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## Rhetoric or Reality? An Assessment of Korea-Africa Relations So Far

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*This essay seeks to assess Korea's relationship with sub-Saharan Africa so far and make a case for future change as the Korean government continues to increase engagement with countries in the region. The Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea) had a unique experience as a developmental state and has much development experience to offer African states. As African states move to diversify their exports and foster entrepreneurship, Korea will also be a favorable economic partner, as Korea is strong in many areas valued by African states, such as technology. Similarly, African states have much to offer Korea. African states are traditional natural resource exporters and are moving to gain space in the agricultural export market. In addition, as a new urban middle class begins to rise in many African states, a new market for the Korean manufacturing and technology sectors emerges. This will be particularly helpful as these sectors continue to face increased competition from China and Japan. As this essay will argue, however, Korea has not yet fully utilized its unique development experience and has fallen into typical Global North-Global South relationships. This essay examines the rhetoric surrounding Korea's approach and conducts policy analysis to highlight the gaps in current Korea-Africa relations. The overfocus on Korea's needs, which prevents economic diversification and skews the relationship, is discussed; ideas for how Korea can develop its still-young Africa relations will be presented to achieve truly mutually beneficial partnerships.*

### **Introduction**

Following the Korean War (1950-1953), Korea entered the twentieth-century

state system as an economically weak aid recipient.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in 1956 the East Asian country shared a GDP per capita with newly independent Ghana, a mere \$500.<sup>2</sup> This statistic pales compared to Korea's present-day \$42,000 GDP p/c,<sup>3</sup> one of the many marks of its "miracle" transformation into a formidable middle power.<sup>4</sup> In its development policies, Korea emphasizes the uniqueness of its trajectory to set itself apart as a development partner.<sup>5</sup> As this essay will highlight, however, this is not the case, and Korea's policies so far have fallen into the same pattern as the rest of the global North (and now emerging China)—assistance in exchange for resource access and beneficial trade agreements. These relationships prevent the natural and effective development of policy and economy in recipient African states. At the same time, historically, aid-resource partnerships have not significantly advanced any African state and often resulted in aid rentiers, misuse of funds, and continued problems. This does not mean, however, that Korea cannot develop these relations. This essay will identify the areas in which Korea can be an ideal partner, based on its own unique state experience and the many areas in which African states have much to offer. This essay's thesis argues that the influence of Korea's legacy as a developmental state is visible in its development discourse and the reality of its policies. However, this influence does not exempt Korea from criticism or improvement. The first section of this essay will briefly outline Korea's unique development experience and Korea-Africa relations so far to provide the necessary background information. The second section will offer an in-depth analysis of Korea's development cooperation rhetoric and establish that while Korea's unique experience does influence its policies, the idea of Korean exceptionalism is a myth. Next, the positives and negatives of the current approach to the Korea-Africa relationship will be assessed. The final section will make a case for improvement and suggest areas and case studies where Korea's relations with African states could be improved.

1 Mi Yung Yoon and Chungshik Moon, "Korean Bilateral Official Development Assistance to Africa Under Korea's Initiative for Africa's Development," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 14, no.2 (2014), 279.

2 Françoise Nicolas, "Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests" Paris: *Études de l'Ifri*, January 2020, 28.

3 "Korea – OECD Data," OECD Data, Countries. Accessed March 2, 2021, <https://data.oecd.org/korea.htm>

4 David Shim and Patrick Flamm, "Rising South Korea: A Minor Player or a Regional Power?" Hamburg: *German Institute of Global and Area Studies* (GIGA) 2012, 9.

5 Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," xii.

