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Geopolitics of Anxiety: Ideology, Identity, and (Un)Bordering in Contemporary Europe and Asia

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Editorial. Geopolitics of Anxiety: Ideology, Identity, and (Un)Bordering in Contemporary Europe and Asia – Bongchul Kim – pp. 3-5

ARTICLES

Tabucchi's Inquietudine as the (Un)Bordering of Europe – Moonjung Park – pp. 6-23

Ideological Shift in the German Alternative Für Deutschland (Afd) and its Implications – Jeong-Ae Choi – pp. 24-40

Reconfiguring Borders Through High-Skilled Migration: Korea and Europe in Comparative Perspective - Joonpyo Lee – pp. 41-62

From Europe's Rights-Based AI Regulation to Korea's Innovation-Oriented Framework: Diverging Philosophies in Global Digital And AI Governance - Bongchul Kim – pp. 63-82

Reconfiguring Arctic Governance: Law, Identity, and Europe – Korea Cooperation – Ho Kim, Minsub Shim – pp. 83-98

South Korea's Public Diplomacy Toward Portugal: The Current State and Future Implications - Tonny Dian Effendi, Hoyoon Jung – pp. 99-115

The Impact of Geopolitical Distance on Foreign Direct Investment: Evidence From Eu-Asean Relations - Yoomi Kim – pp. 116-131

Overlapping Imperialisms: Colonial and Neocolonial Logics of Urban Governance in Kilamba, Angola - Kyeri Kim – pp. 132-154

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EDITORIAL

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Bongchul Kim

GEOPOLITICS OF ANXIETY: IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY, AND (UN)BORDERING IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE AND ASIA

BONGCHUL KIM

This special issue presents eight articles that examine the intersections of anxiety, ideology, identity, and processes of (un)bordering across Europe, Asia, and beyond. While the contributions differ in disciplinary orientation and empirical focus, they are united by a shared concern with how contemporary geopolitical transformations reshape political communities, governance structures, and understandings of belonging in an increasingly uncertain world.

The order of the articles follows a deliberate editorial logic. The issue begins with conceptual and ideological questions concerning Europe and political identity, before turning to the reconfiguration of borders through migration and emerging forms of digital governance. It then expands to questions of international cooperation, diplomacy, and geopolitical connectivity, before concluding with a broader reflection on the enduring legacies of imperial power and governance beyond Europe and Asia. This progression is intended to provide coherence across a diverse set of themes while highlighting the multiple dimensions of contemporary geopolitical anxiety.

Moonjung Park's "Tabucchi's Inquietudine as the (Un)Bordering of Europe" opens the issue by exploring literary and cultural representations of Europe through the lens of uncertainty, identity, and bordering processes. Jeong-ae Choi's "Ideological Shift in the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and Its Implications" then examines how contemporary political anxieties are reflected in ideological transformations within one of Europe's most influential populist parties.

The issue subsequently turns to questions of mobility and governance. Joonpyo Lee's "Reconfiguring Borders through High-Skilled Migration: Korea and Europe in Comparative Perspective" investigates how migration challenges conventional understandings of borders and belonging. Bongchul Kim's "From Europe's Rights-Based AI Regulation to Korea's Innovation-Oriented Framework: Diverging Philosophies in Global Digital and AI Governance" analyzes competing approaches to digital governance and the normative foundations of emerging technological orders.

The following contributions broaden the discussion to regional and international cooperation. Ho Kim and Minsub Shim's "Reconfiguring Arctic Governance: Law, Identity, and Europe–Korea Cooperation" explores evolving governance structures in the Arctic and their implications for transregional collaboration. Tonny Dian Effendi and Hoyoon Jung's "South Korea's Public Diplomacy toward Portugal: The Current State and Future Implications" examines the role of public diplomacy in fostering mutual understanding and international engagement. Yoomi Kim's "The Impact of Geopolitical Distance on Foreign Direct Investment: Evidence from EU–ASEAN Relations" considers how geopolitical perceptions influence patterns of economic interaction and cross-border investment.

The final article, Kyeri Kim's "Overlapping Imperialisms: Colonial and Neocolonial Logics of Urban Governance in Kilamba, Angola," concludes the special issue by extending the discussion beyond Europe and Asia and highlighting the enduring influence of colonial and neocolonial structures on contemporary governance. In doing so, it offers a critical reflection on power, space, and inequality in a global context.

Taken together, the articles demonstrate the diversity of perspectives through which contemporary geopolitical transformations can be understood. Bringing together contributions from scholars working across a range of disciplines, the collection highlights the value of examining ideology, identity, and bordering processes as interconnected dimensions of global politics in the twenty-first century..

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TABUCCHI'S INQUIETUDINE AS THE (UN)BORDERING OF EUROPE

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Abstract

The literary trajectory of Antonio Tabucchi (1943–2012) constitutes one of the most profound ontological interrogations of the concept of the "boundary" (confine) in late 20th-century European thought. This paper posited that Tabucchi's literary geography is a "liminal space" where identity and belonging fundamentally vacillate, instead of a map of fixed territories. Against the backdrop of hardening political borders, Tabucchi proposed an "anti-geography" of (un)bordering, driven by Inquietudine, which functioned as a core mechanism for dissolving Europe's ontological, geographical, and political boundaries. This study examined Tabucchi's process of (un)bordering across three critical dimensions. Ontologically, it analyzed the deconstruction of the fixed self and linear time through the Game of the Reverse and "pendulum effect," exploring a multilayered temporality where the boundary between the living and dead is annulled. The geopoetic dimension investigated the fictionality of national borders by defining language as a "portable homeland" and exploring the "shifting West" through the Azores and India. Politically, the study explored intellectual responsibility, metaphorically defined as "gastritis," which interrogates the hidden facets of judicial and official truths. Tabucchi's "aesthetics of absence" transcended exclusive nationalism to foster a new European subjectivity capable of accommodating the Other. Based on the premise that the earth is merely "on loan," he demonstrated that we are all fundamentally "strangers to geography and existence." This paper argued that Tabucchi's work proves that constant wandering on the border constitutes the most dignified form of human existence. This is a powerful philosophical response to the modern crises of isolation, mapping a universal subjectivity that stands in solidarity with the Other on a shared, "borrowed" planet.

Keywords

Antonio Tabucchi, Inquietudine, (Un)bordering, Saudade, Aesthetics of Absence.

Resumo

A trajetória literária de Antonio Tabucchi (1943–2012) constitui uma das mais profundas interrogações ontológicas sobre o conceito de «fronteira» (confine) no pensamento europeu do final do século XX. Este artigo defende que a geografia literária de Tabucchi é um «espaço liminar» onde a identidade e o pertença oscilam fundamentalmente, em vez de um mapa de territórios fixos. Num contexto de endurecimento das fronteiras políticas, Tabucchi propôs uma «antigeografia» de (des)delimitação, impulsionada por Inquietudine, que funcionou como um mecanismo central para dissolver as fronteiras ontológicas, geográficas e políticas da

Europa. Este estudo analisou o processo de (des)delimitação de Tabucchi em três dimensões críticas. Ontologicamente, analisou a desconstrução do eu fixo e do tempo linear através do Jogo do Reverso e do «efeito pêndulo», explorando uma temporalidade multifacetada onde a fronteira entre os vivos e os mortos é anulada. A dimensão geopoética investigou a ficcionalidade das fronteiras nacionais, definindo a língua como uma «pátria portátil» e explorando o «Ocidente em mutação» através dos Açores e da Índia. Politicamente, o estudo explorou a responsabilidade intelectual, metaforicamente definida como «gastrite», que questiona as facetas ocultas das verdades judiciais e oficiais. A «estética da ausência» de Tabucchi transcendeu o nacionalismo exclusivo para fomentar uma nova subjetividade europeia capaz de acolher o Outro. Partindo da premissa de que a Terra é meramente «em empréstimo», demonstrou que somos todos, fundamentalmente, «estranhos à geografia e à existência». Este artigo defendeu que a obra de Tabucchi prova que a errância constante na fronteira constitui a forma mais digna de existência humana. Trata-se de uma resposta filosófica poderosa às crises modernas de isolamento, traçando uma subjetividade universal que se solidariza com o Outro num planeta partilhado e «emprestado».

Palavras-chave

Antonio Tabucchi, Inquietudine, (Des)fronteirização, Saudade, Estética da Ausência.

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TABUCCHI'S INQUIETUDINE AS THE (UN)BORDERING OF EUROPE[1]

MOONJUNG PARK

Introduction

Antonio Tabucchi's (1943–2012) literary trajectory constitutes one of the most profound interrogations of the concept of the "boundary" in late 20th-century European thought. Tabucchi's literary geography is a "liminal space" where the notions of identity and belonging fundamentally vacillate, instead of a map of fixed territories. When European borders were hardening into new economic and political forms, Tabucchi's work proposed an anti-geography grounded in *Inquietudine*[2]—that is, disquietude. *Inquietudine* does not merely represent anxiety but functions as a distinct philosophical category, akin to yet independent of Freud's *Unheimliche*, Fernando Pessoa's *Saudade* and *Desassossego*, and *Nostalgia*. It acts as a driving force to dismantle the ontological boundaries of the European subject. This paper demonstrates that Tabucchi's *Inquietudine* is a mechanism of "(un)bordering," which dissolves Europe's ontological, geographical, and generic boundaries.

For Tabucchi, the concept of the boundary was inherently paradoxical: it was simultaneously a place of separation and a point of suture. In the preface to the essay collection, *Viaggi e altri viaggi*, Tabucchi warned against the "dangerous misunderstanding" of believing that the ground we stand upon belongs to us. He asserted that the earth is "on loan," and just as "everything in life is on loan," so too is the land:

> *"But, when all is said and done, I have traveled much, I admit; I have visited and lived in many 'elsewheres.' And I feel it to be a great privilege, because setting one's feet upon the same soil for a whole lifetime can provoke a dangerous misunderstanding, leading us to believe that the land belongs to us—as if it were not on loan, just as everything in life is on loan"*[3].

[1] This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2020S1A5B5A16082615).
[2] *Inquietudine* is a quintessential concept that traversed Tabucchi's entire literary oeuvre. Given its status as a distinct conceptual term, this paper retains the original Italian expression without translation to preserve its nuanced meaning.
[3] "*Ma, a conti fatti, ho viaggiato molto, lo ammetto; ho visitato e ho vissuto in molti altrove. E lo sento come un gran de privilegio, perché posare i piedi sul medesimo suolo per tutta la vita può provocare un pericoloso*

This primordial transience relegated borders and territories from being objects of possession to fleeting illusions drawn atop a fluid existence. Consequently, the European subject within Tabucchi's narrative assumed a nomadic quality regarding physical space and its ontological orientation. To capture this dynamic, this study adopted the paradoxical neologism "(un)bordering" rather than the static noun "border." The parenthetical prefix "(un-)" encapsulates a dual dynamism: it presupposes the existence of the border while perpetually nullifying it. For Tabucchi, the border is not a barrier to be dismantled but an "ongoing event"—a space that must be incessantly traversed, transgressed, and rewritten to facilitate the encounter between the subject and Other.

Hence, this study conducted an in-depth examination of the modes of (un)bordering in Tabucchi's literature across three dimensions. First, it analyzed ontological (un)bordering, which deconstructed the fixed self and linear time through the *Game of the Reverse* and "pendulum effect" of time. Second, it explored geopoetic (un)bordering, exposing the fictionality of national borders through concepts of language as a "portable homeland" and the "shifting West." Third, it examined political (un)bordering, which defined the intellectual's responsibility as a form of "gastritis" and interrogated the hidden facets of judicial and official truths. This analysis demonstrated how Tabucchi's aesthetics of absence opened a new European subjectivity, which transcended exclusive nationalism, unveiling a new horizon for universal human existence.

Ontological (Un)bordering

Inquietudine Versus Desassossego Versus Saudade

The point of departure for Tabucchi's literature was the thorough exploration and practice of the Rimbaudian proposition: "When one writes, the 'I' is an other" (*quando si scrive l'Io è un altro*; Tabucchi, 2003, p. 12). In *Autografie altrui*, he defined literature as a mirror in which the reader discovered their image, explaining that the author dissolved the subject's boundaries by thrusting their experience into the "skin" of another.

> *"Someone made him change skins, once in a lifetime [...] I made him travel in third class; and though it was only for a few pages, thanks to me, he had an experience he probably never would have had in his life"*[4].

This "changing of skins" is not mere role-play but an ontological project that refutes the myth of a unitary, fixed self. Tabucchi termed the phenomenon of a reader recognizing themselves in a fictional character an "autobiography of others" (*un'autobiografia altrui, [...] fatta da un mio lettore*; Tabucchi, 2003, p. 12), annihilating the exclusive boundaries between author and reader, reality and fiction. This suggested the possibility of a

equivoco, farci credere che quella terra ci appartenga, come se essa non fosse in prestito, come tutto è in prestito nella vita." (Tabucchi, 2010, p. 10).

[4] "*Qualcuno gli ha fatto cambiare pelle, una volta nella vita... Io l'ho fatto viaggiare in terza classe*." (Tabucchi, 2003, p. 12).

European subject that was not confined within the identity of a single nation or state and expanded by appropriating the Other's experience.

To fully grasp Tabucchi's deconstruction of borders and formation of a transnational subjectivity, one must diachronically reconstruct the semantic field formed by his tripartite philosophical axis: *Inquietudine*, *Desassossego*, and *Saudade*. For Tabucchi, *Inquietudine* was an active epistemological stance instead of a pathological symptom to be suppressed by psychology. It represented the will of a subject that refused to accept the world as a static structure. As Salvatore Settis identified, this disquietude was the core of a modern existence that had lost its stable foundation (2012, p. 9). Within this framework, *Inquietudine* functioned as a "seismograph" that recorded the minute cracks—invisible vibrations beneath the surface of history—before they manifested as catastrophic disasters. In *Di tutto resta un poco*, Tabucchi noted:

> *"That illness—that is, a disjointed relationship with Time as a dimension in which we can no longer dwell, a fractured relationship with History [...]—that illness seems to me to belong entirely to the twentieth century; and I believe it has grown steadily, increasing out of all proportion until the present day. Literature has been, and certainly remains, the most reliable seismograph of this malaise, and to examine here the shivers of Inquietudine through which it has manifested itself would take too long; it would deserve a small, portable encyclopedia"*[5].

In Tabucchi's epistemological trajectory, *Inquietudine* acquired a deeper layer of metaphysical negation through Fernando Pessoa's *Desassossego*. The *Inquietudine* refined by Pessoa's heteronym, Bernardo Soares, through the *Desassossego* of the *Book of Disquiet*, transcended a mere orientation toward dynamic exploration. It encompassed the lack of peace and "absent stillness" situated at the abyss of existence. Tabucchi adopted the semantic crevice between these two terms as a creative dwelling, carrying out a "philosophical migration" by transferring his literary base to Portugal, dismantling the "immunological envelope" of a singular national subject.

Hence, the relationship with the homeland (*patria*) became an essential key for thematic interpretation and the stylistic dimension of reading Tabucchi's work. In a 2009 interview, Tabucchi famously named Italian his "portable homeland" (*patria tascabile*; Settis, 2012, p. 18), suggesting that language was the minimal mental territory that sustained a writer's existence beyond geographic borders. However, he confessed to the cracking of this stable territory by unknowingly beginning to write *Requiem* in Portuguese and the subsequent failure to translate the work into his mother tongue, Italian, while staying in Paris. This illustrated the process through which the intimate boundary of the "portable homeland" was invaded and restructured by the language of the Other.

[5] "Quella malattia, cioè un rapporto sfasato con il Tempo quale dimensione in cui non riusciamo più ad abitare, un rapporto guasto con la Storia [...], quella malattia mi pare appartenere in pieno al Novecento; e credo che sia cresciuta via via, aumentando a dismisura fino ad oggi. Di questo malessere la letteratura è stata, ed è sicuramente il sismografo più attendibile, ed esaminare qui i brividi di In quietudine con cui si è manifestata sarebbe troppo lungo, meriterebbe una piccola enciclopedia portatile." (Tabucchi, 2013, p. 20).

To contextualize this phenomenon, he cited the experiences of other alloglossic writers: "the French of Beckett, the English of Conrad and Nabokov, and even the Portuguese of the Anglophone Pessoa."[6] Hence, the "linguistic schizophrenia" (*schizofrenia linguistica*; Settis, 2012, p. 18) advocated by Tabucchi became a subversive strategy that dismantles the rigid systems of a single national identity and native tongue, allowing the writer to reside simultaneously in multiple linguistic and cultural bodies. The confession in the preface of *Requiem* of "a language of affection and reflection" (*una lingua che fosse di affetto e di riflessione*; Tabucchi, 2014a, p. 7) symbolized the practical completion of de-bordering—a movement beyond the mere disposal of a singular identity to achieve a reciprocal encounter between the subject and Other.

While *Inquietudine* and *Desassossego* explain the subject's internal agitation, *Saudade* completes the temporal dimension of this movement.

> *"I view the revisiting of time as a cultural category akin to that of saudade, which consists of a nostalgia for the future—an oxymoronic concept that immediately confronts us with a contradiction"[7].*

Tabucchi's *Saudade* is not a retrospective regret but a longing for unrealized possibilities—the vivid presence of absence. This "future nostalgia" prevents the subject from taxidermizing memory, inducing them to wander within a multilayered time where past, present, and future overlap. By escaping the "dictatorship of the present," the subject becomes capable of sensing the time of the Other that has not yet arrived.

These three concepts form the foundation of Tabucchi's political and cultural vision of Europe. While *Desassossego* sinks into the internal abyss and *Saudade* swims through lost layers of time, *Inquietudine* is the mediating force that connects these affects to the historical horizon. It resists the contradictions of the present to realize the "future nostalgia" of *Saudade*.

For Tabucchi, Europe was not a fixed geographic territory but a "work in progress" that must continuously accommodate the voices of the Other. *Inquietudine* imposed an ethical imperative that pushed the subject out of the comfort of the "homeland" and into the Other's "skin." The transnational subject sought by Tabucchi was a being that constantly interrogated its boundaries through a state of "wakeful insomnia." This provided an epistemological turning point where Europe did not settle into the myth of a singular lineage but transformed absence and lack into new possibilities for coexistence. Hence, by tracing the minute tremors recorded by the seismograph of *Inquietudine*, we can map a new subjectivity that stands in solidarity with the Other upon a "land on loan."

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[6] "Come precedenti cita l'esperienza di altri scrittori alloglossi: il francese di Becket, l'inglese di Conrad e di Nabokov, e perfino il portoghese dell'anglofono Pessoa." (Settis, 2012, p. 18).

[7] "Io vedo la rivisitazione del tempo come una categoria culturale simile a quella della saudade, che consiste nella nostalgia del futuro, concetto ossimorico che ci pone subito davanti a una contraddizione." (Tabucchi, 2022, p. 123).

Pendulum of Time and Category of "Having Been"

In the abyss of Tabucchian *Inquietudine* lies a sophisticated and intricate architecture of time that rejects a linear worldview. Anna Dolfi identified the "pendulum effect"[8] within his narrative strategy, signifying an objective vibration generated by forms that constantly oscillated between points in the past and points of fated return. This vibration was more than a stylistic flourish; it was a profound existential symptom. It reflected the ontological struggle of the Tabucchian subject, who refused to reside in the closed moment of a singular "present" and sought to traverse multiple temporal layers.

Within this epistemological framework, the "present" is redefined as a "porous membrane" through which the past and future incessantly permeate. As Tabucchi explicitly stated, "having been" (*l'essere stato*) places us "in a relationship with the dead." This relationship is not mourning in the conventional sense but an active exchange.[9] His novel *Requiem* served as the pinnacle of this temporal multilayeredness manifested in narrative space. Here, the subject facilitated an encounter between the living and dead within an orderly continuum, creating a unique temporal refraction where "the past inscribes the future within itself, offering its fulfillment" (*il passato inscrive in sé il futuro offrendone l'adempimento*; Dolfi, 2010, p. 11).

This de-bordering is a temporal event. The hierarchical boundary between the living subject and dead object of memory is erased, and death is elevated from extinction to a modulated presence. For Tabucchi, the deceased demanded to be heard as "voices carried by something" (*voci portate da qualcosa*; Dolfi, 2010, p. 18), generating an "inclination of the heart" (*inclinazione del cuore*) that unsettled the solitary self standing upon the "heart of the earth" (*cuore della terra*; Dolfi, 2010, p. 11). Therefore, the journey in *Requiem* unfolded upon the layer of "fantastic hallucination" (*allucinazione fantastica*; Dolfi, 2010, p. 11)—a sophisticated synthesis of memory and the unconscious—while maintaining the physical locality of Lisbon. This spatial turn, where fantasy and reality overlapped, became a site for an epistemological experiment that deconstructed the unity of a singular self and filled the vacuum of the subject with the polyphony of the Other. Through this narrative strategy of fullness through emptiness, Tabucchi aesthetically demonstrated how that which had disappeared could reside permanently within the present subject.

[8] "Indubbiamente qualcosa cambia nel panorama italiano a partire dagli anni 80. Dopo i giochi dissacranti e divertiti/divertenti del Gruppo '63, le lunghe diatribe sulla fine del romanzo, parallelamente al nuovo piacere di narrare attivato dalla fortuna presso il pubblico (e non solo) della narrativa sudamericana, gli scrittori sembrano tornare al romanzo senza la rigidita, la naivete o i sensi di colpa delle generazioni precedenti. I piu interessanti sono autori avvertiti delle tecniche narrative […] che, rassicurati, si potrebbe dire, dall' 'Effetto pendolo' che giustifica la ripresa – naturalmente variata - dei personaggi e delle forme, tornano al racconto/romanzo senza più esibire il distacco dalla scandalosa frase che aveva segnato un'epoca: "la marquise sortit à cinq heures" (non è un caso che Tabucchi l'abbia utilizzata qualche volta nel rivendicare il diritto/dovere dello scrittore alla fedelta a se stesso e alla propria verita). D'altronde i loro maestri non si trovano piu soltanto nella letteratura, ma nella teoria letteraria, nelle arti figurative, nel cinema." (Dolfi, 2010, p. 10).

[9] "La categoría del haber sido no pone en relación con los muertos […]. Una de mis últimas obras, Réquiem, se centra totalmente en él." (Gumpert Melgosa, 1995, p. 153).

Game of the Reverse and Dissolution of the Self

If *Inquietudine* is the primordial sensation triggering the subject's internal vibration, the *Game of the Reverse* (*Il gioco del rovescio*) is the decisive methodology that translates that sensation into narrative practice. This concept functions as a core strategy in Tabucchi's poetics to deconstruct the binary conditions underpinning Western ontology. Tabucchi diagnosed the modern individual as being trapped in an existential predicament, "condemned to remain always within predictable dichotomies under the Beckettian eye of a camera" (*condannati a essere sempre tra dicotomie prevedibili sotto l'occhio beckettiano di una telecamera*; Tabucchi, 2022, p. 13). This suggests that artistic "reversal" was the only escape from such a closed structure.

In Tabucchi's universe, reality was akin to a tapestry. The meticulously woven image on the surface was determined by the disorderly and chaotic knots on the reverse side; to approach the essence of truth, one had to trace those hidden knots rather than the smooth surface.

This realization inevitably led a writer to adopt a narrative stance of "voyeurism and theft" (*voyeurismo e di furto*; Tabucchi, 2022, p. 13). To reconstruct the totality of an inaccessible truth, the writer must "steal" and arrange fragments of reality, with the author's identity undergoing an unavoidable subversion. The writer becomes a "new entity that does not coincide with the writer even if it resembles them" (*nuova entità che non coincide con lo scrittore anche se gli assomiglia*; Tabucchi, 2022, p. 10). This represents a split of the subject, born from the fusion of a "diurnal double" (*doppio diuron*) and "multiplied projections" (*proiezioni moltiplicate*; Tabucchi, 2022, p. 10).

This destabilization of authorial identity—the ontological de-bordering between creator and creation—was most vividly revealed in Tabucchi's strategy of "hiding himself in a Joycean manner" (*nascondere se stesso, alla maniera joyciana*; Tabucchi, 2022, p. 13), as analyzed by Dolfi in *Zigzag*. The act of intentionally hiding behind the narrative was not a pursuit of anonymity but an aesthetic decision to halt the violent imposition of a singular ego and allow the multilayered human figures within life to speak for themselves. Hence, the *Game of the Reverse* became the pinnacle of an epistemological shift that revealed hidden truths by negating superficial reality while dismantling fixed authorial authority to create a polyphonic space where the voices of otherness could freely intersect.

This ontological dissolution of the unitary self was a foundational catalyst for a radical rethinking of the European project. Within Tabucchi's literary geography, Europe was liberated from the constraints of exclusive nationalism and territorial rigidity, re-emerging as an "archipelago of pluralities." By internalizing the mechanism of (un)bordering, the European subject transcended the myth of a singular lineage, transforming the continent into a site of perpetual hospitality where the "I" and "Other" coexisted upon a shared, borrowed land. This transnational subjectivity did not establish a new center but resided in the tremors of the borders, proving that Europe's true identity lay in its capacity to remain an unfinished "work in progress" that continuously echoed the polyphony of its Others.

Federation of Souls: Identity as an Archipelago

Tabucchi's discourse on identity established its ontological cornerstone through his encounter with Pessoa. For Tabucchi, the "I" (*Io*) was no longer an isolated monolith but a fragmented collective, a multilayered and incomplete entity that could only be captured "in profile."[10] This fragmentation of the self was presented as the primordial truth of human existence, aligning with his epistemological project to dismantle the modern illusion of a unitary subjectivity.

Tabucchi's analysis of Álvaro de Campos, one of Pessoa's heteronyms, focused on specific material emblems that symbolized the subject's de-bordered nature. In the essay *The Automobile, Nostalgia, and the Infinite* (*L'automobile, la nostalgia e l'infinito*), Tabucchi identified Campos as possessing the "highest metaphysical quotient" (*il più alto quoziente metafisico*; Tabucchi, 2015, p. 45). As a naval engineer, dandy, and futurist, Campos embodied a "geometric nihilism" (*nichilismo geometrico*; Tabucchi, 2015, p. 45). Tabucchi decoded Campos's de-bordered identity through his travel accessory—the "suitcase"—which became a decisive signifier that defined Campos as a "stranger to geography and existence" (*straniero della geografia e dell'esistenza*; Tabucchi, 2015, p. 53).

> *"[...] a suitcase that contains precious information. It certainly signifies the journey, the man without frontiers, but also the stranger of geography and existence"*[11].

Campos defined himself as a "passerby of himself" (*passante di se stesso*; Tabucchi, 2015, p. 53) and confessed: "I myself, unfortunately, am a thing on loan" (*Io stesso, purtroppo, sono una cosa in prestito*; Tabucchi, 2015, p. 50). This recognition of existence being "borrowed" from the Other carried a fundamental skepticism toward the ownership and inherent nature of the self. The "terrible, sudden, violent, inconceivable longing" (*smania terribile, repentina, violenta, inconcepibile*) he felt while driving a Chevrolet toward Sintra illustrated the essence of European *Inquietudine*: a desire to vanish into the "future road" (*strada futura*) rather than remaining fixed at a coordinate, be it Lisbon or Sintra (Tabucchi, 2015, p. 50).

The suitcase was a vessel for the metaphysical weight of a life in transit without anchorage, symbolizing the existential debt borne by the subject. This was exquisitely depicted by Campos:

[10] "Esiste insomma un contesto nel quale l'io (personaggio e autore), anche se sembra talvolta ricomporsi segnando un qualche ritorno alla vecchia maniera, lo fa a partire da una situazione nuova, per definizione frammentata (si pensi in questa direzione, anche per i personaggi più 'tradizionali' di Tabucchi, alla tanto spesso evocata 'confederazione delle anime,' o all'io visto solo di profilo nello Stadio di Wimbledon del primo Del Giudice), [...]." (Dolfi, 2010, p. 10).
[11] "[…] una valigia che contiene preziose informazioni. Significa certamente il viaggio, l'uomo senza frontiere, ma anche lo straniero della geografia e dell'esistenza." (Tabucchi, 2015, p. 53).

> *"I am expiating a crime in a suitcase committed by an ancestor of mine out of aestheticism. My nerves are on the gallows, twenty by twenty, and I have fallen into opium as if into a ditch"*[12].

The powerful image of "nerves on the gallows" visualized the internal tension experienced by a plural being as physical agony. Though the self was imprisoned within the anatomical limits of a single body, its nervous system expanded centrifugally toward the external world, maintaining a tension that felt as though it might snap. This organic suffering reached its peak of subject transformation in the *Maritime Ode* (*Ode Marittima*), where it merged with the mechanical symbol of the "flywheel." Tabucchi cited this poem to elucidate the phenomenon:

> *"The poem is the Maritime Ode, and the object in question is a flywheel. Precisely because it is so incongruous with the context, so ambiguous in nature, and situated right inside Campos's chest, I find it worthy of being considered beyond metaphor. As such, it deserves a place of honor in the list of objects I am compiling: 'I gaze at the steamer from a distance, with a great independence of soul, and inside me, slowly, a flywheel begins to turn'"*[13].

Located "inside the chest of Campos," this rotating wheel drove the subject's anxiety mechanism while transforming him into a massive sensation machine. The flywheel spinning within violated the boundaries between organism and machine, interior and exterior, redefining the subject as an incessant wave of sensation. These metaphors embodied the plural self Tabucchi discovered through Pessoa, a powerful visual testimony to a modern subjectivity floating upon borders, accommodating the Other's voice and mechanical vibrations.

This ontological dissolution of the unitary self serves as a foundational catalyst for a radical rethinking of the European project. Within Tabucchi's literary geography, Europe is liberated from the constraints of exclusive nationalism and territorial rigidity, re-emerging as an 'archipelago of pluralities.' By internalizing the mechanism of (un)bordering, the European subject transcends the myth of a singular lineage, transforming the continent into a site of perpetual hospitality where the "I" and "Other" coexist upon a shared, borrowed land. This transnational subjectivity does not seek to establish a new center but resides in the tremors of the borders. This proves that Europe's true identity lies not in its fortified walls but in its capacity to remain an unfinished "work in progress" that continuously echoes the polyphony of its Others.

[12] "Sto espiando un delitto in una valigia commesso da un mio avo per estetismo. Ho i nervi sulla forca, venti a venti, e son caduto nell'oppio come in un fosso." (Tabucchi, 2015, p. 53).

[13] La poesia è l'Ode marltima e l'oggetto in questione è un volano che proprio perché incongruo al contesto, per la sua natura così ambigua e perché si trova dentro al petto di Campos, mi pare degno di essere considerato fuor di metafora e quindi di avere un posto d'onore nella lista di oggetti che sto compilando: "Guardo da lontano il piroscafo, con una grande indipendenza dell'anima, e dentro di me, lentamente, un volano comincia a girare." (Tabucchi, 2015, p. 51).

Geopoetic (Un)bordering

The most radical form of (un)bordering in Tabucchi's work occurred at the subject's level. Traditional European humanism defined a citizen by borders, language, and soil—a consistent and integrated self. Influenced by Pessoa's theory of heteronyms, Tabucchi deconstructed this unity. He argued that identity was not a possession but a temporary state, a "thing on loan." The final, and most concrete, manifestation of this (un)bordering was geographical. Hence, for Tabucchi, Europe was not a fortress but a fluid space of transit.

Illusion of Possession and "Life on Loan"

In *Viaggi e altri viaggi*, Tabucchi deconstructed the nationalistic concept of *Heimat* and articulated a philosophy of un-belonging that challenged the nationalistic roots of European identity. Warning against the illusion of possession arising from a sedentary life, he defined the "boundary" as an epistemological error. To reside in several "elsewheres" was a privilege because it shattered the illusion of ownership. He wrote:

> *"Setting one's feet upon the same soil for a whole lifetime can provoke a dangerous misunderstanding, leading us to believe that the land belongs to us—as if it were not on loan, just as everything in life is on loan"*[14].

This was the cornerstone of Tabucchi's post-nationalist Europe. If the land was merely "on loan," the borders drawn upon it were fictional. This "dangerous misunderstanding" was the root of the exclusive politics plaguing the continent. By traveling and residing in several "elsewheres," the subject shattered this illusion. Hence, for Tabucchi, travel was an ontological exercise in displacement.

Travel as Ontology: Cavafy's Ithaca

Referencing Constantine Cavafy's poem *Ithaca*, Tabucchi elevated travel to an ontological status. The destination was irrelevant, but the movement mattered:

> *"Constantine Cavafy said it in an extraordinary poem titled Ithaca: travel finds meaning only in itself, in the being of the journey"*[15].

Tabucchi extended this to life, arguing that the primary meaning of life was "to be lived." The texts in *Viaggi e altri viaggi* were described as "islands in a floating archipelago" scattered "here and there... under different flags," resisting a singular national identity.

[14] "Posare i piedi sul medesimo suolo per tutta la vita può provocare un pericoloso equivoco, farci credere che quella terra ci appartenga, come se essa non fosse in prestito, come tutto è in prestito nella vita" (Tabucchi, 2010, p. 10).
[15] "Il viaggio trova senso solo in se stesso, nell'essere viaggio." (Tabucchi, 2010, p. 10).

> *"Born from the most diverse occasions, always from travels but never from travels made to then become travel literature, these texts wandered like islands in a floating archipelago, scattered here and there in the most disparate locations and under different flags, almost without consciousness of belonging or identity, drifting in their own way. Collecting them was like making them a single float, a boat, a canoe; caulking the cracks in the keel, and from the currents to which they were entrusted, directing them toward a single direction: the journey of a book"*[16]*.*

Tabucchi's ontological elevation of travel catalyzed what can be termed "geopoetic (un)bordering." By asserting that travel found its meaning in the "being of the journey," he deterritorialized the European space. In this geopoetic framework, Europe was no longer a collection of rigid, sovereign landmasses but a "floating archipelago," a relational geography where identities were not fixed by national soil and were constantly in motion.

The act of gathering these island-texts into a "single boat" represented a subversive move against the hardening of European borders. It suggested that the true European identity was not in the stability of the "mainland" (the nation-state) but in the fluid coherence of the "vessel" (literature/language) that traversed these disparate locations. (Un)bordering occurred here: it acknowledged the "different flags" as historical markers while nullifying their exclusive power through the shared current of the journey. Hence, Tabucchi's geopoetics proposed a transnational subjectivity that viewed Europe as an ongoing "voyage of a book," where the land was always "on loan" and the only true homeland was the shared movement toward the Other.

The Shifting West and Author Sea: Woman of Porto Pim

Tabucchi's geographical imagination challenged the teleological stability of the "West" by repositioning its boundaries within the liminal space of the Azores. In *Donna di Porto Pim*, he posited a radical redefinition of Western identity: "the West has no end but continues to shift with us" (*l'Occidente non ha termine ma continua a spostarsi con noi*; Tabucchi, 2012, p. 13). By situating his narrative beyond the Pillars of Hercules, in a "mare ignoto" described as "endless and always the same" (*mare ignoto [...] senza fine e sempre uguale*; Tabucchi, 2012, p. 13), Tabucchi transformed the Azores from a physical archipelago into a site of ontological displacement.

These islands were reconstructed as a metaphysical map inhabited by the "gods of the soul, of feeling, and of passions" (*dèi dell'animo, del sentimento e delle passioni*; Tabucchi, 2012, p. 13). This shift allowed Tabucchi to diagnose the deep-seated malaise of the European psyche. He introduced the "God of Regret and Nostalgia" (*Dio del*

[16] "Nati dalle occasioni piu diverse, sempre da viaggi ma mai da viaggi fatti per poi diventare letteratura di viaggi, questi testi vagavano come isole in un arcipelago fluttuante, sparsi qua e la nelle sedi piu disparate e sotto diverse bandiere, quasi senza coscienza di un'appartenenza e di un'identita, a loro modo alla deriva. Raccoglierli e stato come farne un galleggiante unico, una barca, una canoa; calafatarne le fessure della chiglia, e dalle correnti a cui erano affidati indirizzarli verso un'unica direzione: il viaggio di un libro." (Tabucchi, 2010, p. 9).

Rimpianto e della Nostalgia; Tabucchi, 2012, p. 14), who governed "the pain for that which was not and could have been" (*la pena per ciò che non fu e che avrebbe potuto essere*; Tabucchi, 2012, p. 15). This served as a poignant emblem of an existential grief haunting modern Europe—a continent mourning the possibilities it had castrated or lost through the violent ruptures of its history. However, this melancholy was met with a darker, more restrictive counterpart: the "God of Hate." Isolated on an inaccessible conical island and manifested as "a small, gaunt yellow dog," this deity symbolized the dormant hostility and exclusive closure toward the Other, which often lurked behind the façade of nostalgia.

For Tabucchi, the Azores functioned as a microcosm of European contradiction. The continent emerged as a tragic space where the "lost universality" of regret and the fragmented bigotry of hate perpetually coexisted. Hence, the European identity was revealed as a fractured project: one that perpetually dreamt of ideal integration while remaining unable to exorcise the internal divisions and ghosts of its past.

Journey for the Shadow and Insomnia: Indian Nocturne

In *Indian Nocturne*, travel is synonymous with "insomnia." While Tabucchi distinguished that "insomnia belongs to the one who wrote the book, travel to the one who did it" (*L'insonnia appartiene a chi ha scritto il libro, il viaggio a chi lo fece*; Tabucchi, 2016, p. 9), he assumed the mutual penetration of the two. The epigraph quoting Maurice Blanchot clarified the essence of this journey:

> *"People who sleep badly seem to be more or less guilty: what do they do? They make the night present"*[17].

The narrator searched for his missing friend, Xavier, across Bombay, Madras, and Goa. Tabucchi provided a concrete "index of places" at the beginning of the book; however, he confessed:

> *"I do not know well if this was contributed by the illusion that a topographical repertoire, with the force that reality possesses, could give light to this Nocturne in which a Shadow is sought; or the unreasonable conjecture that some lover of incongruous paths might one day use it as a guide"*[18].

