NATION BRAND IMAGES OF EAST ASIA IN THE WORLD: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF JAPAN, CHINA AND KOREA

DANIEL JONG SCHWEKENDIEK

Sungkyunkwan University
Email: danjosch@skku.edu

Abstract—In recent years, some attention is paid to nation brand indices since a good country reputation improves the soft power of a nation in the political-diplomatic arena while also resulting in fewer economic opportunity costs is terms of inbound tourists, international exports, and foreign investments. The purpose of this research is to investigate the reputation of the three core nations in East Asia— Japan, China and Korea – drawing on the inaugural Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index which measured the global image of countries in six key areas: people, products, culture, government, tourism, and immigration. This study finds that Japan has one of the top reputations in all six key areas, whereas China and Korea are rank below average. This comes as a surprise since Japan and Korea have the same income per capita, which is commonly considered as the best proxy for the developmental status of a nation. Moreover, despite Korean products excelling in design, technology and quality, goods "Made in China" have the same reputation as Korean ones. China only scored low in the key area of government, yet astonishingly, it was ranked as one of the top nations in the world in the key area of culture. While this descriptivestudy exclusively focused on the "how much" question, future research will have to address the more powerful "why" question.

Index Terms—East Asia, Nation Brand Image, Socioeconomic Development, Public Diplomacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this day and age, country reputations have become increasingly important as they directly influence the hard and soft power of a nation in the rest of the world. While soft power relates to cultural and ideational attractiveness of a country, hard power commonly pertains to economic and military strength [1]. According to Joseph Nye, both soft and hard powercan be combined to "smart power" that affects "the behavior of others to get what one wants" in theinternational political arena [2]. In this sense, country reputations represent a form of "public diplomacy" [1].

Moreover, a good country reputation literally brings in foreign currency through tourists, exports and investors. Conversely, a bad country reputation causes high opportunity costs. For instance, previous research found that products made in South Korea had a 30% discount once people learn that the product was "Made in Korea" [3]. As worded by Dinnie: "This gap is evidence of the power of nation branding. Product quality alone won't close the gap. Negative perceptionsof the country of origin will exacerbate the gap."[3].

In summation, country reputations have an impact on the political-diplomatic leverage of a nation while also affecting its economic opportunity costs in terms of tourists, investors, and foreign buyers.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the nation brand images of the three main East Asian nations: Japan, the People's Republic of China (China hereafter), and the Republic of Korea, widely known as South Korea (Korea hereafter). Japan might be of particular interest since it has been credited as being the first-follower nation in East Asia to adapt to the industrialization [4], while Korea was the fastest-follower nations in East Asia and even in the world [5]. China has traditionally been the factory of the world [6], and, along with Japan and Korea, undoubtedly represents a technological powerhouse in the world economy let alone in the Asia-Pacific region.

II. DATA SOURCE

To measure the reputation of countries, the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Indexwas introduced in 2008[7].The index was based on opinion polls of 20,000 average citizens in 20 core nationsaround the globe by asking multiple questions related to how respondents perceive 50 nations in six key areas.

The 20 core countries included Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States. People in these 20 countries were asked to rate 50 nations (i.e. the 20 core nations, including their own, in which people were surveyed,plus 30 supplementary nations in which surveys were not implemented). The 30 supplementary nations included Austria, Belgium, Chile, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Lithuania, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates. No explanations were given by the surveyors behind that study as to selecting the nations and discarding others out of a pool of some 200 nations and territories in the world. However, it seems that the 20 core nations were

apparently selected for their economic power (gross domestic product, as opposed to gross domestic product per capita) or their demographic strength (population size), both of which represent a good proxy of the size of the consumer market which in turn is important for the industry and politicians.

The six key areas includedpeople, products, culture, government, tourism, and immigration. Each of the six subindices was based on three to five rating questions using Likert scales ranging from 1 to 7 and word choice questionsusing oftentimes adjectives to describe nations [8]. For instance, among others, the key area "people" was measured by rating the general friendliness and appeal of citizens of a specific nation, the key area "products" by capturing the country-of-origin-effect (i.e. the likelihood to purchase a good from a specific country), the key area "culture" by investigating both old and new cultural values (ranging from ancient heritage to modern pop culture), the key area "government" by surveying the perception of politicians in terms of competency and honesty, the key area "tourism" by gauging the likelihood to visit a specific country if money was no constraint, and the key area of immigration (including investment) by asking respondents if they wanted to live in a specific country as students or workers[8].

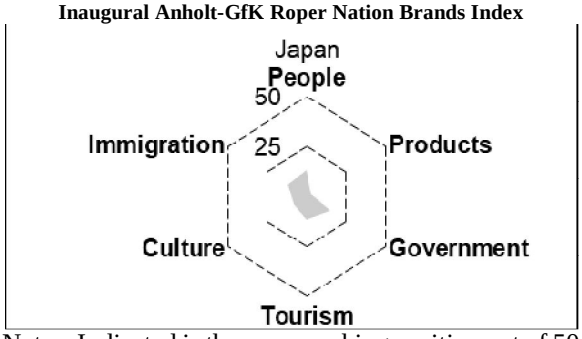
Drawing on the inaugural Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands ranking, the purpose of this research is to investigate how the three main East Asian nationsare perceived in the rest of the world.Previous research based on the same inaugural survey focused on how specifically South Korea is perceived in different world regions [9] and on how the East Asian nations see each other [10]. Moreover, as discussed elsewhere, access to later Anholt-GfK Roper Nation BrandsIndices (2009 to 2017) was not granted, meaning that the analysis had to be limited to the inaugural Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands ranking of 2008[9]. Also note that the ranking positions (out of 50 nations), as opposed to the actual score, was reported in the original source for each of the six subindicators. In the following the number sign (#) will be used to indicate ranks. For instance, #7 indicates that the country was ranked on average seventh (out of 50 nations) in the respective key area.