## Background

Korea's history must be understood to analyze the discourse surrounding Korea-Africa relations. This discourse centers around the idea that Korea has a shared experience with African states due to its trajectory from a poor state to an economic powerhouse. By extension, Korea offers something different from other development partners. This rhetoric presents itself to export policies modeled on Korea's development experience to African states. This is promoted primarily by the Ministry of Strategy and Finance (MOSF) through its 'Knowledge Sharing Program' established in 2004.<sup>6</sup> Members of parliament had also promoted this idea, as Park Geun-Hye did when she defended the idea of Korea as a bridge between developed and developing countries.<sup>7</sup> The clearest example of this discourse's impact can be seen through the introduction of the "Global *Saemaul Undong*" (New Villages) movement for rural development in developing countries, including African states such as Kenya and Rwanda,<sup>8</sup> which directly imitates the "*Saemaul Undong*" movement implemented to develop Korea in the 1970s.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the Korean government multiplied industrialization efforts, focusing heavily on stimulating the supply side of industrial activity. The state provided support until the private sector was stable and profitable on its own, allocating resources to encourage comparative advantage in targeted export industries.<sup>9</sup> This began in industries such as cement and petroleum and was later followed by goods like steel and petrochemicals.<sup>10</sup> Support came through direct tax reductions, preferential interest rates for business loans, and privileged access to import licenses for specific industries. In return, government departments set export quotas and requirements for corporate performance, smoothly overseeing Korea's transformation. The policy of state intervention undoubtedly facilitated Korea's rapid industrialization,<sup>11</sup> as is most clearly evidenced by Korea's monopolistic business conglomerates, the *Chaebols*, such as Samsung and Hyundai.<sup>12</sup>

6 Ibid., 28.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 29.

9 Garth Shelton, "Korea & South Africa: Building a Strategic Partnership," Johannesburg: *Institute for Global Dialogue* 2009, 8, 11.

10 Ibid., 10.

11 Ibid., 8.

12 Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," 30.

This growth can be accredited to apt state policies, assisted by the \$12 billion in official development assistance (ODA) the Korean government received.<sup>13</sup>

On paper, Korea should have much to offer the African continent as an example of effective aid utilization and state intervention to achieve economic transformation. Unlike other dominant global powers who achieved their status through industrialization and colonization in the nineteenth century, Korea entered the global system in the mid-twentieth century in a similar position to many African states today. Utilizing these strategies to transform that situation into one of economic prosperity in the twenty-first century places Korea in an optimal position to offer advice to African states. Until 2006 however, Korea had limited economic relationships with countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In the 1970s and 1980s, Korea interacted with Africa along Cold War lines, with support being offered to key states, including Kenya, Senegal, and Uganda, based on the Pyeongyang-Seoul rivalry. Following the end of the Cold War, Seoul pursued “Northern Diplomacy,” focusing foreign policy on the Korean peninsula, pushing African relations to the periphery until 2006, when “Korea’s Initiative for Africa’s Development” was launched.<sup>14</sup> This initiative proclaimed a focus on “win-win cooperation,” championing Korea’s unique development experience as an example and presenting Korea as a bridge between the developed and developing worlds.<sup>15</sup> Since 2006, Korea has strengthened its policy approach and official relations with Africa, with the African continent seeing increased heads of state visits, increased Korean interaction with the African Union, and various forums and foundations aimed at improving cooperation.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Korea has continued to increase aid flows, trade, and foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa. Despite these increases, neither trade nor FDI exceeds 1.5 percent of the Korean total;<sup>17</sup> nevertheless, those efforts demonstrate continued Korean interest in the African continent. As this essay will argue, however, the construction and integrity of this relationship deserve further scrutiny, and in the next decade, improvement.

### **Rhetoric or Reality?**

13 Yoon and Moon, “Korean Bilateral Official Development Assistance to Africa Under Korea’s Initiative for Africa’s Development,” 279.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Nicolas, “Korea in Africa,” xii.

Korea's legacy as a developmental state influences its discourse surrounding development cooperation policies and affects the reality of its policies to a certain extent. Korea presents its relationships with Africa as a variant of its developmental state policy, championing the Korean trajectory as the path to success for African states. This emphasis aims to distinguish Korea from other African development partners, depicting Korea as a friendly helper offering the solution to facilitate a strong, independent Africa, in comparison to the greedy neocolonial actions of other partners, with Korea being a "South-South" bridge as opposed to a "North-South" trade partner.<sup>18</sup> This emphasis is based upon the foreign policy idea that Korea's unique development trajectory sets it apart. While it is correct that Korea and Africa share experiences of colonialism, independence timings, and to a certain extent, conflict,<sup>19</sup> there are several features of this discourse that bear discussion.