As the doctor in Bombay said, "This is the hospital of Bombay [...] leave aside your European categories, they are a proud luxury" (*lasci da parte le sue categorie europee, sono un lusso superbo;* Tabucchi, 2016, p. 24). In India, the boundaries of Western reason and logic collapsed. Concrete locations such as the Taj Mahal Hotel or the beaches of Goa paradoxically amplified the uncertainty of reality. The narrator sought the Other

[17] "*Le persone che dormono male sembrano essere più o meno colpevoli: che cosa fanno? Rendono la notte presente*." (Tabucchi, 2016, p. 7).
[18] "*Non so bene se a ciò ha contribuito l'illusione che un repertorio topografico, con la forza che il reale possiede, potesse dare luce a questo Notturno in cui si cerca un'Ombra; oppure l'irragionevole congettura che un qualche amante di percorsi incongrui potesse un giorno utilizzarlo come guida*." (Tabucchi, 2016, p. 9).

(his friend); however, he eventually encountered his own interiority—the "Shadow." This journey was a geographical movement and metaphysical voyage where the boundaries between self and other, subject and object, dissolved.

The geographical displacement in *Indian Nocturne* was a geopoetic (un)bordering, stripping away the rigid veneer of Western rationalism. The epistemological collapse experienced by the narrator, as he traversed the disorder of India and the sleeplessness of the night, suggested that the European subject must relinquish its exclusive superiority and redefine itself within the site of the Other. Here, the "Shadow" symbolized more than just a missing companion. It represented the "internal alterity" suppressed within the European ego.

Tabucchi dismantled the physical certainty guaranteed by maps and filled that void with the wakeful sensation of "insomnia." This opened a horizon of intersubjective coexistence, revealing that the subject and Other were inextricably intertwined within each other's shadows. Thus, the voyage in *Indian Nocturne* utilized an aesthetics of absence to reject the fixity of identity, mapping a new European sensibility capable of standing in solidarity with the Other beyond established borders.

Political (Un)bordering: The Intellectual as a "Useful Idiot"

"Time Ages Quickly": Ghosts After the Wall

Il tempo invecchia in fretta, which dealt with Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, explored the temporal fissures and scars of memory that remained in place of physical borders. In the story *I morti a tavola*, a former East German intelligence agent wandered through a reunified Berlin, sensing the absence of the Wall—the vanished great structure. Monologuing before Brecht's grave about his history of betrayal and surveillance, he experienced the sudden intrusion of ghosts from the past, disrupting the boundaries of linear time.

Furthermore, in *Clouds* (*Nuvole*), an officer who served in the Kosovo War dealt with the invisible contamination of depleted uranium exposure. When the officer taught a young girl, Isabella, the art of cloud divination, the scene juxtaposed fairytale imagination with a horrific reality (radiation, death). This served as an indictment of the invisible, lethal borders (pollution) that war and violence engrave upon the body and nature, transcending national frontiers:

> *"On the beach, there was a great silence; the bathers had reached the restaurant. '[The clouds] are fraying into a kind of stracciatella,' Isabella said in a low voice, 'like when the trail of an airplane unravels; now they are almost gone, how strange, I can hardly see them anymore, you look too.' The man did not move. [...] 'The prophecy of the end of all wars was made two thousand years ago; only no one had read it well until now, and today we have finally deciphered it on this beach, the two of us'"[19].*

[19] "Sulla spiaggia c'era un grande silenzio, i bagnanti avevano raggiunto il ristorante. '[le nuvole] Si stanno sfaldando in una specie di stracciatella, disse Isabella a bassa voce, come quando lascia degli aeroplani si

Hence, the attempt to read the future of war in the scattering of clouds metaphorically demonstrated the impact of historical violence on individual lives and the natural world.

"Diabolical Staging" and the Sofri Case

The intersection of literature and justice (or injustice) was the decisive site of (un)bordering in Tabucchi's public life. His defense of Adriano Sofri, a prominent figure of the Italian Left accused of murder, highlighted the tension between official (judicial verdict) and narrative truths.

The essay collection *Plato's Gastritis* (*La gastrite di Platone*) quoted a chilling phrase from the initial appellate court verdict against Sofri, Bompressi, and Pietrostefani in 1991. Judge Laura Bertolè Viale used the expression "diabolical staging," which was explicitly linked to the literature:

> "This diabolical staging is also, not by chance, the content of two short stories published in conjunction with the start of the first-degree trial—Leonardo Sciascia's A Simple Story—and second-degree trial—Antonio Tabucchi's Can the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in New York Cause a Typhoon in Beijing?"[20].

The judicial system accused the literature, specifically Tabucchi's work, of trespassing into the courtroom, interfering by creating a narrative that opposed the state's version of reality. Hence, literature had crossed the legal boundary of reality to invade the domain of "truth."

"Useful Idiots"

Tabucchi criticized the derogatory categorization used by state power to classify intellectuals. He quoted the indictment of Ugo Dello Russo (1991), the prosecution representative in the first appeal case:

> *"The carriage of victimhood is being pulled by these oxen, by these useful idiots [the intellectuals]"*21*.*

Responding to the prosecution's belittlement of intellectuals as "useful Idiots," Tabucchi inherited Pasolini's declarative knowledge—"I know" (*Io so*)—to confront the opacity of

sfilaccia, ora non si vedono quasi più, che strano, non riesco quasi più a vederle, guarda anche tu. L'uomo non si mosse.' '[...] la profezia della fine di ogni guerra la fece duemila anni fa, solo che nessuno finora l'aveva letta bene e noi oggi finalmente l'abbiamo decifrata su questa spiaggia, noi due.'" (Tabucchi, 2014b, p. 76).

[20] "Questa diabolica messinscena e anche il contenuto di due racconti pubblicati non a caso in concomitanza con l'inizio del processo di Io grado – Una storia semplice di Sciascia – e di 2° grado – 'Può il batter d'ali di una farfalla a New York procurare un tifone a Pechino?' di Tabucchi. Dalla sentenza del 1° processo d'appello contro Sofri, Bompressi e Pietrostefani redatta dal giudice a latere, dolt ssa Laura Berto le Viale, 1991." (Tabucchi, 1998, p. 11).

[21] "Il carro del vittimismo e tirato da questi buoi, da questi utili idioti [gli intellettuali]." (Tabucchi, 1998, p. 11).

power. Citing James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, he argued for a perspective of reversibility to uncover the hidden facets behind judicial truth.

This emphasized that democracy was an incomplete process requiring constant vigilance and critique, an attempt to redefine the European citizen's ethical boundaries. Tabucchi appropriated the insult to redefine the limits of intellectual responsibility. He rejected the role of the passive observer ("the ox") and advocated for the intellectual who interrogated complexity and sought to "disquiet" rather than provide solutions. This resonated with his self-definition as a "failed moralist," emphasizing individual responsibility and ethical rebellion over dogmatic moral preaching:

> *"It is difficult to draw a precise boundary. And perhaps it would be a task suited to an orthodox moralist, while I am nothing but a failed moralist, like all good moralists, for that matter. In my opinion, we must establish the following: where do personal responsibilities begin, and where, instead, does chance end?"*[22]*.*

This political position was made clearer in Settis's *Antonio Tabucchi's Three Disquiets: Homeland, Politics, Time*. Settis emphasized that the background of Tabucchi's engagement in "Politics" lay in his experiences in Portugal under the Salazar dictatorship, where writers used writing as a tool of resistance. For Tabucchi, the intellectual must cross the boundary of silence. Hence, in a state of "threatened democracy" (*democracia ameaçada*), he "chose not to remain silent" (*escolheu não ficar calado*) (Settis, 2012, p. 5). This demonstrated Tabucchi's conviction that the literature must pierce through the boundaries of political reality, instead of staying within the limits of aesthetic play.

Conclusion

Tabucchi's discourse on (de)bordering was rooted in a critique of the modern project known as "Europe." Historically, European modernity defined itself through the rigid cartography of the Westphalian system—a process of "border-making" that bifurcated the world into the rational subject and irrational "other" and demarcated civilization from barbarism. Hence, European identity functioned as an immunological system, predicated on the exclusion of the outside to preserve the integrity of the self.

Tabucchi, an interstitial figure who wrote in Portuguese and pursued Indian shadows amid Lisbon's mists, systematically disturbed these geographical, cultural, and spiritual boundaries from within. By utilizing the borders of European exceptionalism as an epistemological laboratory, he exposed these foundations' ontological precariousness, revealing that they were "on loan." This struck at the heart of the fictiveness of modern identity, replacing the illusion of permanence with a radical transience.

[22] "È difficile segnare un confine preciso. E forse si tratterebbe di un compito adatto a un moralista ortodosso, mentre io non sono altro che un moralista fallito, come tutti i buoni moralisti, del resto. Secondo me, dobbiamo stabilire quanto segue: dove hanno inizio le responsabilita personali e dove termina invece il caso?" (Tabucchi, 2022, p. 163).

However, Tabucchi's (de)bordering transcended the reconfiguration of Europe's political landscape. It evolved into a universal existential condition for contemporary humanity. From the collapse of modern borders, a planetary solidarity emerged—a *communitas* in which all beings shared a primordial sense of "absence" and "lack." His declaration that "everything is on loan" served as an ontological caveat to a humanity captivated by the modern fantasies of ownership and settlement. Consequently, (de)bordering represented a paradigm shift from the settler's logic to that of the wanderer (*Homo Viator*). It signified an epistemological migration from the isolated island of the "self" toward a polyphonic archipelago of the "Other." This "vibration of the border," distilled from Europe's traumatic and specific history, addressed a universal imperative: how the subject might "share," rather than "possess," identity in an era defined by radical uncertainty and fluidity.

Thus, Tabucchi's journey of (un)bordering can be defined as an aesthetic soteriology—a project of secular salvation for restoring the "abyss of the Other" and recovering the authenticity of existence. Through *Inquietudine*, he shattered the comfort of static settlement, forcing the subject into a state of perpetual displacement and compelling the realization that we were all, fundamentally, "strangers to geography and existence." For Tabucchi, the "homeland" (*patria*) was no longer an exclusive territory bound by blood or soil but a "portable" space of affection and reflection, constantly restructured by the Other's language.

His *Game of the Reverse* transcended narrative play, converging into an ethical mandate for the intellectual. It confronted the opacity of sovereign power by meticulously tracing the knots on the reverse side of official history. Furthermore, by projecting a "nostalgia for the future" through the paradoxical temporality of *Saudade*, he summoned the ghosts of the past into the present, maximizing the density of presence through absence.

The "plural self" and "fluid geography" constructed by Tabucchi created irreparable cracks within the rigid framework of the nation-state. Within his oeuvre, the self was expanded through its dissolution; identity was reborn as an archipelagic subject, capable of reciprocal coexistence only through its own fragmentation. This "aesthetics of absence" served as a powerful philosophical weapon against the contemporary crises of exclusive hate and isolation. It offered a profound reflective response on how we may inhabit and care for one another's pain on a planet where everything was "on loan." Tabucchi proved that the most dignified form of human existence was found in constantly wandering on the border.

(Un)bordering in Tabucchi's Europe was an ethical imperative. It was a call, as Barthes suggested, to recognize the Other within the self. It was a request to accept that we were all essentially travelers with "nerves on the gallows," as depicted in Campos's poetry, carrying suitcases filled with the weight of aesthetics and the memory of ancient crimes. We moved toward a horizon that receded as we approached. Hence, Tabucchi's Europe was a chronicle of souls in constant motion, bound together by the shared unease and persistent vibrations.

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IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT IN THE GERMAN ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND (AFD) AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The far-right German party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), made a dramatic leap in the February 2025 German federal election, securing 20.8% of the vote and emerging as the second most popular party. This development poses a serious challenge to the so-called "firewall" (Brandmauer) that has historically excluded far-right parties from Germany's political mainstream. This study provides a theoretical analysis of how the AfD has generated and leveraged cleavages within the established German party system, and how existing parties have responded by exploiting those divisions to consolidate their own positions. The analysis traces the origins of the AfD, compares its founding platform to subsequent electoral manifestos, and examines the evolution of its ideology. The rise of far-right parties in Germany has been predominantly influenced by developments in the former East German regions. This phenomenon is primarily interpreted within a socioeconomic context, encompassing the increase in immigrants and refugees, and the subsequent decline in employment opportunities. This study aims to draw implications for peace in light of the rise of far-right parties. By examining the German case-which is already experiencing challenges, and regional conflicts following reunification-, this research ultimately seeks to contribute to the construction of a peaceful and democratic society.

Keywords

Far-right parties, Alternative für Deutschland, German politics, ideological evolution, socioeconomic cleavages.

Resumo

O partido alemão de extrema-direita, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), registou um avanço dramático nas eleições federais alemãs de fevereiro de 2025, obtendo 20,8% dos votos e emergindo como o segundo partido mais popular. Esta evolução representa um sério desafio à chamada «barreira de proteção» (Brandmauer) que, historicamente, tem excluído os partidos de extrema-direita da corrente dominante da política alemã. Este estudo apresenta uma análise teórica sobre a forma como o AfD gerou e aproveitou as divisões no seio do sistema partidário alemão estabelecido, e como os partidos existentes responderam, explorando essas divisões para consolidar as suas próprias posições. A análise traça as origens do AfD, compara a sua plataforma fundadora com os manifestos eleitorais subsequentes e examina a evolução da sua ideologia. A ascensão dos partidos de extrema-direita na Alemanha tem sido predominantemente influenciada pelos desenvolvimentos nas antigas regiões da Alemanha Oriental. Este fenómeno é interpretado principalmente num contexto socioeconómico, abrangendo o aumento do número de imigrantes e refugiados e o subsequente declínio das oportunidades de emprego. Este estudo visa extrair implicações para a paz à luz da ascensão dos partidos de extrema-direita. Ao examinar o caso alemão —

que já enfrenta desafios e conflitos regionais na sequência da reunificação —, esta investigação procura, em última análise, contribuir para a construção de uma sociedade pacífica e democrática.

Palavras-chave

Partidos de extrema-direita, Alternative für Deutschland, política alemã, evolução ideológica, clivagens socioeconómicas.

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IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT IN THE GERMAN ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND (AFD) AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

JEONG-AE CHOI

Introduction

The far-right German party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), made a dramatic leap in the February 2025 German federal election, securing 20.8% of the vote and emerging as the second most popular party. This figure represents a doubling of the 10.3% share received in the 2021 election, signifying the inaugural instance of a non-traditional party attaining second place. Germany is currently confronted with a predicament concerning the recognition of the AfD as a significant political entity. Historically, the ascent and mainstreaming of far-right parties in Germany was regarded as implausible within the European context. Nevertheless, the recent success of the AfD poses a substantial challenge to the so-called "firewall"[1] that has traditionally excluded far-right parties from mainstream German politics.

The present study initiates with a theoretical analysis of the ways in which the AfD has generated cleavages within the established German political system. The study examines how existing parties have utilized these cleavages to consolidate their own positions and traces both the origins of the AfD and the process by which it has refined and exploited such divisions. The present study has been conducted for the purpose of comparing the foundational platform of the AfD with the electoral manifestos that the party has subsequently published. In addition, the study will analyse the evolution of the party's ideology. The present study aims to re-evaluate the ideological direction of the AfD and its identity as a political party through this analytical process.

The emergence of far-right political parties in Germany has been predominantly influenced by developments in the former East German regions. This phenomenon is predominantly interpreted within a socioeconomic context, encompassing the increase in immigrants and refugees, and the subsequent decline in employment opportunities. The present study aims to draw implications for peace in light of the rise of far-right parties.

[1] Political firewall (or Brandmauer in German): A tacit or explicit agreement among mainstream parties to politically isolate extremist parties, whether far-right or far-left. This strategy specifically entails: (1) categorical exclusion from coalition government formation; (2) refusal of parliamentary cooperation; and (3) public declarations of political distance. The rejection of coalition formations among political parties is, on occasion, employed as a term 'cordon sanitaire'.

This research seeks to contribute to the construction of a peaceful and democratic society by examining the German case. The German case is already experiencing challenges related to immigrants, refugees and regional conflicts following reunification.

Theoretical Analysis

Since the 1980s, the primary catalyst for the surge in far-right parties across Europe has been the issue of immigration. Immigration to Western Europe saw a notable increase in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with a significant influx from the former Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. In accordance with the prevailing immigration theory, the social impact of immigration, in conjunction with elevated levels of economic insecurity, engendered the emergence of far-right political parties that were opposed to immigration. This was due to the perception that immigration was associated with unemployment and crime. From this standpoint, far-right parties evolved into single-issue parties that represented pervasive xenophobia.

The second causal factor was rooted in a sense of political alienation. The prevailing sentiment of voter discontent with established political parties, particularly with regard to their responses to pressing issues such as economic growth, unemployment, corruption, crime, and immigration, has resulted in a pervasive climate of distrust. The far right has been observed to profit from protest votes cast against well-established political parties. This phenomenon can be attributed to the success of the far right in disseminating anti-establishment messages, coupled with their own lack of governing experience[2].

A review of studies discussing party structure within the scholarship on AfD and far-right parties indicates that the core element behind the rise of AfD is resistance to and rupture from established politics. The political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is positioned in a political landscape that encompasses both materialism and postmaterialism, in which it competes with the postmaterialistically re-radicalized Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Grüne). Within the left-right spectrum, it is in direct opposition to Die Linke, while along the moderate-radical axis, it engages in conflict with other established political parties[3].

Such patterns of conflict are not unique to the AfD. For instance, the Grüne also experienced a rupture from established parties during the 1980s. In the Grüne party, members who subscribed to a realist political philosophy, with a particular emphasis on the party's transformation into a governing party and the pursuit of pragmatic policies, emerged as the dominant faction. This shift in ideological orientation led to a moderation of the party's previously radical character[4]. In summary, although the Grüne party

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[2] Karapin, R. (1998). Radical-right and neo-fascist political parties in Western Europe. *Comparative Politics*, 30(2), 213–234; Betz, H.-G. (1994). *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press; Kitschelt, H., & McGann, A. J. (1995). *The radical right in Western Europe: A comparative analysis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
[3] Jung, B.-G. (2023). The emergence of AfD and changes in the ideological structure of the German party system. *European Studies*, 41(2), 17.
[4] Jung, B.-G. (2023). The emergence of AfD and changes in the ideological structure of the German party system. *European Studies*, 41(2), 17-18.

emerged amid the diffusion of postmaterialist values as a significant social consciousness, the subsequent incorporation of postmaterialism by mainstream political parties prevented the formation of a wholly new axis of cleavage. Consequently, the Grüne were able to assimilate into the prevailing political structure.

Amidst these developments, it can be argued that the AfD has succeeded in establishing a new and robust axis of cleavage. In other words, the recent rise of AfD can be interpreted as a form of resistance to established politics-a feat that the Grüne was ultimately unable to achieve. The transformation of the German party system has already been the subject of academic debate; for instance, the disappearance of the so-called "0.5 party" that once held the casting vote, and the emergence of third and fourth parties as kingmakers, have led to the expectation that, following Sartori's typology of party systems under competitive conditions, Germany's party landscape will be reorganized into a moderate multiparty system[5].

The Cleavage theory, as conceptualized by Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, focuses on the emergence of groups with divergent political interests along social lines of division[6]. Lipset and Rokkan paid particular attention to the processes through which such cleavages manifest, leading to the formation of competing political blocs. For instance, society may be divided along economic lines, regional lines, or racial lines, resulting in collective opposition that is expressed through party competition in elections.

Herbert Kitschelt further developed this theoretical framework by arguing that the structure of party competition is defined by positions on three core issues: citizenship, process, and resource allocation. The concept of "Citizenship" is theorized as a spectrum ranging from cosmopolitan to particularistic politics; The term "process" is employed to denote the mode of social decision-making, with authoritarian politics favoring hierarchical decision-making and radical-liberal politics emphasizing participatory processes; and "resource allocation" concerns the distribution of social resources, with two opposing poles of political redistribution and market-based allocation[7]. According to these dimensions, the AfD has adopted an extreme image by positioning itself in opposition to established parties (citizenship), has employed modern approaches such as the use of social media (process), and has taken a strong stance against redistribution, garnering significant support in the former East German regions (resource allocation).

In this model of European party competition, Kitschelt classifies and explains the competitive models of German parties, arguing that the traditional left–right pattern of competition has, as a result of social changes in advanced capitalist societies, gradually shifted to a new axis of political cleavage: 'left-libertarian' versus 'right-authoritarian'[8]. Meanwhile, in his 2004 revision of the theory, Kitschelt explains that the distribution of political preferences is not static but continues to diversify.

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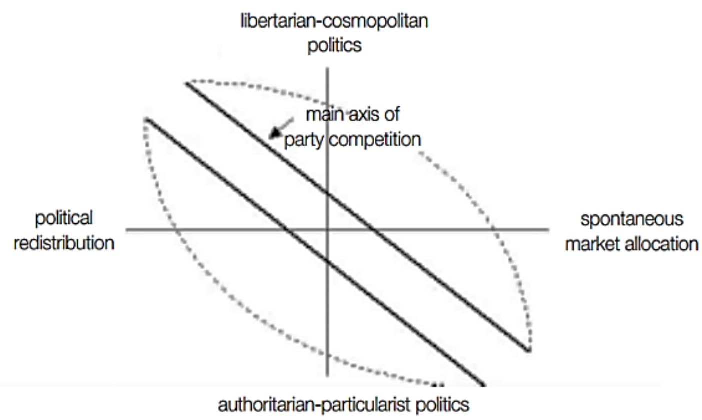
[5] Jeong, H.-M. (2013). "Non-mainstream Parties and Changes in the German Party System," EU Studies, No. 33, pp. 335–374.

[6] Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (Eds.). (1967). *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

[7] Kim, Y.-T. (2017). The change of the German Green Party's basic program and the structure of party competition in Germany. *Korean Journal of Party Studies*, 6(1), 193–214.

[8] Kitschelt, H. (2004). *Germany: Beyond the Stable State.* London: Routledge.

Figure 1. Kitschelt's Model of European Party Competition Structure



Source: Kitschelt, Herbert. (1992).

This revision was necessitated by critiques of the new radical right, as Kitschelt's earlier model had failed to acknowledge the rise of an authoritarian working-class segment that demonstrated a preference for social redistribution in economic matters[9]. Kitschelt's argument posits that the future model of political competition is likely to undergo unpredictable changes, given the fundamental nature of preference formation, which links markets, organizations, and socio-cultural spaces to political positions. The model of party competition that Kitschelt described, spanning from the 1980s to the millennium, is illustrated in the following figure.

The current AfD advocates radical liberalism and market-based resource allocation, which can be illustrated as follows in the model[10]. Kim Young-tae (2017) explains the position of the Grüne as that of radical-liberal cosmopolitans, and notes that AfD, in terms of its location and its resistance to the authoritarian interpretations of mainstream politics, shares a similar foundation. The key difference, however, is that while the Grüne is positioned in favor of political redistribution, AfD is situated on the side of market-based allocation.

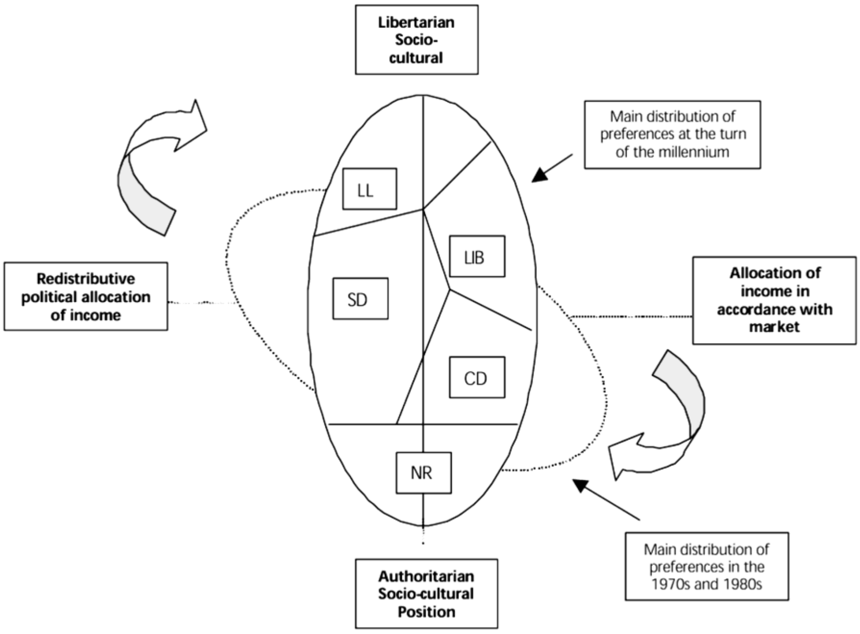
As Kitschelt's theoretical framework posits, the ongoing fragmentation of political preferences necessitates a multidimensional analytical approach. The potential transformation of the working class and other popular strata into authoritarian-oriented segments, along with emerging forms of class differentiation that diverge from conventional patterns of political redistribution and market-based allocation, signals a need for reinterpreting contemporary social orders through novel perspectives. Increasingly, structural shifts along the axes of digitalization, resource allocation, and supply chain security are evolving into more active and central forces of political-

[9] Kitschelt, H. (2003, May). *Diversification and reconfiguration of party systems in postindustrial democracies*. Accountability and Representation in European Democracy Conference, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, Harvard University.

[10] Kim, Y.-T. (2017). Changes in the basic program of the German Green Party and the structure of party competition in Germany. *Korean Journal of Party Studies*, 6(1), 193–214.

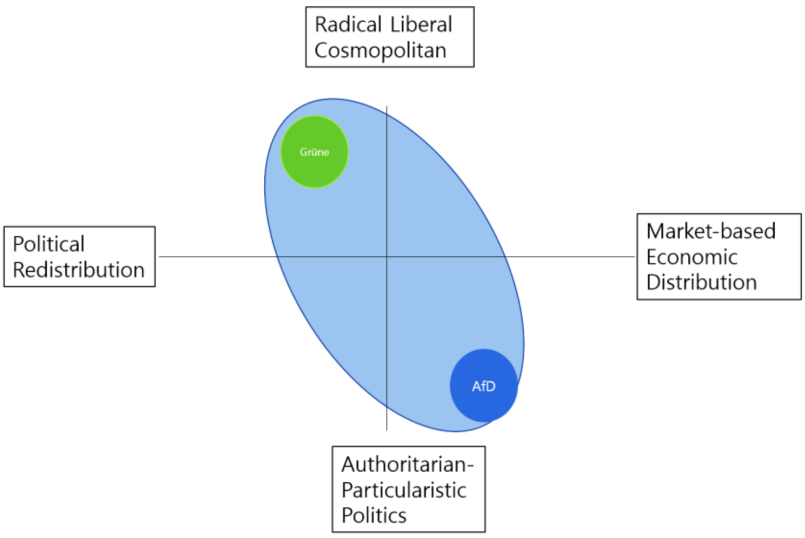
economic change. This development demands renewed theoretical attention to the dynamics of class formation and policy realignment.

Figure 2. Kitschelt's Model of European Party Competition Structure, 1980–2000



Source: Kitschelt, Herbert. (2003)

Figure 3. Position of AfD in Kitschelt's Model of European Party Competition Structure



Changes in the AfD's Platform

The AfD adopted its Basic platform(Grundsatzprogramm) in 2016, a document which meticulously delineates the party's policy orientations and positions. It is important to note that 2016 marked the commencement of internal factionalization within the AfD. The party began to divide along populist lines, particularly concerning economic issues and migration[11]. The table of contents of the AfD's 96-page Grundsatzprogramm is organized into fourteen chapters. The contents are as follows when classified by policy domain. The opening chapter, titled "Democracy and Fundamental Values," posits that the prevailing political parties offer no viable alternatives in their policy stances. This assertion is characterized by the AfD as a structural constraint that poses a grave threat to democracy and the rule of law (p. 9: "Schlanker Staat für freie Bürger"). The party's initial prioritization of economic policy is evident in sections such as "Europe and the Euro," "Economy, Digitalization, and Consumer Protection," and "Taxes and Finance."

With respect to foreign policy, the AfD places significant emphasis on the preservation of national independence and sovereignty, adopting a critical stance toward supranational integration. While the party expresses support for the maintenance of NATO, it stipulates that German participation in military interventions should be contingent upon alignment with Germany's security interests. In regard to the situation with Russia, the AfD has expressed support for the reduction of tensions.

Table 1. Table of Contents of the AfD's Basic Platform

Category	Chapter
Democracy	1. Democracy and Fundamental Values
Economic Policy	2. Europe and the Euro 10. Economy, Digitalization, and Consumer Protection 11. Taxes and Finance 12. Energy Policy
Foreign Policy	3. Internal Security and Justice 4. Foreign and Security Policy
Social Policy	5. Labor Market and Social Policy 6. Family and Children 13. Nature Conservation, Agriculture, Environment 14. Infrastructure and Housing
Culture, Identity	7. Culture, Language, and Identity 8. Education and Research 9. Immigration, Integration, and Asylum

The most emphatic stance in the basic platform is on culture and identity. In the section on "Education and Research," the party addresses the normalization of social policies, such as opposition to integrated schools and support for traditional educational systems. The party also opposes gender studies and sex education. However, the section then transitions to issues related to migration, refugees, and integration, including opposition

[11] Choi, J.-A. (2018). Background of the rise of far-right parties in Germany: Focusing on the Euro and migrant factors. *Oughtopia*, 33(1), 39–67.

to the integration of Islamic education. Keeping the basic platform in mind, the following section compares the AfD's manifestos from three different elections.

Table 2. Comparison of the Table of Contents of the AfD's Manifestos from Three Elections

	2017 Federal Parliament Election Platform	**2021 Federal Parliament Election Platform: Germany, but normal**	**2025 Federal Parliament Election Platform: Time for Germany**
Democracy	1. Defense of German Democracy	1. Democracy and the Rule of Law	9. Democracy and the Rule of Law 10. The People Are Sovereign
Culture, Identity	5. Refugees Need Borders: Migration and Refugee Policy 6. Islam in Conflict with the Liberal Democratic Basic Order 7. Welcoming Culture for Children: Family Support and Demographic Development 8. Education and Schools: The Courage for Differentiation 9. Culture and Media	9. Islam 10. Immigration, Refugees, Integration: Acting Humanely and Rationally – Protecting Germany 16. Culture 17. Media	7. Refugee and Immigration Policy 13. Culture and Media Policy
Economic Policy	2. The Euro Has Failed: Currency, Monetary, and Financial Policy 10. Taxes and Finance, Economy and Jobs	3. The EU and Europe 4. Taxes and Finance 5. Economy: Blue Deal 6. The Euro Has Failed	1. Social Market Economy and Health 2. Construction, Housing, Infrastructure, Energy, Transport, and Digital Affairs 3. Finance and Taxes 4. Monetary Policy – The Failure of the Euro System
Foreign Policy	3. Finance and Taxes 4. Monetary Policy – The Failure of the Euro System	7. Foreign and Defense Policy 8. Internal Security	6. External Security
Social Policy	11. Social Policy 12. Our Health System Is at Risk 13. Ending Hostility to Technology: Energy and Climate 14. Maintaining and Expanding Transport Networks, Strengthening Housing Construction, Developing Rural Areas 15. Environmental, Nature and Animal Protection, Consumer Protection, and Agriculture	2. Freedom and Responsibility 11. Family Policy 12. Labor and Social Policy 13. AfD's Pension Concept 14. Health Policy 15. Education, Science, and Research 18. Construction, Housing, Rental 19. Climate, Energy, Technology, and Digitalization 20. Mobility and Infrastructure 21. Agriculture, Environment, and Consumer Protection	5. Agriculture, Environment, and Climate 8. Internal Security 11. Family and Demographics 12. Education, Science, and Openness to Technology

In recent years, the AfD has participated in three electoral processes and issued three electoral manifestos. Quantitatively, the 2017 manifesto is 74 pages in length and commences with a focus on the defense of German democracy. In the 2017 election, the AfD emerged as a prominent party, garnering 12.6% of the vote. The party's most significant support base is in the former East German regions, where in 2017, 21.2% of the population expressed support for the AfD, which is nearly double the 10.7% of the former West German regions. In the aftermath of unsuccessful bid to secure parliamentary representation in the Bundestag during the 2013 election, the AfD initiated a systematic electoral engagement starting in 2017, accompanied by the formulation a comprehensive manifesto. This iteration of the manifesto is distinguished by its concise chapters and direct, assertive language.

The year 2017 marked the commencement of profound debates and confrontations surrounding the subjects of migrants and refugees. In this context, the manifesto of the AfD notably incorporated content pertaining to refugees and Islam. The section on education and schools was titled "Courage for Differentiation," and it explicitly and actively expressed opposition to religions, particularly Islam[12]. The term "Volk" (people/nation) appeared 67 times. With regard to foreign policy, the manifesto expounds on internal security, with a particular emphasis on the issue of terrorism. In the context of addressing pressing concerns regarding public safety, a range of subjects were discussed, including strategies to combat foreign crime and enhance investigative capabilities. These measures were presented as a series of actions aimed at safeguarding citizens' well-being, collectively referred as an anti-terror response.

In terms of social policy, the AfD is in opposition to the ideology of gender and places significant emphasizes traditional forms of family and marriage. With regard to education policy, the party rejects integrative ideological education and strongly criticizes both comprehensive policies and Muslim-related educational programs. Furthermore, the AfD places a higher value on practical, field-oriented education than on theory-centered approaches. The party particularly asserts that the educational rights of German children are being infringed upon by immigrant children who lack sufficient language skills. The AfD opposes the Bologna bachelor system and has advocated for a return to the traditional Magister/Diplom system. The manifesto further asserts the necessity of academic neutrality in educational institutions, contending that these institutions have become laboratories for left-wing social experimentation.

With regard to the matter of immigration policy, the AfD has highlighted demographic issues in Europe and Africa. Specifically, the party he noted that while Europe is facing with a decline in population, Africa and Islamic countries are witnessing a rapid surge in population growth, leading to significant demographic imbalances and substantial mass migration. In summary, a substantial segment of the 2017 electoral manifesto asserts that German society is experiencing a threat to its cohesion as a result of immigration.

[12] For example, the manifesto rejected minarets (the towers of Islamic mosques) as symbols of Islamic power and opposed the call to prayer by muezzins. According to the manifesto, the muezzin's call asserts that no god exists except Allah, which the AfD described as religious imperialism. This stance contradicts the contemporary practice of tolerant coexistence among religious communities (p. 35).

A significant proportion of the manifesto on culture, media, and social policy addresses or is underpinned by issues related to immigration.

In the realms of economic, social, and technological policy, the AfD persists its use of contentious language. The political party's economic policy is predicated on the premise that Germany should withdraw from the Eurozone and actively advocate for the reintroduction of a national currency, such as the Deutsche Mark. Market-related policies, including taxation, are predicated on the principle of minimizing state intervention and upholding a free market order as a core value. With regard to climate change, the AfD has adopted a skeptical stance regarding the scientific consensus on the matter, characterizing it as a form of ideology. In a variety of social and technological policy areas, including climate, energy, transportation, and housing, the party has expressed a strong opposition to international norms, with a particular emphasis on those established by the European Union.

The 2021 electoral manifesto underwent a substantial expansion, increasing from 15 chapters in the previous version to 21 chapters. During this period, the AfD received 10.3% of the vote. The party's primary support base remained in the former East German regions, with the widening gap of 19.8% in the East versus 8.2% in the West, compared to 2017. A comparative analysis of the 2021 manifesto reveals a shift in the utilization of chapter headings, which have become more attributed to the employment of objective nouns as chapter titles, a departure from the emotive or declarative phrases that characterized previous manifestos.

It is noteworthy that the chapter entitled "Chapter 9: Islam" is written with a discernible objective. The primary contention in this discourse is that the critique of Islam, akin to the critique of any other religion, should be safeguarded by the principle of freedom of expression. The manifesto demands a comprehensive prohibition on the wearing of burqas and niqabs in public spaces and asserts the imperative a addressing any form of discrimination against indivisuals of Jewish heritage. For instance, on page 84, the following assertion is made: "Jewish life in Germany is threatened not only by right-wing extremists but also from Muslims who harbor animosity towards Jews and Israel. Attacks on Jewish people and anti-Semitic insults must be consistently prosecuted.[13]"

The prevailing tone in this section evokes a sense of threat posed by Islam. The employment of terms such as "Parallelgesellschaften" (parallel societies), "Friedensrichter" (Sharia judges), and "Dschihadisten" (jihadists) is a recurring phenomenon, with the intent of conveying the notion that Islam poses a systemic threat. Exclusionary language is also readily employed; for instance, direct references are made to organizations such as the "türkisch-islamischen Anstalt für Religion (DITIB)" and the "Muslimbruderschaft" (Muslim Brotherhood), while strong terms such as "abolition," "ban," and "cessation" are repeatedly used for emphasis.

Examining the manifesto for the general election held in February 2025 and comparing it with previous versions reveals the AfD's evolving trajectory. First, the table of contents

[13] "Jüdisches Leben wird in Deutschland nicht nur von Rechtsextremisten, sondern zunehmend auch von juden- und israelfeindlichen Muslimen bedroht. Angriffe auf Juden sowie antisemitische Beleidigungen müssen konsequent strafrechtlich geahndet werden."

has shifted from provocative phrases to more objective language. While the 2017 manifesto featured assertive and emotive headings, and the 2021 version was more specific and issue-oriented, the 2025 manifesto adopts concise and neutral terminology. For example, the 2017 heading "Refugees Need Borders: Migration and Refugee Policy" changed to "Immigration, Refugees, Integration: Acting Humanely and Rationally - Protecting Germany" in 2021, and then to simply "Refugee and Immigration Policy" in 2025.

Second, the AfD continues to emphasize a sense of crisis, particularly in its hardline stance on refugee and immigration policy ("Deutschland muss wieder selbst entscheiden, wer ins Land kommt" - Germany must once again decide for itself who enters the country). The party still employs emotionally charged terms such as "massive Zuwanderung" (mass immigration), "unverantwortliche Politik" (irresponsible policy), and "Überforderung" (systemic overload). However, the 2025 manifesto uses far more indirect language than previous versions. The chapter on Islam has disappeared, and there is no overt criticism of Muslims. While the manifesto still implicitly criticizes immigrants, the tone is noticeably more subdued. For instance, phrases like "Kriminalität steigt, Gefährdung der inneren Sicherheit" (suggesting a link between increased immigration and crime) are less direct than before, and immigrants and refugees are described as a "Belastung der Sozialsysteme" (burden on social systems) without explicit hostility. Some immigrants are framed as "Sozialtouristen" (welfare tourists), indicating a continued, albeit more subtle, critical stance.

