, the Embassy in Italy has organized four editions of the Business Forum in major Italian cities, with the participation of companies from both countries, thus encouraging the development of new economic cooperation in various fields.“*

(Embassy greeting, Korean embassy to Italy)

However, not all of the coded elements were as specific as this one, and most just listed economic cooperation as one of the goals of the bilateral relationships. Nevertheless, the prevalence of this role conception further accentuates the importance of economic ties in the diplomatic relations between South Korea and European countries. Korea and Europe are important trade partners (MOFA 2020) and these results show that above all else, South Korea views itself as an economic collaborator in this relationship.

Furthermore, it shows that Korean role conceptions have largely moved away from those in Holsti's original work and towards a more economy-oriented foreign policy. Its key differences with Holsti's economic role conceptions is the country's perception of dominance. Namely, "developer" role would take on a rather dominant status, while "internal development" highlights non-involvement in international issues. It should be said that in some cases, themes under this role conception could be classified as both "regional subsystem collaborator" as well as "internal development", however it was concluded that neither of these role conceptions accurately represent the way South Korea actively seeks cooperation in economic fields.

It is also noteworthy that while “economic co-operator” was an extremely widely expressed role conception, it was the only economy-related role in the top five roles. Other economic roles that were found but were not as significant as the co-operator role. There were two specific topic roles – “environmentally conscious country” and “pioneer of technology and science” as well as Holsti’s codes “developer” and “example” which show Korea in a more dominant light, especially highlighting its own economic success story.

#### **4.1.2 Protectee**

The second most popular theme was that of the protectee, including its sub-theme receiver of military aid. Together, these roles came up 128 times in the analysed texts, which highlights that South Korea often alludes to the responsibility of other countries to protect them. In this case, the protectee status was usually assumed by asking European countries to cooperate in order to resolve the conflict on the Korean peninsula. Although this approach doesn’t aggressively assert that other countries are responsible for resolving the conflict, it clearly states Korea’s wish for support in this conflict and by asking for cooperation, South Korean officials make the assumption that resolving this conflict is an international responsibility that extends to Europe.

When looking at this theme through Wish’s (1980: 540) criteria of status, motivational orientation and substantive problem areas, it is evident that this role can be classified under the territorial/defence problem area. Furthermore, it shows that South Korea defines its influence domain here mainly as domestic, or bilateral (*ibid*: 537), as it strives to solve its own defence issues by asking for bilateral cooperation and thus is more focused on its own issues, rather than dominance over other nations. Therefore, Korea also tends to position itself as a cooperative partner or even as a dependent partner when it comes to their degree of influence (*ibid*). The protectee role shows the country’s individualistic motivations, as it emphasizes solving a conflict that is important mainly for South Korea itself. While Wish says the protectee role is associated with a very little amount of change (*ibid*: 539) this is not the case for the South Korean protectee role, as it alludes to the responsibility of other countries to aid in resolving an ongoing conflict and to stop aggressions by North Korea. Therefore, it can be said that this theme signifies a wish for moderate change. An example of this role conception can be found in one of the diplomatic white papers:

*“President Moon also expressed his gratitude to Switzerland for its contribution to the peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula as a member of the Neutral Nations Supervisory*

*Commission and asked for its continued support for the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.”*

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019: 133)

As mentioned before, the protectee role conception also has a sub-theme – receiver of military support. This role was found in instances when South Korean officials reminded people of the times when the target country sent military aid to help in the Korean War. It essentially has very similar motivations to the protectee role, but it puts emphasis to things that have happened in the past and through these messages, South Korea usually expresses gratitude for the aid. An example of this role conception can be seen in the greeting by the Korean Ambassador to the United Kingdom:

*„The relationship is forged in blood since the UK provided the second largest contingent of troops of more than 80,000 to Korea during the Korean War (1950-1953). The courage and sacrifice of those troops are still vividly remembered by way of the Gloucester Valley Battle Monument in Paju, Gyeonggi Province together with the Korean War Memorial in Victoria Embankment Gardens alongside the river Thames in London.“*

(Korean embassy to the United Kingdom)

The prevalence of this national role conception shows that while Korea does largely define itself in terms of its economic success, territorial and defence issues still play a large role in the country’s self-definition. Specifically, Korea does still define itself as a country that needs the assistance of other countries to solve these issues, and they show gratitude for the help that European countries have so far provided. Generally, territorial and defence is quite a prevalent problem area, as three of the five top role conceptions fall under this category. The remaining two themes will be discussed in detail in the coming sub-chapters.