First is the claim that Korean-African interactions promote the Korean development trajectory. Kalinowski and Park highlight the continued importance of institutional support in Korea's cooperation with the developing world. Case studies and investment projects suggest that state initiative and strong state-business partnerships define development cooperation elements.<sup>20</sup> Kalinowski and Park also suggest that developmental state policies have lost domestic relevance, as *chaebols* have grown beyond the need for state assistance. Therefore, "institutional retreat" occurs, whereby the goals of industry expansion and investment facilitation are now being pursued internationally, as there is no longer domestic policy space for them.<sup>21</sup> South Korean development cooperation, therefore, does utilize the same rationale as Korea's experiences as a developmental state. This can be seen most clearly in the attempt to transport the "*Saemaul Undong*" (New Villages) movement to the African continent. In the 1970s, the original "*Saemaul Undong*" Movement encompassed a set of government policies focused on building rural infrastructure and improving community income to ensure that rural communities were not left behind following rapid urban industrialization,

18 Ibid., 19.

19 Youngho Park and Yejin Kim, "The Strategic Value of Africa as the New Market and Korea's Economic Cooperation with Africa," *Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law* 11, no.5 (2018): 236-48, 243.

20 Thomas Kalinowski and Min Joung Park, "South Korean Development Cooperation in Africa: The Legacy of a Developmental State," *Africa Spectrum* 51, no.3 (2016): 61-75, 61.

21 Ibid., 62-63.

as is now occurring in several growing African states.<sup>22</sup> In 2013, The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) launched the “Global *Saemaul Undong*” Movement in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya.

Interestingly, information about the outcomes of these projects is not easily accessible beyond what is available on the official website of the movement, leaving this essay with limited scope to assess the efficacy of these projects. The *Saemaul Undong* Foundation has also been established in various countries, with the stated aims of helping locals diversify sources of income and contribute to community development.<sup>23</sup> This movement is founded on the belief in the utility of Korean state-interventionist policies and attempts to transport those policies to the African continent. Thus, “Global *Saemaul Undong*” highlights how the legacy of Korea’s experiences influences Korean developmental cooperation policies in Africa as a developmental state. Policies such as “*Saemaul Undong*” have significantly been championed by KOICA and the Korean Ministry of Strategy and Finance.<sup>24</sup> Thus, this essay confirms its argument that the influence of Korea’s legacy as a developmental state is visible in both its development discourse and the reality of its policies.

The second facet of Korea’s development cooperation rhetoric is that Korea exemplifies the South-South partnership and offers an alternative to self-centered Western assistance. Due to the exceptional nature of the Korean economic trajectory, Korea is portrayed to be theoretically different from traditional donors. However, this essay rejects this claim, as Korea-Africa relations have typically followed only Korean interests. In the twentieth century, this is best highlighted through Seoul’s abandonment of the “One Korea” policy in 1973 in favor of African support at the United Nations (UN), as newly independent African states now represented a large voting bloc.<sup>25</sup> Support to Africa to achieve diplomatic objectives has continued in the twenty-first century, most notably during the 2006 campaign to elect Ban Ki-Moon as UN Secretary-General, which included a marked increase in aid disbursements.<sup>26</sup> Korean-African relations have also been directed to counter North Korean influence on the African continent. This was particularly clear during the Lee

22 Nicolas, “Korea in Africa,” 29.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Yoon and Moon, “Korean Bilateral Official Development Assistance to Africa Under Korea’s Initiative for Africa’s Development.” 282.

26 Nicolas, “Korea in Africa,” 31.

Myung-Bak administration (2008-2013), which focused on developing ties with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia, two states with high levels of cooperation with Pyongyang in particular.<sup>27</sup> When visiting both countries, Lee discussed issues African leaders had previously discussed with Pyeongyang, demonstrating an interest in developing commercial and geopolitical ties to counter decades-old North Korean cooperation with these states.<sup>28</sup> This continued in the Park Geun-Hye era (2013-2017), which saw several visits to Uganda and meetings with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, a long-time North Korean co-operator, to discuss commercial ties, security cooperation, and education assistance – fields where Uganda had a history of cooperation with North Korea.<sup>29</sup> This successfully culminated in Uganda suspending military cooperation with Pyeongyang in 2016.<sup>30</sup> This change was even emphasized by Korean news agencies in 2016, with the visit cited as “an important opportunity to enhance cooperation between Uganda and other major African countries in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue.”<sup>31</sup> Korea’s diplomatic needs have influenced Korea-Africa relations in the twenty-first century.