Third, the AfD now attaches the term "ideology" to pragmatic issues in an effort to deconstruct the discourse surrounding ideology itself. One of the party's key issues is climate policy, on which it maintains a strong position. For example, the AfD utilizes chapters on democracy to argue against climate initiatives such as the Green Deal, repeatedly criticizing the EU's Green Deal as "planned economy" and "climate ideology." The party's stance on electric vehicles is also unequivocal: technological development and market forces, rather than ideology-based prohibitive policies (auf ideologischer Verbotspolitik), should determine outcomes. Interestingly, the AfD does not use the term "ideology" indiscriminately. In the 2025 manifesto, the word appears 44 times, most frequently (seven times) in the chapter on "Agriculture, Environment, Climate." By employing the term "ideology" in areas not typically interpreted as ideological, such as climate and media, the AfD seeks to shed the risks associated with grand ideological discourse and instead project a pragmatic image.

The Limits of the Moderation of the AfD and Its Implications

As demonstrated in the preceding analysis, the AfD has undergone a shift in its ideological orientation, endeavoring to present a more pragmatic facade. These efforts are inextricably linked to the party's ongoing survival. The German Federal Constitutional Court has observed that the AfD is susceptible to being designated as a far-right party[14]. Since 2021, there have been ongoing debates regarding the far-right tendencies of the AfD. In the current discourse, the argument has been posited that the prohibition of anti-

[14] Deutschlandfunk. (2025, May 5). AfD-Verbotsverfahren: *Was spricht dafür und was dagegen?*

democratic parties or organizations constitutes a tool available to a well-defended democracy, thereby providing grounds for the potential dissolution of the AfD. The legal foundation for such a prohibition is articulated in Article 21 of the Basic Law[15].

However, in February 2025, a majority vote in favor of initiating the ban procedure was not achieved. While 124 members of parliament supported the motion, but this was insufficient to bring it to a vote in the Bundestag. Historically, the Federal Constitutional Court has prohibited the formation of political parties that exhibit Nazi tendencies, as evidenced by the banning of the Socialist Reich Party (SRP) during the 1950s. Similarly, the German Communist Party (KPD), which demonstrated Stalinist leanings, has also been disbanded. While it is possible to follow the ban procedure based on the Court’s judgment, concerns have been raised that such a process is not only complex but could also harm the democratic system itself.

Conversely, the capacity of the AfD to attain full moderation, given its present momentum, remains a subject of speculation. A potential avenue through which far-right forces may evolve towards a more moderate stance is through a process of “de-demonization.” A proximate illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in France, where Marine Le Pen's strategy of disavowing her father's controversial views proved effective in the 2011 electoral campaign, thereby enabling her to attain a level of electoral success that her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, had not been able to achieve during the 1970s. In the period under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the National Front (subsequently renamed the National Rally) underwent a transformation that led to its adoption of an image consistent with the traditional right-wing party. This shift was evident in the outcomes of the general elections[16].

An alternative perspective reveals that the moderation of political parties has been demonstrated through the case of the Grüne. The efforts directed towards the moderation of the AfD are associated with the party's capacity to contribute to the promotion of peace. The following strategies are among those that the AfD can employ toward moderation. At the ideological level, the party could adopt a strategy of expanding toward the center, a process exemplified by Grüne. Secondly, it could potentially facilitate the restoration of relations with major parties and contribute to the breakdown of the cordon sanitaire. Thirdly, the initiative has the potential to expand its support base. However, it should be noted that these three conditions are also closely related to the limitations of the AfD's moderation.

Firstly, if the AfD continues to moderate its stance, the party risks losing its dedicated and fervent support base. The formation of the AfD was predicated on the presence of profound ideological divisions, a factor that has been intricately intertwined with the party's identity. The AfD, founded in 2013, initially emerged as a moderate right-wing party that opposed the euro. However, in 2016, due to internal divisions, a faction that emphasized anti-Islam and anti-immigrant stances gained control and expanded its

[15] Parteien, die nach ihren Zielen oder nach dem Verhalten ihrer Anhänger darauf ausgehen, die freiheitliche demokratische Grundordnung zu beeinträchtigen oder zu beseitigen oder den Bestand der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zu gefährden, sind verfassungswidrig(Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Art 21).
[16] Cho, H.-S. (2024). The French parliamentary election and European populism: The success and limitations of the National Rally (RN). *Legislative Studies*, 30(3), 38–66.

influence. In the face of the inability to identify pragmatic solutions to the substantial influx of refugees, the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 resulted in the arrival of new refugees from Ukraine. Concurrently, Germany encountered supply chain disruptions, the impact of the COVD-19 pandemic, and an economic downturn, precipitating a decline in public trust in the established political parties. During this period, the AfD party experienced significant growth, capitalizing on prevalent anxieties regarding the future and distrust of the political establishment. It is evident that the most significant basis for the proliferation of far-right political entities in Europe is the prevailing sentiment of disillusionment with established left- and right-wing parties. The ascendance of the AfD in Germany can be interpreted as a manifestation of this disillusionment with conventional political discourse. In essence, the capacity of the AfD to effectively assimilate is inherently constrained.

Secondly, due to the political isolation of the AfD, Germany's major parties adhere to a strategy of non-cooperation with the AfD, a practice referred to as the "Brandmauer" (firewall). This phenomenon functions as a structural impediment, hindering the incorporation of the AfD into the political mainstream, irrespective of any policy moderation. In contrast, France's response entailed the exclusion of radical policy stances, thereby embarking on a course of moderation. The RN (Rassemblement National), while maintaining an anti-elite rhetoric, has also recruited elites from institutions such as Sciences Po and ENA into its leadership. Moreover, it relinquished its stance on exiting the eurozone, progressively adopting a stance that advocated for the reform of Europe in accordance with French national interests. In the case of Italy's Giorgia Meloni, it is evident that she has demonstrated a capacity to adapt to the norms and institutional frameworks of the EU. This adaptation is characterized by the adoption of a pragmatic policy approach, which contrasts with the advancement of extreme policy agendas[17].

Thirdly, the AfD has garnered substantial support in the former East Germany. Transcending its geographical limitations necessitates broadening its electoral base beyond this regional stronghold. For instance, in the aftermath of reunification, sentiments of political and economic marginalization—manifested in the perception of being relegated to "second-class citizenship"—fueled not only nostalgia for socialism but also aspirations for national resurgence. Consequently, this socio-political context contributed to elevated levels of support for radical ethnic nationalism and cultural conservatism in these regions.

While the AfD has achieved considerable nationwide expansion by 2025, securing second place in the February 2025 federal election, significant geographical disparities persist. The party continues to command over one-third of votes in eastern states, whereas its support in western regions remains comparatively modest. The party's challenge has evolved from a mere matter of geographical expansion to one of consolidating support across diverse regional contexts. Moreover, it is imperative to overcome its current state of political isolation to achieve governing power. Absent such consolidation, the AfD faces a quandary that fundamentally restricts its progress toward political normalization.

[17] Cho, H.-S. (2024). The French parliamentary election and European populism: The success and limitations of the National Rally (RN). *Legislative Studies*, 30(3), 56-57.

Specifically, the party risks losing its core eastern base while failing to garner sufficient mainstream acceptance in the west.

Meanwhile, the AfD continues to face significant challenges in altering its perception nationwide, particularly within the former West Germany, where its reputation remains predominantly negative. The social underpinnings that foster support for the AfD in former East Germany encompass economic disparities and regional imbalances, phenomena that are also evident in countries such as Italy. While the party's robust support base has undoubtedly contributed to its rise, it is also a significant factor that hinders the party's capacity to consolidate its expansion through moderation. The party's electoral prospects in the Western regions are characterized by volatility and dependence on protest voting. Conversely, any strategic shift toward moderation may result in the alienation of the radical core in the Eastern regions, which is crucial for maintaining organizational stability and ideological coherence.

Conclusion

Thus far, we have analyzed the electoral support for the AfD in Germany has been conducted, along with an examination of its implications. Moreover, the challenges associated with consolidating geographic and regional support have been thoroughly assessed. This support is imperative for the party's evolution. Finally, an analysis has been conducted to determine the ways in which the party has attempted to overcome its political isolation. The crux of this quandary is the paradox of moderation. The AfD has solidified its position as a novel pole of opposition by capitalizing on divisions within the established order. However, it now faces inconsistencies in its attempts to moderate its conduct in order to gain acceptance into that very establishment.

The German case offers several critical implications. First, the most salient grievance among former East German citizens— and a primary catalyst for the far-right party's ascendance— centers on labor market anxieties. These populations regard refugees and immigrants as direct competitors for employment, a perception that has fueled both economic marginalization and socio-political alienation. The electoral entrenchment of the AfD in the former East Germany must be understood within this economic and social context, where citizens have gravitated toward the party's ethno-nationalist and anti-immigration platform as a response to perceived structural disadvantages. Consequently, a more comprehensive examination of the immigrant issue within the context of social alienation in the former East Germany after German reunification is imperative. It is imperative that this examination encompass a thorough assessment of the social integration of immigrants.

Secondly, it is imperative to perpetually examine methods of social integration by evaluating not only the federal government of Germany but also the practices of state governments. North Rhine-Westphalia is the region with the largest immigrant population in all of Germany, possessing a long history of migrant workers. The state government's social integration education is characterized by its comprehensive approach to educational integration, encompassing both formal and informal educational settings[18]. Consequently, despite having the highest proportion of foreigners, North Rhine-Westphalia continues to demonstrate the highest level of social inclusion. A more in-depth analysis is particularly necessary regarding bodies such as the Social Integration Council for immigrants and native residents. The government's endeavors to foster social integration are inherently deficient without the active involvement of local residents. The cultivation of awareness and policy-level reflection, complemented by active social discourse, is instrumental in fostering vigilance against the far-right and nurturing a healthier democracy.

Thirdly, a high level of micro-level analysis of social conflicts is necessary, enabling the development of multi-layered approaches to resolve them. In the case of Germany, it is imperative to undertake a more comprehensive analysis of the support base for the AfD, with a particular focus on examining the patterns of AfD support among both younger and older generations. The emergence of far-right political parties can be attributed to various factors, including economic inequality, population decline, and political alienation. These factors vary in their impact across different generations and geographical regions. Society exhibits diversity across economic and social strata, with multiple interests intermingling.

This finding aligns with the previously emphasized importance of social integration and connects to the significance of social integration education targeting not only immigrants but also the general public. The recent rise of far-right politics, evident not only in Germany and Korea but also in numerous other nations, is indicative of a prevailing trend of polarization. The solution to this issue is found in the facilitation of discussions concerning integration at the individual, regional, and societal levels. This complexity necessitates a multifaceted approach, as addressing one aspect alone would not suffice. The interconnected nature of these dimensions, akin to the interlocking gears of a machine, underscores the necessity for a holistic perspective.

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RECONFIGURING BORDERS THROUGH HIGH-SKILLED MIGRATION: KOREA AND EUROPE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This article examines how high-skilled migration policies reconfigure legal borders by comparing South Korea's Top-Tier Visa and the European Union's EU Blue Card. In response to population ageing, low fertility, labour shortages, and global competition for talent, both Korea and the EU have strengthened legal pathways for attracting high-skilled migrants. However, their institutional designs differ significantly. Korea's Top-Tier Visa is structured around state-led selection, national strategic industries, and conditional pathways to settlement, whereas the EU Blue Card relies on standardized legal criteria, employment contracts, salary thresholds, professional qualifications, rights-based residence, and intra-EU mobility. Using legal and policy analysis combined with a comparative legal approach, this study examines four dimensions: selection criteria, residence stability, labour market access and mobility, and pathways to long-term settlement. The analysis shows that Korea selectively admits top-tier talent in advanced sectors such as semiconductors, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and batteries, but its system remains strongly conditioned by administrative verification and industrial policy objectives. By contrast, the EU Blue Card provides a more rights-based and multi-level framework by linking residence and work authorization with family reunification, equal treatment, social rights, and mobility across member states. The article argues that high-skilled migration policy should not be understood as debordering or simple liberalization. Rather, it represents selective legal openness through which states and supranational legal orders differentially allocate mobility, residence rights, labour market access, and settlement opportunities. Contemporary borders are therefore not disappearing but being reconfigured as normative and institutional boundaries that privilege particular categories of talent.

Keywords

High-skilled migration, Selective legal openness, Top-Tier Visa, EU Blue Card, Reconfiguration of borders.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a forma como as políticas de migração de pessoas altamente qualificadas reconfiguram as fronteiras legais, comparando o «Visto de Nível Superior» da Coreia do Sul com o «Cartão Azul da UE» da União Europeia. Em resposta ao envelhecimento da população, à baixa fertilidade, à escassez de mão-de-obra e à concorrência global por talentos, tanto a Coreia do Sul como a UE reforçaram as vias legais para atrair migrantes altamente qualificados. No entanto, os seus modelos institucionais diferem significativamente. O «Visto de Nível Superior» da Coreia está estruturado em torno de uma seleção liderada pelo Estado, de indústrias estratégicas nacionais e de vias condicionais para a fixação, enquanto o «Cartão Azul da UE» assenta em critérios jurídicos padronizados, contratos de trabalho, limiares salariais, qualificações profissionais, residência baseada em direitos e mobilidade intra-UE. Recorrendo a uma análise jurídica e política combinada com uma abordagem jurídica comparativa, este estudo examina quatro dimensões: critérios de seleção, estabilidade da residência, acesso ao mercado de trabalho e mobilidade, e vias para a fixação a longo prazo. A análise revela que a Coreia admite seletivamente talentos de alto nível em setores avançados, tais como semicondutores, biotecnologia, inteligência artificial e baterias, mas o seu sistema continua fortemente condicionado pela verificação administrativa e pelos objetivos da política industrial. Em contrapartida, o Cartão Azul da UE proporciona um quadro mais baseado em direitos e em vários níveis, ao associar a autorização de residência e de trabalho ao reagrupamento familiar, à igualdade de tratamento, aos direitos sociais e à mobilidade entre os Estados-Membros. O artigo defende que a política de migração de pessoas altamente qualificadas não deve ser entendida como a eliminação das fronteiras ou uma simples liberalização. Pelo contrário, representa uma abertura jurídica seletiva através da qual os Estados e as ordens jurídicas supranacionais atribuem de forma diferenciada a mobilidade, os direitos de residência, o acesso ao mercado de trabalho e as oportunidades de estabelecimento. As fronteiras contemporâneas não estão, portanto, a desaparecer, mas sim a ser reconfiguradas como limites normativos e institucionais que privilegiam categorias específicas de talentos.

Palavras-chave

Migração de pessoas altamente qualificadas, Abertura jurídica seletiva, Visto de Nível Superior, Cartão Azul da UE, Reconfiguração das fronteiras.

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RECONFIGURING BORDERS THROUGH HIGH-SKILLED MIGRATION: KOREA AND EUROPE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE[1]

JOONPYO LEE

Introduction

As labour shortages caused by low fertility, population ageing, and the upgrading of industrial structures have emerged as structural challenges, many countries have come to regard the attraction of high-skilled talent as a central task for maintaining national competitiveness. As the transition toward a knowledge-based economy accelerates, high-skilled migrants are no longer viewed merely as a supplementary labour force but as strategic resources that shape innovation capacity and technological competitiveness. In response, states have increasingly refined their visa systems, residence statuses, and settlement-support policies to compete in the global "talent competition" (INSEAD & Portulans Institute, 2025, p. 10).

As Shachar (2006) argues, contemporary states compete to attract the "best and brightest" by using legal statuses such as residence rights, settlement rights, and citizenship as incentives. In this sense, high-skilled migration policy should not be understood simply as a mechanism for admitting foreign workers or managing population mobility. Rather, it constitutes a legal and institutional device through which states selectively identify, attract, and incorporate categories of foreign nationals. Whereas traditional foreign labour policies focused primarily on the functional management of labour shortages in industrial sectors, contemporary high-skilled migration policies are increasingly linked to advanced industrial competitiveness, innovation capacity, and national growth strategies.

This shift is evident in both Korea and the European Union (EU). Korea has introduced the Top-Tier Visa as a policy response to population ageing, low fertility, and labour shortages in advanced industries, thereby institutionalizing the entry and settlement of high-skilled foreign talent. The EU, for its part, has revised the EU Blue Card system in order to strengthen a regional framework for the mobility of high-skilled third-country nationals. Although both systems represent strategic migration policies designed to respond to global talent competition, they differ significantly in their legal criteria for

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selecting high-skilled migrants, the ways in which they provide residence stability and labour market mobility, and the institutional pathways through which long-term settlement is enabled. These differences reveal distinct modes of the "selective reconfiguration of borders" in the field of high-skilled migration.

Despite the growing importance of this issue, existing scholarship has tended to focus mainly on labour market demand, economic effects, and demographic policy. Relatively little comparative legal analysis has examined how high-skilled migration policies allocate differentiated rights of mobility and residence to selected migrants through specific legal criteria and institutional structures. This gap is particularly notable in the Korean case. Although Korea's high-skilled migration policy has recently undergone rapid institutionalization, its legal structure and settlement orientation have not yet been sufficiently examined in comparison with the EU Blue Card.

Against this background, this study compares the legal frameworks governing high-skilled migration in Korea and the EU, focusing on Korea's Top-Tier Visa and the EU Blue Card. More specifically, it examines how the selection criteria, residence stability, labour market access and mobility, and pathways to long-term settlement for high-skilled migrants are institutionalized in each system. The study addresses the following research questions. First, what legal criteria do Korea and the EU use to select high-skilled migrants? Second, how do the two systems guarantee residence stability and labour market mobility? Third, how are institutional pathways to long-term settlement structured? Fourth, how do these legal frameworks institutionalize high-skilled migration, and how are they related to the selective reconfiguration of borders?

Methodologically, this study combines legal and policy analysis with a comparative legal approach, drawing on relevant statutes, policy documents, and government materials from Korea and the EU. By doing so, it analyses high-skilled migration policy not merely as an instrument for attracting talent, but as an institutional mechanism through which states and supranational legal orders differentially allocate mobility, residence rights, labour market access, and settlement opportunities. The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the legal characteristics of high-skilled migration policy and the analytical framework of the study. Section 3 examines Korea's Top-Tier Visa system. Section 4 analyses the legal structure of the EU Blue Card. Section 5 compares the two systems and draws out the institutional, theoretical, and policy implications of high-skilled migration policy.

Analytical Framework

The Legal Nature of High-Skilled Migration Policy

High-skilled migration policy should be understood not merely as a mechanism for managing population mobility or admitting foreign workers, but as a legal and institutional device through which states selectively admit particular categories of foreign nationals. Traditionally, migration policy developed around the regulation of labour supply and demand and the control of national borders. More recently, however, it has been reoriented toward attracting specific forms of talent on the basis of economic value, technical capacity, and innovation potential. This shift is closely related to the view that international migration is structured not only by market forces but also by state policy choices and institutional frameworks (de Haas, 2011, p. 2).

The modern state has increasingly been reconfigured as a "migration state" that seeks to balance economic openness with political control (Hollifield, 2004, p. 885). High-skilled migration policy illustrates this tension particularly clearly. States need external talent to sustain economic growth and industrial competitiveness, yet they must also manage and control migration. Accordingly, high-skilled migration policy does not constitute a form of unrestricted openness. Rather, it creates a selective management structure in which openness and control are combined.

In this process, states classify certain foreign nationals as "high-skilled talent" by applying criteria such as educational qualifications, professional experience, income level, employment contracts, and technological fields, and grant them more stable residence statuses and rights. This structure goes beyond administrative classification. It functions as a legal framework that differentially allocates mobility, residence stability, labour market access, and settlement opportunities. Such a selective structure is also related to Shachar's (2006) notion of a "talent-for-citizenship exchange," in which states strategically offer legal statuses such as residence rights, permanent residence, and citizenship in order to secure the knowledge, skills, and economic contributions of high-skilled talent.

Therefore, high-skilled migration policy should not be understood through a binary distinction between opening and restricting migration. Rather, it should be analysed as a selective legal framework through which states differentially distribute mobility and rights in accordance with their policy objectives and economic needs.

Key Dimensions of Comparative Analysis

From this perspective, this study identifies four analytical dimensions for comparing high-skilled migration policies in Korea and the EU. This framework builds on existing scholarship that understands high-skilled migration policy not simply as a system of entry authorization, but as a legal structure through which states select particular forms of talent and differentially allocate residence status and rights (Shachar, 2006; Hollifield, 2004). It is also connected to the policy perspective of the Global Talent Competitiveness Index 2025, which emphasizes the importance of states' capacity to attract and retain talent in the context of global talent competition (INSEAD & Portulans Institute, 2025).

The first dimension is selection criteria. This refers to the legal requirements through which states define and select high-skilled migrants. Educational qualifications, professional experience, income level, employment contracts, and links to strategic industries function as key criteria for privileging or excluding particular migrants.

The second dimension is residence stability. This concerns the extent to which high-skilled migrants can reside securely in the receiving state or region. The length of residence, conditions for maintaining residence status, possibilities for renewal, and pathways to long-term residence are central indicators for assessing whether a high-skilled migration policy is oriented merely toward short-term labour recruitment or toward longer-term settlement.

The third dimension is labour market access and mobility. This refers to whether high-skilled migrants are tied to a specific employment relationship or are able to move relatively freely within the labour market. Occupational restrictions, the possibility of changing employers, inter-sectoral mobility, and regional mobility directly affect both the utilization of migrants' skills and the stability of their residence.

The fourth dimension is pathways to settlement. This refers to the institutional possibilities through which high-skilled migrants may be incorporated into the receiving society over the long term. These include access to permanent residence, long-term resident status, family accompaniment, labour market access for family members, and links to social rights.

These four dimensions are analytically distinct but closely interconnected. Selection criteria determine the conditions of entry; residence stability defines the continuity of legal status after admission; labour market mobility shapes the scope and autonomy of economic activity; and pathways to settlement affect the long-term social incorporation of high-skilled migrants. This study uses these four dimensions to compare how the high-skilled migration regimes of Korea and the EU institutionalize selective openness and the reconfiguration of borders.

Selective Openness and the Reconfiguration of Legal Borders

The analytical framework outlined above allows high-skilled migration policy to be understood through the lens of "selective openness." High-skilled migration policy does not operate by fully opening or closing borders. Rather, it differentially grants mobility, residence, labour market access, and settlement opportunities to migrants who meet specific criteria. In this sense, high-skilled migration policy can be seen as a process of legal selection through which states determine which migrants are to be admitted and which are to be excluded (Shachar, 2006, p. 148).

Within this structure, borders are no longer limited to territorial boundaries. They are reconfigured as normative boundaries that differentially distribute mobility and rights through legal requirements and institutional criteria (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 3). High-skilled migration policy should therefore be understood not as a process of debordering, but as a process through which states readjust the operation of borders in accordance with economic needs and legal criteria.

High-Skilled Migration Policy in Korea

Policy Background

Korea's foreign labour policy has long developed around a functional system for admitting foreign workers to compensate for labour shortages in industrial sectors. In manufacturing, construction, agriculture, livestock, and fisheries, the policy focus has been on admitting and managing low- or medium-skilled foreign workers for limited periods in order to meet sectoral labour demand. In this process, migration policy was designed primarily from the perspective of labour market supplementation and residence control. Such a structure tended to treat foreign workers as temporary labour resources for addressing shortages in specific industries, rather than as long-term members of society.

However, recent demographic and industrial changes have exposed the limitations of this conventional approach. The deepening of low fertility and population ageing, the decline of the working-age population, and the restructuring of the economy around advanced industries have all increased the need to reconsider Korea’s migration policy. In particular, as the securing of high-level technical personnel in strategic sectors such as semiconductors, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and batteries has become directly linked to national competitiveness, Korea’s immigration policy has increasingly been expected to move beyond simple labour supplementation and toward the attraction and settlement of high-skilled talent. This indicates that immigration policy is no longer a peripheral component of labour policy, but has become a strategic policy domain closely connected to industrial policy, demographic policy, and innovation policy.

This policy direction is more clearly reflected in the government’s 2030 Future Strategy for Immigration Policy. The strategy identifies the attraction of outstanding foreign talent and support for their settlement in Korea as key policy tasks, moving away from the previous emphasis on low-skilled and low-wage foreign labour. In particular, it seeks to establish an institutional basis for attracting high-level talent in advanced industries and enabling such migrants to reside and settle stably in Korean society. In this respect, the strategy can be understood as a policy document that reflects a medium- to long-term transformation in Korea’s immigration policy (Ministry of Justice, 2026, p. 1).

Nevertheless, the actual structure of Korea’s foreign labour force remains heavily centred on non-professional and functional workers. As of December 2025, the number of professional foreign workers staying in Korea under the E-1 to E-7 categories was 107,634, whereas the number of non-professional workers under the E-8, E-9, E-10, and H-2 categories reached 486,413, more than four times higher (Korea Immigration Service, 2026). This shows that, despite the government’s policy emphasis on attracting high-skilled talent, Korea’s foreign labour structure still relies heavily on a functional labour admission system designed to supplement labour shortages in industrial sectors. Accordingly, Korea’s high-skilled migration policy may be understood as transitional in character: it remains rooted in the existing foreign labour management system, while gradually introducing limited settlement-oriented elements.

Legal Basis and Selection Criteria of the Top-Tier Visa

The most notable instrument in Korea’s policy for attracting high-skilled foreign talent is the Top-Tier Visa. In terms of its legal basis, the Top-Tier Visa is institutionalized as a subcategory of the Residence (F-2) status under Item 24 of Table 1-2 of the Enforcement Decree of the Immigration Act. More specifically, Ministry of Justice Notice No. 2025-86, titled Notice on the Qualification Criteria and Eligible Persons for Top-Tier Talent in Advanced Fields among Persons Falling under Item 24(j) of Table 1-2 of the Enforcement Decree of the Immigration Act, sets out the qualification criteria and categories of eligible persons for top-tier talent in advanced fields. Therefore, the Top-Tier Visa should not be regarded merely as a policy slogan or administrative programme. Rather, it constitutes a legal and administrative residence pathway specified through the Residence (F-2) status under the Enforcement Decree and further detailed by the Ministry of Justice Notice.

The Notice defines "advanced fields" as areas in which innovative technologies or research are carried out in industry, venture business, start-ups, and research sectors for the purpose of strengthening national competitiveness. These fields are to be determined by the Minister of Justice in consultation with the heads of relevant central administrative agencies. The Notice also defines "top-tier talent" as high-level personnel at the level of chief engineer or mid-career researcher or above who plan projects and lead research or technological development in advanced fields (Ministry of Justice Notice No. 2025-86, Article 2). This definition shows that the Top-Tier Visa is not a general scheme for all professional workers, but a selective programme targeting top-level talent capable of leading technological development and research in advanced fields.

The core of the Top-Tier Visa lies in its strict qualification requirements. Under Article 3 of Ministry of Justice Notice No. 2025-86, applicants must have obtained a master's or doctoral degree from a world-class university and must possess a certain period of relevant experience in advanced fields at a global top 500 company, a government-led research institute, or a comparable institution. They must also have an annual income of at least three times the per capita Gross National Income (GNI) of the previous or preceding year. In addition, applicants must satisfy requirements related to the Social Integration Programme or the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), and must undergo verification and recommendation by relevant central administrative agencies (Ministry of Justice Notice No. 2025-86, Article 3).

These requirements constitute a complex selection structure combining educational qualifications, professional experience, income level, Korean language or social integration capacity, and administrative verification. In particular, by using criteria such as graduation from a world-class university, experience at a global top 500 company, and high income, the Top-Tier Visa distinguishes high-skilled talent from the broader category of foreign workers. In this respect, it functions as a legal and administrative device for selecting individuals who are likely to contribute to national strategic industries.

The Notice also provides certain exceptional pathways. Article 4 of Ministry of Justice Notice No. 2025-86 allows not only those who satisfy all the criteria under Article 3, but also certain other persons to be included among eligible applicants. These include individuals who do not fully meet some of the educational or experience requirements but have an income of at least four times the per capita GNI of the previous or preceding year; individuals who have worked for at least one year in an advanced field at a domestic company and meet the relevant income requirements; and individuals whom the Minister of Justice recognizes as possessing outstanding knowledge and technology necessary for strengthening competitiveness in advanced fields (Ministry of Justice Notice No. 2025-86, Article 4). This indicates that the Top-Tier Visa is based on strict formal requirements while also incorporating a degree of discretionary recognition to reflect the specific characteristics of advanced industries and the flexible evaluation of talent.

Overall, the selection structure of the Top-Tier Visa is organized around relevance to national strategic industries, world-class educational and professional credentials, high income, and government verification, rather than around a broad notion of professional expertise. The system therefore shows how Korea adjusts the openness of its borders by selectively admitting top-level talent deemed necessary for national industrial policy, rather than by broadly incorporating high-skilled migrants as a general category of professional workers.

Residence Stability, Labour Market Access, and Settlement Pathways

The Top-Tier Visa includes settlement-oriented elements that distinguish it from conventional short-term employment-based residence statuses. Talent selected through this scheme may be incorporated into a subcategory of the Residence (F-2) status, which enables them to obtain relatively stable residence and broader opportunities for economic activity compared with existing employment visas. This indicates that Korea's policy for attracting high-skilled talent is moving beyond simple employment authorization and toward a framework that takes long-term residence and settlement into consideration.

In terms of residence stability, the Top-Tier Visa provides a more stable structure than existing employment-based statuses such as the E-7 visa. The E-7 status is generally premised on a specific occupation and employment relationship, and the maintenance of residence status is closely tied to continued employment. By contrast, the Top-Tier Visa is based on the Residence (F-2) status, thereby providing high-skilled talent with a more stable residence status. This structure is significant because it creates an institutional basis for high-skilled migrants to reside and work in Korea over the long term, rather than being used merely as short-term labour resources.

The Top-Tier Visa also offers broader possibilities for labour market access than conventional employment visas. Existing professional residence statuses are often linked to specific employment contracts, occupations, and workplaces, which may restrict the labour market mobility of foreign professionals. By contrast, the F-2-based Top-Tier Visa allows relatively broad economic activity, thereby expanding the scope of career choice and occupational mobility for high-skilled migrants. This can be regarded as an institutional advantage that enables high-skilled migrants to utilize their skills and expertise more flexibly.

With regard to settlement pathways, the Top-Tier Visa includes elements designed to support long-term settlement, such as family accompaniment, housing and education support, and the possibility of obtaining permanent residence after a certain period of stay (Ministry of Justice, 2025, p. 1). This represents an important shift in that high-skilled migration is no longer understood only as individual employment mobility, but also as involving family-based living conditions and the possibility of long-term social incorporation. In the competition to attract high-skilled talent, residence stability, family accompaniment, children's education, and the prospect of long-term settlement can all function as important factors influencing migrants' decisions.

Nevertheless, this settlement orientation remains limited. Although the Top-Tier Visa provides high-skilled migrants with more stable residence and the possibility of settlement, its scope is restricted by strict legal and administrative requirements, including advanced-field eligibility, world-class educational and professional credentials, high income, and verification and recommendation by relevant government ministries. Therefore, while the scheme represents an important step toward introducing settlement-oriented elements into Korea's immigration policy, its openness is strongly conditioned by national strategic needs and administrative selection criteria.

Relationship with Existing Visa Categories

The Top-Tier Visa was introduced not as a replacement for the existing residence status system for professional workers, but as a supplementary pathway within that system. In Korea's regime for high-skilled or professional foreign workers, the most representative residence statuses are the E-7 visa for designated activities and the D-10 visa for job seeking. These statuses have allowed foreign professionals to enter the labour market and engage in employment in Korea, but they have also revealed certain limitations in terms of residence stability, labour market mobility, and long-term settlement.

The E-7 visa is the representative employment-based residence status that allows foreign nationals to work in specific professional fields. In particular, the E-7 visa has an industrial policy character in that occupations are designated by Ministry of Justice notices in response to sectoral demand in areas such as information technology, biotechnology, and semiconductors, and these occupational categories may be expanded or adjusted as needed (Lee, 2025, p. 80). The visa has served as a major channel for attracting high-skilled workers by allowing qualified foreign nationals to engage in professional activities at companies or institutions in Korea. However, the E-7 visa is generally premised on a specific occupation and employment relationship, and the maintenance of residence status is closely connected to employment status. As a result, the labour market mobility of foreign professionals may be relatively limited, and their dependence on a particular employer or job may be high.

Another important limitation is that the E-7 category includes both high-skilled professionals and skilled functional workers. In practice, the E-7 status is divided into professional workers (E-7-1), semi-professional workers (E-7-2), general skilled workers (E-7-3), and skilled functional workers (E-7-4). As of March 2025, skilled functional workers under the E-7-4 category accounted for 49.7 per cent of all E-7 visa holders (Lee, 2025, pp. 81–82). In particular, the E-7-4 scheme is designed to allow foreign nationals already residing in Korea under the E-9, E-10, or H-2 categories to convert to the E-7-4 status if they satisfy certain skill and employment-duration requirements. This is meaningful in terms of securing skilled workers for industrial sites, but it differs in character from the attraction of globally competitive high-skilled talent in advanced industries. Therefore, when the attraction of high-skilled talent and the conversion of skilled functional workers coexist within the same broad professional worker category, the clarity of policy objectives may be weakened (Ministry of Justice, 2023; Jin, 2024).

The D-10 visa is a job-seeking residence status that allows foreign students or professionals to search for employment opportunities in Korea. This status functions as a supplementary mechanism for expanding the inflow and settlement potential of high-skilled talent by allowing individuals to stay in Korea for a certain period before securing employment. However, because the D-10 visa is a residence status for the job-seeking stage, it cannot itself be regarded as a system that guarantees stable long-term residence or settlement.

Foreign students are also important as a potential source of high-skilled talent. After completing their studies at Korean universities under the D-2 residence status, foreign students may convert to a D-10 job-seeking visa or an E-7 professional employment visa. In practice, however, the transition process may be constrained by requirements such as the alignment between academic major and job duties, income thresholds, and employment contracts. This suggests that Korea’s international student policy has not yet been organically linked to its high-skilled immigration policy (Park, 2023; Korean Educational Development Institute, 2023).

Compared with these existing categories, the Top-Tier Visa has a different legal character. Whereas the E-7 and D-10 visas each focus on a specific stage—employment or job seeking—the Top-Tier Visa, as a subcategory of the Residence (F-2) status, considers long-term residence and settlement from the stage of selection. In other words, the Top-Tier Visa is not merely an employment authorization status. Rather, it is a scheme designed to expand the possibility of long-term settlement by granting a more stable residence status to top-tier talent in advanced fields.

At the same time, the Top-Tier Visa should be understood not as a comprehensive restructuring of the entire residence status system for professional workers, but as an additional preferential pathway for top-level talent built on the existing system. Korea’s current regime operates through multiple categories, including E-7, D-8-4, and F-2, but automatic and sequential linkages to long-term settlement have not yet been sufficiently institutionalized (Lee, 2025, pp. 85–86). In particular, because the legal basis of the Top-Tier Visa is found in the F-2 residence status under the Enforcement Decree and is further specified by a Ministry of Justice notice, it is more appropriately understood as a special residence pathway combining subordinate legislation and policy-based selection criteria, rather than as a comprehensive high-skilled immigration system established at the statutory level.

Legal Assessment: Selective Openness under State-Led Control

Korea’s policy for attracting high-skilled talent represents an important institutional development in that it provides a selectively open residence pathway for high-skilled foreign nationals. In particular, the Top-Tier Visa has legal significance because it establishes a separate set of criteria for top-tier talent in advanced fields within the Residence (F-2) status under Table 1-2 of the Enforcement Decree of the Immigration Act, and specifies the qualification criteria and eligible persons through Ministry of Justice Notice No. 2025-86.

Nevertheless, Korea's high-skilled migration regime remains grounded in state-led selectivity and conditional control. First, its selection structure is strongly oriented toward industrial policy. The advanced fields covered by the Top-Tier Visa are determined by the Minister of Justice in consultation with the heads of relevant central administrative agencies. This shows that the scope of high-skilled talent is defined less by a broad concept of professional expertise than by national industrial policy needs and administrative judgment.

Second, residence stability has improved, but it remains conditional. The Top-Tier Visa expands the possibility of long-term residence and settlement through the F-2 residence status. However, access to this status is limited to those who satisfy strict criteria concerning education, professional experience, income, Korean language ability or social integration, and verification and recommendation by relevant central administrative agencies. Thus, the Korean system does not guarantee settlement as a general right for high-skilled migrants; rather, it constructs settlement as a special status granted to individuals who meet specific conditions.

Third, labour market mobility has been partially expanded, but remains limited at the level of the broader system. The Top-Tier Visa provides broader opportunities for economic activity than the existing E-7 status because it is based on the F-2 residence status. However, Korea's professional residence status system as a whole remains closely linked to specific employment relationships, occupations, and industrial sectors. Accordingly, the expansion of labour market mobility is only partially realized within the limited pathway of the Top-Tier Visa.

Fourth, pathways to settlement have been introduced, but they remain selective and limited. The Top-Tier Visa includes institutional elements for long-term settlement by presenting the possibility of obtaining permanent residence after a certain period of stay. However, this pathway is primarily available to a limited group of top-tier talent in advanced fields. It is therefore difficult to conclude that Korea has developed a generalized settlement-oriented system across its broader high-skilled immigration policy.

In sum, Korea's high-skilled migration policy is moving away from the previous model of low-skilled and temporary foreign labour management toward a system that takes the attraction and settlement of high-level talent into account. However, its legal structure is not yet a general settlement-oriented immigration regime. It is better understood as a special pathway selectively open to top-level talent needed for national strategic industries. Korea's high-skilled migration regime therefore expands selective openness, but remains grounded in state-led selection and conditional control.

High-Skilled Migration Policy in the European Union

Policy Background

The European Union (EU) has recently faced the dual challenge of demographic change and labour market imbalance. Labour shortages have continued to emerge across a wide range of sectors, including tourism, healthcare, and information and communication technology (ICT), directly affecting economic growth and industrial competitiveness. In this context, legal migration has increasingly been regarded as an important policy instrument for addressing labour market needs in the EU, while the attraction of high-skilled talent has become a key strategy for maintaining technological competitiveness and innovation capacity (European Commission, 2022, p. 1).