#### **4.1.3 Advocate for peace**

One of the national role conceptions related territorial and defence issues is advocate for peace. This theme was the third most popular, with a total of 117 references. Similarly, to the previous role conception, this role stems from the conflict on the Korean Peninsula. However, while the protectee role is derived from South Korea’s position towards European countries, the advocate for peace role conception illustrates South Korea’s role towards North Korea and how it wants to be seen by other countries in the context of this relationship. Essentially this role conception paints the country as a peace-loving conflict resolver. Most commonly

this theme revolves around cooperation with European countries to achieve peace on the Korean peninsula, however sometimes the topic is also addressed in more general terms.

In terms of status, this role shows Korea in somewhat more of a dominant role, positioning itself as a dominant partner to North Korea, by taking an active role in the conflict resolution. However, in its relationship with Europe it still has a bilateral influence domain, as they work together towards peace on the Korean peninsula. Nevertheless, regarding their degree of influence, the advocate for peace role conception, presents itself more as an example to follow, rather than just an ally (Wish 1980: 537). It is difficult to position this role in the sense of individualistic or cooperative motivations, as it does mostly deal with the conflict with North Korea, however it often also signifies South Korea's general peace-loving nature. As the analysed texts referred to resolving the conflict in terms of cooperation with Europe, cooperative motivations seem to be more relevant in this case. Lastly, this role conception pursues a moderate amount of change, much like the previous national role conceptions. An example of the advocate for peace role conception can be seen in the following statement:

*“Norway and Korea are partners for peace. I hope that Norway will continue to share its wisdom and strength until peace on the Korean Peninsula firmly takes root. The Republic of Korea will always remain with Norway on its noble journey toward peace and prosperity for all of humanity.”*

(Cheong Wa Dae 2020: 352)

While this previous segment emphasizes cooperation, there are also many instances, where South Korean officials talk about their own efforts and accomplishments in establishing peace. For example:

*“The Republic of Korea will also surely realize a peaceful Korean Peninsula through the power of its mature democracy.”*

(Cheong Wa Dae 2018: 56)

#### **4.1.4 Cultural powerhouse and co-operator**

The fourth most popular role conception was that of the cultural powerhouse and co-operator. This role was identified in cases where South Korea discussed the success of its pop culture and language, especially focusing on the emphasis on the hallyu wave. This theme occurred a total of 82 times in all of the sources, which shows that South Korea does find its cultural success to be a part of its identity in the diplomatic relations with Europe.

While portraying the cultural powerhouse and co-operator role conception, South Korean government officials view the country in terms of a dominant bilateral domain, and as an example for others to follow or look up to (Wish 1980: 537). Furthermore, it exhibits individualistic motivational orientations and does not strive towards any particular change of the situation (*ibid*: 538-539) and rather wishes to maintain the status quo of the success of the Korean wave. An example of this national role conception can be seen in the following section:

*“In Bulgaria, k-pop, Korean movies and TV series, Korean cuisine, taekwondo, national costumes and other manifestations of Korean culture are extremely popular. With the development of good relations, the number of Bulgarian pupils and students who are interested in learning Korean is growing. The institutions in which the language is taught are constantly growing - the Department of Korean Studies at Sofia University, the New Bulgarian University, the 18th William Gladstone High School, schools in the city of Burgas and Varna, as well as the Sejong Institute in Sofia.”*

- (Korean Embassy to the Republic of Bulgaria)