Resource needs have also been a clear driver of Korea-Africa relations. Korea is pursuing “resource diplomacy,” actively using development cooperation to secure resource access and open African markets to Korean businesses.<sup>32</sup> This can be seen most clearly through Korea’s oil field project in Mozambique, which opened the door for state-owned Korea Gas (KOGAS) to secure Korea’s natural gas needs – KOGAS’s 10 percent stake Mozambican project is equivalent to Korea’s five-year demand.<sup>33</sup> Following their analysis, Yung Yoon and Moon conclude that Korean bilateral ODA does not significantly

27 R. Maxwell Bone and Matthew Minsoo Kim, “South Korea’s Africa Outreach,” *The Diplomat*, August 2, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/south-koreas-africa-outreach/>

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Samuel Ramani, “North Korea’s African Allies,” *The Diplomat*, June 4, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/north-koreas-african-allies/>

31 Kim Hanyoung, “President Park Geun-hye visits Africa... Prospects for North Korean Nuclear Pressure Diplomacy,” *Voice of America: Korea*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.voakorea.com/korea/korea-politics/3345306>.

32 Kalinowski and Park, “South Korean Development Cooperation in Africa,” 63, 65.

33 Ibid., 66.

differ in approach from conventional donors.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Nicolas concludes that Korea-Africa relations reflect traditional North-South relationships, overwhelmingly seeking raw materials for manufactured products.<sup>35</sup> This rejects the discourse of South-South partnership or Korean exceptionalism.

Furthermore, rhetoric can be rejected based on elite opinions as well. Seoul can publicly declare itself as an altruistic benefactor; however, research on the policymaking elite's argument highlights the importance of Korean aims. When surveyed, policy and government elites expressed support for development assistance to enhance overall peace and stability in the international society.<sup>36</sup> However, they also expressed motivations to improve Korea's international image and diplomacy and motivations to serve national interests, such as increasing trade.<sup>37</sup> This exemplifies the nature of Korean-African relations: while they may seek to help develop the African continent, they are also grounded in self-serving motivations. Thus, this section concludes that while Korea's experiences as a state have affected its development cooperation policies, Korea's espoused rhetoric of development exceptionalism or a South-South partner does not hold when the facts are examined.

### **The Hidden Negatives**

As this essay has established, Korea's stated and actual aims differ significantly. The question that must be asked next is, is this a bad thing? There is a case to be made for the policies so far. In Mozambique, Korean investment improved infrastructure and has led to an increase in Mozambican gas exports while meeting Korea's gas import needs.<sup>38</sup> Korean involvement in Rwanda established a 4G LTE network across the country, ensuring that 95 percent of Rwandans have access to fast wireless and broadband services while fitting into the Rwandan government's preexisting development framework.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, there are broad material benefits from ODA and Korea-Africa cooperation. However, an examination of the details is vital.

34 Yoon and Moon, "Korean Bilateral Official Development Assistance to Africa Under Korea's Initiative for Africa's Development." 279.

35 Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," xii.

36 J. James Kim et al., "The Giving Mind: Analysis of South Korean Public and Elite Attitudes on ODA," Seoul: *ASAN Institute for Policy Studies* 2017, 20.

37 *Ibid.*, 20, 25.

38 Kalinowski and Park, "South Korean Development Cooperation in Africa," 65.

39 Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," 24.



In Mozambique, the creation of oil fields could be detrimental to long-term economic development, as it is overwhelmingly based on raw materials and prevents economic diversification.<sup>40</sup> Gas extraction creates relatively few jobs, and profits are usually divided among foreign investors and a small local elite, negatively impacting local fishermen's income, already affected by ecological changes.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Korean investment may benefit Mozambique in the short term. However, the choice of an oil field to fulfill Korean resource criteria may harm the Mozambican economy in the long term. This is not solely blaming Korea for a mutual agreement but highlight the gaps in Korea's current resource-focused approach to African states.

Conversely, investment in Rwanda may have more positive outcomes. Projects in Rwanda, especially an ICT-related project involving the Korean telecommunication company KT, had a significant degree of ownership by the Rwandan government and assisted in the technology sector, an area in which Korea excels.<sup>42</sup> This model presents a more promising framework for future Korean engagement with other African states. Korean influence has had a mixed impact, then positives are found despite Korea-Africa relations diverging from their stated aims.