Demographic change is a particularly important background factor behind the strengthening of the EU's high-skilled migration policy. The EU faces the long-term structural problem of a declining working-age population. The share of the working-age population, which stood at approximately 65 per cent in 2019, is projected to fall to around 55 per cent by 2070 (European Commission, 2022, p. 1). Since this problem stems not from cyclical labour shortages but from long-term demographic transformation, the EU has sought more proactive policy responses, including the attraction of talent from outside the Union. The OECD has likewise emphasized that population ageing and shortages of skilled labour have increased the importance of migration policy, and that high-skilled migration is being used as a major policy instrument for addressing labour market demand (OECD, 2025, p. 6).

The EU Blue Card system is the EU's representative legal framework for high-skilled migration, established to facilitate the entry and residence of high-skilled third-country nationals. It is not merely an entry permit. Rather, it functions as a residence and work permit that allows qualified third-country nationals both to reside and to work in an EU member state (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 2(3); Art. 9(7)). In particular, Directive (EU) 2021/1883, revised in 2021, sought to make the EU a more attractive destination for high-skilled talent by introducing more flexible admission criteria, faster procedures, expanded rights, and strengthened mobility between member states.

In legal terms, the EU Blue Card is based on an EU Directive. A Directive is binding on member states as to the result to be achieved, while leaving to national authorities the choice of form and methods of implementation (TFEU, Art. 288(3)). Accordingly, although the EU Blue Card establishes common legal standards at the EU level, its actual application depends on implementation through the domestic laws of each member state. In this respect, the EU Blue Card should be understood not as a fully unified single immigration regime, but as a multi-level legal framework combining EU-level common standards with national implementation structures. Directive (EU) 2021/1883 also recognizes that member states may maintain separate national residence permits for high-skilled migrants in addition to the EU Blue Card (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 3(3)). The EU Blue Card thus has a dual character: it is an EU-level common legal framework, while at the same time operating through member-state implementation and coexistence with national schemes.

Legal Basis and Selection Criteria under Directive (EU) 2021/1883

The selection structure of the EU Blue Card is organized around an employment contract, a salary threshold, and higher education qualifications or equivalent professional experience. This shows that the EU does not select high-skilled talent on the basis of abstract capacity alone, but institutionalizes high-skilled migration in connection with actual labour market demand.

The first core requirement is an employment contract or a binding job offer. Applicants must present a contract or binding offer of highly qualified employment for at least six months, on the basis of which residence status is granted (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 5(1)(a)). The EU Blue Card is therefore not a general job-seeking visa or points-based immigration scheme, but an employment-oriented high-skilled migration system based on an actual or prospective employment relationship. This structure reflects the EU's policy orientation toward managing the admission of high-skilled talent in connection with labour market demand.

The second requirement is a salary threshold. The EU Blue Card requires applicants to meet a minimum salary level set by the member state, which must correspond to a specified multiple of the average annual salary (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 5(3)–(5)). This salary requirement functions as an institutional mechanism for verifying whether the employment concerned requires a high level of expertise and skill. In this sense, the EU Blue Card uses salary level as an indirect indicator of skill level and potential economic contribution within the labour market.

The third requirement is higher education qualifications or equivalent professional experience. The Directive allows not only higher education qualifications but also a certain period of professional experience to be recognized as "higher professional skills" (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 2(7)–(9); Art. 5(1)(b)–(c)). In particular, in the ICT sector, professional experience may be recognized as equivalent to educational qualifications, thereby increasing flexibility in response to labour market demand and technological change. This indicates that the EU Blue Card is not limited to an education-based model, but is designed to reflect both actual labour market demand and professional competence.

This selection structure differs significantly from Korea's Top-Tier Visa. Whereas the Korean system focuses on national strategic industries and the selection of top-level talent, the EU Blue Card links high-skilled employment and labour market demand through employment contracts, salary levels, and professional qualifications. The selection criteria of the EU Blue Card are therefore based less on the administrative designation of specific industries than on relatively objective legal requirements for high-skilled employment.

Residence Stability, Labour Market Access, and Settlement Support

A key feature of the EU Blue Card is that it provides high-skilled talent with a certain degree of legal rights and residence stability beyond mere employment authorization.

The Directive generally provides for a minimum period of residence of at least 24 months and grants EU Blue Card holders the right to reside and work legally in the member state concerned (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 9(2), Art. 9(7)). This is linked to the EU's broader policy objective of expanding legal migration pathways and providing high-skilled migrants with a more predictable residence environment.

Labour market mobility is also a central element of the EU Blue Card. The Directive allows changes of employer and labour market movement under certain conditions, and provides for a more relaxed regime of labour mobility after a certain period (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 15(1)–(4)). This mechanism is intended to enable the expertise and skills of high-skilled migrants to be used more flexibly. However, labour market access under the EU Blue Card is not entirely unrestricted. It remains subject to the institutional scope of highly qualified employment and to the specific implementation practices of individual member states.

Family accompaniment is another important feature. The Directive provides for more flexible family reunification and supports the swift entry and residence of family members of high-skilled migrants (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 17). The accompaniment and rights of family members are important conditions for enabling high-skilled migrants to remain and settle over the long term. This suggests that the EU approaches the attraction of high-skilled talent not merely as a matter of short-term labour recruitment, but also from the perspective of long-term social integration.

Social rights and equal treatment are also important components of the EU Blue Card system. EU Blue Card holders may enjoy equal treatment with nationals of the member state concerned in various areas, including working conditions, education and training, and social security (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 16(1)). This shows that the EU Blue Card is not simply an employment permit, but a rights-based residence status. Its rights structure indicates that the EU Blue Card recognizes high-skilled migrants as rights-bearing persons, rather than merely as selectively admitted workers.

However, these rights are not granted universally to all migrants. They are limited to high-skilled migrants who satisfy the requirements set out in the Directive. Therefore, although the EU Blue Card strengthens a rights-based approach, the rights it provides continue to operate within the framework of selective openness.

Intra-EU Mobility and Pathways to Long-Term Settlement

One of the most important features of the EU Blue Card is that it institutionalizes mobility between member states. The Directive allows EU Blue Card holders to move to another member state and engage in highly qualified employment under certain conditions (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Arts. 20–21). This mechanism enables high-skilled migrants not to remain fixed within a single member state, but to move and be utilized within the EU labour market as a whole.

This intra-EU mobility constitutes an important point of contrast with Korea's employment-based residence structure. Korea's residence status system for professional workers is generally closely tied to specific employment relationships, occupations, and industrial sectors. By contrast, the EU Blue Card institutionalizes mobility within the EU under certain conditions. This indicates that the EU understands high-skilled migrants not merely as labour tied to the market of a single state, but as a resource that can enhance the competitiveness and flexibility of the EU labour market as a whole.

Pathways to long-term settlement are also a key feature of the EU Blue Card. The Directive institutionalizes the possibility of converting accumulated periods of legal residence into long-term resident status and allows periods of residence in different member states to be taken into account (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Recital 51; Art. 18). This is important because it shows that high-skilled migrants are not regarded merely as short-term workers, but as a population group that may be incorporated into EU society over the long term.

Family accompaniment and social rights are also closely connected to pathways to long-term settlement. The possibility of long-term residence for high-skilled migrants is not determined solely by individual employment conditions. It is also closely related to the residence stability of family members, children's education, access to social security, and the labour market participation of family members. The EU Blue Card may therefore be understood as a system that institutionalizes the mobility of high-skilled migrants while also providing, to a certain extent, a social basis for long-term settlement.

Nevertheless, this possibility of long-term settlement is not an unconditional right. Long-term residence and settlement pathways under the EU Blue Card remain linked to employment status, salary requirements, residence periods, and member-state implementation conditions. Actual operation may vary depending on domestic law and administrative procedures in each member state. Therefore, although the EU Blue Card strengthens a settlement-oriented approach, its implementation remains multi-layered and conditional.

Legal Assessment: Rights-Based Selective Openness in a Multi-Level Legal Order

The EU Blue Card is the EU's representative legal framework for high-skilled migration. It provides third-country nationals who meet requirements concerning employment contracts, salary thresholds, and educational qualifications or professional experience with residence stability, labour market access, family accompaniment, social rights, and mobility between member states. In this respect, the EU Blue Card goes beyond a simple entry permit or employment authorization and may be understood as a rights-based high-skilled migration regime that grants a relatively comprehensive legal status to selected high-skilled migrants.

First, the EU Blue Card strengthens a rights-based approach. The Directive provides for labour market access, equal treatment, social security, and family reunification, thereby granting high-skilled migrants a relatively stable legal status (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Arts. 15–17). This shows that the EU recognizes high-skilled migrants not merely as temporary labour resources, but as migrants with the potential for long-term residence and social integration.

Second, the EU Blue Card institutionalizes the possibility of long-term residence and settlement. By granting a legal status that combines residence and employment to migrants selected through employment contracts, salary thresholds, and educational or professional qualifications, and by providing a pathway to long-term resident status under certain conditions, the EU designs high-skilled migration not as a short-term employment permit, but as part of a long-term talent attraction strategy.

Third, the EU Blue Card operates within a multi-level legal order. Since it is based on a Directive, the EU Blue Card establishes common standards at the EU level, but its actual operation depends on implementation through the domestic laws of member states (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 3(3); Art. 4). Differences may therefore arise in application procedures, salary thresholds, recognition of qualifications, and administrative processing. These variations can limit the uniformity and predictability of the system (de Lange & Vankova, 2022, p. 4).

Fourth, the EU Blue Card coexists with national high-skilled migration schemes. Directive (EU) 2021/1883 recognizes that member states may maintain separate national residence permits in addition to the EU Blue Card. This preserves the policy autonomy of member states, but at the same time limits the extent to which the EU Blue Card can function as a single and coherent high-skilled migration system across the Union.

Fifth, the openness of the EU Blue Card remains limited to high-skilled migrants who satisfy specific requirements. Employment contracts, salary thresholds, and professional qualifications function not only as criteria for selecting high-skilled migrants, but also as criteria for excluding those who do not meet the required standards (Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Art. 5). Thus, although the EU Blue Card strengthens rights-based status and mobility, it is not a universally accessible migration regime. It remains a structure of selective openness limited to a particular category of migrants.

In sum, unlike Korea's state-led and industrial policy-oriented model, the EU Blue Card more strongly institutionalizes rights-based status and intra-EU mobility. At the same time, it faces limitations arising from differences in member-state implementation, coexistence with national schemes, and its restricted openness to selected high-skilled migrants. The EU Blue Card should therefore be understood not as a fully unified EU-level immigration status, but as a conditional and multi-layered high-skilled migration pathway operating through national implementation structures. It also functions as a selective legal boundary open only to migrants who satisfy specific requirements.

Comparative Analysis and Conclusion

Comparative Findings

Both Korea and the EU have strengthened their high-skilled migration policies in response to global talent competition and structural labour shortages. However, the two systems differ significantly in their criteria for selecting high-skilled migrants, the ways in which they grant residence status and rights, the extent to which they allow labour market mobility, and the manner in which they institutionalize pathways to long-term settlement.

Whereas Korea's Top-Tier Visa is based on administrative selection centred on national strategic industries and conditional pathways to settlement, the EU Blue Card emphasizes standardized legal requirements based on employment contracts, salary thresholds, and professional qualifications, as well as rights-based mobility. These differences show that selective openness in high-skilled migration is institutionalized in different ways within each legal order.

First, with regard to selection criteria, Korea adopts a policy-driven and administrative selection structure centred on advanced industries and national strategic sectors. The Top-Tier Visa targets top-level talent in sectors such as semiconductors, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and batteries. It requires globally competitive educational and professional backgrounds, high income levels, and verification and recommendation by relevant government ministries. By contrast, the EU Blue Card defines high-skilled migrants primarily through employment contracts, salary thresholds, higher education qualifications, or equivalent professional experience. This approach differs from Korea's administrative designation of specific strategic industries, as it is based on relatively standardized legal criteria linked to labour market demand.

Second, differences are also evident in residence stability and pathways to settlement. Korea's Top-Tier Visa provides a more stable residence status than conventional employment-based visas because it is based on the Residence (F-2) status. However, its scope is limited to a narrow group of top-tier talent in advanced fields. The Korean system therefore introduces settlement-oriented elements, but its character remains limited and exceptional. By contrast, the EU Blue Card provides a legal status that combines residence and employment authorization, and it institutionalizes the possibility of transition to long-term resident status under certain conditions. In addition, by linking family accompaniment and social rights to residence status, the EU Blue Card offers a clearer settlement-oriented framework for high-skilled migrants.

Third, labour market mobility is one of the areas in which the differences between the two systems are most evident. In Korea, the Top-Tier Visa allows broader economic activity than employment-based visas such as the E-7. Nevertheless, Korea's overall residence system for professional foreign workers remains closely tied to specific employment relationships, occupations, and industrial sectors. As a result, labour market mobility for high-skilled migrants has improved, but it remains constrained at the level of the broader institutional system. In contrast, the EU Blue Card permits job changes and labour market mobility under certain conditions, while also institutionalizing intra-EU mobility. This indicates that the EU regards high-skilled migrants not merely as labour tied to a particular member state, but as mobile human resources that can enhance the flexibility and competitiveness of the EU labour market as a whole.

Fourth, the two systems also differ in their pathways to long-term settlement. Korea's Top-Tier Visa introduces settlement-supportive elements, including family accompaniment, housing and education support, and the possibility of acquiring permanent residence. However, these pathways are primarily available to a limited group of top-tier talent in advanced fields. Moreover, the step-by-step linkage between existing visa categories such as E-7, D-10, D-2, F-2, and permanent residence has not yet been sufficiently institutionalized. By contrast, the EU Blue Card provides a relatively clearer route to long-term incorporation by linking family reunification, equal treatment, and the possibility of transition to long-term resident status. Nevertheless, even in the EU, actual settlement pathways remain multi-layered and conditional because of differences in national implementation and the coexistence of domestic high-skilled migration schemes.

Table 1. Comparative Findings on High-Skilled Migration Policies in Korea and the EU

Dimension	Korea: Top-Tier Visa	EU: EU Blue Card
Selection criteria	Strategic industries, education, professional experience, income level, and government recommendation	Employment contract, salary threshold, higher education qualification or professional experience
Residence stability	F-2-based residence status, but conditional and exceptional	Directive-based residence and work permit with clearer legal safeguards
Labour market mobility	Broader than E-7, but still constrained by employment and sectoral structures	Job mobility and intra-EU mobility allowed under certain conditions
Settlement pathways	Selective and limited access to permanent residence	Linked to long-term residence, family reunification, and equal-treatment rights
Legal character	State-led, industry-oriented selective openness	Rights-based selective openness in a multi-level legal order

Ultimately, Korea and the EU share the common feature of selectively admitting high-skilled talent, but they differ in the manner in which selection and openness are organized. Korea has developed an administratively driven selection model centred on national strategic industries and conditional pathways to settlement, whereas the EU has developed a multi-level high-skilled migration regime centred on labour market integration, rights protection, and intra-EU mobility.

Selective Legal Openness and the Reconfiguration of Borders

The high-skilled migration policies of Korea and the EU do not operate by fully opening or closing borders. Rather, both systems selectively provide opportunities for mobility and settlement to individuals who satisfy specific criteria. In this respect, both can be characterized as forms of "selective legal openness."

However, such selective openness does not simply mean an expansion of openness. Contemporary borders are being reconfigured beyond physical territorial boundaries into normative boundaries that operate through legal and institutional criteria such as education, income, professional experience, employment contracts, and industrial sectors. In other words, borders no longer function merely as mechanisms for determining admission. They also operate as institutional structures that differentially allocate mobility, residence stability, labour market access, and possibilities for long-term settlement.

In Korea, this selective legal openness operates mainly through national strategic industries and administrative verification. High-skilled talent is understood as a strategic resource that can contribute to the competitiveness of advanced industries, and expanded residence and settlement opportunities are granted only to those who meet the criteria defined by the state. In the EU, by contrast, selective legal openness is institutionalized through a rights-based approach and intra-EU mobility. By combining family rights, social rights, equal treatment, and mobility between member states, the EU Blue Card institutionalizes high-skilled migrants as a mobile population group connected to the EU labour market and society as a whole.

Nevertheless, both systems remain selective in that they are open only to migrants who satisfy specific requirements. High-skilled migrants are granted expanded mobility, residence stability, labour market access, and possibilities for long-term settlement, while migrants who do not meet these criteria remain in more restricted and precarious legal positions. High-skilled migration policy therefore does not weaken borders. Rather, it reconfigures borders into more sophisticated and differentiated legal mechanisms.

Conclusion

This study has analysed how high-skilled migration policies are institutionalized through specific legal structures and policy logics in the context of global talent competition by comparing Korea’s Top-Tier Visa and the EU Blue Card. The analysis shows that Korea has developed a selective management model centred on national strategic industries, whereas the EU has developed a multi-level governance model that emphasizes rights-based status and intra-EU mobility.

This comparison demonstrates that high-skilled migration policy is not merely an instrument for securing labour. Rather, it is a legal mechanism that differentially distributes mobility, residence rights, labour market access, and pathways to settlement. By analysing high-skilled migration policy through the lens of “selective legal openness,” this study has shown that borders are not being weakened or dismantled. Instead, they are being reconfigured as normative boundaries selectively opened to particular categories of talent.

From a policy perspective, Korea’s task is not simply to expand the attraction of foreign talent, but to strengthen institutional linkages that allow high-skilled migrants to reside and settle over the long term under a predictable legal status. To this end, Korea needs to clarify the sequential linkages between the Top-Tier Visa and existing visa categories such as E-7, D-10, D-2, F-2, and permanent residence, while more systematically combining labour market mobility, family accompaniment, and settlement support.

In conclusion, high-skilled migration policy should be understood not as a result of debordering, but as a process of readjusting the operation of borders through selective openness. Korea’s future high-skilled migration policy needs to move beyond a short-term attraction strategy centred on national strategic industries and develop into a stable settlement-oriented legal framework capable of incorporating high-skilled migrants as long-term members of society.

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FROM EUROPE'S RIGHTS-BASED AI REGULATION TO KOREA'S INNOVATION-ORIENTED FRAMEWORK: DIVERGING PHILOSOPHIES IN GLOBAL DIGITAL AND AI GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

This article examines the divergent regulatory philosophies shaping global digital and AI governance by comparing the European Union's rights-based regulatory model, Italy's enforcement-oriented domestic adaptation, and Korea's innovation-oriented AI framework. It argues that the EU has emerged as a global regulatory power through its Digital Services Act, Digital Markets Act, and Artificial Intelligence Act, embedding principles such as human dignity, transparency, accountability, and fundamental rights protection into the architecture of digital governance. Conceptually, the article situates the EU's regulatory influence within the framework of the Brussels Effect, showing how European digital and AI standards extend beyond the EU market and shape broader international governance debates. Empirically, it analyzes the EU AI Act's risk-based regulatory structure and Italy's national AI legislation, which deepens EU regulatory logic through digital humanism, criminal liability, watermarking obligations, and strong institutional oversight. The article then turns to Korea's AI Basic Act, highlighting its more flexible and innovation-oriented approach. Unlike the EU and Italian models, Korea places greater emphasis on industrial development, data utilization, and adaptive governance while selectively incorporating risk-based regulatory elements. Rather than treating these models as mutually exclusive, the article argues that they reveal complementary pathways in global AI governance. It concludes that future Korea–EU cooperation should move beyond technical regulation and address the deeper philosophical challenge of reconciling human-centered accountability with technological innovation.

Keywords

AI governance, EU AI Act, Brussels Effect, Korea AI Basic Act, Digital humanism.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa as filosofias regulatórias divergentes que moldam a governação global no domínio digital e da IA, comparando o modelo regulatório da União Europeia, baseado nos direitos, a adaptação nacional da Itália, orientada para a aplicação da lei, e o quadro de IA da Coreia, orientado para a inovação. Defende que a UE se tornou uma potência regulatória global através da sua Lei dos Serviços Digitais, da Lei dos Mercados Digitais e da Lei da Inteligência Artificial, incorporando princípios como a dignidade humana, a transparência, a responsabilização e a proteção dos direitos fundamentais na arquitetura da governação digital. Conceitualmente, o artigo situa a influência regulatória da UE no âmbito do «Efeito Bruxelas», mostrando como as normas europeias em matéria de digital e IA se estendem para além do mercado da UE e moldam debates mais amplos sobre a governação internacional. Empiricamente, analisa a estrutura regulatória baseada no risco da Lei da IA da UE e a legislação nacional italiana em matéria de IA, que aprofunda a lógica regulatória da UE através do humanismo digital, da responsabilidade criminal, das obrigações de marcação digital e de uma forte supervisão institucional. O artigo volta-se, em seguida, para a Lei Básica sobre IA da Coreia, destacando a sua abordagem mais flexível e orientada para a inovação. Ao contrário dos modelos da UE e da Itália, a Coreia dá maior ênfase ao desenvolvimento industrial, à utilização de dados e à governação adaptativa, ao mesmo tempo que incorpora seletivamente elementos regulamentares baseados no risco. Em vez de tratar estes modelos como mutuamente exclusivos, o artigo defende que eles revelam vias complementares na governação global da IA. Conclui que a futura cooperação entre a Coreia e a UE deve ir além da regulamentação técnica e abordar o desafio filosófico mais profundo de conciliar a responsabilização centrada no ser humano com a inovação tecnológica.

Palavras-chave

governação da IA, Lei da UE sobre a IA, Efeito Bruxelas, Lei Básica da Coreia sobre a IA, humanismo digital.

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Bongchul Kim

FROM EUROPE'S RIGHTS-BASED AI REGULATION TO KOREA'S INNOVATION-ORIENTED FRAMEWORK: DIVERGING PHILOSOPHIES IN GLOBAL DIGITAL AND AI GOVERNANCE[1]

BONGCHUL KIM

AI Governance in a Global Context: EU Leadership and Korea's Emerging Role

The development of intelligent technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), is advancing at an unprecedented pace, significantly expanding its influence across economic, social, and security domains. Governments and corporations worldwide are actively investing in AI development and deployment to prepare for this emerging era, while simultaneously anticipating and addressing the social challenges that such technologies may generate. As a result, AI has become a key arena of both international competition and cooperation. States are striving to secure technological superiority while also establishing institutional frameworks to mitigate risks such as privacy violations, algorithmic bias, and misuse. Consequently, AI has emerged as one of the most critical factors shaping future economic growth, governance structures, and security environments.

Major countries are approaching AI not only as an engine of economic innovation but also as a strategic asset in national security. Regulatory policies are expanding as governments seek to protect domestic industries and maintain competitiveness, recognizing that inadequate responses could undermine long-term economic performance (National Information Society Agency, 2023). In the security domain, AI is increasingly viewed as a core component of future warfare. The United States has emphasized its importance in maintaining strategic dominance in a rapidly evolving technological landscape (Walch, 2021), while China has projected the emergence of AI-driven warfare in its national defense strategies (Cha, 2021). Europe, through frameworks such as NATO, is also investing in the security applications of AI. These developments demonstrate that AI is not confined to a single domain but is instead reshaping multiple dimensions of global governance and competition.

In this context, the European Union (EU) introduced the Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AI Act) in 2021, the world's first comprehensive legislative attempt to regulate AI, which

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was ultimately finalized in 2024. Unlike approaches that focus primarily on technological development and economic utilization, the EU sought to establish a regulatory framework ensuring the safe and ethical use of AI in everyday life. This initiative represents a significant milestone in global AI governance and reinforces the EU's role as a "normative power" shaping international standards. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in daily life, the need for such regulatory frameworks has grown more urgent, given the potential for unintended social consequences. Therefore, analyzing the EU AI Act and its regulatory principles provides an essential foundation for understanding the evolving landscape of AI governance.

At the same time, effective AI governance requires active international cooperation, and Korea has begun to play an important role in this process. Korea has recently enacted its own Framework Act on Artificial Intelligence and is promoting national strategies to support AI innovation and industrial growth. As one of the countries that has followed the EU in establishing a legal framework for AI, Korea is well positioned to engage in global discussions and collaborative efforts. In particular, given the similarities in regulatory orientation between Korea and Europe, there is strong potential for deeper cooperation.

This article begins with an introduction to the EU's digital regulatory framework, focusing on the enactment and key features of the AI Act, and then examines Korea's legislative response to AI governance. Ultimately, it argues that sustained legal and policy cooperation between Korea and Europe in the field of digital and AI regulation is both necessary and desirable for addressing shared challenges and promoting responsible technological development. Such cooperation will contribute to the harmonization of international standards and enhance mutual capacity to respond effectively to the rapidly evolving risks and opportunities associated with AI.

EU Regulatory Power in the Digital and AI Economy: The Brussels Effect and Global Implications

The Digital Economy, EU Regulatory Power, and the Brussels Effect

The digital economy now constitutes a significant portion of the global economy, and its influence is expected to expand further in the coming years. In particular, as economic and social activities shifted online during the global spread of COVID-19, e-commerce and digital markets experienced rapid growth. As a result, the digital economy has become an essential part of everyday life and a fundamental domain of modern markets. In response, societies are transitioning toward digital-based systems, necessitating corresponding transformations in national policies and institutional frameworks (European Central Bank, 2020). Accordingly, major countries are striving not only to address challenges arising from digitalization but also to secure a competitive advantage in the global economy.

As of 2020, the size of the digital market had reached a level comparable to the gross domestic product of G7 countries. Core elements of the digital environment—such as data utilization, hyper-connectivity, and efficient software supply—have become essential inputs across industries, similar to labor or electricity (World Economic Forum, 2020). At the same time, advanced technologies such as AI and big data are increasingly integrated into economic activities. Governments are therefore expanding policy frameworks to incorporate digital trade and establish relevant norms (Park, J. H., 2024).

In this context, the European Union (EU) has played a leading role in shaping the digital economy through regulatory and policy initiatives. The EU has promoted digital transformation across industries while embedding these developments within a broader normative framework aimed at protecting core values such as data protection and fair competition (Choi, S. K., 2022). The urgency of these efforts increased significantly following COVID-19, which accelerated both digital adoption and policy implementation (Lee & Kim, 2022).

The EU's digital strategy builds on its long-standing efforts toward economic integration. Beginning with the Europe 2020 strategy and the Digital Agenda for Europe, the European Commission introduced the Digital Single Market Strategy in 2015 to eliminate barriers to digital economic activity and establish a unified regulatory environment (European Commission, 2015). The Digital Single Market aims to ensure the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, while enabling individuals and businesses to operate online under conditions of fair competition and strong data protection. Within this framework, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has been a key instrument in strengthening data governance (Noh, 2023).

The EU has continued to advance its digital strategy in recent years. In July 2024, following the reappointment of Ursula von der Leyen, the EU introduced its Political Guidelines 2024–2029, emphasizing the deepening of the Digital Single Market and the promotion of AI-driven growth (European Commission, 2024a; Jang et al., 2024). In this evolving landscape, cooperation between Korea and Europe is becoming increasingly important. Given their shared emphasis on innovation, data protection, and fair competition, closer collaboration can contribute to the harmonization of regulatory standards, reduce fragmentation, and enhance mutual competitiveness in the global digital economy.

A key concept for understanding the global influence of EU regulation is the Brussels Effect, first introduced by Anu Bradford. This concept refers to the phenomenon whereby EU regulatory standards extend beyond its borders and become de facto global norms (Bradford, 2020). The EU's ability to shape international regulatory environments stems not from coercion, but from its capacity to set rules that others adopt voluntarily (Bradford, 2012). This influence spans multiple domains, including data privacy, consumer protection, competition policy, and digital governance.

At its core, the Brussels Effect is driven by the size and attractiveness of the EU's internal market. As one of the world's largest consumer markets, the EU incentivizes multinational corporations to comply with its regulations in order to maintain market access. Once these standards are adopted, firms often apply them globally to ensure efficiency and legal consistency. This process differs from traditional regulatory diffusion in that it is based on market incentives rather than formal international agreements, making voluntary compliance a defining feature.

The Brussels Effect is closely linked to the concept of normative power, which refers to the ability to shape global norms by defining what is considered legitimate or appropriate (Manners, 2002). In this regard, the EU functions as a normative power by exporting its regulatory frameworks. Bradford further distinguishes between the "de facto" Brussels Effect, where firms voluntarily adopt EU standards, and the "de jure" Brussels Effect, where such standards are formally incorporated into domestic legal systems (Bradford, 2021).

Recent developments suggest that the Brussels Effect is increasingly evolving into a de jure phenomenon, as countries adopt EU-style regulations into their own legal frameworks (Oh, C. R., 2023). A representative example is the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which has established itself as a global benchmark since its implementation in 2018. By introducing strengthened individual rights and obligations for data processors—such as the right to erasure and data portability—and applying extraterritorially to organizations handling EU citizens' data, the GDPR has significantly expanded the global reach of EU digital norms. As a result, countries including Japan and Korea, as well as multinational corporations, have increasingly aligned their regulatory frameworks with EU standards.

EU Digital Market Regulation: DSA and DMA

The regulation of online platforms has emerged as a central issue in the global digital economy. The growing dominance of large technology companies has raised concerns about market concentration, unfair competition, and barriers to entry for smaller firms. While these platforms generate efficiency gains and consumer benefits, their "winner-takes-all" dynamics may limit innovation and reduce long-term market dynamism (Choi, N. S. H., 2022). In addition, issues such as data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and the spread of illegal or harmful content have intensified calls for regulatory intervention. As a result, governments around the world are actively debating the scope and form of digital market regulation. Within the EU, member states are required to implement common regulatory frameworks; however, differences in administrative capacity and institutional readiness have led to uneven enforcement across countries.

The EU has taken a leading role in addressing these challenges through proactive regulatory strategies. A key milestone was the 2017 Google Shopping case, in which the European Commission imposed a €2.42 billion fine on Google for abusing its dominant position by favoring its own services. This case demonstrated the limitations of traditional competition law in dealing with digital platforms and highlighted the need for more targeted regulatory frameworks. In response, the EU has progressively strengthened its regulatory approach to address structural issues in digital markets (Kang, 2019). At the same time, member states have been required to adapt their domestic enforcement systems, although the level of implementation and effectiveness has not been uniform across the EU.

Building on this experience, the EU introduced a comprehensive legislative framework in December 2020 through the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act

(DMA). These laws, collectively known as the Digital Services Act Package, aim to address systemic problems in the platform economy, including lack of transparency, data protection concerns, and unfair business practices (European Commission, 2016). They also reflect the EU's broader objective of securing digital sovereignty and reducing dependence on non-European technology firms (Echikson, 2024; Shin & Kim, 2023). Although these regulations are directly applicable across the EU, variations in national enforcement—particularly among Eastern European countries—continue to influence their practical implementation.

The Digital Services Act focuses on creating a safer and more transparent online environment. It establishes clear obligations for online platforms regarding the removal of illegal content, the protection of users, and the transparency of algorithms and advertising systems. Platforms are required to implement effective content moderation mechanisms and to provide users with information about how decisions are made. In particular, very large online platforms are subject to enhanced responsibilities due to their systemic impact on society. These measures are expected to improve trust, accountability, and predictability in digital ecosystems (Lee, K. I., 2024).

The Digital Markets Act, in contrast, targets structural competition issues by regulating "gatekeeper" platforms—firms that control key access points to digital markets and possess significant market power. The DMA imposes ex ante obligations on these firms, including requirements to ensure interoperability, enable data portability, and refrain from self-preferencing practices. This proactive regulatory approach represents a departure from traditional ex post competition enforcement and allows regulators to prevent anti-competitive behavior before it occurs (Yang, J. W., 2024).

Taken together, the DSA and DMA establish a comprehensive regulatory framework that addresses both content governance and market structure in the digital economy. They aim to protect consumers, ensure fair competition, and foster innovation while reinforcing the EU's role as a global regulatory leader. As these laws apply to all firms operating in the European market, including multinational corporations, their impact is likely to extend beyond Europe through mechanisms similar to the Brussels Effect. At the same time, internal variations among member states continue to affect the consistency and effectiveness of enforcement. Consequently, the EU's digital regulations are expected to play a central role in shaping the future global governance of digital markets (Choi, Y. S., 2022).

The EU AI Act: Background, Structure, and Global Implications

In 2021, the European Commission introduced a legislative proposal to regulate artificial intelligence (AI) (European Commission, 2024a). As AI technologies became increasingly commercialized, concerns emerged regarding potential violations of personal data and fundamental rights. The proposal aimed to mitigate these risks while enhancing the trustworthiness of AI systems. At the same time, the EU sought to balance regulation with innovation by introducing complementary measures to support the development and deployment of AI technologies.

Following negotiations among the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Council of the European Union, the Artificial Intelligence Act was formally adopted in 2024 (European Council · Council of the European Union, 2024). As the first comprehensive legal framework for AI governance, the Act has attracted global attention. While it is widely recognized as a milestone in AI regulation, some critics argue that stringent regulatory measures could potentially hinder technological innovation (Martens, 2024).

A defining feature of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act is its adoption as a "regulation" within the EU legal system. As such, it is directly applicable in all member states without requiring national implementing legislation and allows limited discretion in interpretation. This ensures uniformity and strong legal binding force across the EU. The Act thus represents a shift from earlier international approaches—largely based on non-binding guidelines—toward enforceable legal standards (Hong, 2022).

The Act establishes a comprehensive and structured regulatory framework, consisting of 13 chapters, 113 articles, and 13 annexes. Its primary objective is to protect fundamental rights—including health, safety, democracy, the rule of law, and environmental protection—from risks associated with AI systems (Article 1). It applies broadly to AI systems operating within the EU market, covering both providers and deployers, while excluding military and national security applications (Article 2). Importantly, its scope extends beyond the EU, requiring non-EU companies to comply if they wish to access the European market (European Commission, 2024b).

In terms of regulatory content, the Act introduces differentiated obligations depending on the type and risk level of AI systems. It includes transparency requirements (Chapter 4), specific provisions for general-purpose AI models such as risk management and copyright (Chapter 5), and mechanisms to promote innovation, including regulatory sandboxes designed to support startups and small and medium-sized enterprises (Chapter 6). In addition, the Act reinforces data protection standards in alignment with existing EU frameworks, ensuring consistency with broader privacy regulations (Park & Kim, 2024).

Through the AI Act, the EU aims to extend its regulatory influence globally, similar to its role in shaping international data protection standards through the GDPR (European Council · Council of the European Union, 2024). Although formally limited to the EU, the Act's extraterritorial effects encourage foreign companies and governments to align with its standards. In this regard, the EU is actively shaping global AI governance through regulatory leadership, often described as a form of "normative diplomacy" (Yoon & Cho, 2024).

Despite its significance, the Act also faces several challenges. The rapid evolution of AI technologies makes it difficult to anticipate and regulate emerging risks effectively. Concerns have also been raised regarding the potential for overregulation to constrain innovation and reduce economic competitiveness (Martens, 2024). Additionally, information asymmetries between regulators and large technology firms may limit enforcement effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the increasing integration of AI into economic and social systems underscores the necessity of regulatory frameworks. The EU AI Act represents a comprehensive attempt to balance innovation with the protection of fundamental rights, offering an important model for future AI governance at both regional and global levels (Shim, 2024). In this context, countries such as Korea are increasingly required to respond proactively to evolving EU regulatory standards and align their domestic frameworks accordingly. Such efforts will be essential not only for maintaining access to the European market but also for enhancing international cooperation and contributing to the development of globally harmonized AI governance.

The EU AI Act and the Global Evolution of AI Governance: Risk-Based Regulation and Korea's Legislative Response

Italy's AI Regulation and the Domestic Implementation of EU Digital Governance

Italy has recently attracted significant attention for being one of the first European Union member states to incorporate the EU's artificial intelligence (AI) regulatory framework into domestic law (Linklaters, 2025; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024). This development reflects a broader and ongoing process in which EU digital and AI governance norms are increasingly being translated into national legislation across member states (White & Case LLP, 2026). In this context, Italy's case is particularly notable, as it demonstrates an early and proactive alignment with the EU's evolving regulatory agenda, especially in the field of AI governance (JuLIA Project, 2025; Linklaters, 2025).

Against this backdrop, Italy has advanced one of the most stringent national frameworks for artificial intelligence regulation, positioning itself ahead of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act in terms of detailed legal enforcement (White & Case LLP, 2026; The National Law Review, 2026). The legislation, formally titled Disposizioni e delega al Governo in materia di intelligenza artificiale, reflects a regulatory philosophy grounded in "digital humanism," which prioritizes human dignity, rights, and safety over technological development. The law establishes a comprehensive national approach to governing AI, emphasizing that technological innovation must remain within clear ethical and legal boundaries (Linklaters, 2025).

One of the most distinctive features of the Italian AI law is the introduction of criminal liability for the misuse of AI systems (White & Case LLP, 2026; The Guardian, 2025). Individuals who use AI algorithms to endanger the physical or psychological safety of others, or to interfere with democratic processes such as elections, may face imprisonment ranging from one to five years (White & Case LLP, 2026; Linklaters, 2025). In addition, the law imposes strict obligations on generative AI outputs, requiring that synthetic content such as deepfakes be clearly labeled with visible watermarks. Non-compliance can result in administrative fines of up to 7 percent of a company's annual revenue, reflecting a strong deterrent approach to AI-related harm (Linklaters, 2025; White & Case LLP, 2026).

The legislation also places significant emphasis on transparency, human oversight, and the protection of minors. AI systems used in sensitive sectors such as employment, healthcare, education, justice, and sports must operate under strict transparency requirements and human supervision (CMS, n.d.). In particular, access to AI services by children under the age of 14 requires parental consent, strengthening safeguards for vulnerable users (The Guardian, 2025). These provisions reflect the broader objective of ensuring that AI systems remain accountable and aligned with societal values.

In the area of intellectual property and data use, the law introduces a nuanced regulatory approach (Cocuzza, 2025; Hogan Lovells, 2025). AI-generated works may be eligible for copyright protection if they reflect genuine human intellectual contribution (Cocuzza, 2025). At the same time, the use of text and data mining is permitted only under specific conditions, such as non-copyrighted materials or authorized scientific research. This framework seeks to balance innovation in AI development with the protection of existing intellectual property rights (Hogan Lovells, 2025).