III. ANALYSIS

The ranking positions of Japan, China and Korea are depicted in Fig. 1-3, where values close to 1 represent a top position and values close to 50 a low position in the subrankings. The ranking position #25is indicated in all three figures as a quick benchmark for "average" performance since values above and below tell us if the nation is ranked better or worse than half of the 50 countriesincluded in the list of nations.

Firstly, how does the world see Japan? Japan overall achieved an outstanding score (Fig. 1) in nearly all six key areas. Japan's highest rankswere in the area of "products" where it ranked on average #2 in the world and "culture" where it was ranked on average #8 out of 50 nations. Japan's worst ranking was in the area of "government" (#15), which is due to very low ratingsgivenby other East Asian nations polled in the survey [10].

Fig. 1: Japanese Imagesin the World According to the Inaugural Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index



Notes: Indicated is the mean ranking position out of 50 nations.

Secondly, how does the world view China? China achieved below average ranking positions in the areas of government (where it actually even scored close to 50), people and immigration (Fig. 2). In the key area of products it was close to 25 out of 50 nations, while in the area of "culture" it was ranked relatively high (#9 out of 50 nations).

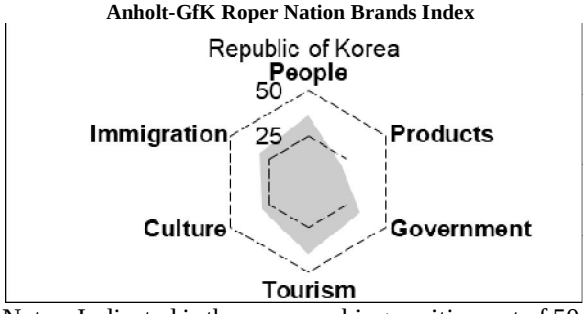
Fig. 2: Chinese Images in the World According to the Inaugural Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index



Notes: Indicated is the mean ranking position out of 50 nations.

Thirdly and lastly, let us take a look at how the world sees Korea. Fig. 3 reveals that Korea is rated below average in 5 out of 6 key areas. Only in the area of "products" it holds a position above the average (#20 out of 50 nations).

Fig. 3: Korean Images in the World According to the Inaugural Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index



Notes: Indicated is the mean ranking position out of 50 nations.

Overall, one gets the impression that Japan is ranked as a top nation in all six areas while China and Korea are ranked below average, with China achieving slightly better ranking positions than Korea.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Japan's high-end reputation in "products" and "culture" in the world as opposed to Korea's low rankings in these areas bears a comment. After all, Korea and Japan nowadays have nearly the same gross domestic product per capita, at about 22,000 international dollars (measured in purchasing power parity), which is commonly accepted as the best proxy for the developmental status of a nation[9]. Yet, the former seems to be perceived as an underdeveloped nation which is clearly not on par with its technological and economic performance as a leading hard power. Although Korean products are excelling in quality, design and technology [11], similar products "Made in China" seem to have the same brand value although being undoubtedly still inferior. Surprisingly, China had a relatively high ranking position in the key area of "culture", coming in just one position behind Japan. In the remaining areas, China mostly scored below average, and in the area of "government' it was ranked even as one of the least preferred countries in the world.

This research focused on the "how much". What has been completely left out in this short study is touching upon the more powerful "why" question. For instance, why do we observe intra-regional differences in East Asia with respect to specific key areas? Why is Japan overall ranked so high while Korea so low? Why has China the nearly same ranking in products as Korea? And why does China excel in cultural appeal?

This study, like many explorative studies, raises more questions than it has answers. That is, future research will have to identify the underlying factors for the relative strengths and weaknesses of each nation in East Asia.

REFERENCES

[1] Lee, S.J. and J. Melissen, eds. Public diplomacy and soft power in East Asia. 2011, Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

[2] Nye, J., Get Smart: Combined hard and soft power. Foreign Affairs, 2009. 88(4): p. 160-163.

[3] Dinnie, K., Repositioning the Korea Brand to a Global Audience: Challenges, Pitfalls, and Current Strategy. Korea Economic Institute Academic Paper Series, 2009. 4(9): p. 1-7.

[4] Wan, M., The Political Economy of East Asia. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press. 2008.

[5] Maddison, A., The World Economy. A Millennial Perspective. 2001, Washington, DC: OECD.

[6] Allen, R., Global Economic History. 2011, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[7] GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media, 2008 Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index. 2009.

[8] GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media, The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index 2009 Report August 2009 - Prepared for: Switzerland. 2009, New York: GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media.

[9] Schwekendiek, D., South Korea: A socioeconomic overview from the past to present. 2016, New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

[10] Schwekendiek, D., Segye Sogui Dongasia Gukga BeuraendeuImiji, in DongasiaYeongu, EotteohgeHar Geos Inga, H. Bae, S. Park, and I. Park, Editors. 2016, Sungkyunkwan University Press: Seoul. p. 175-192.

★★★