Despite the positives, Korea-Africa relations still warrant some criticism. As established, these relations mimic other typical North-South relations. Conventional donor-recipient relations and aid flows have been responsible for a loss of policy space in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>43</sup> These relations limit policy space for local governments to innovate and contribute to the growing marginalization of sub-Saharan African countries from international capital flows.<sup>44</sup> In addition, projects and aid that only seek to serve donor interests are ineffective and detrimental at worst. At best, only provide benefits with longer-term drawbacks, as the case of Mozambique shows. Therefore, the disparity between Korea's stated aims and actual

40 Kalinowski and Park, "South Korean Development Cooperation in Africa," 65.

41 *Ibid.*, 67.

42 *Ibid.*, 70, 68.

43 Carlos Oya, "The Political Economy of Development Aid as Main Source of Foreign Finance for Poor African Countries: Loss of Policy Space and Possible Alternatives from East Asia," Paper Presented at International Forum on Comparative Political Economy of Globalisation, Beijing, China. September 1-3, 2006, 3.

44 *Ibid.*

policies is detrimental to the African continent. The possibility of African countries' needs being overlooked in favor of Korean diplomatic and material conditions hinders Korea-Africa relations from developing into a mutually beneficial partnership, relegating them into the same category as the conventional, borderline neocolonial relationships by Western states.

Furthermore, the disparity between stated and actual aims also prevents accountability. If Korean influence in Africa is presented as a South-South partnership and as an exception from Northern relationships, appropriate criticisms and scrutiny cannot be applied – the discourse prevents accountability. Therefore, the disparity between Korea's described and actual interactions can be seen as unfavorable and should be altered to ensure prosperous relations in the next decade.

### **Improving the Relationship**

The case for improvement can be made on several grounds, the first of which is timing. Both Korea and the African continent are poised to interact with each other as Korea moves towards a global outlook and African states diversify their economies, indicating promising economic growth. Seoul aims to achieve a "Global Korea"<sup>45</sup> and recognize global issues, both inside and outside of Africa.<sup>46</sup> Nicolas suggests that Korea is still in its learning stage. Now is the ideal time to improve relations with KOICA and the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) to implement a consistent approach towards Africa.<sup>47</sup> President Moon Jae-in (2017-) has emphasized more diversified diplomacy, with a global outlook and commitments rather than a Korean-peninsula-focused approach,<sup>48</sup> and in addition, does not seem to view Africa as a venue for competition with North Korea<sup>49</sup> divergence from past presidents. If the cards are played right, the next decade could be a game-changer for Korea to provide an alternative form of development cooperation. In addition, the African continent is primed to become an ideal trade partner for Korea.

Furthermore, the African continent has significantly in the past two decades, maintaining an average economic growth rate above five percent

45 "Information on the Region: The ROK-Africa Relations."

46 Shim and Flamm, "Rising South Korea," 3-4.

47 Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," xiii.

48 J. James Kim and Hong Sanghwa, "Moon's Foreign Policy Priorities in Words and Deeds," Seoul: *ASAN Institute for Policy Studies* 2020, 9.

49 Bone and Minsoo Kim, "South Korea's Africa Outreach."

since the early 2000s.<sup>50</sup> Africa is a promising market and offers Korean companies the opportunity to expand when the domestic market is stagnating.<sup>51</sup> As the continent develops further, it will continue to grow into a promising partner for Korea. This makes the next decade the perfect time to iron out any creases in the relationship and develop truly mutually beneficial partnerships.