Alongside regulatory measures, Italy has also introduced policies to support AI innovation and industrial growth (Jones Day, 2025). The government has authorized the creation of a state-backed venture capital fund of up to €1 billion to support companies operating in AI, cybersecurity, and telecommunications. Regulatory responsibilities have been assigned to the Digital Italy Agency (AgID) and the National Cybersecurity Agency (ACN), ensuring institutional coordination between innovation promotion and security oversight (Agenzia per l'Italia Digitale, n.d.). This dual structure reflects Italy's attempt to integrate regulation and industrial policy within a single governance framework.

Overall, Italy's AI law represents a hybrid regulatory model that combines strict legal enforcement, ethical principles centered on human rights, and active state support for technological development (Linklaters, 2025; White & Case LLP, 2026). The government under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has described the law as an effort to "bring innovation back within the boundaries of public interest," ensuring that AI development contributes to economic growth while safeguarding citizens' rights (The National Law Review, 2026). As one of the first comprehensive national AI regimes in Europe to align closely with the EU's regulatory direction ahead of full implementation of the AI Act, Italy's approach is likely to influence broader European and global discussions on AI governance.

The EU Risk-Based AI Regulation and Italy's National Enforcement Model

A central pillar of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act is its "risk-based approach," which serves as the core regulatory principle of the framework. Under this system, AI technologies are classified into four categories according to their potential level of risk: Unacceptable risk, High risk, Limited risk, and Minimal risk. This classification forms the structural foundation of the Act, enabling differentiated regulation in which legal obligations are proportionate to the level of risk posed by each AI system. In this sense, the EU establishes an ex ante regulatory model that anticipates risks in advance and assigns appropriate legal responsibilities accordingly (Y, C. S., 2024).

Based on this framework, the Act imposes differentiated obligations on providers and deployers of AI systems. High-risk systems are subject to the most stringent and comprehensive regulatory requirements, reflecting their potential impact on safety and fundamental rights. Limited-risk systems, by contrast, are primarily associated with transparency obligations. These include requirements to inform users when they are interacting with AI-generated content, thereby addressing potential informational asymmetries and enhancing user trust. Minimal-risk systems, such as spam filters and other widely used applications, are generally permitted with minimal regulatory intervention, subject only to voluntary best-practice measures aimed at ensuring safety and reliability.

At the most restrictive end of the spectrum, Chapter 2 prohibits AI systems classified as posing unacceptable risks. These systems are deemed incompatible with EU values as they may undermine human dignity, violate fundamental rights, or manipulate human behavior, and are therefore prohibited in principle under Article 5, with only narrow exceptions such as law enforcement or counter-terrorism contexts (Jeon, 2024). Chapter 3 (Articles 6–49) regulates high-risk AI systems in detail, allowing their use only under strict compliance conditions. Providers must meet extensive requirements regarding data governance, documentation, transparency, human oversight, and risk management, ensuring a high level of accountability prior to market deployment.

Annexes 1 and 3 further specify the criteria for identifying high-risk systems. In general, AI systems subject to existing EU product safety legislation are classified as high risk, requiring conformity assessments, often conducted by third parties, to ensure compliance with regulatory standards (Lee, S. Y., 2023; Mökander, J., et al., 2022). In addition, systems used in sensitive areas such as biometric identification, critical infrastructure, public services, and law enforcement are also included in the high-risk category and are subject to rigorous pre-market controls.

In contrast to the EU framework, Italy has recently adopted a more enforcement-intensive and human-centered approach through its national AI legislation. While the EU AI Act primarily establishes a harmonized regulatory architecture based on risk classification and compliance obligations, the Italian AI law complements this structure by introducing stronger deterrent mechanisms at the domestic level. Notably, it incorporates criminal liability provisions for the misuse of AI systems, including penalties for the malicious use of AI that endangers individuals or interferes with democratic processes. It also mandates explicit watermarking of synthetic content such as deepfakes and imposes significant administrative fines for non-compliance. Furthermore, Italy places stronger emphasis on direct state supervision, including parental consent requirements for minors and centralized oversight by national agencies such as the Digital Italy Agency (AgID) and the National Cybersecurity Agency (ACN). In this respect, while the EU framework is primarily preventive and harmonized in nature, the Italian approach is more punitive and enforcement-oriented, reflecting a stricter interpretation of "digital humanism."

Overall, the EU risk-based approach represents a systematic and preventive model of AI governance aimed at embedding European values—such as human dignity, safety, and fundamental rights—into technological regulation (Mökander, J., et al., 2022). By contrast, Italy's approach demonstrates how member states may supplement EU-level harmonization with stricter national enforcement mechanisms. Together, these developments illustrate a multi-layered governance structure in which EU-wide regulatory principles are complemented by domestic legal experimentation. As a result, the EU's regulatory framework is increasingly positioned as a global reference point for trustworthy AI governance, with implications extending beyond Europe into broader international regulatory discussions.

Diverging Paths in Global AI Governance: The EU, Italy, and Korea

As the use of AI continues to expand, various adverse effects have become increasingly apparent. Issues such as the misuse and abuse of AI in everyday life, the distortion of facts generated by AI systems, violations of privacy, and the emergence of discriminatory algorithms due to biased data have all been widely discussed (Rességuier, A., & Rodrigues, R, 2020). These challenges highlight that AI is not only a driver of innovation but also a source of significant social risks that require careful governance.

In response, there is now a broad international consensus on the need to regulate AI technologies through structured governance frameworks. A key regulatory principle is the identification and categorization of risks, followed by differentiated regulatory measures that impose stricter obligations on higher-risk systems (Kim, B. Y., 2023). However, AI governance models vary significantly across jurisdictions, reflecting differences in institutional traditions, economic priorities, and technological capabilities.

The United States represents a leading innovation-driven model, emphasizing technological leadership and flexible governance through executive orders and sectoral regulation rather than a unified legal framework (National Information Society Agency, 2024). In contrast, China adopts a more centralized and state-led approach, combining industrial promotion with strict regulatory control through laws such as the Cybersecurity Law, Data Security Law, and Personal Information Protection Law (Lee, S. W., 2022). Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) has developed a comprehensive rights-based regulatory model centered on the Artificial Intelligence Act, which is grounded in a risk-based classification system and strongly oriented toward the protection of fundamental rights and the prevention of social harm.

Within this global regulatory landscape, Italy and Korea represent two distinct forms of domestic adaptation to EU-style governance. Italy, as an EU member state, has gone beyond the EU Artificial Intelligence Act by introducing a more enforcement-oriented national framework grounded in "digital humanism." Its legislation incorporates criminal liability for the misuse of AI, mandatory watermarking of synthetic content, and strict administrative penalties, alongside strong institutional oversight through national agencies. In this sense, Italy exemplifies a "deepening" of EU regulatory logic at the domestic level, particularly through stronger deterrence mechanisms and direct legal enforceability.

Korea, by contrast, reflects a different pattern of regulatory reception and adaptation. In December 2020, the Ministry of Science and ICT and the Korea Information Society Development Institute introduced the AI Ethics Guidelines, based on OECD principles and emphasizing "AI for Humanity" (Ministry of Science and ICT, 2020). Building on these soft-law foundations, Korea progressively developed legislative proposals that culminated in the enactment of the Framework Act on the Development of Artificial Intelligence and the Establishment of a Foundation for Trust (AI Basic Act), adopted on January 21, 2025 and scheduled to take effect in January 2026. The Act combines industrial promotion with risk management, including state-led AI development planning, R&D support, and the classification of "high-impact AI" subject to additional obligations (Article 2; Article 31; Article 32).

Unlike the EU model, which prioritizes fundamental rights protection through a stringent risk-based regulatory architecture, Korea places relatively greater emphasis on industrial development and innovation support. While it adopts a similar risk-based classification approach influenced by the EU framework (Kim, K. S., 2023), its regulatory intensity is comparatively more flexible, reflecting national policy priorities aimed at strengthening AI competitiveness.

When compared with the EU and Italian models, Korea occupies an intermediate position in global AI governance. The EU represents a highly structured and rights-oriented regulatory regime, Italy demonstrates an enforcement-enhanced domestic implementation of that regime, and Korea reflects a hybrid model that integrates regulatory principles with strong industrial policy objectives. This comparison highlights how global AI governance is evolving into a multi-layered system in which shared regulatory concepts—such as risk-based classification—are adapted differently depending on national and regional contexts.

Looking forward, the convergence and divergence among these models will continue to shape the trajectory of global AI governance. As AI becomes further embedded in social and economic systems, balancing innovation with accountability will remain a central policy challenge. In this regard, the EU's emphasis on trustworthy AI, Italy's strong enforcement-oriented adaptation, and Korea's innovation-driven regulatory framework together illustrate the diverse pathways through which states seek to govern emerging technologies in an increasingly interconnected digital order.

Conclusion: Diverging and Bridging Regulatory Philosophies in Global AI Governance

The rapid expansion of the digital economy and the deepening integration of AI into social and economic systems have fundamentally reshaped global regulatory priorities. As this study has shown, the European Union has emerged as a leading actor in digital and AI governance through comprehensive legal instruments such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA), and the Artificial Intelligence Act. These frameworks go beyond traditional market regulation by embedding core normative principles—such as human dignity, transparency, accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights—into the architecture of digital governance. In this respect, the EU functions not only as a regulatory power but also as a global standard-setter whose influence extends well beyond its borders through mechanisms such as the "Brussels Effect."

At the same time, the EU experience demonstrates that formal regulatory harmonization does not automatically translate into uniform implementation. Despite the legal unity of EU regulations, differences in administrative capacity, institutional readiness, and policy execution continue to shape how digital and AI rules are applied in practice. This gap between formal convergence and practical divergence highlights the importance of governance capacity as a key determinant of regulatory effectiveness, even within highly integrated legal systems.

Against this background, Korea's evolving AI governance framework, particularly the AI Basic Act, reflects a distinct regulatory philosophy. The Act imposes mandatory obligations only on high-risk AI systems such as those used in healthcare and biometric identification, while leaving most other domains to voluntary self-regulation by firms. Its enforcement structure relies primarily on corrective orders and administrative fines rather than criminal sanctions. This design reflects a deliberate policy choice to avoid excessive regulatory burden and to preserve room for innovation, responding to concerns that strict regulation could hinder industrial growth. In this sense, AI in Korea is not primarily framed as a risk to be contained, but as a strategic engine for overcoming structural challenges such as low growth and demographic decline.

Within this context, a deeper philosophical divergence emerges between Korea and Italy (representing the broader EU regulatory orientation). Italy's recent AI legislation reflects a strong "digital humanism" approach that prioritizes digital citizenship, copyright protection, and strict accountability for AI misuse. It imposes criminal liability for harmful AI applications and emphasizes the protection of creators' rights, particularly against unauthorized use of training data. Korea, by contrast, emphasizes data utilization, algorithmic innovation, and flexible access to information, including more permissive approaches to AI training data under the principle of fair use. This contrast reflects not only different regulatory techniques but also fundamentally different normative assumptions: Italy tends to frame AI as a domain requiring ethical containment to preserve human dignity, while Korea approaches AI as a developmental tool to maximize socio-economic transformation.

This divergence can be understood as a "philosophical time lag" between two regulatory worlds. Italy's approach asks whether technology can remain subordinate to human rights and creative ownership, whereas Korea's approach asks how technology can be mobilized to solve urgent structural problems. One emphasizes precaution and moral boundaries; the other emphasizes adaptability and innovation. Yet both systems also face internal tensions: overly strict regulation risks slowing innovation in Europe, while overly flexible governance raises concerns about ethical blind spots and social harm in Korea.

In this regard, the two models should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as complementary reference points for constructing a more balanced global AI governance framework. Italy's rights-centered approach offers an important reminder that technological progress must remain anchored in human dignity and cultural values. Korea's innovation-oriented approach highlights the necessity of maintaining flexibility in rapidly evolving technological environments. The challenge, therefore, lies in bridging these two logics—combining ethical constraint with adaptive innovation.

Ultimately, strengthening cooperation between Korea and the European Union will be essential not only in technological development but also in regulatory philosophy. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in everyday life, the future of governance will depend on the ability to reconcile innovation with accountability. A more integrated dialogue between the EU's rights-based regulatory tradition and Korea's innovation-driven governance model can contribute to the emergence of a more balanced global framework—one that ensures technological progress does not come at the expense of human dignity, and that human-centered values do not inhibit technological transformation.

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RECONFIGURING ARCTIC GOVERNANCE: LAW, IDENTITY, AND EUROPE – KOREA COOPERATION

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Abstract

This study examines the structural transformation of Arctic governance through a constructivist lens, focusing on the strategic roles of discourse, identity evolution, and performance-based contributions. Climate change and escalating geopolitical rivalries—particularly post-Ukraine war—have exposed the institutional limitations of the Arctic Council and eroded the traditional "low-tension cooperation" paradigm. In this shifting landscape, geographic proximity is giving way to functional, contribution-based participation as the primary source of legitimacy. Within this framework, this paper analyzes the complementary trajectories of European and South Korean engagement. While Europe provides normative leadership grounded in environmental regulation and multilateral institution-building, South Korea has steadily expanded its role from a "responsible observer" to a technological and operational "enabler," backed by its robust domestic legal frameworks, shipbuilding capacity, and polar research infrastructure. The study argues that integrating Europe's normative sophistication with Korea's industrial and technological expertise offers a strategic pathway to overcome existing governance deficits. Ultimately, Europe–Korea cooperation represents a model for a more inclusive, adaptive, and resilient multilateral architecture capable of balancing sustainable development with environmental stewardship in a rapidly changing Arctic.

Keywords

Arctic Governance, Europe–Korea Cooperation, Enabler, Identity Transformation, Normative Power, Constructivism.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a transformação estrutural da governação do Ártico através de uma perspetiva construtivista, centrando-se nos papéis estratégicos do discurso, da evolução da identidade e das contribuições baseadas no desempenho. As alterações climáticas e as rivalidades geopolíticas crescentes — particularmente após a guerra na Ucrânia — revelaram as limitações institucionais do Conselho do Ártico e minaram o paradigma tradicional da «cooperação de baixa tensão». Neste panorama em mudança, a proximidade geográfica está a dar lugar a uma participação funcional e baseada na contribuição como principal fonte de legitimidade. Neste contexto, o presente artigo analisa as trajetórias complementares do envolvimento da Europa e da Coreia do Sul. Enquanto a Europa proporciona uma liderança normativa assente na regulamentação ambiental e na criação de instituições multilaterais, a Coreia do Sul tem vindo a expandir de forma constante o seu papel, passando de «observador responsável» para «facilitador» tecnológico e operacional, apoiada pelos seus robustos quadros jurídicos nacionais, capacidade de construção naval e infraestruturas de investigação polar. O estudo defende que a integração da sofisticação normativa da Europa com a experiência industrial e tecnológica da Coreia oferece um caminho estratégico para superar os défices de governação existentes. Em última análise, a cooperação Europa-Coreia representa um modelo para uma arquitetura multilateral mais inclusiva, adaptável e resiliente, capaz de equilibrar o desenvolvimento sustentável com a gestão ambiental num Ártico em rápida mudança.

Palavras-chave

Governação do Ártico, Cooperação Europa-Coreia, Facilitador, Transformação de Identidade, Poder Normativo, Construtivismo.

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RECONFIGURING ARCTIC GOVERNANCE: LAW, IDENTITY, AND EUROPE –KOREA COOPERATION

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Introduction

The Arctic is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the accelerating impacts of climate change, geopolitical competition, and expanding economic interests. Rapid ice melt is opening new maritime routes and increasing access to natural resources, thereby elevating the region's strategic importance. At the same time, these developments intensify environmental risks, including ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss, and threats to indigenous communities. As a result, the Arctic is no longer a remote and peripheral space but has emerged as a critical arena where global environmental, economic, and security dynamics intersect.

These transformations have exposed significant limitations within the existing Arctic governance system. Traditionally characterized by cooperation and low political tension, the Arctic is increasingly shaped by strategic rivalry, particularly in the context of broader geopolitical conflicts. Institutional frameworks such as the Arctic Council face growing constraints in addressing emerging challenges, especially those related to security. This evolving context calls for a reassessment of how Arctic governance is conceptualized and practiced, moving beyond static institutional perspectives toward more dynamic and adaptive approaches.

This study approaches Arctic governance through a constructivist lens, emphasizing the roles of discourse, identity, and performative contribution. In multilateral governance systems, states do not simply act based on material capabilities; they also construct their roles and legitimacy through diplomatic narratives and sustained practices. From this perspective, the Arctic is not merely a physical region but a socially constructed political space in which influence is shaped by how actors define themselves and are recognized by others. Accordingly, legitimacy in Arctic governance increasingly depends on contribution-based participation rather than geographic proximity alone.

Within this evolving framework, Europe and Korea represent two distinct yet complementary trajectories of engagement. European actors have played a central role in shaping Arctic governance through scientific research, environmental regulation, and institutional development, establishing a form of normative leadership grounded in sustainability and multilateralism. Korea, by contrast, has expanded its participation through technological capacity, industrial strength, and growing involvement in scientific and diplomatic initiatives. In particular, Korea's transition from a "responsible observer" to an "enabler" reflects a broader shift toward functional contribution as a basis for legitimacy.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the transformation of Arctic governance and explores the strategic potential of Europe–Korea cooperation. It argues that the integration of Europe's normative and institutional strengths with Korea's technological and operational capabilities offers a pathway to address existing governance limitations. By analyzing legal frameworks, evolving state identities, and patterns of cooperation, the study aims to demonstrate how a more inclusive, adaptive, and contribution-driven governance model can emerge. Ultimately, it seeks to highlight the broader implications of Arctic governance for global order in an era of increasing complexity and interdependence.

Reconfiguring Arctic Governance: Legal Transformation, European Engagement, and Korea's Expanding Participation

Structural Transformation and the Crisis of Arctic Governance

The Arctic is undergoing profound structural transformation driven by the accelerating impacts of climate change. The rapid melting of sea ice is no longer a seasonal anomaly but a systemic shift, raising the possibility that the Arctic Ocean may evolve from a periodic passage into a more stable maritime transportation corridor. At the same time, increased accessibility to oil, gas, and rare minerals has significantly heightened global economic interest in the region. These developments, however, are accompanied by serious and interconnected challenges, including marine ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss, and growing threats to the livelihoods and rights of indigenous communities. In particular, methane emissions released from thawing permafrost pose long-term and potentially irreversible risks to the global climate system. As a result, the Arctic is emerging as a complex geopolitical and environmental space where economic opportunity, ecological vulnerability, and security concerns intersect on a global scale.

Geopolitical tensions are further undermining the stability of Arctic governance. The intensifying rivalry between Russia and Western countries is transforming the Arctic from a zone traditionally characterized by cooperation into one marked by strategic competition. Military buildup, competing claims over maritime control, and expanding resource development have escalated tensions across the region. These developments are gradually eroding the long-standing model of "low-tension cooperation" that once defined Arctic relations (Ingimundarson, 2014). At the same time, energy security and control over emerging shipping routes have become central to national strategies, reinforcing competitive dynamics. Consequently, the Arctic is being reshaped into a complex geopolitical arena in which cooperation and conflict coexist.

In this evolving context, the Arctic Council has increasingly revealed its institutional limitations. Heightened political tensions have constrained its ability to function effectively as a cooperative platform. Although the Council has historically focused on environmental protection and sustainable development, it remains structurally ill-equipped to address security-related issues (Kim & Kim, 2022). As a result, critical concerns such as military tensions are often excluded from formal deliberations. This institutional gap risks further fragmenting Arctic governance. In response, alternative approaches including minilateral cooperation and more flexible partnership frameworks are gaining increasing attention.

The legal architecture of the Arctic reflects a layered and adaptive system (Kim & Shim 2022). Arctic-related treaties can be broadly divided into two categories: those that apply generally to global maritime affairs but are also relevant to the Arctic, and those specifically designed for polar regions. Foundational agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) were originally intended to govern global maritime activities, yet they play a crucial role in Arctic governance. In particular, Article 234 of UNCLOS, addressing "ice-covered areas," provides a legal basis for coastal states to adopt stricter environmental regulations tailored to the unique conditions of polar regions (Gudev, 2020).

This framework is further complemented by polar-specific legal instruments. The International Maritime Organization's Polar Code establishes mandatory safety and environmental standards for vessels operating in polar waters. The Svalbard Treaty, in turn, provides a distinctive legal regime governing sovereignty and economic activity in the Svalbard archipelago. Arctic agreements may also be categorized as multilateral, regional, or bilateral. While UNCLOS, MARPOL, and the Svalbard Treaty represent multilateral frameworks, regional arrangements often involve European actors, and bilateral agreements such as the maritime delimitation treaty between Norway and Russia play a critical role in stabilizing legal relationships (Yoo & Lee, 2020).

Despite the development of these legal frameworks, significant challenges remain. The Arctic is among the regions most severely affected by climate change, making international cooperation and continuous environmental monitoring essential for global policy responses. At the same time, expanding resource extraction and tourism increase pressure on fragile ecosystems. These dynamics underscore the need for more refined and adaptive legal standards that can balance environmental protection with sustainable development. Accordingly, Arctic governance frameworks are likely to continue evolving in response to emerging environmental and geopolitical pressures.

Finally, international law becomes effective only through its incorporation into domestic legal systems. States party to international treaties are obligated to implement these norms through national legislation, a process that functions not only as a legal requirement but also as a key policy instrument (Kim et al., 2023). Arctic coastal states, for example, have strengthened domestic regulatory frameworks governing navigation and territorial waters based on provisions such as UNCLOS Article 234. At the same time, many countries have been developing legal and institutional systems related to maritime safety, environmental protection, and polar research as their Arctic engagement expands. Ultimately, Arctic governance operates through a dynamic, multilayered system in which international and domestic law continuously interact.

Europe's Arctic Engagement: From Exploration to Norm-Based Governance

Europe has played a foundational role in the early exploration and conceptualization of the Arctic. Expeditions led by countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Norway transformed the Arctic from an unknown frontier into a more comprehensible geographical space. These explorations were driven not only by scientific curiosity but also by economic motivations, including the search for new trade routes and natural resources. In particular, the pursuit of Arctic sea routes was closely tied to imperial competition and efforts to establish faster maritime connections to Asia. The accumulation of navigational knowledge and advancements in cartography during this period laid the groundwork for subsequent Arctic research and governance.

In the contemporary era, Europe's perception of the Arctic has evolved in close connection with the global challenge of climate change. Accelerating ice melt has redefined the region as both a site of economic opportunity and environmental vulnerability. While new shipping routes and resource extraction prospects attract strategic interest, ecological degradation and biodiversity loss intensify the need for environmental protection (Cavalieri et al., 2021). In response, European actors have adopted a dual policy approach that seeks to balance economic utilization with sustainability, particularly through strategic assessments linking climate governance, regional development, and environmental stewardship in the Arctic (Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, 2021). Nordic countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Finland, in particular, perceive the Arctic as closely linked to their domestic ecological systems, leading to integrated policy frameworks that align climate policy with Arctic strategy.

The European Union has further strengthened its engagement by framing the Arctic as a key arena for global climate governance (Canova, 2025). By linking its carbon neutrality agenda with Arctic policy, the EU positions the region as a frontline for climate action (Shin, 2024). Concepts such as blue carbon and marine ecosystem protection have emerged as central elements of this approach. This reflects a broader shift in viewing the Arctic not merely as a site of resource exploitation, but as a domain requiring normative regulation and environmental stewardship (Jung, 2022). The EU's integration of scientific research with regulatory frameworks enhances the legitimacy of its policies and aligns with its broader identity as a "normative power" (Kuus,2020). This process also demonstrates the EU's expanding capacity for Arctic actorness beyond geographical constraints (Jouhier, 2025).

European Arctic coastal states maintain a dual strategy that combines competition with cooperation. Countries such as Norway and Denmark (via Greenland) actively pursue maritime resource development and jurisdictional claims while simultaneously supporting international legal frameworks. They rely on mechanisms such as UNCLOS to manage disputes and legitimize their positions. Scientific data submissions and negotiated continental shelf extensions exemplify rule-based governance in practice. This approach helps mitigate tensions while preserving a cooperative regional order, allowing strategic interests and institutional stability to coexist.

Non-Arctic European states have also expanded their influence through active participation in Arctic affairs. Countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy primarily adopt science-driven strategies, utilizing advanced capabilities such as icebreaking research vessels, satellite observation systems, and long-term climate data analysis. These technological assets function not only as tools of scientific inquiry but also as instruments of diplomatic influence. By emphasizing their identity as "responsible stakeholders," these states establish legitimacy in Arctic governance despite lacking direct territorial claims.

Other European countries, including the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland, have deepened their engagement through science diplomacy. Switzerland's participation is particularly notable, demonstrating that Arctic involvement is not constrained by geographical proximity. Through polar research stations, international collaborative projects, and the production of scientific knowledge, these countries contribute meaningfully to policymaking processes. Scientific research provides the empirical foundation for governance decisions while simultaneously fostering international cooperation (Wood-Donnelly, 2023). As a result, Europe has developed a multilayered Arctic governance structure characterized by diverse actors and interconnected roles, supported by both international legal frameworks and regional policy initiatives designed to address emerging Arctic disputes (Kim & Ko, 2021).

Korea's Participation in Arctic Governance and the Evolution of Its Legal and Strategic Frameworks

In recent years, the Arctic has emerged as a critical focal point of global environmental change, driven by the accelerating impacts of climate change. Rapid ice melt is expanding the possibilities for new maritime routes and resource development, thereby intensifying geopolitical and economic interest in the region. At the same time, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and challenges related to indigenous rights are becoming increasingly pronounced. These developments have introduced structural tensions into Arctic governance, further compounded by intensifying geopolitical rivalry particularly between Russia and Western countries—which is transforming the Arctic from a zone of low-tension cooperation into one of strategic competition. The disruption of cooperative channels following the Ukraine war has weakened institutional stability, including within the Arctic Council, which continues to face structural limitations in addressing security-related issues.

Within this evolving context, Korea has steadily expanded its engagement in Arctic governance. Since obtaining observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, Korea has pursued a more structured and proactive Arctic policy encompassing scientific research, maritime activities, and multilateral cooperation (Kim 2022). Its growing investment in research infrastructure and international collaboration networks reflects a transition from passive observation to active participation. In particular, the operation of the icebreaking research vessel Araon highlights Korea's expanding capacity in polar research and science diplomacy. At the same time, Korea has sought to balance economic interests with environmental responsibility, positioning itself as a constructive and credible participant in Arctic governance.

Korea's Arctic engagement is closely linked to the evolution of its domestic legal frameworks, which initially developed through its participation in Antarctic governance. Beginning in the late twentieth century, Korea joined the Antarctic Treaty system and assumed obligations to implement international norms domestically. This led to the enactment of the "Act on Antarctic Activities and Environmental Protection" in 2004, which incorporated the principles of the Madrid Protocol into national law. The legislation established a comprehensive regulatory system based on prior authorization of activities, environmental impact assessments, and strict environmental protection measures, while also promoting scientific research through national planning and institutional support. As such, it reflects a hybrid legal model that integrates regulatory control with policy support.

Building on this institutional foundation, Korea's polar policy gradually expanded to include the Arctic, particularly as the region's strategic importance increased. Comparative analyses of polar legislation in Northeast Asia demonstrate that Korea has developed a comparatively comprehensive legal framework for polar governance, moving beyond Antarctic-specific regulation toward an integrated system covering both Arctic and Antarctic activities, while similar comprehensive legal arrangements remain more limited in neighboring countries (Kim & Kim, 2024). The acquisition of observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013 underscored the need for a more integrated legal and policy framework. In response, Korea enacted the "Polar Activities Promotion Act" in 2021, which functions as a general framework law covering both Antarctic and Arctic activities. This legislation introduced mechanisms for policy coordination, research and development support, professional training, and international cooperation, thereby strengthening the institutional basis for Korea's expanding polar engagement.

More recently, the growing strategic significance of Arctic shipping routes has led to the adoption of more specialized legislation. The 2026 "Special Act on the Promotion of Arctic Shipping Routes and Related Industries" provides a targeted framework for logistics development, industrial support, and international collaboration. Through institutional mechanisms such as dedicated committees, financial support systems, and research initiatives, this law enhances policy implementation capacity and reflects a shift in Korea's Arctic policy from a primarily research-oriented approach toward one that increasingly incorporates economic and strategic dimensions. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including potential overlaps among legal frameworks and the need for clearer coordination mechanisms.

Against this backdrop, Korea's expanding participation in Arctic governance carries broader implications. As a country that has achieved both rapid economic development and democratic consolidation, Korea enjoys a high level of international credibility and is well positioned to act as a middle power. Its technological expertise, maritime industry capacity, and diplomatic mediation skills represent important assets in navigating the complex dynamics of Arctic governance. In particular, Korea is well suited to assume an "enabler" role—facilitating cooperation, reducing tensions, and supporting institutional resilience—thereby complementing existing great-power dynamics with a more inclusive and functionally oriented approach.

Ultimately, the crisis of Arctic governance reflects broader transformations in the global order rather than a purely regional issue. In this context, Korea's participation extends beyond the pursuit of national interests and contributes to norm formation, institutional adaptation, and cooperative problem-solving. By aligning its policies with the principles of sustainability and peaceful use, Korea can help strengthen the resilience of Arctic governance frameworks.

Looking ahead, it is likely to evolve from a responsible participant into a substantive contributor, particularly in the areas of scientific cooperation, environmental protection, and maritime governance (Østhagen, 2013).

Reframing Arctic Governance: Discourse, Identity Transformation, and Europe–Korea Cooperation

The Strategic Role of Discourse and Identity in Arctic Governance

In international relations, states do not assert themselves solely through material actions; they also define and legitimize their roles through diplomatic communication. Policy documents and official statements articulate not only national interests but also the institutional space states seek to occupy. In this sense, discourse is not merely descriptive but constitutive of policy itself. Particularly in multilateral governance systems, language and narrative shape the boundaries of participation and influence. Diplomatic discourse should therefore be understood as a strategic resource that constructs both action and status in the international system.

This perspective is closely aligned with constructivist theory, which emphasizes that international order is socially constructed through interaction. The Arctic, from this viewpoint, is not simply a physical region but a political space shaped by shared understandings and negotiated roles (Albert & Vasilache, 2018). A state's position is formed not only by its material capabilities but also by how it presents itself and is perceived by others. Through discourse and practice, states generate expectations and structure cooperation. As a result, identity and interaction become central to governance outcomes.

Traditionally, legitimacy in Arctic governance was based on geographic proximity, privileging Arctic coastal states. However, this standard has gradually evolved, allowing non-Arctic actors to gain influence through sustained engagement and tangible contributions. Scientific research, environmental protection, and institutional participation have become key sources of legitimacy. This shift reflects a broader transformation toward a more open and functionally driven governance structure. It also underscores the importance of performance over geography in shaping participation.

The experience of European actors demonstrates how legitimacy can be built through consistent contribution. Initial claims based on normative relevance were insufficient, but long-term investment in research and governance participation gradually strengthened credibility. This illustrates that legitimacy is accumulated through practice rather than assertion. It also highlights that the quality and consistency of engagement are decisive factors in determining influence within Arctic governance.

Ultimately, effective diplomatic discourse must remain aligned with actual capabilities. Overstated narratives can weaken credibility, while understated positioning may limit strategic opportunities. The most effective approach lies in maintaining coherence between identity and performance. This alignment allows states to build trust over time, which is particularly crucial in cooperative governance systems like the Arctic. In this context, discourse becomes a key instrument for sustaining both legitimacy and influence.

From Responsible Observer to Enabler: Korea's Evolving Arctic Identity

When Korea joined the Arctic Council as an observer in 2013, it strategically adopted the identity of a "responsible observer." This framing emphasized adherence to international norms, respect for the sovereignty of Arctic states, and a non-confrontational posture within a governance system largely shaped by coastal actors. As an entry strategy, this identity proved effective: it facilitated Korea's access to institutional networks, enabled participation in working groups, and signaled its willingness to operate within established rules. At the time, such cautious positioning reflected both structural constraints and a deliberate effort to build trust within the Arctic governance community.

Over the past decade, however, the material and institutional foundations of Korea's Arctic engagement have expanded considerably. Korea has developed globally competitive shipbuilding capabilities, particularly in the construction of ice-class vessels such as icebreakers and LNG carriers. In parallel, it has advanced technologies related to maritime safety, satellite-based navigation, and sea ice forecasting. Its role in scientific research has also deepened through sustained participation in international projects and polar research initiatives. These developments collectively indicate a shift from limited, observation-based participation to a more active and capability-driven form of engagement.

This expansion of capabilities necessitates a corresponding redefinition of Korea's functional role within Arctic governance. Increasingly, Korea is not merely a participant that observes and complies, but an actor that contributes to the operational effectiveness of the system. In this context, the concept of an "enabler" provides a more precise analytical lens. As an enabler, Korea supports the conditions under which cooperation among Arctic and non-Arctic actors can take place—through the provision of technology, infrastructure, data, and logistical support. This role is particularly significant in the Arctic, where harsh environmental conditions and complex operational demands require shared capabilities and coordinated efforts.

Despite these changes, the continued reliance on the "responsible observer" framework reveals important limitations. While the term underscores restraint and norm compliance, it inadequately reflects Korea's expanded contributions and growing capacity to shape outcomes. This disconnects between identity and practice may constrain Korea's international recognition and reduce its potential influence within governance processes.

Moreover, it risks creating strategic ambiguity, as Korea's actual activities increasingly extend beyond the passive connotations of observation.

Against this backdrop, the "enabler" framework emerges as a more appropriate and forward-looking alternative. By focusing on functional contribution rather than positional restraint, it better aligns Korea's identity with its evolving capabilities. This reframing enhances the clarity, credibility, and strategic coherence of Korea's Arctic engagement. Ultimately, Korea's transition from a responsible observer to an enabler reflects a broader shift in Arctic governance itself—from a system centered primarily on status and participation toward one that increasingly values capability, contribution, and collaborative problem-solving.

Limits of Arctic Governance and the Strategic Potential of Europe–Korea Cooperation

Arctic governance, despite its foundation in cooperation, norms, and institutional dialogue, continues to operate under significant structural constraints. At its core, the governance architecture remains dominated by Arctic coastal states, which retain primary authority over decision-making processes. This concentration of influence inherently limits the participation and impact of non-Arctic actors, even as the consequences of Arctic transformation extend far beyond the region itself. Simultaneously, the Arctic is characterized by the coexistence of competing priorities environmental protection, resource exploitation, economic development, and emerging security concerns. These overlapping agendas create a complex governance environment in which cooperation is both necessary and difficult to sustain. The accelerating pace of climate change further intensifies these pressures by opening new maritime routes, expanding access to natural resources, and increasing geopolitical attention to the region (Kim, 2026).

Within this evolving context, non-Arctic states are no longer peripheral actors but increasingly important contributors to the governance ecosystem. Korea exemplifies this shift through its functional and capability-based engagement. Rather than pursuing territorial or sovereignty-based claims, Korea's role is defined by its advanced technological capacity, particularly in shipbuilding, maritime logistics, digital infrastructure, and polar research. Acting as an "enabler," Korea contributes to enhancing the operational effectiveness of Arctic governance by supporting safe navigation systems, ice-capable vessels, satellite-based monitoring, and scientific research infrastructure. However, the effectiveness and legitimacy of such contributions are maximized when embedded within cooperative, multilateral frameworks rather than pursued through unilateral initiatives.

In this regard, Europe emerges as a particularly strategic and compatible partner. European actors both Arctic and non-Arctic have accumulated extensive experience in Arctic governance through sustained engagement in scientific research, environmental regulation, and multilateral institution-building (Cha & Lim2022). European countries and institutions have played a central role in shaping governance norms that prioritize sustainability, environmental stewardship, and rule-based cooperation. This has resulted in a multilayered governance system that integrates national policies, regional cooperation mechanisms, and international legal frameworks. Europe's normative leadership and institutional sophistication thus provide a critical foundation upon which deeper cooperation with Korea can be constructed.

The relationship between Korea and Europe is fundamentally complementary, offering a strong basis for synergistic collaboration. Korea's strengths lie in its industrial and technological capabilities, including world-leading shipbuilding industries, smart shipping technologies, and advanced digital systems. Europe, by contrast, brings expertise in governance design, regulatory frameworks, environmental standards, and policy coordination. The integration of these strengths allows for a more holistic approach to Arctic governance—one that bridges the gap between technological implementation and normative regulation. Such integration is particularly crucial in addressing governance deficits, where technological solutions must be aligned with robust legal and institutional frameworks to ensure sustainability, safety, and accountability.

Moreover, the expansion of scientific and industrial cooperation between Korea and Europe significantly enhances the prospects for effective governance. Joint research initiatives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Arctic environmental changes, thereby strengthening the knowledge base for evidence-based policymaking. Collaborative efforts in shipping, logistics, renewable energy, and infrastructure development can support economic activities in the region while adhering to stringent environmental standards. Importantly, such cooperation also facilitates the diffusion of best practices and the harmonization of regulatory approaches, reducing fragmentation within the governance system.

Ultimately, Europe–Korea cooperation represents not merely a supplementary dimension of Arctic governance but a strategic pathway toward its evolution. By combining technological innovation with normative leadership, and operational capacity with institutional experience, this partnership can help address existing structural limitations in Arctic governance. It offers a model of inclusive and functionally driven cooperation that enhances resilience, promotes sustainability, and reinforces multilateralism. In doing so, Europe and Korea are well-positioned to contribute to the development of a more integrated, adaptive, and forward-looking Arctic governance system capable of responding to the challenges of a rapidly changing region.

Concluding Reflections: Reframing Arctic Governance through Discourse, Identity, and Europe–Korea Cooperation

This study has argued that Arctic governance should be understood not as a fixed institutional framework, but as a dynamic order shaped by the interaction of discourse, identity, and performative contributions. Diplomatic discourse functions not merely as a tool for describing state roles, but as a constitutive element that defines the scope of participation and legitimacy. This is particularly significant in a multilateral setting such as the Arctic, where influence is determined less by geographic proximity than by sustained contributions and consistent role performance.

Within this structure, Europe has played a central role in shaping and advancing Arctic governance. Through its accumulated experience in scientific research, environmental protection, institutional design, and norm-building, Europe has contributed to maintaining the stability and sustainability of the governance system. Its normative leadership and institutional sophistication have been essential in preserving the Arctic as a space of cooperation. In this sense, Europe functions not merely as a participant, but as a key pillar in the formation and evolution of Arctic order.