The prevalence of this role conception and the pride that Korean officials have in the success of their popular culture is especially noteworthy in terms of this thesis, as it proves the initial hypothesis that soft power elements have taken on a greater role in the foreign policy of South Korea. Joseph Nye (2008: 94) that defines soft power as “(...) the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment.” can clearly be seen in the previous example of the cultural powerhouse role. Thus, it exemplifies how South Korea has moved towards soft power in its foreign policy. However, it should be noted that the cultural powerhouse theme is the only representative of the soft power problem area and does not have as big of a presence when compared to the economic and territorial/defence problem areas. Nevertheless, it does represent a significant shift in the national role conceptions of the country.

#### **4.1.5 Regional protector**

The last of the most relevant national role conceptions was the role of a regional protector. This is one of Holsti's (1970: 261-262) original codes, where he defined it as a country that provides protection for adjacent regions. In the case of South Korea, this role stems from its relationship with North Korea. Specifically, it was found in instances when South Korea painted itself as a resolver of the conflict on the peninsula, thus proving to be a regional

protector. It was especially evident in cases when South Korean officials listed their accomplishments in resolving the conflict.

To further understand the implications of the regional protector role conception, it is useful to look at how it compares to Wish's (1980: 540) coding system. In terms of perception of dominance, South Korea as a regional protector sees itself as an example for others to follow or a dominant ally, since in this case Korean officials aren't putting emphasis on cooperation but are providing an example for European nations and being proud of their accomplishments. Therefore, its level of domain is also bilateral or dominant bilateral, as it portrays the relations and situation between the two Koreas (*ibid*: 537). As to the motivational orientations of a regional protector, it seems that it represents cooperative motivations and aspires to a moderate amount of change (*ibid*: 538-539). An example of this role conception can be found in the 2019 diplomatic white paper:

*„Furthermore, President Moon visited Europe in October 2018 and shared with European countries and ASEM member states the positive progress made on the Korean Peninsula, as well as the ROK government's efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in a peaceful manner. He also promoted the Korean Peninsula Peace Initiative on this occasion.“*

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019: 57)

The regional protector role conception shows South Korea as an active and responsible party in resolving the conflict on the Korean peninsula, furthermore it concentrates on the pride in different measures that were taken to achieve it. In its essence, the regional protector role conception has similar motivations as that of the advocate for peace. However, during the analysis it was found that there are distinct differences between the two, as this role emphasizes actions towards the conflict, while the advocate for peace role promotes the idea of peace and Korea as a peace-loving nation above all. It is also notable how at one moment South Korea alludes to the responsibility of other countries to resolve the conflict and assumes a protectee role, however at other moments it emphasizes its own importance in handling the issue with North Korea. Nevertheless, all of these roles are classified under the territorial and defence issue area and as such show how important these issues still are in South Korean foreign policy.

## 4.2 Similarities and differences in role conceptions between the three government levels

During the analysis of texts from the three different levels of government, it became evident that the role conceptions they portray are not identical between the institutions. This subchapter will introduce the main notable differences in the role conceptions that emerged from different sources. Namely, the chapter will introduce the main patterns of the embassies, the president and the Foreign Ministry by pointing out the five most common national role conceptions of each institution.

### 4.2.1 Embassies of the Republic of Korea

National role conceptions	Aggregate number of coding references	Aggregate number of items coded
Economic co-operator	50	32
Cultural powerhouse and co-operator	47	30
Holsti\Protectee	18	11
Pioneer of technology and science	12	10
Holsti\Developer	10	9

*Table 3: South Korea's national role conceptions in embassy greetings*

For this analysis, a total of 39 embassy greetings were read through and coded. While there were a few that did not exhibit any national role conceptions and focused on consular advice and a very general greeting, most highlighted at least one aspect of South Korea's role in its relationship with Europe. When looking at the top 5 themes that emerged from analysis, it can be seen that economy related roles take the lead in embassy greetings, as two new role conceptions, pioneer of technology and science, as well as developer, have a significant presence in the analysed texts. It is also evident that the first two national role conceptions – economic co-operator and cultural powerhouse, are significantly more popular than the following three roles, and can be found in almost all the analysed greetings.