*Improving the Relationship: Trade and the Economic Relationship*

Beyond timing, there are various ways the economic relationship between Korea and the African continent could be expanded. From a trade perspective, rapid economic growth on the continent has strengthened the purchasing power of African consumers, particularly those in the swiftly growing urban centers.<sup>52</sup> These consumers represent a growing African middle class from a new urban culture that demands household appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators, and air conditioners, in addition to mobile phones and computers.<sup>53</sup> This is a perfect match for Korean appliance manufacturers facing international competition, particularly as China expands. Furthermore, Korea's technology brands have a strong reputation in Africa, with Samsung and LG placing among the top 10 most admired brands in Africa in 2020 (2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, respectively).<sup>54</sup> It is clear, therefore, that Africa represents a budding market for Korean production. The state should continue to foster this relationship and encourage Korea-Africa economic cooperation. With the establishment of several conferences and events, such as the Korea-Africa Economic Co-operation Conference, this has already begun. This establishes a permanent framework for cooperation between the African Development Bank and the Korean Ministry of Strategy and Finance, and the wider Korean private sector, focusing on discussing opportunities for Korean companies and furthering trade links.<sup>55</sup> This forum and other forums such as the Korea-Africa Forum and the Korea-Africa Forum for Industrial Co-operation are steps in the right direction. They suggest that Seoul is paying attention to the potential the African continent has to offer. This essay hoped to see the continued

50 Park and Kim, "The Strategic Value of Africa as the New Market and Korea's Economic Cooperation with Africa," 237.

51 Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," 27.

52 Park and Kim, "The Strategic Value of Africa as the New Market and Korea's Economic Cooperation with Africa," 237.

53 Ibid., 238.

54 Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," 11.

55 Ibid., 11.

expansion of these programs and continued Korean-African trade in the next decade to realize a mutually beneficial partnership between the two thoroughly.

*Improving the Relationship: Knowledge and Experience*

Outside of the direct economic relationship, Korea has much to offer Africa development knowledge and experience beyond rhetoric. Indeed, Africa generally seeks technology transfer and education techniques from Korea.<sup>56</sup> This call has been answered through forums such as the Korea-Africa Youth Forum and the Seoul Dialogue on Africa in 2020, which provided African graduate students with the opportunity to present their research to experts and the opportunity for entrepreneurs to establish networks with industry professionals.<sup>57</sup> The Korean government should continue to foster these relations and work to make its discourse a reality. Recent smart city development projects in Africa, most notably in Kampala, Uganda, are an excellent example of a new direction; however, Korean expertise must be catered to local contexts in each African country rather than imported as a blanket solution. This could be further fostered by increasing the number of researchers working in the region and increasing academic and policy knowledge of Africa, as both general and professional knowledge of Africa remains low in Korea.<sup>58</sup>

Korea could also offer a framework for cultural export. Korea is the only country that successfully exports across all cultural sectors<sup>59</sup> because of the government's focus on creative industries. The drive to diversify exports will be critical to African development.<sup>60</sup> African countries could offer the world much culturally, from music to food to other creative industries, such as the arts. In South Africa, music is thriving, with styles such as *gqum*, *afrohouse*, and *amapiano* beginning to receive wider international attention.<sup>61</sup> Nigeria is already home to a strong domestic film industry (colloquially referred

56 Park, "Korean ODA Strategies for Resource Diplomacy Towards Africa," 26.

57 Emilia Columbo, "South Korea's Evolving Role in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Centre for Strategic and International Studies: Analysis*. January 2, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/south-koreas-evolving-role-sub-saharan-africa>

58 Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," 34.

59 Dal Yong Jin, *New Korean Wave* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 5.

60 Chris Alden, "Emerging Powers and Africa: From Development to Geopolitics," London: Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) 2019, 3.

61 "It Speaks to an Ancient History': Why South Africa Has the World's Most Exciting Dance Music," *The Guardian*, December 21, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/dec/21/south-africa-dance-music-afrohouse-gqum-amapiano>.

to as *Nollywood*). Since 2008, the Korean state has renewed its focus on creative exports, working for the “intensification of the commodification and capitalization of cultural products”<sup>62</sup> through investment and subsidization, with the express intent of economic benefit.<sup>63</sup> This has been wildly successful, mainly due to the cultural and financial success of K-Pop. For example, the hit group *BTS* generates an estimated KRW4 trillion (US\$3.54 billion) in added economic value to the country per year.<sup>64</sup> The success of K-Pop combined with the global success of the 2020 film *Parasite* moved Korea to 10<sup>th</sup> place on the Global Innovation Index last year.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, Korea’s interventionist cultural policies have greatly benefited the Korean economy and Korea’s reputation as a state and offer a framework from which other African states could benefit. This is an area that the Korea-Africa relationship has not yet prioritized. This essay argues that it presents an opportunity for Korea to provide the exceptionalism it seeks in its relationships with African states.