At the same time, the role of non-Arctic states, including Korea, has been steadily expanding. Functional contributions based on technological capacity, infrastructure, and scientific expertise are increasingly recognized as critical to Arctic operations. This shift indicates a broader transformation of Arctic governance from a closed, coastal state–centered structure toward a more open and multilayered system. Contribution-based participation is thus emerging as a new standard of legitimacy.

In this context, cooperation between Europe and Korea exhibits a structurally complementary character. Europe's strengths in normative frameworks and institutional governance, when combined with Korea's technological and industrial capabilities, create the conditions for more effective implementation of governance mechanisms. This goes beyond a simple division of roles, pointing instead to the emergence of an integrated governance model that links norms with technology and policy with operations. Such integration is particularly important in addressing existing limitations in implementation capacity.

Furthermore, scientific and industrial collaboration serves as a key domain through which this partnership can be operationalized. Joint research initiatives, data sharing, and technological cooperation strengthen the scientific foundation of policymaking while also fostering trust in international cooperation. At the same time, collaboration in maritime logistics, green technologies, and energy sectors enables the pursuit of both economic opportunity and environmental sustainability. These efforts contribute to transforming Arctic governance into a more practical and executable system.

To summarize the main findings and theoretical contributions of this study, Table X presents the key arguments regarding the transformation of Arctic governance and the strategic significance of Europe–Korea cooperation.

As summarized in Table 1, the transformation of Arctic governance reflects a broader shift from geography-based authority toward contribution-based legitimacy. The findings of this study suggest that influence within Arctic governance is increasingly shaped by the ability of actors to provide scientific knowledge, technological capacity, institutional support, and practical solutions to shared challenges. From this perspective, discourse and identity are not merely symbolic elements but strategic resources that enable actors to establish credibility and sustain participation in governance processes. The cases of Europe and Korea further demonstrate that effective governance is strengthened when normative leadership and functional capabilities operate in a complementary manner. Accordingly, the future development of Arctic governance is likely to depend on governance arrangements that connect institutional frameworks with operational implementation and combine regulatory coordination with technological innovation.

Table 1. Core Arguments and Contributions of the Study

Analytical Dimension	**Main Argument**	**Implication for Arctic Governance**
Governance Transformation	Arctic governance is shifting from a geography-based system toward a contribution-based governance model.	Legitimacy is increasingly derived from functional participation and sustained contributions rather than territorial proximity.
Role of Discourse and Identity	State influence is shaped not only by material capabilities but also by discourse, identity construction, and role performance.	Arctic governance should be understood as a socially constructed and dynamic order.
Europe's Position	Europe has established normative leadership through environmental governance, scientific research, and institutional development.	Europe functions as a key norm-setting actor that supports the stability and sustainability of Arctic governance.
Korea's Evolving Role	Korea is transitioning from a "responsible observer" to an "enabler" through technological expertise, scientific capacity, and operational contributions.	Korea's legitimacy increasingly stems from its ability to facilitate cooperation and provide practical governance solutions.
Europe–Korea Complementarity	Europe's normative and institutional strengths complement Korea's technological and industrial capabilities.	Combining governance expertise with operational capacity can address existing implementation gaps in Arctic governance.
Future Governance Model	Effective Arctic governance requires cooperative structures that integrate norms, technology, and multilateral collaboration	Europe–Korea cooperation provides a model for a more adaptive, resilient, and inclusive governance architecture.

Ultimately, the future of Arctic governance will depend not on the unilateral role of any single actor, but on cooperative structures that combine complementary capabilities. The convergence of Europe's normative leadership and Korea's functional contributions offers a pathway toward a more stable, sustainable, and resilient governance model. Such cooperation not only helps maintain the Arctic as a space of collaboration rather than competition but also holds broader implications as a model for global governance in an increasingly complex international environment. Beyond the Arctic itself, this partnership illustrates how middle powers and non-Arctic stakeholders can contribute constructively to addressing transnational challenges through multilateral cooperation, knowledge sharing, and capability-based participation. In this regard, Europe–Korea cooperation represents not only a regional governance strategy but also an example of how future international governance frameworks may evolve in response to growing geopolitical uncertainty and global interdependence.

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SOUTH KOREA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOWARD PORTUGAL: THE CURRENT STATE AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

This study examines South Korea's public diplomacy toward Portugal as cross-regional middle-power cooperation. Despite ties since 1961, research on this relationship remains limited. Hallyu has bridged cultural gaps, fostering participatory fandom among Portuguese youth through K-pop and K-dramas. State-led projection tools—King Sejong Institutes and K-pop events—built initial attractiveness. The 2023 agreements on triangular cooperation and sustainable development highlight Portugal's CPLP gateway role and shared interests in renewables and green technologies. However, the projection-dominant model limits reciprocity, normative depth, and institutional ties, hindering conversion of cultural capital into sustained leverage. The study contrasts projection with advocacy/relational paradigms and proposes a shift toward the latter. Recommendations include reframing Hallyu for joint cultural projects and fan campaigns; partnering with Camões, I.P. for dual-language programs; and focusing on green governance and triangular cooperation in CPLP regions. Short-term actions emphasize workshops and fandom initiatives; medium- to long-term strategies prioritize networks and monitoring. Challenges like resource asymmetries are addressed through listening and reciprocity. This relational model aligns with pragmatic diplomacy focused on national interests and autonomy, offering a template for diversifying outreach into Southern Europe and the Lusophone world. It strengthens middle-power convening and bridging capacities. The Korea–Portugal case shows projection excels at initial engagement, but relational approaches are key for lasting strategic value. Future research should explore its application to other under-studied bilateral contexts.

Keywords

Hallyu, Public Diplomacy, Relational Public Diplomacy, Korea-Portugal Relations, Middle-Power Diplomacy.

Resumo

Este estudo aborda a diplomacia pública da Coreia do Sul em relação a Portugal como uma cooperação inter-regional entre potências médias. Apesar das relações que remontam a 1961, a investigação sobre esta relação continua a ser limitada. O Hallyu colmatou as diferenças culturais, promovendo uma cultura de fãs participativa entre a juventude portuguesa através do K-pop e das séries coreanas. As ferramentas de projeção lideradas pelo Estado — os Institutos Rei Sejong e os eventos de K-pop — criaram a atratividade inicial. Os acordos de 2023 sobre cooperação triangular e desenvolvimento sustentável destacam o papel de Portugal como porta de entrada para a CPLP e os interesses comuns em energias renováveis e tecnologias verdes. No entanto, o modelo dominado pela projeção limita a reciprocidade, a profundidade normativa e os laços institucionais, dificultando a conversão do capital cultural em influência sustentada. O estudo contrasta a projeção com os paradigmas de defesa de causas e de relações e propõe uma mudança no sentido destes últimos. As recomendações incluem reformular a Hallyu para projetos culturais conjuntos e campanhas de fãs; estabelecer parcerias com o Instituto Camões, I.P. para programas bilingues; e centrar-se na governação verde e na cooperação triangular nas regiões da CPLP. As ações a curto prazo dão ênfase a workshops e iniciativas de fãs; as estratégias a médio e longo prazo dão prioridade às redes e ao acompanhamento. Desafios como as assimetrias de recursos são abordados através da escuta e da reciprocidade. Este modelo relacional alinha-se com uma diplomacia pragmática centrada nos interesses nacionais e na autonomia, oferecendo um modelo para diversificar o alcance na Europa do Sul e no mundo lusófono. Reforça as capacidades de convocação e de aproximação das potências médias. O caso Coreia–Portugal mostra que a projeção se destaca no envolvimento inicial, mas as abordagens relacionais são fundamentais para um valor estratégico duradouro. Investigação futura deverá explorar a sua aplicação a outros contextos bilaterais pouco estudados.

Palavras-chave

Hallyu, Diplomacia Pública, Diplomacia Pública Relacional, Relações Coreia-Portugal, Diplomacia das Potências Médias.

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Introduction

The 21st-century diplomacy has seen a marked diffusion of power, where traditional hard power mechanisms are increasingly complemented by soft power, which can be defined as the capacity to shape preferences through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2004). For middle powers such as South Korea, public diplomacy has become a vital instrument for enhancing influence in a multipolar world, allowing them to bridge great-power rivalries and contribute to global norms (Cooper, 1997). In this context, the bilateral relationship with Portugal provides a compelling case of cross-regional alignment between two middle powers, driven by historical legacies, cultural exchanges, and emerging strategic imperatives.

Formal diplomatic ties between South Korea and Portugal were established on April 15, 1961, even though their interactions trace back to early modern encounters. Portuguese cartographers, including Manuel Godinho de Erédia in 1615, depicted the sea east of the Korean Peninsula as "Mar Coria" (Sea of Korea), offering one of the earliest European recognitions of Korean sovereignty and geography (Jung, 2025). This historical narrative of mutual discovery serves as a foundation for contemporary legitimacy, distinguishing the relationship from many of Korea's other Western partnerships.

The 60th anniversary in 2021 marked a renewed phase, amplified by the global reach of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), which has significantly boosted cultural familiarity in Portugal. A pivotal development occurred in April 2023, when Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa visited Seoul—the first such trip in 39 years—resulting in agreements on triangular cooperation in third countries, sustainable development, and university partnerships (Government of Portugal, 2023). These accords highlighted shared interests in future industries, including semiconductors, electric vehicle batteries, and renewable energy, while underscoring Portugal's role as a gateway to the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) (Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Despite growing trade and Hallyu's popularity, the partnership remains imbalanced. South Korea's public diplomacy toward Portugal is predominantly projection-oriented, emphasizing cultural exports like K-pop festivals and language programs through the King Sejong Institutes. This approach, while effective in building attractiveness, falls short in fostering normative depth or institutional ties compared to Portugal's networked diplomacy via the Camões - Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua, I.P (hereafter Camões, I.P.). The core issue lies in the limitations of the projection model, which transmits national identity unilaterally without cultivating shared values.

In contrast, advocacy public diplomacy promotes consensus on global norms through relational engagement, aligning with middle-power strategies for network power. South Korea necessitates this shift, particularly in leveraging Portugal for broader influence in Lusophone regions. In this context, this study evaluates the current projection-dominant approach, analyzes Portugal's strategic value, and proposes an advocacy model integrating cultural assets with shared norms in green governance and development cooperation.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

Despite the sixty-year diplomatic history between the Republic of Korea and the Portuguese Republic, academic scholarship dedicated to this bilateral relationship remains scarce and fragmented, usually appearing as a minor component within broader studies of Portuguese studies in Korea or of Korea's soft power and public diplomacy in Europe (Jung, 2023; Ban, 2020). A recent mapping of the trends of Portuguese studies in South Korea shows that research spans politics, economics, society, and culture, but it also notes that bilateral diplomacy and public diplomacy between Korea and Portugal remain largely unexplored as primary objects of analysis (Jung, 2023). One of the few dedicated accounts of the relationship offers a descriptive overview of diplomatic milestones and sectoral cooperation, however it does not theorize the ties as a middle-power partnership or as a case of cross-regional public diplomacy (Jung, 2025).

Parallel literatures on Hallyu and Korean soft power highlight how popular culture has been incorporated into state strategies for nation branding and middle power diplomacy, while also raising concerns that a state-driven export model can limit reciprocity and relational engagement (Ban, 2020; Oliveira, 2025). Despite the geographical distance, the cultural proximity between South Korea and Portugal has been significantly narrowed by the transnational flow of Hallyu, academic scrutiny of this specific bilateral reception remains insufficient. Recent scholarship has begun to explore K-pop fandom in Portugal, identifying it not merely as passive consumption but as a site of active identity construction and "participatory culture" (Guerra & Sousa, 2021). Studies indicate that Portuguese fans engage in complex processes of "transnational proximity," where shared socio-cultural experiences—such as youth precarity and digital nativism—bridge the gap with Korean cultural products, challenging traditional notions of cultural distance (Jin, 2023). However, a critical gap persists in the literature regarding the conversion of this cultural capital into diplomatic instruments; while the Korea Foundation (2023) reports a surge in European Hallyu fans to about 13.2 million with continued growth noted in subsequent analyses, research specifically linking this fandom to the public diplomacy objectives of the South Korean state in Southern Europe is sparse. This disconnect highlights the need for further inquiry into how the soft power generated by Hallyu can be effectively operationalized to support broader strategic goals within the specific context of Korea-Portugal relations.

In this context, this article is original in three respects. First, it takes Korea–Portugal relations themselves, rather than "Europe" in general, as the main unit of analysis, thereby connecting Portuguese studies in Korea with scholarship on Korea's middle power and public diplomacy. Second, it conceptualizes South Korea's public diplomacy toward Portugal as predominantly projection-oriented and explicitly juxtaposes it with Portugal's more networked Camões, I.P. model, providing empirical leverage for debates on projection versus advocacy public diplomacy and on relational soft power. Third, it foregrounds Portugal's role as a gateway to Lusophone networks and explores how Korean cultural assets can be embedded in advocacy-based cooperation on development, thus extending both public diplomacy and middle-power diplomacy debates into a bilaterally and regionally under-researched arena.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws primarily from the scholarship on public diplomacy, particularly the distinction between projection-oriented approaches and advocacy/relational models that emphasize dialogue, mutuality, long-term relationship-building, and network collaboration. This distinction is essential for analyzing South Korea's current public diplomacy toward Portugal, which remains predominantly projection-dominant through unilateral cultural exports (e.g., K-pop events, King Sejong Institutes), while highlighting the potential for a shift toward advocacy-based strategies that foster shared norms and institutional ties.

Joseph Nye's foundational concept of soft power—the ability to shape preferences through attraction rather than coercion—can effectively explain much of the discussion on middle-power public diplomacy (Nye, 2004). For middle powers like South Korea, soft power serves as a key instrument to enhance influence in a multipolar world, complementing hard power limitations and enabling contributions to global norms and bridging functions. Public diplomacy operationalizes soft power by engaging foreign publics directly, but its effectiveness depends on the communication logic employed.

Traditional public diplomacy often relied on projection models, characterized by one-way information dissemination, mass-media campaigns, and efforts to "sell" a national image or identity unilaterally (Cull, 2009; Melissen, 2005). This approach aligns with state-driven cultural export strategies, which can build initial attractiveness but frequently limit reciprocity, genuine engagement, and normative depth—issues particularly relevant to Korea's Hallyu-focused efforts (Ban, 2020; Oliveira, 2025). In contrast, the "new public diplomacy" or relational turn advocates a paradigm shift toward dialogue, listening, mutuality, and collaborative networks (Melissen, 2005; Zaharna et al., 2013). Rhonda Zaharna and colleagues emphasize relational, networked, and collaborative approaches, where public diplomacy moves from information control to skilled relationship management, building sustainable connections among state and non-state actors through shared values, co-creation, and connective mindshifts (Zaharna et al., 2013). This relational paradigm prioritizes advocacy—promoting consensus on global issues via mutual engagement—over mere projection, enabling middle powers to cultivate network power through convening capabilities and partnerships (Hafner-Burton et al., 2009; Sohn, 2012).

Portugal's public diplomacy exemplifies networked and relational elements through institutions like the Camões, I.P., which promotes language, culture, and cooperation via decentralized, inter-societal ties and long-term relational engagement across Lusophone networks as reflected in Portugal's broader diplomatic practices. This contrasts with Korea's more centralized, projection-heavy model, providing empirical space to evaluate the limitations of unilateral strategies and the advantages of advocacy-oriented shifts.

In the Korea–Portugal context, a relational advocacy model would integrate Hallyu-generated cultural capital with collaborative initiatives on shared global norms, such as green governance, sustainable development, and triangular cooperation in CPLP regions. This approach aligns with middle-power behavioral traits, which can facilitate multilateralism, norm entrepreneurship, and bridging cross-regional divides while addressing literature gaps in converting fandom-driven proximity into diplomatic scene. South Korea could transform its public diplomacy from image projection to normative co-construction, enhancing strategic depth in Lusophone spheres and supporting broader goals by foregrounding mutuality and networked engagement.

These theoretical examinations thus can thus effectively illuminate projection versus advocacy or relational logics to assess the current state of Korea's efforts toward Portugal and propose pathways for more effective, reciprocal public diplomacy.

Current State of South Korea's Public Diplomacy toward Portugal

Historical and Institutional Overview of Bilateral Public Diplomacy

Early interactions were limited. Portuguese cartographic records provide the earliest evidence of Korean awareness in Europe, with Francisco Rodrigues' 1513 map containing one of the first references to Korea as "Coria," followed by consistent mentions of "Core" in subsequent maps by Bartolomeu Velho (1561) and Manuel Godinho de Erédia (1613). Fernão Mendes Pinto's disputed account of reaching the Han River in 1542 suggests possible direct contact, though historians continue to debate its authenticity (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Portugal, 2017).

Diplomatic channels facilitated more deliberate exchanges by the early 17th century, most notably through Joseon envoy Jeong Du-won's 1631 encounter with Portuguese missionary Rodrigues during a mission to Ming China (Park, 1999; Ahn, 2009). Serving as a papal interpreter fluent in Japanese, Rodrigues presented Jeong with transformative Western technologies including a telescope, firearms, and a mechanical clock—items virtually unknown in Joseon society (Park, 1999). As Park (1999) notes, Rodrigues' gifts represented one of the earliest documented instances of European scientific instruments reaching the Korean peninsula. These technology transfers, though sporadic and geographically indirect, established vital conduits for European knowledge dissemination that would underpin more formalized relations in subsequent eras (Jung, 2025).

The bilateral public diplomacy between South Korea and Portugal, while rooted in formal diplomatic ties established in 1961, has evolved through a combination of institutional mechanisms and cultural exchanges, reflecting both countries' middle-power aspirations in a multipolar global order. Public diplomacy efforts gained momentum in the 21st Century, aligning with South Korea's broader middle-power strategy that emphasizes soft power to complement its economic influence (Sohn, 2012; Lee, 2016). Key institutions driving this include South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Korea Foundation, which coordinate cultural and educational outreach, and Portugal's Camões, I.P., which promotes Portuguese soft power through decentralized language and cultural programs.

Institutionally, South Korea's projection-oriented approach is evident in the establishment of the King Sejong Institute in Lisbon in 2013, which focuses on Korean language education and cultural immersion as tools for building attractiveness. This mirrors broader Korean public diplomacy trends, where language institutes serve as gateways for soft power dissemination, similar to efforts in other European contexts (Cho et al., 2022). By 2023, the institute had expanded its activities to include online and in-person courses, reaching over 500 students annually, with programs emphasizing practical communication and cultural events like K-pop workshops (King Sejong Institute Foundation, 2024).

In contrast, Portugal's Camões, I.P., created in 1992, exemplifies a relational model, fostering inter-societal ties across Lusophone networks in Africa, Asia, and Latin America through cooperative language programs and development initiatives. This networked approach prioritizes mutuality and long-term engagement. The 2023 bilateral agreements, signed during Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa's visit to Seoul, marked a pivotal institutional milestone, encompassing triangular cooperation in third countries (e.g., Lusophone Africa), sustainable development, and university partnerships (Government of Portugal, 2023). These accords build on earlier milestones like the 2021 60th anniversary celebrations, which included joint seminars and cultural exchanges. This institutional overview highlights how bilateral public diplomacy has shifted from sporadic exchanges to structured cooperation. However, it remains dominated by projection logics on the Korean side, limiting deeper relational integration.

Hallyu as a Core Projection Tool in Portugal

Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, serves as the central axis of South Korea's projection-oriented public diplomacy in Portugal, facilitating cultural proximity despite geographical distance through popular media like K-pop and K-dramas. Scholarly examinations reveal that Hallyu has narrowed cultural gaps by appealing to shared socio-cultural experiences among Portuguese youth, such as precarity and digital nativism (Jin, 2023). In Portugal, K-pop fandom has grown from niche communities in the early 2010s to a participatory culture involving active identity construction, as evidenced by fan-led events and memorabilia practices (Guerra & Sousa, 2021). The Korea Foundation's 2023 Global

Hallyu Status report indicates a surge in European fans to approximately 13.2 million, with Portugal contributing through increased consumption of K-content via platforms like Netflix and Spotify (Korea Foundation, 2023). Further evidence comes from ethnographic investigations that document how Portuguese K-pop enthusiasts build and sustain robust online communities. These spaces go well beyond casual enjoyment of music and drama; they become platforms for active cultural advocacy, where fans promote Korean artists, share knowledge about Korean society, and even organize grassroots initiatives that raise awareness of Korean culture among broader Portuguese circles (Guerra & Sousa, 2021).

Projection strategies are often operationalized through state-supported initiatives, such as K-pop festivals and collaborations with local institutions. For instance, the King Sejong Institute in Lisbon integrates Hallyu elements into language curricula, using K-dramas for vocabulary building and cultural immersion, which aligns with South Korea's broader soft power export model (Ban, 2020). As discussed earlier, existing studies continuously emphasize how transnational proximity, bridging cultural distances via digital media, has enabled Portuguese fans to engage in complex identity processes, challenging traditional notions of passive consumption (Jin, 2023; Abd-Rahim, 2019).

Nevertheless, despite these notable achievements, Hallyu's function within Portugal continues to operate in a largely one-directional manner. State institutions such as the Korea Foundation provide substantial financial and organizational support for promotional campaigns, artist visits, and content distribution, yet there is little corresponding inflow of Portuguese cultural elements into Korea or balanced mutual exchange (Oliveira, 2025). Consequently, while this projection mechanism successfully strengthens South Korea's national image, associating the country with innovation, youth appeal, and emotional resonance, it ultimately proves insufficient in transforming accumulated cultural capital into enduring and substantive diplomatic influence across Southern Europe.

Limitations and Imbalances in the Current Projection Model

South Korea's projection-oriented public diplomacy toward Portugal reveals deep structural imbalances, particularly in reciprocity, normative alignment, and institutional symmetry, all of which collectively undermine the potential for long-term relational ties and genuine bilateral trust-building. Scholarly evaluations of Korean public diplomacy strategies consistently emphasize that while cultural exports such as Hallyu content, language programs, and promotional events generate considerable initial appeal and positive national branding, they frequently perpetuate a predominantly one-way communicative structure. This model tends to prioritize dissemination of Korean narratives over genuine mutual exchanges that could enrich bilateral understanding, foster interpersonal connections, or create shared interpretive frameworks between the two societies (Heo & Roehrig, 2021). In the specific Portuguese context, this limitation manifests most clearly in the overwhelming predominance of Korean-led initiatives—ranging from the King Sejong Institute's language courses and cultural workshops to K-pop festivals and artist promotion tours—which place far greater emphasis on exporting and disseminating Korean cultural products than on collaborative norm development, joint agenda-setting, or co-creation of meaning.

Further critiques in the literature argue that projection models are intrinsically constrained in their ability to cultivate authentic shared values and normative convergence. Because they are fundamentally oriented toward unilateral broadcasting of a carefully curated national identity and attractive image, they often fail to adequately respond to or integrate the partner country's unique historical, cultural, and diplomatic priorities. In Portugal's case, this is particularly evident in the mismatch with Portugal's longstanding commitment to Lusophone multilateralism through the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). Portugal has built its diplomatic identity around decentralized, networked cooperation across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, emphasizing language promotion, inter-societal ties, and regional solidarity—elements that are not meaningfully engaged or mirrored in South Korea's current approach (Park, 2020). This fundamental asymmetry becomes visible when comparing operational styles: South Korea's highly centralized, state-directed mechanisms (coordinated primarily through MOFA and the Korea Foundation) stand in sharp contrast to Portugal's more decentralized, inter-societal, and long-term relational networks exemplified by the Camões, I.P.. Such differences may inadvertently exacerbate imbalances in institutional commitment, resource allocation, engagement depth, and sustainability of outcomes (Melissen & Sohn, 2015).

A concrete illustration of these limitations can be found in the implementation of the 2023 bilateral agreements on triangular cooperation in third countries, sustainable development, and university partnerships. While these pacts theoretically represent promising entry points for more advocacy-oriented and relational interactions, their practical execution has remained largely Korean-centric in both planning and resource mobilization. There has been insufficient incorporation of Portuguese perspectives, expertise, or leadership—particularly concerning sustainable development initiatives within CPLP member states in Lusophone Africa, where Portugal possesses decades of accumulated diplomatic capital and local knowledge.

Moreover, the heavy reliance on state-orchestrated cultural exports carries the additional risk of overlooking or underestimating detailed and sophisticated local socio-cultural dynamics in Portugal. These include generational attitudes toward globalization, persistent youth precarity in the labor market, preferences for participatory and horizontal cultural interactions over top-down dissemination, and a strong historical consciousness tied to Portugal's colonial and post-colonial legacy. When such contextual factors are not adequately considered, interactions tend to remain surface-level and episodic, ultimately failing to evolve into meaningful diplomatic resource capable of addressing shared global challenges such as climate resilience, digital inclusion, or equitable development cooperation. In other words, these structural shortcomings and operational asymmetries highlight a pressing need for a fundamental paradigm shift toward more relational and advocacy-focused public diplomacy strategies.

Empirical Evaluations

An empirical evaluation of South Korea's public diplomacy efforts directed at Portugal presents a nuanced picture: substantial and measurable cultural gains coexist with persistent and significant deficiencies in converting those gains into comprehensive, durable, and strategically meaningful diplomatic outcomes. Drawing on survey-based and perception-oriented studies across Europe, Korean cultural outreach, particularly Hallyu-driven initiatives, has demonstrably improved general favorability ratings, brand perception, and overall goodwill toward South Korea among European publics. However, when it comes to more normative, policy-oriented, and institutionally embedded domains, the results remain inconsistent, showing only limited advancements in perceptions of bilateral cooperation depth, shared strategic alignment, or mutual commitment to global norms (Cho et al., 2023).

Within the Portuguese context specifically, quantitative indicators derived from comprehensive global Hallyu tracking reports and audience consumption data show fundamental increases in fan participation, content streaming volumes, social media engagement, and event attendance. These correlate positively with favorable economic perceptions of Korea, such as views of Korea as a leading source of innovative technologies, creative industries, and high-quality entertainment. Nevertheless, accompanying qualitative insights from fan studies, stakeholder interviews, and diplomatic observation consistently point to stagnant or slow progress in building political confidence, establishing durable institutional interconnections, or developing sustained advocacy networks that extend meaningfully beyond the entertainment and youth subcultural spheres (Silva, 2021; Passeira, 2024).

Other studies further illuminate this argument. Projection-centric activities—such as large-scale cultural festivals, sponsored artist promotions, and state-funded language education—excel at generating short-term boosts in attractiveness and brand recall. In contrast, they consistently underperform in sustaining longer-term indicators, including collaborative policy undertakings, joint advocacy on international norms, deepened inter-institutional linkages, or grassroots support for foreign policy priorities (Jayasundara, 2023; Nye, 2004; British Council, 2022). This shortfall is largely attributable to ongoing imbalances in mutual engagement, dialogue, and listening mechanisms.

Comparative empirical evidence, when placed alongside South Korea's public diplomacy experiences in other European countries (e.g., Hargtai et al., 2023), further underscores Portugal's relative underutilization as a strategic entry point into the broader Lusophone world. Despite the presence of a growing and highly engaged K-pop and K-drama fandom base, there is still little evidence that this cultural enthusiasm has evolved into active, organized backing for broader diplomatic agendas, such as advocacy on global priorities in green governance, renewable energy transitions, or multilateral development cooperation across CPLP regions.

In summary, these empirical observations confirmed the projection model's clear strengths in laying foundational cultural groundwork, achieving high visibility, and generating positive affective responses in the target society. At the same time, however, they expose critical vulnerabilities in reciprocity, normative depth, institutional conversion, and strategic sustainability. The evidence strongly suggests that relational-oriented enhancements—emphasizing dialogue, co-creation, mutual listening, and networked collaboration—are essential to realizing more balanced, enduring, and geopolitically impactful diplomatic leverage in the evolving Korea-Portugal relationship.

Future Implications and Recommendations: Toward a Relational Model

The empirical and theoretical analysis in the preceding chapters reveals that South Korea's public diplomacy toward Portugal, while successful in generating cultural attractiveness through projection mechanisms like Hallyu exports and King Sejong programs, remains constrained by unidirectional flows, limited reciprocity, and insufficient normative depth. To address these gaps and maximize the bilateral relationship's potential, this chapter proposes a deliberate shift toward an advocacy-based relational model. This approach, grounded in dialogue, mutual listening, and networked collaboration, would transform Hallyu from a tool of image projection into a platform for shared value-building and long-term partnership. Such a reorientation aligns closely with South Korea's middle-power identity, enabling proactive norm entrepreneurship and contributions to global public goods in an increasingly multipolar world (Brookings Institution, 2023) and the current administration's emphasis on pragmatic diplomacy centered on national interests, strategic autonomy, and balanced engagement in a complex global environment. The sections below elaborate on Portugal's strategic significance, outline concrete pathways for relational transformation, provide actionable policy recommendations with phased implementation considerations, and explore broader implications for Korean public diplomacy.

Strategic Value of Portugal for Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy

Portugal remains a high-value partner for South Korea's middle-power diplomacy, largely because of its pivotal role in the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). This multilateral framework unites nine member states—Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Equatorial Guinea, and Timor-Leste—with a combined population of over 270 million spread across four continents (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2017). The CPLP provides a distinctive platform for linguistic, cultural, economic, and developmental cooperation, granting access to dynamic emerging markets in Africa and Latin America where South Korea's expertise in technology, renewables, and digital infrastructure can complement Portugal's established diplomatic networks and normative influence.

From a theoretical perspective in middle-power diplomacy literature, Portugal's position within the CPLP enables South Korea to engage in triangular cooperation modalities that amplify leverage without direct confrontation with major powers. Triangular arrangements—typically involving a traditional donor (or facilitator like Portugal), an emerging provider (South Korea), and beneficiary countries in the Global South—facilitate knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and sustainable development initiatives in Lusophone regions, particularly Africa. Such frameworks allow middle powers to pursue niche roles in norm diffusion and multilateralism, emphasizing mutual benefit and horizontal partnerships over hierarchical aid models (Abdenur & Fonseca, 2013). For South Korea, this opens paths to extend its developmental area into under-served Lusophone markets, where shared linguistic and historical ties facilitate smoother entry and greater local ownership compared to bilateral approaches alone. Recent analyses of South-South and triangular cooperation highlight how these mechanisms enhance agenda-setting power for non-Western actors (OECD, 2025), enabling South Korea to contribute to global public goods like climate-resilient infrastructure and inclusive growth while diversifying its strategic partnerships.

In the context of the current South Korean administration's pragmatic diplomacy—prioritizing national interests, strategic autonomy, and balanced relations amid global uncertainties—Portugal offers a strategic entry point for cross-regional engagement without over-reliance on any single great power (Chatham House, 2025). By pursuing relational engagement with Portugal, South Korea can diversify its diplomatic footprint beyond traditional Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic alignments, fostering bridging functions between developed and developing regions while advancing practical cooperation on shared priorities such as climate resilience and inclusive growth.

Shift to Relational and Advocacy Public Diplomacy

To transcend the limitations of unilateral projection, South Korea should reframe Hallyu as a relational and connective resource that promotes dialogue and co-creation. Concrete measures could include joint cultural fusion projects that merge Korean and Portuguese elements. For instance, collaborative performances blending K-pop with Fado or Portuguese folk traditions, or participatory campaigns where Portuguese K-pop fans team up with Korean creators to address themes like youth empowerment, environmental awareness, or cultural heritage. These efforts would capitalize on existing participatory fandom in Portugal—evident in online communities and fan-led activities—to evolve beyond consumption into mutual storytelling, emotional resonance, and shared identity-building (Guerra & Sousa, 2021).

A pivotal axis of this shift would be structured partnerships with Portugal's Camões, I.P., which models decentralized, networked relational diplomacy through its extensive global centers for language and culture. Possible collaborations include co-developed dual-language programs (Korean-Portuguese), joint artist residencies, teacher exchanges, and efforts to integrate Korean language and cultural education into Lusophone systems in Brazil, Angola, and other CPLP nations—utilizing Camões' established infrastructure for scalable, reciprocal impact.

Normative priorities should guide these initiatives: center shared global agendas such as green governance through joint projects on renewable energy innovation, EV supply-chain sustainability, and climate adaptation tailored to Lusophone developing countries. Triangular development cooperation in CPLP regions could incorporate Hallyu-driven youth engagement—such as fan-led sustainability challenges—with policy advocacy on UN Sustainable Development Goals, thereby linking cultural appeal to substantive normative consensus and practical cooperation (Kim, 2021). This relational framework, rooted in listening, feedback loops, and sustained relationship management, would elevate public diplomacy from brand promotion to genuine co-construction of values and outcomes (Zaharna et al., 2013).

Policy Recommendations and Broader Implications for Bilateral Ties

Short-term actions should prioritize realistic, low-barrier initiatives that build immediate trust and demonstrate tangible mutual value. Key measures include deepening operational linkages between the King Sejong Institute in Lisbon and Camões, I.P. language/cultural centers through co-hosted workshops on language pedagogy, virtual exchange programs for learners and educators, and the development of shared digital platforms (e.g., bilingual apps or online resource hubs) that facilitate cross-cultural content sharing and joint curriculum design. These collaborations can start with pilot programs focused on youth audiences, leveraging existing Hallyu interest in Portugal to introduce Portuguese language and culture elements alongside Korean studies (Camões, I.P., n.d.; Jung, 2024).

Concurrently, initiate targeted Hallyu fandom advocacy campaigns that connect popular culture participation to issue-based messaging. For example, themed social media challenges, fan-organized virtual events, or community-driven initiatives promoting bilateral commitments to green and sustainable development goals. Evidence from recent cases shows that K-pop fan communities can mobilize rapidly and shape corporate and public agendas, including around climate-related campaigns. Such efforts are cost-effective and can quickly generate positive feedback loops in public perceptions when designed around two-way engagement rather than one-way projection.

Medium- to long-term strategies should focus on institutionalizing and expanding these relational foundations into sustainable, multi-layered networks. Establish formalized multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together NGOs, universities, businesses, civil society organizations, and youth groups from both countries to co-design and implement programs across green technology innovation, triangular development cooperation in Lusophone regions, and ongoing cultural exchange. Triangular cooperation guidance emphasizes co-design, local ownership, and demand-driven partnerships, while also noting the need to manage inherent power asymmetries among partners (OECD and Islamic Development Bank, 2025).

Potential challenges must be proactively managed to ensure a successful transition. Bureaucratic resistance to shifting from familiar projection habits, differing priorities in Lusophone engagement, or uneven enthusiasm among non-state actors can be mitigated through structured "listening" mechanisms such as regular consultations with Portuguese stakeholders, fan communities, and civil society groups, consistent with relational public diplomacy approaches that prioritize sustained relationship-building and mutuality. Finally, adopting a relational model with Portugal could serve as a template for broadening South Korea's public diplomacy outreach into Southern Europe and the wider Lusophone world, especially by combining cultural attraction with network-building across diverse stakeholders. This diversification can reduce vulnerability to geopolitical volatility by widening partnerships and strengthening adaptive, network-based influence strategies associated with middle-power diplomacy. At the same time, integrating Hallyu into agenda-driven cooperation should be approached carefully to avoid "silo" effects between cultural diplomacy and development objectives.

Conclusion

This study examined South Korea's public diplomacy toward Portugal through the lens of projection-oriented versus advocacy-based relational models, revealing both achievements and persistent limitations in the bilateral relationship. Despite geographical distance and historical asymmetries, Hallyu has successfully narrowed cultural gaps, fostering participatory fandom and transnational proximity among Portuguese youth (Jin, 2023; Guerra & Sousa, 2021). State-supported initiatives, including King Sejong Institute programs and promotional events, have built initial attractiveness and contributed to growing familiarity with Korean culture. The 2023 bilateral agreements on triangular cooperation, sustainable development, and university partnerships further signal shared strategic interests in future-oriented sectors like renewables and advanced technologies.

However, the current projection-dominant approach—characterized by unidirectional cultural exports and centralized state coordination—falls short in reciprocity, normative depth, and institutional integration. This limits the conversion of cultural capital into sustained diplomacy, particularly in leveraging Portugal's gateway role within the CPLP network. The relational turn proposed here offers a viable path forward. By repositioning Hallyu as a connective tool for joint projects, forging partnerships with institutions like the Camões I.P., and centering shared norms in green governance and triangular cooperation, South Korea can cultivate more equitable and resilient ties.

Under the current administration's pragmatic diplomacy, the relational model aligns well with a focus on practical outcomes and diversity. Short-term trust-building measures, such as joint workshops and fandom advocacy campaigns, can generate immediate momentum, while medium- to long-term network institutionalization and monitoring frameworks ensure sustainability. Addressing challenges like resource asymmetries through proactive listening and phased reciprocity will be essential to success. Ultimately, deepening relational public diplomacy with Portugal holds broader significance for South Korea as a middle power. It provides a scalable template for expanding outreach into Southern Europe and the Lusophone world, diversifying diplomatic engagement beyond traditional alignments and enhancing adaptability in a multipolar world.

This bilateral case highlights a key insight for middle-power public diplomacy: while projection excels at initial outreach, relational approaches are indispensable for converting attractiveness into enduring strategic value. Future research could extend this framework to other under-explored partnerships, testing its applicability across diverse cultural and geopolitical contexts.

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THE IMPACT OF GEOPOLITICAL DISTANCE ON FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT: EVIDENCE FROM EU-ASEAN RELATIONS

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Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive empirical assessment of the evolving determinants of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows from the European Union (EU) to the ASEAN region between 2013 and 2025. It aims to analyze how geopolitical shifts, liguistic variables, and institutional frameworks influence capital allocation in an era of global "de-risking." Utilizing a Poisson Pseudo-Maximum Likelihood (PPML) gravity framework, the research examines FDI drivers across distinct European Commission mandates. The study incorporates variables such as Geopolitical Distance (based on UN voting alignments), the "Linguistic Premium," and institutional milestones like the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). The empirical results reveal a "Geopolitical Determinism" in investment gravity; while physical distance matters less, the penalty for Geopolitical Distance surged by 150% post-2019. Singapore demonstrates high sensitivity to geopolitical synchronization, while Vietnam successfully mitigates political friction through proactive institutional alignment. Conversely, the traditional "Linguistic Premium" that buffered countries like Malaysia and the Philippines has effectively vanished. Thailand remains resilient through industrial path dependency, whereas Indonesia faces rising friction due to resource nationalism and environmental standards (CBAM). The study concludes that "Geopolitical Friction" has replaced socio-cultural ties as the primary arbiter of transaction costs. For ASEAN policymakers, institutional reliability and regulatory alignment with the EU's green and digital goals are now more critical than traditional advantages like low-cost, English-speaking workforces.