#### Economic co-operator and other economic codes

Much like in the general findings of the thesis, the economic co-operator was also the most popular role conception found in the embassy greetings, having a total of 50 references. It is evident, that strong economic cooperation with Europe is a priority for South Korea in their

foreign policy and they tend to see their own position in these relationships as a country with whom economic cooperation is desirable.

It is also noteworthy that embassy greeting emphasized two additional economic roles. The first of these is the role of the pioneer of technology and science, which was mentioned 12 times. This role could be linked to the definition of Holsti's (1970: 269) internal development role, however in this thesis it was found that this role conception was too general and would not be useful in terms of Korean role conceptions. As mentioned before, pioneer of technology and science is a role conception that highlights Korea's accomplishments in these fields and also strives towards increased cooperation. An example of the code can be seen in the greeting of the ambassador in Croatia:

*“Korea is the 12th world economy and a world leader in many fields such as technological innovation and scientific progress.”*

(Korean Embassy to the Republic of Croatia)

Another new role conception is that of the developer, which was mentioned a total of 10 times in embassy greetings. Although this deductive code was defined by Holsti (1970: 260–271) as a country that helps underdeveloped countries, the role was additionally identified in cases where South Korea talked about all the investments Koreans have made in the European countries. An example of this can be seen here:

*“The investments of Korean companies in the Czech Republic since 2000, when the Czech reliability and production base were combined with Korean technical skills and capital, are a successful example of mutually beneficial industrial cooperation.”*

(Korean embassy to the Czech Republic)

### Cultural powerhouse

The cultural powerhouse role conception that was already introduced in detail within the general findings, proves to be much more emphasized in the texts from embassies. It's the second most popular theme in these sources, being mentioned a total of 47 times, barely behind the economic co-operator role. This proves a further importance of soft power elements in the way South Korea presents itself. Cultural themes were popular in the greetings as they usually alluded to increased interest in Korean popular culture as a point of an improving relationship between Korea and the European country. This role conception was actually most popular in the texts from embassies, and less so from the foreign ministry white papers and the President's speeches. This shows a significant difference in the way that

Korea tries to portray itself and in turn highlights different priorities. As embassy greetings are often oriented towards tourists and other non-official members of the public, it can be concluded that Korean embassies use their image as a cultural powerhouse to their advantage in relating to a “foreign audience” and making Korea more attractive to tourists browsing the website.

Protectee

The third most popular national role conception in the embassy greetings was that of the protectee with a total of 18 references in the texts, which means it’s much less relevant than the economic co-operator and the cultural powerhouse roles. As this was a popular theme in the general analysis, the definition and example can be found in the previous chapter. In the context of embassy texts, the role of a protectee once again highlights the fact that the cooperation of European countries in resolving the conflict on the Korean peninsula is of significant importance in their diplomatic relations. Furthermore, the fact that this was the only defence and territory related role conception relevant in the case of embassies, shows that the embassy greetings tend to portray Korea as a country asking for help in this realm, not showing its own military strength.

**4.2.2 President of the Republic of Korea**

National role conceptions	Aggregate number of coding references	Aggregate number of items coded
Advocate for peace	64	3
Economic co-operator	37	3
Holsti\Protectee	25	2
Holsti\Regional protector	25	3
Environmentally conscious country	17	2

***Table 4: South Korea’s national role conceptions in the president’s speeches***

In order to look into the president’s national role conceptions of the Republic of Korea, the translated versions of his translated speeches were analysed. For this purpose, the thesis focuses on three of Moon Jae In’s selected speeches from 2017-2018, 2019 and 2020 published by Cheong Wa Dae (also known as the Blue House or the *Presidential office*). From looking at the general picture of the most popular role conceptions emphasized by the president, it can be seen that defence and territorial issues take lead in this case. However,

economic cooperation is still a leading role conception and this level of analysis also brings in a new top role conception - environmentally conscious country. It is also noteworthy that presidential speeches are the only sources where cultural powerhouse is not a very relevant role, which shows that defining Korea in terms of its cultural aspects is not a priority for the Korean President.