#### *Improving the Relationship: Individual and Diaspora-Level Support*

Finally, Korea could offer much in terms of migration and individual level support to African people. As previously mentioned, projects such as the Korea-Africa Forum already exist, establishing linkages between African entrepreneurs and industry professionals in Korea. These projects should, and likely will, continue to expand. In addition, the African diaspora could be better fostered in Korea. Diaspora communities greatly benefit the African continent, with Africans remitting more than development aid funds in 2012.<sup>66</sup> There are various advantages to remittance funds, including the fact that they leave less room for misappropriation and usually come without

62 Yong Jin, *New Korean Wave*, 28.

63 *Ibid.*, 32.

64 “K-pop Group BTS Induces Production Worth 4 Tril. Won per Year,” *Businesskorea*, December 19, 2018, <http://www.businesskorea.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=27583>.

65 “Economic Effect of BTS’ Conquest of Billboard Hot 100 Chart,” *KBS World*, September 14, 2020, [http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/contents\\_view.htm?lang=e&menu\\_cate=business&id=&board\\_seq=390930](http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/contents_view.htm?lang=e&menu_cate=business&id=&board_seq=390930). 2021, [http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/contents\\_view.htm?lang=e&menu\\_cate=business&id=&board\\_seq=390930](http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/contents_view.htm?lang=e&menu_cate=business&id=&board_seq=390930).

66 Adams Bodomo, “African Diaspora Remittances Are Better than Foreign Aid Funds: Diaspora-Driven Development in the 21st Century,” *World Economics Journal* 14 (December 1, 2013), 21-29.21

conditionalities to satisfy individual and community needs.<sup>67</sup> A few programs to foster African migration to Korea exist, such as programs and opportunities to study abroad. However, support following the completion of a migrant's program is limited.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the Korean immigration system is strict with high entry requirements for migrants,<sup>69</sup> and Korean society is homogenous and often opposed to foreign residents, particularly those of African origin.<sup>70</sup>

Overcoming these barriers to African migration to Korea would benefit the African continent and wider Korean society, as African individuals have much to offer. Korea is currently facing an aging population and a low birth rate,<sup>71</sup> which will present problems for its workforce. Improving Korea-Africa migration links, increasing awareness, and combatting anti-African prejudice in society would offer a partial solution to this problem and help invigorate Korea's labor force. This is a new avenue for the Korea-Africa partnership.

## Conclusions

In summary, this essay has analyzed Korea's relationships with African countries, companies, and institutions so far and suggested areas for improvement. In the post-2006 era of renewed Korean-African cooperation, Korea has attempted to present its relations with Africa as a cut apart from traditional relations, emphasizing its unique development trajectory as a model for African states. While Korea's developmental experiences have been shown to influence its development cooperation policies, the idea that Korea-Africa relations are unique to other North-South relationships is just that, an idea. This prevents the full realization of Korea-Africa relations, hindering policy space development and often trapping African states in economic relationships that do not fully benefit them. Improvement of these relations would provide a mutually beneficial opportunity to fully achieve the potential of both Korea and its African partner states. However, there is great space for improvement

67 Ibid., 21, 25.

68 Seongyong Heo, "Measures to Raise African Awareness and Implications for Our Foreign Policy Against Africa," Seoul: *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* November 2020.

69 Young-bum Park, "South Korea Carefully Tests the Waters on Immigration, With a Focus on Temporary Workers," Migration Policy Institute, March 1, 2017. <https://bit.ly/3xrqfED>

70 Heo, "Measures to Raise African Awareness and Implications for Our Foreign Policy Against Africa."

71 Park, "South Korea Carefully Tests the Waters on Immigration, With a Focus on Temporary Workers."

as Korea and Africa have much to offer one another and are poised at a prime time to do so. The economic relationship could be tweaked, and Korea's developmental policies could be altered to transport its experiences to the continent in both traditional economic spaces and cultural spaces.

Furthermore, awareness and acceptance could be improved in Korean society to help foster African migration and diaspora communities, again for the mutual benefit of both communities. Ultimately, Korea will have to entrench the importance of African relations into its foreign policy and public consciousness to achieve a focused, long-term African policy that avoids the influences of diplomatic considerations, material needs, and administration changes. In the next decade, it can be hoped, expected with reasonable certainty, that this will occur.