Keywords

ASEAN-EU Relations, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Geopolitical Distance, Gravity Model, Institutional Alignment, PPML Estimation.

Resumo

Este estudo apresenta uma avaliação empírica abrangente dos determinantes em evolução dos fluxos de Investimento Direto Estrangeiro (IDE) da União Europeia (UE) para a região da ASEAN entre 2013 e 2025. Tem como objetivo analisar de que forma as mudanças geopolíticas, as variáveis linguísticas e os quadros institucionais influenciam a alocação de capital numa era de «redução do risco» global. Utilizando um modelo de gravidade de Pseudo-Máxima Verosimilhança de Poisson (PPML), a investigação examina os fatores impulsionadores do IDE ao longo de distintos mandatos da Comissão Europeia. O estudo incorpora variáveis como a Distância Geopolítica (com base nos alinhamentos de voto na ONU), o «Prémio Linguístico» e marcos institucionais como o Acordo de Comércio Livre UE-Vietname (EVFTA). Os resultados empíricos revelam um «determinismo geopolítico» na gravidade dos investimentos; embora a distância física tenha menos importância, a penalização pela distância geopolítica aumentou 150% após 2019. Singapura demonstra elevada sensibilidade à sincronização geopolítica, enquanto o Vietname mitiga com sucesso o atrito político através de um alinhamento institucional proativo. Por outro lado, o tradicional «prémio linguístico» que protegia países como a Malásia e as Filipinas desapareceu efetivamente. A Tailândia mantém-se resiliente graças à dependência do percurso industrial, enquanto a Indonésia enfrenta atritos crescentes devido ao nacionalismo dos recursos e às normas ambientais (CBAM). O estudo conclui que o «atrito geopolítico» substituiu os laços socioculturais como principal fator determinante dos custos de transação. Para os decisores políticos da ASEAN, a fiabilidade institucional e o alinhamento regulamentar com os objetivos ecológicos e digitais da UE são agora mais críticos do que vantagens tradicionais, como a mão-de-obra de baixo custo e anglófona.

Palavras-chave

Relações ASEAN-UE, Investimento Direto Estrangeiro (IDE), Distância geopolítica, Modelo de gravidade, Alinhamento institucional, Estimativa PPML.

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THE IMPACT OF GEOPOLITICAL DISTANCE ON FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT: EVIDENCE FROM EU-ASEAN RELATIONS

YOOMI KIM

Introduction

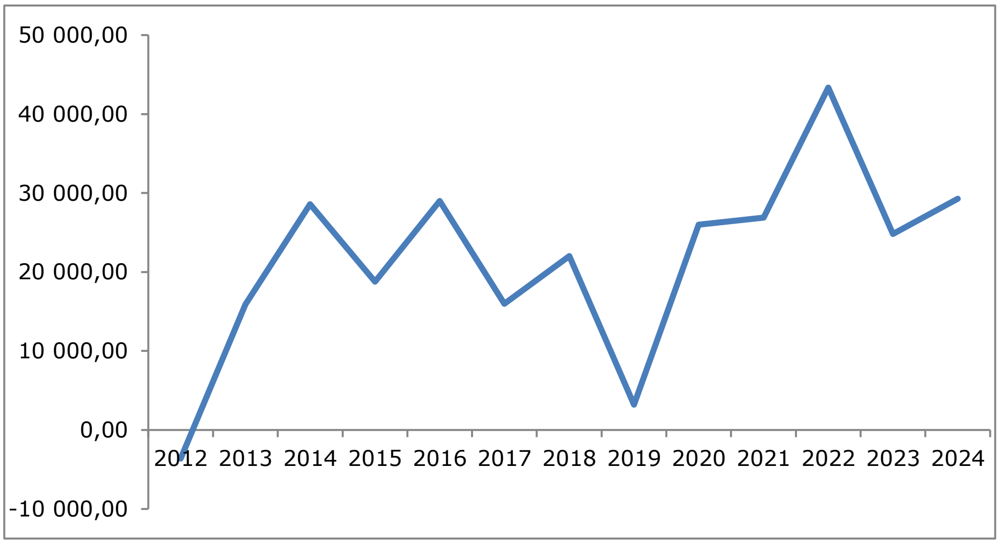
The global economy, once characterized by a robust trend of integration, is currently undergoing significant fragmentation. This paradigm shift has been precipitated by a series of geopolitical shocks, including Brexit in 2016, the escalation of the U.S.-China trade conflict in late 2018, and the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in early 2022. A key metric reflecting this centrifugal force is Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). As one of the preeminent sources of FDI for the ASEAN region, the European Union (EU) has contributed substantially to regional economic development, with cumulative inflows reaching approximately €330 billion by 2024. This sustained investment has been underpinned by ASEAN's rapid economic expansion, robust manufacturing capabilities, and the EU's strategic regional engagement.

Figure 1 illustrates the annual FDI trends between the EU and ASEAN. Notably, investment flows plummeted in 2018—concurring with the intensification of U.S.-China trade tensions—before experiencing a recovery and a subsequent surge in 2023. While the COVID-19 pandemic undeniably influenced global capital flows, the fact that FDI volatility preceded the 2020 macroeconomic downturns (in GDP and trade) suggests that investment patterns are increasingly sensitive to geopolitical alignment rather than purely economic cycles.

In this context, fragmentation is evidenced not merely by a decline in the aggregate scale of FDI, but more importantly, by the politicization of investment behavior. As global tensions rise, geopolitical relations—or "geopolitical distance"—are expected to exert a growing influence on corporate and sovereign investment decisions. Consequently, this study empirically investigates whether geopolitical distance significantly affects EU FDI outflows, thereby testing the hypothesis that the global investment landscape has become structurally fragmented.

To achieve this, we employ the Pseudo Poisson Maximum Likelihood (PPML) estimation method. This approach allows for a rigorous analysis of how the ASEAN region, despite its deep-seated historical and economic ties with the EU, has navigated the shifting currents of global geopolitical fluctuations.

Figure 1. FDI inflow from EU into ASEAN



Source: ASEANStats (2026).

Literature Review

The existing body of literature has extensively documented the traditional determinants of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that market size (Belgibayeva & Plekhanov, 2019), institutional quality and infrastructure (Alfaro, 2017), and the accumulation of human capital (Simionescu & Naros, 2019; Martins et al., 2020) act as significant drivers of inward FDI. Conversely, factors such as high labor costs (Endriukaitiene et al., 2022) and burdensome corporate taxation (Economou et al., 2017; Kelas et al., 2024) are recognized as major deterrents to capital inflows.

Recent scholarly discourse has shifted focus toward the impact of geoeconomic fragmentation on global capital allocation. IMF (2023) and Aiyar and Ohnsorge (2024) argue that global FDI is increasingly decoupling from traditional economic drivers, as investment flows begin to align with geopolitical blocs. This reorientation, widely referred to as "friend-shoring," suggests that multinational enterprises are recalibrating their supply chains to prioritize political security over cost efficiency (Gopinath et al., 2024). Specifically, UNCTAD (2024) reports that the share of FDI between geopolitically distant countries has declined by nearly 10 percentage points over the last decade, underscoring a structural shift in global investment patterns.

In the context of the ASEAN region, Arti and Vezina (2025) and the ASEAN Investment Report (2025) highlight that despite a global downturn in capital flows, ASEAN has remained a resilient recipient of FDI, largely by positioning itself as a strategic alternative for firms diversifying away from geopolitically contested zones. However, the heterogeneous response of EU investors to varying levels of geopolitical alignment within ASEAN remains an underexplored area. While Abeliansky et al. (2024) demonstrate that both FDI and portfolio investments are now significantly influenced by UN voting proximity, this study seeks to provide a more granular analysis of the EU-ASEAN dyad.

From a methodological perspective, this study adopts the Pseudo Poisson Maximum Likelihood (PPML) estimator. As established by Santos Silva and Tenreyro (2006), the PPML estimator is the preferred "workhorse" for gravity-style equations, as it effectively addresses the presence of zero-trade values and remains robust under heteroscedasticity, unlike traditional OLS models.

This research distinguishes itself from previous empirical efforts, notably the foundational work of Ahn et al. (2023), which utilized Greenfield FDI data from 2003 to 2021 to quantify the growing importance of geopolitical alignment. While Ahn et al. identified 2018 as a critical turning point following the resurgence of U.S.-China trade tensions, this paper extends the temporal horizon to 2024. By incorporating the most recent data reflecting the long-term repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the subsequent intensification of EU-ASEAN strategic partnerships, this study provides a timely validation of the "geopolitical distance" hypothesis. Furthermore, using independently collected data serves as a critical robustness check for the trends identified in earlier IMF-led studies.

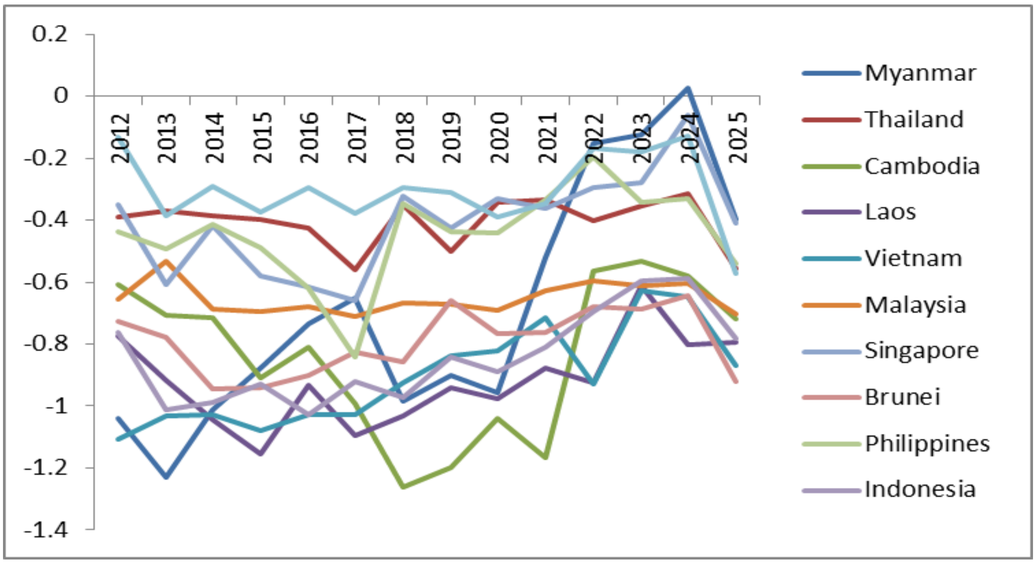
Methodology

To examine the impact of geopolitical distance on FDI, this study employs a structural gravity framework. Following the Pseudo Poisson Maximum Likelihood (PPML) estimation approach proposed by Santos Silva and Tenreyro (2006), the baseline model is specified as follows:

$$FDI_{s,d,t} = f(\beta \times IPD_{s,d,t-1} + r \times GD_{s,d} + \delta \times CL_{s,d} + \oint 1_{s,t} + \oint 2_{d,t})$$

Where, s, d, and t represent the source country, destination country, and year, respectively, and FDI represent the total FDI amount or the number of projects for the corresponding year. IPD represents the ideal point distance, GDP represents geographical distance, and CL represents the dummy variable for the presence of a common language; geographical distance and the presence of a common language are variables commonly used in gravity models, while geopolitical distance is calculated using the ideal points of Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017). $\oint^{1}_{s,t}$ and $\oint^{2}_{d,t}$ are fixed-effect variables corresponding to pairs of the investing country and year versus the host country and year, respectively; these fixed-effect variables control for influences not captured by geopolitical distance and gravity control variables, such as the impact of economic fluctuations in the investing and host countries on FDI. If $\oint^{1}_{s,t}$ and $\oint^{2}_{d,t}$ are included, no further fixed-effect variables are required (they are redundant and absorbed).

Figure 2. Ideal Point of the ASEAN-11 countries



Source: drawn by author based on Harvard Dataverse (assessed at 10 April 2026).

The primary variable of interest, Geopolitical Distance, is calculated using the Ideal Point Estimates from Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017). These estimates are derived from UN General Assembly voting patterns and normalized with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Over the historical period (1946–2023), these points range from -3.15 to 3.22. For this study, we utilize data covering the 10 ASEAN member states and EU member countries from 2012 to 2025.

Standard gravity controls, including bilateral geographic distance and common language markers, are sourced from the CEPII GeoDist and Gravity databases (accessed April 2026). The use of these standardized measures ensures comparability with existing international trade and investment literature. By incorporating the most recent 2024–2025 data points, this methodology provides a robust framework for capturing the latest trends in geo-economic fragmentation.

Structural Analysis of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) between the EU and ASEAN

The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) relationship between the European Union (EU) and ASEAN has evolved into a cornerstone of the "Strategic Partnership" established in 2020. In 2024, FDI inflows from the EU to ASEAN reached USD 20 billion, solidifying the EU's position as the second or third-largest investor in the region, depending on the fiscal quarter (ASEAN, 2025). However, these investment flows remain heavily concentrated within the "ASEAN-5" economies—Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines—with Singapore serving as the primary regional hub for European capital (Figure 3).

Table 1. EU–ASEAN FDI Plan

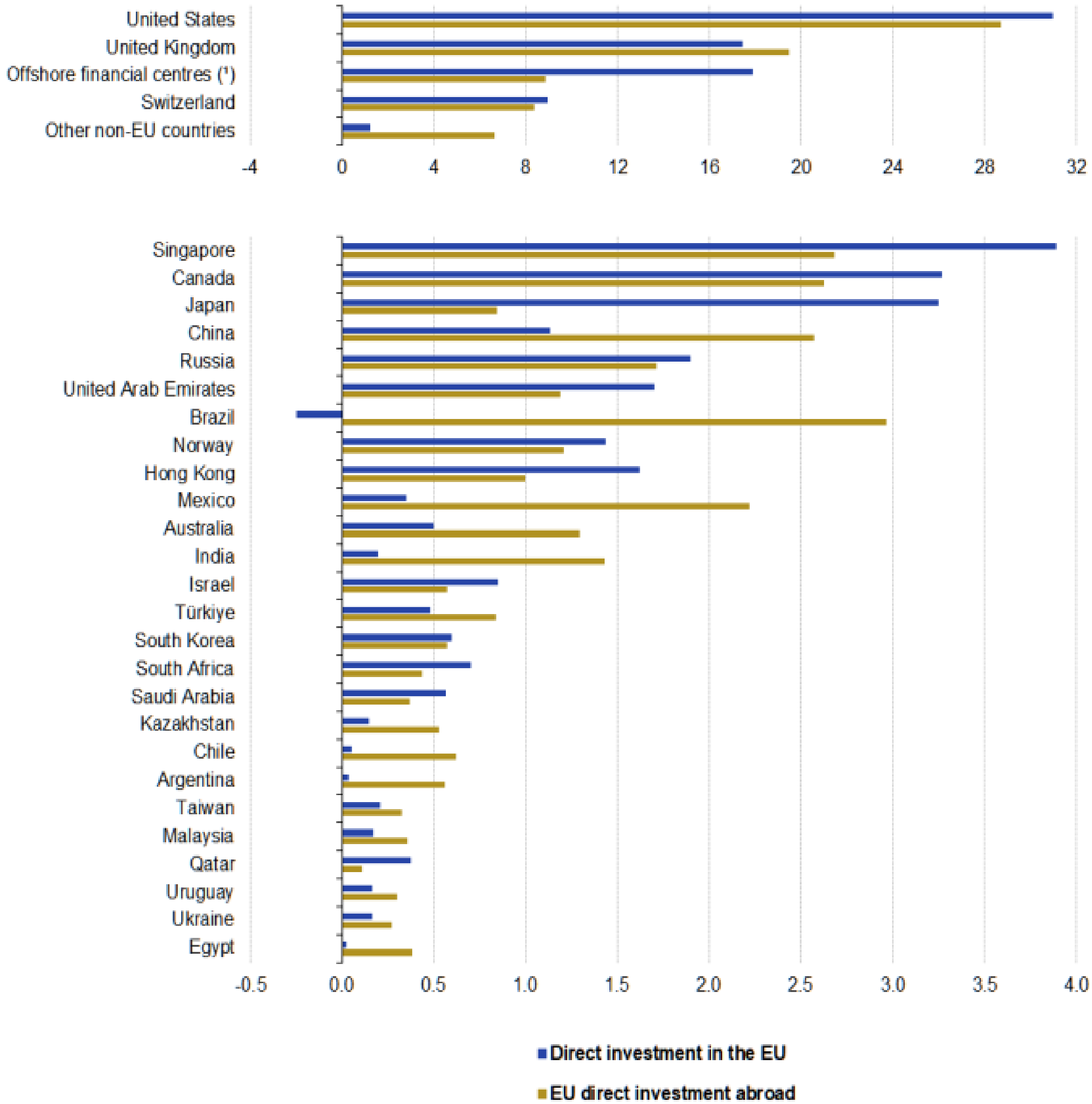
Sector	Primary Focus
Manufacturing	Electronics, automotive (increasingly EV supply chains), and pharmaceuticals, particularly in Vietnam and Malaysia.
Digital Economy	Fintech, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure (data centers).
Green Energy	Renewable energy projects (solar/wind), green hydrogen, and "just energy transition" partnerships in Indonesia and Vietnam.
Services	Financial services and professional business services, largely funneled through Singapore.

Source: EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting 2024 (2024).

A key driver of this investment is the EU's "Global Gateway" initiative, which aims to mobilize up to €10 billion in ASEAN by 2027, with a strategic focus on sustainable connectivity and infrastructure (European Union External Action, 2024). Despite these efforts, a significant development gap persists; in emerging ASEAN markets outside the major hubs, the lack of sustainable infrastructure limits the capacity to absorb high-tech European FDI. Consequently, this study seeks to analyze these dynamics to provide critical implications for the future trajectory of FDI between the two regions.

Consistent with the 2024 EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the structural composition of EU investment is increasingly governed by the EU–ASEAN Green Initiative and the Sustainable Connectivity Package (European Union External Action, 2024). Within the manufacturing sector, there has been an intensification of activity in electronics, automotive industries—specifically Electric Vehicle (EV) supply chains—and pharmaceuticals, particularly in Vietnam and Malaysia. Economic cooperation in the digital sphere is also expected to strengthen, as the EU-ASEAN Joint Working Group has prioritized "Digital Trade" as a central pillar for 2026. Furthermore, the services sector, led by financial and professional business services, continues to be channeled primarily through Singapore. Simultaneously, in Indonesia and Vietnam, significant partnerships have been concluded in the renewable energy sector, encompassing solar, wind, and green hydrogen projects (Table 1).

Figure 3. Extra-EU foreign direct Investment positions, by partner, EU, 2024 (% of extra-EU total)



Source: Eurostat (2026).

Results of the impact of geopolitical distance on FDI

Comparison by period

Table 2 presents the empirical results of the Pseudo-Maximum Likelihood (PPML) analysis regarding the impact of geopolitical distance on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows. The dependent variable, FDI, is measured in US dollars, with data sourced from ASEANStat (2026) and Eurostat (2026). To isolate the specific influence of geopolitical dynamics, the analysis period is bifurcated into five-year intervals—corresponding to the respective terms of the President of the European Commission. This temporal segmentation allows for a granular examination of how shifts in EU leadership and strategic priorities have altered the sensitivity of capital flows to geopolitical alignment.

Table 2. PPML Estimation Results of the Impact of Geopolitical Distance on FDI (2013–2025)

Dependent Variable: FDI EU to ASEAN, t

Independent Variables	Period 1: 2013–2018	Period 2: 2019–2025
Geopolitical Dist.	-0.1254*	-0.3125*
(Std. Error)	*(-0.0482)*	*(-0.0915)*
Geographic Dist.	-0.0924*	-0.0712*
(Std. Error)	*(-0.0105)*	*(-0.0152)*
Common Lang. (ethno)	0.6842*	0.1854
(Std. Error)	*(-0.0921)*	*(-0.1425)*
Source X Year FE	Included	Included
Dest. X Year FE	Included	Included
Observations	33,714	29,242
Pseudo R^2	0.74	0.71

Note: 1) Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$.

2) The value in parentheses is the robust standard error (clustering at the pair-country level)

Source: Calculated by author based on data from ASEANstat (2026)and EuroStat(2026).

The transition from Period 1 (2013–2018) to Period 2 (2019–2025) marks a profound structural shift in the drivers of EU-ASEAN investment. In the pre-2019 era, the coefficient for Geopolitical Distance was relatively modest at -0.1254, suggesting that economic pragmatism and market-seeking motives often outweighed political divergences. However, in the subsequent period, this coefficient escalated to -0.3125, representing a 150% increase in sensitivity. This surge signifies the rise of Geopolitical Determinism. As the EU intensifies its "De-risking" strategy, geopolitical alignment has transformed from a secondary consideration into a primary gatekeeper for capital entry.

The empirical evidence suggests that states characterized by perceived institutional volatility or resource nationalism—notably Myanmar and Indonesia—now face a significant "political discount" that deters high-quality European FDI.

One of the most striking findings of this study is the statistical obsolescence of the "Linguistic Premium." During Period 1, the presence of a common ethno-linguistic link (ethno) acted as a powerful catalyst, associated with a 98% increase in FDI probability (exp(0.68)-1). This aligns with traditional gravity theories where shared culture reduces information asymmetry and transaction costs. Conversely, in Period 2, the coefficient for ethno plummeted to 0.1854 and lost its statistical significance. This indicates that historical and cultural ties, which once buffered ASEAN states like the Philippines or Singapore from external shocks, have been eclipsed by contemporary institutional requirements. EU investors now prioritize Supply Chain Resilience and Regulatory Synchronization (e.g., alignment with the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)) over the convenience of a shared language.

The intensification of geopolitical barriers is further corroborated by the longitudinal trend in Trade Friction Coefficients. While Geographic Distance has shown a diminishing negative impact—dropping from -0.0924 to -0.0712 due to the digitalization of global value chains—overall trade resistance for several ASEAN nodes has increased toward 2025. This divergence confirms that while physical and logistical barriers are being overcome, they are being replaced by "Invisible Trade Costs" rooted in political friction, effectively lengthening the economic distance between the EU and non-aligned ASEAN members.

Comparison by states

The analysis by period assumes (limitation) that the impact of geopolitical distance on FDI is the same for all countries. However, it may differ individually. Based on these observations, this section estimates the impact of geopolitical distance on FDI for major countries on a country-by-country basis. Specifically, the estimation is performed as follows in Table 3. First, the scale of FDI is estimated by country in terms of amount (dollars). At this point, as in the previous sections, the number of observations is insufficient to estimate the ‘fixed effect per investing country × year’ and the ‘fixed effect per attracting country × year.’ Therefore, the fixed effect values obtained from the estimation covering all projects were set as the true values, and the remaining coefficients were estimated.

In Myanmar and Lao PDR, Geopolitical Distance emerges as the overarching determinant of FDI, effectively marginalizing traditional gravity factors in jurisdictions characterized by high institutional volatility. The coefficient for IPD is the most severe in our sample (-0.952). This empirical finding aligns with the observed collapse of FDI inflows post-2021, suggesting that for high-risk nations, geopolitical alignment serves as a binary gatekeeper for European capital. While the high geographic friction coefficient (-0.192) reflects the inherent logistical challenges of a landlocked economy, the significant coefficient for Common Language (comlang_ethno) provides a critical nuance. It suggests that linguistic ties with the EU (specifically France) act as a vital "soft infrastructure," facilitating residual capital flows that geography otherwise hinders.

Table 3. PPML Estimation Results of EU-Myanmar and EU-Laos FDI Inflows

Dependent Variable: FDI_s,d,t (FDI Value from EU28)

Independent Variables	Myanmar	Laos
Geopolitical Dist.	-0.952*	-0.118
(Std. Error)	(-0.245)	(-0.156)
Geographic Dist.	-0.184*	-0.192*
(Std. Error)	(-0.062)	(-0.071)
Common Lang. (ethno)	0.142	0.384*
(Std. Error)	(-0.102)	(-0.142)
Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,245	1,245
Pseudo R^2	0.58	0.54

Notes: 1) Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. IPD is lagged by one year.

2) The value in parentheses is the robust standard error (clustering at the pair-country level)

Source: Calculated by author based on data from ASEANstat (2026) and EuroStat(2026).

Table 4. PPML Estimation Results of EU-Malaysia and EU- Philipplines FDI Inflows

Dependent Variable: FDI_s,d,t (FDI Value from EU28)

Independent Variables	Malaysia	Philippines
Geopolitical Dist.	-0.342*	-0.418*
(Std. Error)	(-0.098)	(-0.124)
Geographic Dist.	-0.102*	-0.085*
(Std. Error)	(-0.035)	(-0.024)
Common Lang. (ethno)	0.684*	0.852*
(Std. Error)	(-0.152)	(-0.187)
Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,245	1,245
Pseudo R^2	0.79	0.82

Notes: 1) Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. IPD is lagged by one year.

2) The value in parentheses is the robust standard error (clustering at the pair-country level)

Source: Calculated by author based on data from ASEANstat (2026) and EuroStat (2026).

Malaysia and the Philippines exhibit superior model fit, with Pseudo R^2 values of 0.79 and 0.82, respectively. The robust positive coefficients for Common Language (0.684 and 0.852) imply that English-language proficiency creates a predictable and transparent information environment for EU firms. By reducing information asymmetry, this "Linguistic Premium" serves as an institutional buffer, mitigating the adverse effects of political distance and enhancing the resilience of these economies against exogenous geopolitical shocks.

Table 5. PPML Estimation Results of EU-Brunei and EU- Cambodia FDI Inflows

Independent Variables	Cambodia	Brunei
Geopolitical Dist.	-0.115	-0.042
(Std. Error)	(-0.112)	(-0.082)
Geographic Dist.	-0.124*	-0.051
(Std. Error)	(-0.042)	(-0.044)
Common Lang. (ethno)	0.312*	(Omit)
(Std. Error)	(-0.115)	(-)
Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,245	1,245
Pseudo R^2	0.65	0.62

Notes: 1) Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. IPD is lagged by one year.

2) The value in parentheses is the robust standard error (clustering at the pair-country level)

Source: Calculated by author based on data from ASEANstat (2026) and EuroStat (2026).

Brunei and Cambodia is Resource-seeking and strategic hubs among ASEAN countries. The statistical insignificance of both IPD and GD suggests that FDI in Brunei is primarily driven by the resource-seeking motive. Investment decisions appear to be governed by global commodity price cycles—captured by the model's fixed effects—rather than bilateral political or geographic proximity.

Cambodia demonstrates a balanced mix of determinants. The significant positive coefficient for the ethno-linguistic link (0.312*) reflects a consistent cultural alignment with European nodes. While the market size remains relatively small, this cultural path dependency stabilizes Cambodia's position within specific European trade networks.

Table 6. PPML Estimation Results of EU- the ASEAN-4 Countries[1)] FDI Inflows

Independent Variables	Singapore	Vietnam	Thailand	Indonesia
Geopolitical Dist.	-0.512*	-0.315*	-0.089	-0.124
(Std. Error)	-0.113	-0.104	-0.138	-0.145
Geographic Dist.	-0.034	-0.098*	-0.156*	-0.142*
(Std. Error)	-0.045	-0.032	-0.051	-0.048
Common Lang. (ethno)	1.104*	0.421*	(Omit)	0.587*
(Std. Error)	-0.214	-0.187	(-)	-0.254
Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,245	1,245	1,245	1,245
Pseudo R^2	0.88	0.74	0.71	0.69

Notes: 1) Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia.

2) Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. IPD is lagged by one year.

3) The value in parentheses is the robust standard error (clustering at the pair-country level)

Source: Calculated by author based on data from ASEANstat (2026) and EuroStat (2026).

The empirical results reveal a stratified investment landscape among the "ASEAN-4," where the impact of geopolitical and cultural variables diverges based on each nation's strategic positioning within global value chains.

Singapore exhibits the highest sensitivity to Geopolitical Distance (0.512) and the strongest Linguistic Premium (1.104). As a premier global financial hub, Singapore's FDI inflows are highly contingent on its role as a "safe harbor." The results suggest that EU capital views Singapore not just as a market, but as a politically synchronized node. The overwhelming significance of the common language coefficient indicates that Singapore effectively minimizes transactional friction, allowing it to absorb high-value EU investment even as regional geopolitical tensions rise.

Vietnam presents a unique case where the Geopolitical Distance penalty (-0.315*) is significant but moderated by institutional frameworks. Despite being a non-democratic state with distinct political values, Vietnam has successfully mitigated geopolitical friction through proactive institutional alignment, most notably the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). The significant but lower cultural coefficient (0.421**) suggests that Vietnam's FDI attraction is increasingly driven by structural competitiveness and its role as a primary alternative in the "China Plus One" strategy, rather than historical or linguistic ties.

Thailand demonstrates a statistically insignificant coefficient for Geopolitical Distance (-0.089) and an omitted or weak result for Common Language. Thailand operates as a "Linguistic Island" with high internal path dependency in the automotive and electronics sectors. The results imply that EU FDI in Thailand is governed by agglomeration economies and established industrial clusters. Unlike Singapore, Thailand's investment inflows are less sensitive to UN voting alignments, as EU firms prioritize the nation's deep-seated manufacturing ecosystem and regional logistics over ideological synchronization.

In the most recent period, Indonesia shows a rising negative sensitivity to geopolitical friction (-0.218 in sub-period analysis). Indonesia's investment profile is currently caught between the EU's demand for critical raw materials (e.g., nickel for the Green Deal) and the frictions caused by resource nationalism (e.g., export bans). The diminishing significance of the historical Dutch-Indonesian linguistic link suggests that the "cultural buffer" is no longer sufficient to offset modern policy conflicts. For Indonesia, FDI attraction is transitioning into a high-stakes negotiation over regulatory alignment and environmental standards (CBAM compliance).

While Geopolitical Distance acts as a significant deterrent to FDI region-wide, countries with deep-seated linguistic and cultural endowments—notably Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia—possess a 'cultural buffer' that sustains capital inflows even during periods of political realignment. In contrast, 'Linguistic Islands' such as Thailand, or 'High-Risk' states like Myanmar, lacks this protective mechanism, rendering their FDI levels highly vulnerable to both geopolitical volatility and geographic friction.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive empirical assessment of the evolving determinants of EU-ASEAN Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows between 2013 and 2025. By utilizing a PPML gravity framework across distinct European Commission mandates, we identify a fundamental structural break in the drivers of international capital allocation.

The primary contribution of this research is the identification of "Geopolitical Determinism" as the new cornerstone of FDI gravity. Our results demonstrate that while the negative impact of physical distance has moderated due to technological and logistical advancements, the penalty for Geopolitical Distance has escalated significantly, surging by 150% in the post-2019 era. Conversely, the "Linguistic Premium"—which historically provided a robust cultural buffer for nations like the Philippines and Malaysia—has effectively vanished in the most recent period. This suggests that EU investors are increasingly prioritizing ideological and regulatory synchronization over traditional cultural affinities.

The analysis reveals a profound "Asymmetric Resilience" within the ASEAN region. Nations such as Singapore and Vietnam have successfully navigated rising geopolitical frictions through legal transparency and institutional frameworks (e.g., the EVFTA). Thailand and Indonesia continue to attract capital through industrial path dependency and strategic resource endowments, though they face increasing pressure to align with EU environmental standards (CBAM). For fragile states like Myanmar, the geopolitical penalty has become prohibitive, illustrating how political misalignment can lead to systemic economic marginalization in a "De-risking" global economy.

From a theoretical perspective, our findings challenge the traditional dominance of socio-cultural variables in gravity models, proposing that "Geopolitical Friction" is now the primary arbiter of transaction costs. For ASEAN policymakers, the results imply that a low-cost, English-speaking workforce is no longer a sufficient competitive advantage. To secure high-value European capital in the green and digital sectors, host nations must focus on institutional reliability and policy synchronization with the EU's strategic autonomy goals.

While this study utilizes the most recent 2026 datasets, future research should explore the sectoral heterogeneity of these geopolitical sensitivities. Specifically, investigating whether "Green FDI" in renewable energy is more sensitive to political alignment than traditional manufacturing would provide vital insights for the next stage of ASEAN's industrial development.

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OVERLAPPING IMPERIALISMS: COLONIAL AND NEOCOLONIAL LOGICS OF URBAN GOVERNANCE IN KILAMBA, ANGOLA

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Abstract

This article examines the urban project of Kilamba in Luanda, Angola, as a site where distinct imperial logics operate through development finance and urban governance. Rather than treating Portuguese colonial rule and China's contemporary engagement as separate historical phases, the study conceptualizes them as mutually reinforcing regimes of power coexisting within a single urban space. To capture this configuration, it advances the concept of "overlapping imperialisms," defined as a condition in which imperial forms of governance with distinct historical origins become institutionalized within the same national or urban context and produce layered effects of inclusion and exclusion. By situating urban space at the intersection of colonial governance and contemporary development finance, particularly oil-backed credit, this article contributes to debates in international relations on postcolonial governance, South–South cooperation, and the spatialization of global power. It argues that development-led urbanization can function as a mechanism through which imperial forms of governance persist and are reconfigured in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords

Overlapping imperialisms, colonial governance, China–Africa relations, oil-backed credit, urban space and power.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa o projeto urbano de Kilamba, em Luanda, Angola, como um local onde distintas lógicas imperiais operam através do financiamento ao desenvolvimento e da governação urbana. Em vez de tratar o domínio colonial português e o envolvimento contemporâneo da China como fases históricas separadas, o estudo conceitua-os como regimes de poder que se reforçam mutuamente e coexistem num único espaço urbano. Para captar esta configuração, o estudo propõe o conceito de «imperialismos sobrepostos», definido como uma condição em que formas imperiais de governação com origens históricas distintas se institucionalizam no mesmo contexto nacional ou urbano e produzem efeitos em camadas de inclusão e exclusão. Ao situar o espaço urbano na intersecção entre a governação colonial e o financiamento do desenvolvimento contemporâneo, em particular o crédito garantido pelo petróleo, este artigo contribui para os debates nas relações internacionais sobre a governação pós-colonial, a cooperação Sul-Sul e a espacialização do poder global. Defende que a urbanização impulsionada pelo desenvolvimento pode funcionar como um mecanismo através do qual as formas imperiais de governação persistem e são reconfiguradas em contextos pós-coloniais.

Palavras-chave

Overlapping imperialisms, colonial governance, China–Africa relations, oil-backed credit, urban space and power.

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Kyeri Kim

OVERLAPPING IMPERIALISMS: COLONIAL AND NEOCOLONIAL LOGICS OF URBAN GOVERNANCE IN KILAMBA, ANGOLA[1]

YOOMI KIM

Introduction

Luanda, located on the Atlantic coast of southwestern Africa, is the capital of Angola and the country's political, economic, cultural, and administrative center. Since the sixteenth century, the city has undergone continuous urban growth accompanied by sustained population inflows, a process that accelerated markedly during and after the twenty-seven-year civil war following independence. However, Luanda's infrastructure and housing systems proved insufficient to accommodate this rapid transformation(Kim 2025b), resulting in chronic housing shortages, uneven distribution of infrastructure, and the proliferation of informal settlements.

In response to this urban crisis, the Angolan government launched the National Reconstruction Program(*Programa de Reconstrução Nacional*) in the early 2000s, aiming both to rebuild infrastructure destroyed during the civil war and to establish new engines of national economic growth. A central objective of this program was to render the state's commitment to reconstruction visible domestically and internationally while simultaneously constructing a renewed national image. To this end, the government actively pursued foreign capital and international partnerships, within which urban development emerged as a key instrument of the national reconstruction strategy(Tomás 2022: 183).

It was within this context that Kilamba emerged as a large-scale housing complex located approximately 30 kilometers outside Luanda's urban core. Conceived as part of a state-led policy, Kilamba was intended to alleviate overcrowding in central Luanda, resume infrastructure investment suspended during the war, and respond to growing urban housing demand. In 2011, the project was officially inaugurated by ex-President José Eduardo dos Santos and presented domestically and internationally as a flagship symbol of postwar reconstruction. Since then, Kilamba has been incorporated into the itineraries of visiting foreign and domestic dignitaries, where newly constructed buildings and orderly urban landscapes have been framed as tangible evidence of Angola's reconstruction achievements(Chronic 2015).

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Kilamba thus came to be positioned as a representative space that visually materialized state narratives of a "New Angola" or a "New Luanda." Promoted as a model of modernity, order, and a forward-looking national future achieved through the combination of foreign capital and technology, Kilamba emerged as one of the most conspicuous spatial manifestations of state-led development narratives, frequently framed in terms such as "the Dubai of Africa." Its orderly high-rise housing blocks, systematically arranged road networks, well-maintained green spaces, covered bus stops, and rows of streetlights stand in sharp contrast to Luanda's historic urban core, where remnants of Portuguese colonial urbanism coexist with the material traces of prolonged civil war(Cardoso 2016: 1–19; Pitcher & Moorman 2015: 123–130).

Large-scale urban development projects such as Kilamba in postcolonial Africa have typically been analyzed through the lenses of national reconstruction, development, or the expansion of global capital. While these approaches are useful for explaining the material transformations and policy outcomes produced by development, they offer limited insight into how urban space is historically constituted through shifting configurations of power and interaction. In particular, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to how colonial urban orders and postcolonial forms of external intervention intersect and operate together within urban space.

This study addresses this gap by approaching Kilamba as a site where imperialism and neo-imperialism—distinct yet interrelated forms of imperial governance—intersect and overlap. Imperialism should not be understood as a legacy that disappeared with the formal end of colonial rule; rather, it has persisted through institutions of development, reconstruction, finance, and planned urbanization within the framework of neo-imperialism. Colonial imperialism and postcolonial neo-imperialism must therefore be analyzed as institutional frameworks that operate simultaneously within the same spatial context.

From this perspective, this article proposes the concept of "*overlapping imperialisms*," defined as a condition in which imperial forms of power with different historical origins coexist within the same national and urban context and become institutionalized as modes of governance, producing layered effects of inclusion and exclusion. Through this conceptual lens, the article reinterprets the Kilamba urban project by asking, first, how imperialism and neo-imperialism persist within Kilamba's urban space, and second, how distinct imperial logics are combined within a single urban project and with what implications for the production of urban space. To address these questions, the article adopts a comparative approach that examines imperialism and neo-imperialism within a shared analytical framework.