#### Defence/territorial role conceptions

The most evident difference that the President's speeches have compared to embassies and the foreign ministry, is the fact that instead of economic co-operator, the president's most emphasized role conception was that of the advocate for peace. Furthermore, it was referenced to significantly more than the otherwise popular economic co-operator role, as the advocate for peace role was assumed 64 times, while the other was only mentioned on 37 occasions. The country's strive towards peace was brought out excessively throughout the president's speeches and it could even be said that it was the driving topic for most of them. This peace-loving nature of South Korea was usually linked to its relationship with North Korea and the way the conflict should be resolved peacefully.

The other two defence and territory related role conceptions, protectee and regional protector, were coded equally 25 times throughout the president's speeches. In essence, this shows a balance between identifying Korea as a country that is in need of help versus a country that is taking successful steps to protect the region. When looking at the general findings, it can be seen that the protectee code is much more popular and overshadows that of the regional protector, however in the president's texts he emphasizes Korea's role in protecting the region enough for them to become equal. This also connects with the strong emphasis on the advocate for peace role, as often enough, the President expressed the wish for peace and Korea's efforts in stabilizing the region together.

#### Economic role conceptions

While the economic co-operator role conception did not take the leading position in the president's speeches, it was still a prominent theme and was coded a total of 37 times across all of his speech collections. While it is significantly behind the advocate for peace role conception, it can still be seen that the element of economic cooperation is a driving force in the relationship between Europe and South Korea. Furthermore, the Korean president identifies the country based on its economic relationship with other, and thus subscribes to the national role conception of an economic co-operator.

There was however another theme related to economic issues that emerged from the President’s speeches and that was the environmentally conscious country. As can be seen from previous analysis, this theme did not take a place in the top five codes in the general analysis, nor in the embassy greetings. This role conception was identified in cases when government officials mentioned how Korea strives towards being a greener country, deals with climate change or wants to cooperate with European countries in environment-related issues. While it can be debated whether this role is an economy-related topic, it should be said that the texts usually referred to environmental issues together with economic cooperation, furthermore, the categorization of different roles is only meant to give an overview of the types of topics covered and isn’t meant as a level of analysis per se. An example of the environmentally conscious country role conception can be found in the following text:

*„While the Republic of Korea grew to a middle power from a developing country, it also achieved successes through its environmental policies. Beginning with reforestation projects that turned lands ravaged after the Korean War into thick forests, Korea has had various successes in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through green growth policies over the past 10 years, all the while maintaining growth.“*

(Cheong Wa Dae 2019: 136)

#### 4.2.3 The Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Korea

National role conceptions	Aggregate number of coding references	Aggregate number of items coded
Economic co-operator	90	5
Holsti\Protectee	85	4
Advocate for peace	46	5
Cultural powerhouse and co-operator	28	5
Environmentally conscious country	28	3

***Table 5: South Korea’s national role conceptions in texts by the foreign ministry***

The third and last collection of sources that were analysed in this thesis were those from the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Initially, the analysis was based on three diplomatic white papers from 2018, 2019 and 2020. The first two sources were published in English, however the paper from 2020 did not have an English translation yet, and thus had to

be translated separately. In addition to the white papers, the thesis also aimed to get input from speeches made directly by Foreign Ministry officials. For this purpose, 4 different speeches were included in the research. These speeches were addressed towards Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Europe more broadly. In terms of the general patterns, it can be seen that three different topic categories are emphasized in these texts – economic, defence/territorial and cultural issues. The most popular role conception is again that of the economic co-operator, however defence/territorial roles are right behind it, highlighting the importance of economic as well as defence cooperation. Unlike the president’s speeches, the Foreign Ministry also prioritizes the role of South Korea as a cultural powerhouse and co-operator.

### Economic role conceptions

Similarly to the general findings of the analysis, economic role conceptions are also highly emphasized in the texts by the Foreign Ministry. In most cases, foreign ministry officials emphasize the need for economic cooperation with European countries. As the diplomatic white papers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are structured so they give a general overview of what went on in high level diplomatic meetings, they tend to give a rather general descriptions of the discussed topics. Because of this, the role of the economic co-operator was also usually brought out in a general list of areas for cooperation. This means that in most cases, the role was not really elaborated on. Nevertheless, the prevalence of the topics related to economic cooperation shows that in terms of the country’s relationship with Europe, South Korea largely defines both itself as well as the relationship in economic terms. For example, in the description of the meeting of South Korean and French foreign ministers it is said:

*“They agreed to deepen comprehensive cooperation in a variety of fields such as trade, investment, industry, technology, clean energy, space, aviation, defence, tourism, education, and local governments.”*

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018: 109)

Another example of a popular economy-related national role conception is that of the environmentally conscious country. As mentioned above, this role is not strictly economic in its nature, however it is usually framed in a way where the environmental aspects stem from economic cooperation. In the case of diplomatic white papers this issue was also touched upon in rather general terms. Nevertheless, by showing that the country is willing and eager

to cooperate in terms of environmental issues, South Korean Foreign Ministry reinforces the idea of Korea as an environmentally friendly country.

#### Defence/territorial role conceptions

Another popular topic category among the texts published by the foreign ministry were issues related to defence and territory. Just like in the previous levels of analysis, these topics were usually focused on the situation on the Korean peninsula. Holsti's protectee role conception was almost as popular as the economic co-operator role, being coded a total of 85 times in the published materials. This shows a concrete difference between the texts by the foreign ministry and embassies versus that of the president, where the advocate for peace role was more prominent. Essentially this means that the foreign ministry takes on somewhat more of a passive role in the Korean conflict and alludes to the responsibility of other countries to help them resolve it. Nevertheless, the advocate for peace role was also somewhat popular in the Foreign Ministry, as it was coded 25 times. While it is still a relevant role conception, it can be seen that the protectee role is much more widespread than the advocate for peace.

#### Cultural powerhouse and co-operator

The texts by the Foreign Ministry also brought back the national role conception of Cultural powerhouse and co-operator, which was rather absent from the President's speeches. In the diplomatic white papers, as well as the individual speeches, the role conception often highlighted Korea's accomplishments in the culture sphere, however, in most cases culture related themes emerged from a list of discussed topics. The prevalence of this topic once again highlights the importance of soft power in modern South Korean foreign relations, as well as the idea that Korea's soft power rests on strategic communication by governments (Nye 2008: 101) among other things.

#### **4.2.4 Main differences between the levels of government**

As is evident from the previous analysis, the texts from the Foreign Ministry, embassies and the president's speeches express somewhat different role conceptions. From looking at the topic categories that are prevalent in each level of government, it can be seen that embassies focus on Korea's role in economic and cultural terms, the president highlights territorial and defence issues, while the foreign ministry sits somewhere in the middle of the two. The differences between the levels of government can be understood in terms of the context that the texts were published.

In the case of the President, his texts were written as a one-way monologue towards high government officials in European countries. Thus, the element of a discussion or dialogue isn't as present as in the Foreign Ministry texts which in turn has resulted in the President's texts being less oriented towards asking for cooperation in different areas of life, and rather just introducing Korea as a capable country by itself. This has resulted in higher scores for role conceptions such as advocate for peace and regional protector and made the economic co-operator role less popular than in other texts. Furthermore, the fact that cultural powerhouse and co-operator was not a prominent theme can also be explained by the fact that these speeches were made to government officials that do not have much to do with music and culture.

The role conceptions portrayed by the embassies and those emphasized by the Foreign Ministry can be viewed as somewhat similar, as they place high importance on economic issues, the cultural powerhouse role, as well as the protectee role. In essence this is quite logical, as embassies are a sub-division of the Foreign Ministry, however the high level of similarity is surprising because the target audiences of the texts should be quite different. That is, embassy greetings are more targeted towards tourists and individuals with interest towards the country, while foreign ministry texts are aimed towards officials of other governments. Nevertheless, stemming from these differences, it is evident that embassies are more inclined towards economic and cultural roles, while the foreign ministry places emphasis on territorial and defence roles as well.

### 4.3 Differences in Korea's national role conceptions in different regions of Europe

National role conceptions	Western Europe	Northern Europe	Southern Europe	Eastern Europe
Active in the international arena	4,52%	5,57%	2,08%	0,79%
Advocate for peace	13,07%	16,38%	19,44%	7,87%
Cultural powerhouse and co-operator	9,55%	5,57%	13,19%	18,9%
Economic co-operator	<b>21,11%</b>	<b>20,21%</b>	<b>20,14%</b>	<b>25,98%</b>
Environmentally conscious country	6,03%	8,71%	3,47%	0,79%
Bridge	3,02%	1,74%	2,78%	0%
Developer	2,51%	1,39%	1,39%	11,81%
Example	0,5%	4,18%	2,78%	2,36%
Protectee	15,58%	11,85%	12,5%	16,54%
Receiver of military support	1,51%	2,79%	2,08%	0%
Regional protector	11,56%	4,53%	6,25%	3,15%
Human rights upholder	1,01%	4,88%	3,47%	2,36%
Relatable struggler	1,51%	1,74%	2,78%	2,36%
Pioneer of technology and science	7,04%	5,57%	4,86%	5,51%
Upholder of democracy	1,51%	4,88%	2,78%	1,57%

***Table 6: South Korea's national role conceptions in different regions of Europe***

To add another layer of analysis and further understand the different national role conceptions that South Korean officials try to portray in their foreign policy, it is also useful to look into the way the portrayed role conceptions differ from region to region. For this purpose, all of the role conceptions found in the analysed papers have been displayed in Table 5 and the roles that were most popular percentage wise (meaning the percentage it makes up of all the roles in the region) were highlighted in increasing intensity.

It can be seen that in all the regions, economic co-operator is still the most popular role conception. There is however some variation in its popularity, as in Eastern Europe this role takes the lead with almost 26% while in Southern Europe the percentage is just over 20%. While other economy-related themes do not emerge as strongly, it is still evident that South

Korean officials aim to portray the image of an economic co-operator across all European regions. This again corresponds with the idea that Korea's relationship with Europe is largely based on economic ties and its interest in the region lies in economic cooperation and opportunities for Korean businesses.

Other two role conceptions that were somewhat popular across all regions were the advocate for peace and the protectee roles. The importance of these themes highlights the continued importance of the conflict with North Korea in the foreign policy of South Korea, as in most cases these themes alluded to North Korea. An interesting pattern that can be seen here is that the advocate for peace role is more prominent in Northern and Southern Europe, while the protectee role is emphasized in Western and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the advocate for peace role is much less popular in Eastern Europe compared to other regions. Therefore, it can be seen that while territorial and defence issues are important in Korea's foreign policy, the roles taken on for the communication of said problems vary in different regions.

#### **4.3.1 Notable differences in the regions**

The first notable difference among regions that can be seen in the table is the difference in the popularity of the cultural powerhouse role conception. While it was seen in the previous general analysis that this theme is rather popular when all the texts are added together, the popularity of it actually varies widely among regions. South Korea tends to portray itself as a cultural powerhouse and co-operator much more in the case of Southern and Eastern Europe, where the popularity is 13% and 19% respectively, meaning it makes up a significant amount of all the roles portrayed to these regions. However, in the case of Western and Northern Europe, the theme took up 9,5% and 5,5% of all the codes, which shows a shift of emphasis in the regions and shows that Korea tends to have other interests in these countries.

Another difference that can be seen is that South Korean officials often take on the role of the developer when speaking to Eastern European countries. In this thesis the role was used also in cases where Korean investments in the region were emphasized, which means that Eastern Europe is a region that South Korean government officials see as an investment opportunity and a place that needs assistance rather than offers it. Furthermore, Korean officials tend to emphasize the country's environmentally conscious nature and technology and science achievements more in the case of Western and Northern Europe, which perhaps aims to highlight the progressive nature of South Korea and helps economic cooperation with these countries.

The last notable difference is the fact that the role of regional protector was very prevalent only in texts targeted towards Western Europe. While the role was mentioned elsewhere too, it is very evident that Korea wishes to highlight its defence efforts mainly to Western Europe. It is also interesting that this doesn't conflict with the protectee role conception, as both are often highlighted in communication with Western Europe. In essence, this once again shows the importance of the North Korean issue in South Korea's foreign policy.

## **5 Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to find out, which national role conceptions South Korea takes on in its communication with Europe, as these provide a better understanding of the topic areas and foreign policy choices in their bilateral relationship. It was found that generally South Korea is quite inclined towards the economic co-operator role, emphasizing the economic partnership the country has with Europe. However, defence/territorial issues also play an important part, as the threat of North Korea is a popular topic in South Korean foreign policy. Korea also tends to highlight its rising importance as a soft power country with its pop culture's popularity which comes together in the cultural powerhouse role conception. All in all, it was found that South Korea takes on a wide variety of different role conceptions from 5 issue areas – economy, defence and territorial issues, culture as well as ideology-related roles.

As the economic nature of the relationship between South Korea and Europe is already widely known, it is no surprise that economic co-operator was the most popular role conception found in the texts. Taking on this role in their communication shows South Korea's willingness to further develop these economic ties and an acknowledgement of European countries as important cooperation partners. As mentioned above, roles related to territorial and defence issues are also prevalent and show South Korea's wish to engage Europe in solving the issue with North Korea and to emphasize its own involvement in solving it. The cultural powerhouse role on the other hand not only shows Korea's dominance in the area of soft power but also aims to make the country more appealing to the European public as well as aims to cooperate in cultural areas.

When looking into the three levels of government that the sources were collected from, it became evident that different sources put emphasis on different role conceptions. For example, embassies are more inclined towards emphasizing the economic co-operator and cultural powerhouse role conceptions and less so the defence/territorial roles. The president on the other hand pays more attention to defence/territorial roles, especially highlighting Korea as an advocate for peace. The Foreign Ministry texts find a balance somewhere in between of the two, stressing both economic and defence/territorial issues.

In terms of geographical regions, the country also exhibited somewhat different role conceptions. In this part, three main differences were found. Firstly, South Korea takes on the role of the developer when talking to Eastern European countries, which is not the case for

other regions. The country's representatives also tend to portray Korea as a cultural powerhouse a much more so in the case of Southern and Eastern Europe, and less so in the West and North. Lastly, the role of regional protector was very prevalent only in texts targeted towards Western Europe.

Even after this thesis, the topic of South Korean national role conceptions in the whole international system is yet to be thoroughly researched, considering countries all around the world, so that the findings of this thesis could be compared to other regions and given further context. This could also provide more information on how the relationship between Korea and European countries differs from other cases. It is definitely a topic that gives insight into a country's foreign policy and thus deserves to be researched more.

All in all, this thesis illuminated how a shift in South Korean foreign policy has happened and the country has transformed from a small Asian country to an internationally renowned middle power. As such, it has expanded its diplomatic horizons to regions around the world, which in turn has led to South Korea and Europe to become important partners in the international system. The thesis showed how Korea presents itself to Europe with many different role conceptions from a variety of issue areas, ranging from economic cooperation to ideological values. It was found that South Korea tends to portray itself to Europe as an economic co-operator, a protectee, an advocate for peace, a cultural powerhouse and co-operator, as well as a regional protector. This illustrates that nowadays South Korea's role in the international sphere is not only limited to one issue area but shows that the country is interested in developing its relationship with Europe in many different capacities.

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