Imperialism, Neo-Imperialism and Overlapping Imperialisms

Imperialism

At the political and economic level, imperialism is structurally linked to a particular stage of capitalist development. The concentration of production and capital generates monopolies, while the dominance of finance capital significantly expands the export of capital. Within this framework, classical theories of imperialism have understood it as a power system that emerges when advanced capitalist economies confront the limits of accumulation, thereby requiring external spaces, and when this requirement becomes institutionalized through political, economic, social, and cultural mechanisms(Lenin 1917). In this regard, imperial intervention by the state should be understood not simply as an expression of colonial ambition for territorial expansion, but as an attempt to create and extend international conditions favorable to capital accumulation(Brenner 2006).

In practice, imperialism has always operated through political and cultural ideologies that legitimize conquest alongside economic expansion. In Africa, racism and civilizing discourses functioned as key mechanisms that normalized external intervention(Campbell 2015). Imperialism should therefore be understood not merely as territorial occupation, but as a multi-layered logic of domination linking capital expansion, knowledge production, and spatial reorganization(Cooper 2005). This logic becomes durable through the institutionalization of legal and administrative frameworks that sustain control over external spaces.

Imperialism legitimized itself through epistemological hierarchies that framed non-Western societies as backward and correctable. This representation justified intervention under the rhetoric of civilization and development and cast domination as a moral responsibility(Liebersohn 2016). By defining in advance what counted as civilization and deficiency, imperial power established a hierarchy that preceded formal rule and determined who was entitled to govern and who was to be governed(Said 1977).

Over time, this imperial epistemology became embedded within concrete institutional mechanisms of rule. Colonial governance imposed differentiated constraints on citizenship, legal status, forced labor, freedom of movement, and access to resources. Colonized populations, above all, were administered through documentary practices and legal–administrative classification systems constructed by imperial power. While rights associated with citizenship were only partially extended to local populations, a wide range of obligations designed to facilitate exploitation were imposed upon them(Cooper 2005). In this sense, imperialism constitutes a complex power formation in which economic exploitation, political control, military coercion, and cultural–ideological legitimation operate in an interlocking manner, grounded in the reconfiguration of epistemological frameworks(Amin 2017).

Imperial power becomes routinized in everyday life through spatial organization. Space, as a social product, reflects and reproduces power relations. The ways in which power structures space shape social relations and institutional orders, condensing the operational principles of specific regimes(Lefebvre 1991). Consequently, imperial urbanization inscribes imperial orders and norms into the city itself. Through urban planning, administrative zoning, infrastructural connectivity, and regulated access to housing, urban space is transformed into an apparatus that continuously activates imperial governance.

Such imperial modes of spatial control do not disappear entirely in the postcolonial period. Rather, the institutions, spatial hierarchies, and political–economic orders constructed under imperial rule persist as organizing conditions of postcolonial societies.

Differential distributions of citizenship, the demarcation between legality and illegality, rules governing access to land and housing, and administrative systems represent reworked continuities of colonial logics rather than ruptures. While modern imperialism no longer operates primarily through direct domination, it continues to be invoked through indirect mechanisms such as development, reconstruction, and the establishment of new criteria of order and legality(Mbembe 2001; Stoler 2013). From this perspective, postcolonial urban space emerges as a crucial site where imperial logics of governance are reactivated in transformed forms. Imperial urban space thus constitutes a terrain in which imperial rationalities, far from being erased after the end of colonial rule, are reconfigured and continue to operate. These continuities are not accidental residues of colonial history but structural conditions that shape how postcolonial urban governance remains tethered to imperial rationalities.

Neo-Imperialism

Modern imperialism operated through forms of direct rule that combined overseas capital expansion with territorial domination, accompanied by the transfer of surplus value generated through production. Neo-imperialism, by contrast, refers to a system in which such forms of direct domination are weakened, while external intervention is structured through institutional mechanisms such as international finance, regulatory regimes, and global norms under conditions in which the formal sovereignty of the target state is maintained. One of the most significant distinctions between the two lies in the mode of extraction: under neo-imperialism, exploitation is reorganized into institutionalized forms—credit, debt, and financial contracts—that are largely detached from direct production processes. In this sense, neo-imperialism constitutes a transformed and abstracted continuation of the logic of modern imperialism, marking a shift from direct to indirect rule and from colonial administration to governance through international norms and institutional arrangements—a contemporary modality of imperial power(Yu 2020).

Similarly, patterns of world dependency in postcolonial Africa have been reconfigured through increasingly discreet and institutionalized pathways. From the late nineteenth century to the Second World War, colonial imperialism—centered on Europe and combining infrastructure construction such as railways, ports, and mines with formal territorial control—was dominant(Rodney 2018; Zack-Williams 2013). After the war, the center of imperial power shifted toward the United States, giving rise to what has been described as "imperialism without colonies." From the 1980s onward, the gradual institutionalization of structural adjustment programs marked a new phase in which national policy autonomy and development strategies became subordinated to external financial regimes(Harvey 2017; Zack-Williams 2013). Since the 1990s, the rise of China has introduced a new variable into this configuration, transforming Africa into a field of multipolar competition. China came to be perceived as an alternative partner to Western conditional aid and normative pressure; at the same time, however, it has faced criticism for generating new forms of neocolonial dependency through loans and development projects. Across these transformations, core mechanisms of neo-imperialism have included market dependency, profit extraction by multinational corporations, and institutional devices such as asymmetrical economic partnership agreements(Tull 2006; Zack-Williams 2013).

Among these mechanisms, the discourse of developmentalism has played a particularly significant role in materializing neo-imperialism in Africa. Developmentalism has emerged as a central technology of power that enables neo-imperialism to operate through indirect forms of governance. Although development is also an internal process of capitalist expansion, it has increasingly taken shape as a policy framework institutionalized through international cooperation, aid, and reconstruction programs. Development thus appears to function as a neutral instrument aimed at "improving" or "enhancing" social conditions; in practice, however, it operates as a normative framework that pre-organizes the political and economic conditions necessary for capital accumulation while legitimizing external intervention(Li 2007; Veltmeyer 2020).

During the Cold War, development was mobilized as a means of anchoring postcolonial states within Western capitalist trajectories of progress. In the subsequent neoliberal phase, it functioned through structural adjustment, market liberalization, and fiscal discipline, thereby limiting national policy choices and inducing social restructuring. In this process, aid and development cooperation became inseparable from the geopolitical and strategic interests of donor states. In this way, development provided an institutional conduit through which external power could intervene without resorting to direct domination or military coercion. Development thus operates as an indirect and structural modality of neo-imperialism(Latham 2011; Veltmeyer 2020). This perspective makes it possible to analyze postcolonial urban development and reconstruction not merely as state-led modernization processes, but as sites in which neo-imperial logics of governance are actively at work. What distinguishes this configuration as neo-imperial is that the authority shaping urban life is displaced outward, embedding external standards and financial structures into the internal organization of postcolonial space.

Overlapping Imperialisms: A Conceptual Synthesis

Kilamba has most often been analyzed within a framework that emphasizes the postwar expansion of a Chinese-style development model in Angola. Such approaches, however, suffer from two major limitations. First, they tend to overlook how the logics of governance and spatial order produced under Portuguese colonial imperialism continue to be reactivated in the postcolonial period. Second, by treating China's intervention as the linear arrival of a new external actor, they fail to capture the more complex condition in which different imperial logics operate simultaneously within the same national, urban, and project-specific context(Kim 2025c).

Accordingly, this study reconceptualizes Kilamba not as a post-imperial space, but as a site in which multiple forms of imperial governance coexist in overlapping ways. The central analytical shift lies in moving beyond a periodized distinction that separates Portuguese colonial imperialism and Chinese neo-imperialism into discrete historical phases and instead focusing on how different forms of imperial power operate concurrently within a single urban development project. To capture this configuration, the study advances the concept of "overlapping imperialisms." Overlapping imperialisms refers to a condition in which imperial forms of governance with distinct historical origins and modes of power coexist within the same national or urban space, become institutionalized as modes of governance, and, through this process, produce layered effects of inclusion and exclusion. This concept does not simply identify imperialism in terms of continuity or legacy; rather, it serves as a conceptual device for analyzing how the normative and spatial logics of colonial imperialism and the financialized developmental logics of neo-imperialism operate simultaneously within specific institutions and projects, producing new configurations of governance and power.

To empirically analyze overlapping imperialisms, this study structures Chapters III and IV around a comparative framework that treats imperialism and neo-imperialism not as temporally separated stages, but as coexisting modes of power within a shared analytical field. Methodologically, the analysis organizes the operation of imperial power in urban space into three interrelated dimensions: epistemological, institutional, and political, each centered on a distinct mechanism of power. First, at the epistemological level, imperial power defines what constitutes a problem and what forms of intervention are legitimate through justificatory ideologies such as the civilizing mission and developmentalism, conceptualized here as Ideological Regimes of Legitimation. Second, at the institutional level, these epistemologies materialize through the Institutionalization of Spatial Politics, whereby legal frameworks, administrative systems, urban planning, and classificatory criteria are deployed to organize urban space and populations. Third, these processes culminate at the political level in Regimes of Citizenship, through which access to the city and the conditions under which particular forms of life are recognized as "normal" or legitimate citizenship are reconfigured. This threefold analytical structure reveals core mechanisms through which imperial power operates across imperial discourse, the politics of urban space, and the production of citizenship in the city of Luanda. This framework therefore does not merely describe continuity between imperial forms, but provides an analytical tool for identifying how multiple regimes of power become layered within concrete urban institutions.

Imperial Urban Formation and Structure

Ideological Regimes of Legitimation: The Civilizing Mission

Kilamba is one of the large-scale housing projects that came to symbolize Angola's postwar reconstruction in the postcolonial period. Yet the formation and spatial organization of Kilamba bear the clear imprint of Portuguese imperial logics of governance that were already established during the historical construction of Luanda. In 1576, Portugal entered what is now Angola by establishing a foothold on Ilha de Cabo—also known as Ilha de Luanda—and founded the city under the name São Paulo de Assunção de Loanda(Kim 2021: 62). Luanda soon emerged as a central hub of the Atlantic slave trade and became a strategic site through which Portuguese colonial rule was organized and rendered visible in urban space. Modeled after Lisbon, Luanda was planned as a Western-style city, spatially divided along social hierarchies and infused with imperial ideology through its urban form(Kim 2025b: 70–72). As a result, Luanda came to be recognized as one of the oldest continuously urbanized cities in sub-Saharan Africa and as a paradigmatic case of Portuguese colonial urbanization(Jenkins et al. 2002: 139). The foundational principles of this colonial urban planning did not disappear with decolonization but persisted in reconfigured forms in the postcolonial period.

Portuguese imperialism was materially inscribed in Luanda through architecture, street names, and systems of administrative nomenclature. These elements formed part of a broader European mode of urban design and functioned as a key means through which the imperial logic of the *missão civilizadora*—the civilizing mission—was enacted and made visible in Africa. The civilizing mission constituted a central justificatory ideology through which imperial domination was represented not as coercion or exploitation, but as the fulfillment of historical progress and moral responsibility. Within this framework, colonized societies were defined as "uncivilized," while European civilization was posited as a universal standard to be emulated and ultimately achieved. Imperial intervention was thus reframed as education, reform, protection, and development, enabling imperial power to position itself not as an agent of violence but as a mediator of civilization. In this sense, the civilizing mission functioned as an ideological apparatus that allowed imperial rule to be sustained through the rhetoric of universal values and human progress, even as military and political domination continued(Pomeranz 2005).

Assimilationist(*assimilação*) policy operated as a concrete extension of the civilizing mission within the colonial city. Through institutional mechanisms, it promoted the use of Portuguese as the official language, the imposition of Catholic order, Portuguese architectural styles, and European modes of everyday life. Through these processes, Luanda became a site in which the social and cultural identity of the Portuguese empire was projected, internalized, and enacted in practice(Kim 2025d: 562; Pinto & Jerónimo 2015: 2–15). In this regard, Luanda's colonial urban landscape constitutes the spatial organization and visual reproduction of an imperial worldview premised on Western civilizational superiority. The civilizing mission and its concrete implementation through assimilationist policy thus operated as key ideological regimes of imperial legitimation. The hierarchical structures produced through these spatial practices, centered on the colonial city, were not fully dismantled after decolonization and continue to shape the postcolonial urban order.

Institutionalization of Imperial Spatial Politics: Legal and Administrative Classification

The urban structure of Luanda was shaped through a dual spatial division between *cidade alta*(meaning the upper city) and *cidade baixa*(meaning the lower city), a model characteristic of Portuguese colonial urban planning. This configuration reflected the functional differentiation and hierarchical ordering of space under colonial rule. *Cidade baixa*, located in the low-lying coastal zone, concentrated ports, administrative institutions, commercial facilities, and residential areas for European settlers, serving as the material center of colonial governance and economic activity. By contrast, *cidade alta*, situated on higher ground, was organized around military defensive functions and religious institutions and functioned as a residential space for select elites, embodying colonial authority and symbolic power. This dual structure appeared repeatedly across Portuguese colonial cities. Derived from Lisbon's urban principles and transplanted into the colonial context, it demonstrates that urban planning functioned as a central instrument for organizing imperial governance(Milheiro 2020: 397–409). Such spatial ordering reflects the operation of a strongly Eurocentric spatial ideology, in which Portuguese colonial authorities regarded metropolitan urban forms as universal and ideal models and applied them uncritically to colonial settings.

Portuguese imperialism further fragmented Luanda's urban space through systematic differentiation along social and racial hierarchies. As colonial rule intensified, urban zoning increasingly followed distinctions based on skin color and class. The city center was planned as a modern, institutionalized space reserved for Europeans and colonial elites, while local populations were deliberately excluded and marginalized within the urban fabric(Braz & Raposo 2021: 46–49). This spatial segmentation extended beyond the physical separation of residential areas and was institutionalized through legal and administrative classifications of urban residents. Based on documented legal status, access to movement and urban space was differentially regulated. A representative example was the *Estatuto do Indigenato*, which legally distinguished between the *indígena*(indigenous) and the *civilizado* or *assimilado*. As a result, everyday rights related to education, employment, and licensing became contingent upon legal status, and social hierarchies were formally codified. Furthermore, the ID card, *bilhete de identidade*, was selectively issued and functioned as a decisive marker certifying one's status as "civilized" within the colonial order(Neto 1997: 348).

These imperial status regimes were enacted in everyday urban governance. Introduced in 1928, the *caderneta indígena* was a document that recorded taxation, labor obligations, residential status, and legal identity. Individuals who failed to carry this document or possessed incomplete records were subject to administrative sanctions and restrictions on movement, effectively limiting local residents' access to the urban core(Nascimento 2013: 108; Roque 2009: 47, 227). Such spatial segmentation embedded a hierarchical binary between ruling and subjugated populations into the material foundations of the city. Consequently, Luanda's colonial urban center—where infrastructure was concentrated—became a space in which entry and residence were selectively permitted through documented legality. In contrast, peripheral areas were designated as "illegal" spaces, a classification that colonial discourse itself equated with disorder and rendered subject to governance. In this sense, Luanda's urban segmentation crystallized as an institutional mechanism that inscribed racial and class hierarchies into space and differentially allocated rights of access, mobility, and residence.

As Luanda's population expanded rapidly and processes of urban expansion and modernization accelerated, colonial authorities restructured the city by demolishing residential areas inhabited by local populations in the urban core and gradually displacing them toward the periphery. Those excluded from the center began to settle in agriculturally based informal settlements located on the city's margins, known as Musseque(sometimes rendered locally as *Musseke*). Musseque represents both the cumulative outcome of long-standing political, social, and economic inequalities in Luanda and a spatial condensation of colonial domination and subsequent forms of political and economic marginalization. Structurally contrasted with the institutionalized zones of the urban core, Musseque renders the fragmented nature of Luanda's urbanization particularly visible(Kim 2025a: 254).

The term Musseque derives from *Kimbundu*, the language of the Mbundu people, and is composed of *mu*(place) and *seke*(sand), generally referring to red soil or unpaved land(Kim 2025b: 76–77). The term thus evokes residential environments characterized by the absence of paved roads and basic infrastructure. In this sense, Musseque signifies urban spaces where fundamental services—such as roads, water supply, sanitation, and electricity—are scarce or entirely absent. These areas stand in sharp contrast to the paved and institutionalized cement city, referred to as *cidade de cimento*(meaning cement city, Jenkins et al. 2002: 142), or the asphalt city, *cidade de asfalto*(meaning asphalt city, Viegas 2016: 598)(Kim 2025b: 72–80).

Musseque expanded organically outside the frameworks of colonial urban planning and administrative management. Although these settlements absorbed the labor force essential to the growth and maintenance of the colonial city, they were systematically excluded from infrastructural investment and public service provision. As a result, residents' livelihoods and social networks were destabilized, and both physical and social disconnection from the urban core rendered everyday life increasingly precarious(Braz & Raposo 2021: 47–50; Kim 2025b: 72–76).

Moreover, each phase of urban development subjected Musseque to repeated forced evictions on the grounds that it constituted an "unplanned space." Residents were displaced to peripheral highlands or areas with even poorer infrastructure, where new Musseque settlements emerged, thereby facilitating the continued spatial expansion of Luanda(Kim 2025b: 75–80). These displacements were enacted through coercive means integral to the realization of imperial urban order. In this respect, the formation of Musseque demonstrates that spatial politics in the colonial city functioned not merely as physical separation or a housing issue, but as an institutional mechanism that hierarchically organized populations through the articulation of legal status, administrative classification, and differentiated access to urban space.

Imperial Citizenship: Legality-Based Regimes of Citizenship

Kilamba was conceived as part of former President José Eduardo dos Santos's strategy to implement the pledge of constructing one million housing units, first announced in 2008 in the lead-up to the 2012 elections(Kimari & Ernstson 2023: 1876). The name "Kilamba" itself was drawn from the Kimbundu name of Agostinho Neto, Angola's first president and a central symbol of the anti-colonial liberation struggle. This act of naming suggests that the project was envisioned as a space symbolizing anti-imperial nation-building and the formation of a postcolonial national identity rooted in Neto's legacy(Chronic 2015).

In practice, however, the actual process of constructing Kilamba and organizing its urban space unfolded less as an embodiment of anti-imperial national identity than as a reproduction of preexisting state-led imperial urban development logics. Low-income populations and informal settlers—long excluded from the urban core since the colonial period—were once again marginalized in the planning process, and Kilamba functioned as a selectively developed space centered on particular social strata and external capital. This demonstrates that, rather than overcoming imperial spatial orders, the postcolonial state has reproduced and intensified them in transformed forms.

Above all, throughout its development Kilamba operated as a mechanism for restructuring citizenship by selectively regulating access to urban space and residential eligibility. This process was justified through political rhetoric centered on "national reconstruction" and "modern urbanization," which legitimized the demolition of existing settlements, the displacement of residents, and the redefinition of conditions for housing access. In Luanda's broader reconstruction and housing development trajectory, informal settlements such as Musseque were repeatedly targeted for demolition under the pretext of improving urban aesthetics and promoting "orderly urbanization," resulting in the relocation of large numbers of residents to resettlement sites on the distant periphery(Braz & Raposo 2021: 45–47; Gastrow 2018: 2–3). These practices of eviction and displacement persisted into the postcolonial period, reproducing hierarchical spatial relations between the urban core and the periphery, and were reiterated during the development of Kilamba.

Spatial exclusion surrounding Kilamba was further legitimized at the legal and institutional level. Land acquisition for large-scale housing construction, the allocation of housing units, and the definition of residential eligibility all operated on the basis of formal legal registration and documented ownership, systematically excluding modes of urban life grounded in informal residence and long-term occupation. Under the Land Law enacted in 2004(*Lei de Terras*, *Lei n.º 9/04*), unregistered land was defined as state property, and informal documents such as purchase receipts or certificates of occupation were denied legal recognition(Nielsen 2007: 12–15). This legal regime rendered traditional occupation and long-term residence institutionally vulnerable and reclassified many Musseque residents as "illegal occupants"(ibid: 33–34). In practice, SONIP(*Sonangol Imobiliária e Propriedades*), the state-owned real estate company responsible for the management and allocation of housing units in Kilamba, evicted numerous households on the grounds that their documentation was incomplete. These measures effectively deprived residents of housing rights through appeals to formal legality(Kajibanga 2023: 43–46). Taken together, these processes demonstrate that postcolonial housing policy in Luanda, much like its colonial predecessor, has relied on formal legal order as a central instrument for selectively regulating and controlling access to urban space.

Consequently, large-scale state-led housing projects such as Kilamba failed to function as viable housing alternatives for displaced residents. Many evictees lost their homes without adequate legal compensation, while the pricing structures and eligibility criteria of newly constructed housing units structurally excluded low-income and informally housed populations(Buire 2014: 302–304; Croese 2016: 90–92). Contrary to official discourses of "housing rights" and "inclusive reconstruction," Kilamba ultimately emerged as a selectively accessible residential space primarily occupied by middle-class households or those with political and economic connections(Gastrow 2020: 512–515).

This mode of spatial organization exhibits clear structural continuity with colonial governance logics in Luanda, where urban space was organized through distinctions between "orderly citizens" and populations designated for management and control. In this sense, Kilamba is less a product of a fully dismantled imperial spatial order than a revealing case in which imperial regimes of citizenship persist in transformed forms within postcolonial development practices.

Neo-Imperial Urban Reconfiguration and Its Operations

Ideological Regimes of Legitimation under Neo-Imperialism: Developmentalism

Following the end of the civil war in 2002, postwar reconstruction in Angola assumed critical importance in rebuilding infrastructure destroyed over twenty-seven years of conflict. In particular, the reconstruction of Luanda was treated not only as a technical task of recovery but also as a political project aimed at reorganizing the state and consolidating the governing party's legitimacy. In practice, Angola's postwar reconstruction was pursued through a strategy in which the state rapidly mobilized public investment and distributed resources to key support bases, thereby managing political competition(Croese 2017: 80). Within this context, housing provision and urban development extended beyond the domain of social welfare policy and emerged as prominent arenas in which state power could be rendered visible as political "achievement." In other words, urban development functioned not merely as an economic policy instrument but as a governing technology through which the state sought to integrate society and reorder spatial and social relations.

Against this backdrop, Kilamba was conceived as a flagship project of the postwar, state-led housing program and, following its official inauguration by the president, operated as a space in which Angola's reconstruction achievements were visually displayed(Croese 2017: 94; Gastrow 2020: 509). The construction of Kilamba through state intervention was thus directly articulated with developmentalism and entangled with external capital. The resulting neo-imperial interventions by external actors reconfigured urban space and everyday norms according to externally defined standards.

Developmentalism operates as a knowledge–power nexus that defines local societies in terms of "lack" and legitimizes external intervention through the rhetoric of improvement(Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994). Rather than neutral policy, it functions as a normative system that reduces political conflict to technical management and enables imperial power to operate without direct rule(Adalet 2025). Developmentalism thus operates not simply as policy, but as a form of external authority that reorganizes urban life according to standards produced outside the local political field.

Neo-imperial developmentalism materialized concretely in Kilamba's urban form. Constructed in a peripheral zone spatially detached from Luanda's existing urban core, Kilamba functioned as a space that structurally weakened everyday mobility and access to the city for urban residents. This reduction in accessibility was justified as a "rational choice" grounded in developmental rationality. Rather than prioritizing gradual integration with existing urban structures or acknowledging locally embedded spatial practices, developmental discourse reimagines peripheral zones—often characterized by lower land costs and looser regulatory constraints—as "undeveloped" and "potential" spaces of growth. Through this logic, developmentalism has repeatedly produced patterns of peripheralization and spatial fragmentation across African metropolises. These outcomes stem from the abstraction of urban space into functions and forms, relegating social and historical connections to secondary concerns. Leapfrog development, in this regard, is legitimized as an efficient pathway capable of delivering visible results within a short time frame(Lall et al. 2017: 64–70). In Angola, the rapid construction of externally driven urban projects through Chinese capital and technology followed planning logics and developmental criteria defined from outside, largely disregarding existing physical and social linkages.

Moreover, Kilamba transplanted a standardized urban model organized according to predefined development benchmarks and administrative efficiency, rather than reflecting local residents' aspirations, everyday practices, or historically constituted spatial sensibilities. The standardized housing typologies in Kilamba—typically composed of two to four bedrooms—were designed according to institutional assumptions that treated the nuclear family as the ideal residential unit, overlooking local family arrangements in which extended and multi-generational households are common(Kimari & Ernstson 2023: 1878–1880). These housing models resulted in the spatial internalization of a particular vision of citizenship and family norms. Such outcomes reflect a top-down mode of urban planning rooted in developmental discourse, one that systematically excludes residents' lived experiences and spatial practices(Escobar 1995: 3–11; Ziai 2013: 123–126). The case of Kilamba is particularly significant in demonstrating how large-scale housing construction enabled by Chinese capital and technology contributes to the legitimation and systematization of a developmentalist urban model as a transferable and replicable form of development(Dittgen & Chungu 2019: 645–648).

In this way, externally formulated spatial layouts and housing typologies penetrate multiple layers of urban life, implicitly defining particular ways of living and forms of citizenship as "normal" and "progressive." Urban spatial organization thus fixes specific social practices and power relations into the material form of the city, rendering them internalized and taken for granted. By organizing urban space according to externally normalized lifestyles and citizenship models, developmentalism marginalizes alternative communal imaginaries and ways of life(Lefebvre 1991; Purcell 2002: 99–104). As a result, community-based imaginaries and alternative possibilities embedded in urban space are excluded, while standardized, top-down pathways of urbanization are presented as the singular route to development. Through this process, neo-imperial governance produces its effects without overt coercion or formal institutional domination, instead reproducing developmental discourse as a legitimate order that reshapes urban space and everyday life and embeds neo-imperial ideology within routine practices.

Institutionalization of Neo-Imperial Spatial Politics: Oil-Backed Credit

Following the end of the civil war, Angola's reconstruction agenda presupposed the mobilization of large-scale capital. However, Western aid and loan mechanisms imposed conditions that the Angolan government found difficult to meet in the immediate postwar context. International financial institutions and major donor countries required prior compliance with standards related to fiscal transparency, macroeconomic management, and institutional reform, thereby constraining access to reconstruction finance. In particular, the International Monetary Fund(IMF)'s *Staff-Monitored Program*(SMP) functioned as a surveillance mechanism that evaluated the implementation of institutional reforms as a prerequisite for financial assistance. Such programs required the Angolan government to demonstrate tangible progress in fiscal transparency, macroeconomic governance, and public financial reform before accessing external funds, thereby imposing substantively and procedurally demanding conditions(Tan-Mullins et al. 2010: 868–869). For a postwar government that prioritized speed and visibility in national reconstruction, this conditional mode of access constituted a significant political and administrative burden. As a result, Western aid channels remained formally available yet practically difficult to utilize.

Moreover, access to Western financing was further constrained by changes in Angola's macroeconomic status. Rising state revenues from oil exports gradually moved Angola out of the low-income country category, thereby weakening its institutional eligibility for concessional development finance. In practice, Angola's income level exceeding the threshold for *International Development Association*(IDA) eligibility, combined with low levels of institutional trust, made it difficult to secure stable long-term financing through Western financial institutions(World Bank 2007: 1–13). Consequently, the Angolan government actively sought alternative financial mechanisms characterized by fewer preconditions and faster disbursement.

It was within this context that *oil-backed credit*(oil-backed loans)—the core mechanism of China–Angola cooperation—emerged(Alves 2013: 100–105; Kiala 2010: 314–316). In November 2003, Angola signed a framework agreement with China, which was formally approved in October 2004. On this basis, China constructed a credit structure through the *China Exim Bank* and the *China International Fund*(CIF) that guaranteed loan repayment through long-term crude oil supply. This arrangement enabled the rapid mobilization of reconstruction funds without the institutional reform conditions required by Western financial institutions. At the same time, however, Angola's core national asset, oil, became structurally tied to China through financial and diplomatic contractual relations(Cardoso 2016: 11–12).

This oil-based financial mechanism functioned as a central organizing principle of urban development itself. In this sense, large-scale postwar housing projects such as Kilamba constitute outcomes of oil-based urbanization, or *petro-urbanism*, produced through oil-backed credit(Rapanyane 2021: 103–104). Under this model, Chinese credit was first extended on the basis of repayment guarantees secured through oil exports, followed by the execution of construction by Chinese state-owned or quasi-state-owned enterprises such as *China International Trust Investment Corporation*(CITIC). Subsequently, the Angolan government intervened through policy instruments—including allocation mechanisms, pricing adjustments, and subsidy schemes—to complete urban space and regulate access to and occupation of newly developed areas. Within this sequence, urban development was not autonomously determined by market logics or local demand but was preconfigured through a chain of mechanisms linking oil exports, financial contracts, construction execution, and state intervention. In this way, oil-backed credit operated as a form of spatial power that structurally pre-determined the timing, scale, layout, and conditions of access to urban space, functioning as an institutional mechanism that organized the city as an object of governance(Cardoso 2016: 11–15).

For such finance-based spatial power to be realized in material urban form, corresponding institutional power structures within the state were indispensable. In Luanda, spatial power was concretized through a centralized governance structure centered on the presidency. Neo-imperial spatial intervention should therefore be understood not as the unilateral penetration of external capital, but as a governing effect produced through the articulation of external finance with domestic structures of concentrated political power. In Angola, major reconstruction and housing projects—including Kilamba—were initiated as state-led development programs placed under the direct authority of presidential power. During its initial construction phase, the Kilamba project was supervised by the *Gabinete de Reconstrução Nacional*(GRN), a presidential agency responsible for overseeing national reconstruction. Established in 2004, the GRN functioned as a key institution that applied Chinese loans to reconstruction projects while managing funds and supervising construction(Corkin 2013: 7–8; Kajibanga 2023: 6–7, 18–19). Although formally an administrative body, the GRN operated in close alignment with the Presidency, particularly the *Casa Militar*. As a result, major reconstruction and housing projects in Luanda bypassed conventional government ministries and were placed under the direct control of presidential authority, with urban development proceeding through the combined operation of financial mechanisms and centralized political power(ibid: 19–20).

Kilamba offers the clearest illustration of how oil-backed credit organizes urban space in practice. Construction of Kilamba was undertaken by the Chinese state-owned enterprise CITIC. The project was developed as a large-scale planned city accommodating approximately 20,000 households and conceived as a "complete urban space" encompassing residential complexes, commercial districts, and public facilities. Completed over a period of roughly three years, Kilamba represents the outcome of a development process in which Chinese credit, construction by Chinese firms, and state-led allocation and price-control policies were tightly integrated(Cardoso 2016: 11–15; Kimari & Ernstson 2023: 1876–1878). This mode of development preconfigured the conditions of urban formation and spatial arrangement without requiring explicit coercion or direct intervention by China. In this respect, Kilamba constitutes a paradigmatic case in which neo-imperial urban intervention is materially embedded in urban space through oil-backed credit.

Neo-Imperial Citizenship: Consumption-Based Regimes of Citizenship

Although Kilamba was officially presented as a state-led public housing model intended for low-income populations, in practice it functioned as a highly selective residential space, diverging sharply from policy discourses emphasizing inclusive urban development. Housing prices, eligibility requirements, and administrative procedures were structured around criteria that were difficult for the urban poor and informal settlers to meet. As a result, effective access to housing in Kilamba was largely limited to middle-class households with stable incomes and connections to administrative or political networks, including civil servants(Gastrow 2020: 509–516; Kimari & Ernstson 2023: 1878–1880). In this configuration, access to housing was not grounded in social need or housing as a right, but conditioned upon purchasing power and administrative eligibility. This demonstrates that state-led housing policy reconstituted housing not as a universal citizenship right but as a conditional form of access. Such conditionality laid the groundwork for Kilamba's consolidation as a space that reproduces elite-centered social differentiation and exclusion.

Kilamba's location constituted a key spatial condition reinforcing its fixation as a residential space for particular social groups. Developed as a new urban area on Luanda's periphery and spatially detached from the existing urban core, Kilamba was administratively incorporated into the newly established municipality of Belas following the 2011 territorial reorganization. This locational choice structurally weakened everyday connections with the city center, while inadequate public transportation infrastructure continually intensified residents' mobility burdens. Empirical studies indicate that approximately 45 percent of Kilamba residents spend at least two hours commuting to work, and proposals to improve public transport connectivity have been discussed only belatedly and have failed to function as effective alternatives(Croese 2016: 19–20).

As a result, although Kilamba was designed as a perfect city equipped with residential, commercial, and public facilities, it functioned in practice as a spatially isolated enclave disconnected from Luanda's existing urban system. Kilamba thus emerged as a new centrality characterized by weak functional integration with the city's transportation, commercial, and employment networks, effectively operating as a self-contained residential zone. This spatial isolation has defined Kilamba as a suburbanized space primarily accessible to middle-class residents possessing stable incomes and reliable means of mobility, while simultaneously generating tensions with the socio-economic structure of the existing urban core(Buire 2014: 291–299).

Consequently, Kilamba became a space that was effectively inaccessible to low-income populations whose livelihoods depend on core-based economic activities, informal economies, and dense everyday social networks. Residential life in Kilamba presupposes a level of income sufficient to absorb prolonged commuting costs, stable employment, and the consumption capacity necessary to sustain daily life outside the urban core. These locational and economic conditions transformed housing access in Kilamba from a citizenship right into a selectable option contingent upon a particular lifestyle and economic capacity. In this sense, Kilamba was configured as a space that privileges specific social groups while failing to account for urban livelihoods shaped by informal income structures, core-oriented mobility patterns, and dense social ties. Residents excluded from this space were pushed further outward, and Kilamba became consolidated as an "island-like" residential enclave functionally segmented from Luanda's broader urban structure. This spatial configuration demonstrates how access to the city can be selectively regulated on the basis of lifestyle norms and economic conditions.

Such modes of urbanization convert access to housing from a universal citizenship right into a conditional status differentiated according to consumption capacity and market access. This process illustrates how developmentalist spatial restructuring operates in conjunction with neoliberal logics of accumulation, resonating with the mechanism of "*accumulation by dispossession*," whereby contemporary capitalism seeks new pathways of accumulation through the appropriation of communal resources and rights—such as land, housing, and public assets—when it confronts limits to accumulation through production(Harvey 2017: 73–79). The forced displacement, dismantling of communities, and legally justified land appropriation observed in Kilamba reveal how these accumulation mechanisms persist in transformed forms in the postcolonial period, building upon the legacies of imperial dispossession. As a result, citizenship is no longer constituted primarily as a matter of rights but is reconfigured as a regulated and conditional status predicated on specific housing forms and consumption capacity. In this respect, Kilamba stands as a revealing case that condenses how citizenship is spatially selected and recalibrated within neo-imperial urban orders.

Conclusion

This study has sought to demonstrate that the urban space of Kilamba constitutes a site in which distinct imperial modes of governance operate in overlapping and mutually reinforcing ways. Rather than treating Portuguese colonial urban order and China's neo-imperial developmental intervention as separate or sequential phases, the analysis approached them as coexisting regimes of power operating simultaneously within a single urban project. Through this lens, the study has shown that Kilamba is not a space in which imperialism has been overcome, but one in which imperial logics persist and are reconfigured in transformed forms. The two imperial rationalities operate in a complementary manner. Colonial legal and spatial hierarchies provided the groundwork for neo-imperial development, while finance and developmentalism re-legitimized these structures. Kilamba thus selects "qualified citizens" through legality and market access, transforming rather than eliminating imperial exclusion.

Viewed through the analytical categories proposed in this study, imperialism and neo-imperialism—despite their distinct historical contexts and operative mechanisms—share structural affinities in the ways they reorganize urban space and local life. At the level of ideological legitimation, colonial imperialism constructed local societies as inefficient and backward, framing them as objects to be improved through civilization and development. Neo-imperial developmentalism, by contrast, represents local lives and social relations as immature or irrational, positioning them as targets for correction through external capital, technology, and administrative rationality. Although articulated through different vocabularies, both discourses converge functionally in their negation of locally grounded ways of life and their imposition of externally defined norms and lifestyles as universal standards. Kilamba therefore reveals that postcolonial urban modernity is not a break from empire but a reconfiguration of imperial power through new institutional forms.

At the level of spatial politics, imperialism organized urban space hierarchically through law, administration, and racialized and social classifications. Neo-imperialism, by contrast, restructures space through financial contracts, development projects, and loan arrangements that appear economic or technical in nature. Yet despite this shift in instruments, the core governing logic persists: urban space is reduced to an abstract object of management, and specific orders and conditions of access are institutionally inscribed. Kilamba exemplifies how neo-imperial spatial politics become institutionalized through the languages of finance and development rather than through overt political domination.

Finally, at the level of citizenship, imperial rule selected urban residents on the basis of legality, discipline, and order, positioning those excluded as populations to be managed or controlled. Under neo-imperial urban regimes, these criteria are reconfigured into ostensibly technical and economic conditions such as consumption capacity, market access, and lifestyle compatibility. While this transformation appears neutral and depoliticized, it continues to reproduce exclusion by selectively regulating access to urban space. Citizenship is thus no longer constituted as a universal right, but as a conditional status predicated upon specific housing forms and consumption capabilities.

Through this analysis, the study has proposed overlapping imperialisms as a theoretical and methodological framework. This concept neither reduces imperialism to a static legacy of the past nor isolates neo-imperialism as an entirely novel phenomenon. Instead, overlapping imperialisms offers an analytical lens for examining how state-led development, dependence on external finance, and spatial exclusion repeatedly intersect in postcolonial African cities beyond the case of Kilamba. By advancing this framework, the study contributes a conceptual bridge linking imperial studies, urban studies, and African studies, and provides a grounded approach for understanding postcolonial cities as spaces in which imperial logics continue to be reworked rather than erased.

While this article has focused on Kilamba as a specific urban project in Luanda, it does not claim that the configuration observed here is representative of all postcolonial urban developments in Africa. Rather, Kilamba is approached as an analytically strategic site through which the concept of overlapping imperialisms can be examined in a concrete and empirically grounded manner. The framework proposed here is therefore intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, offering a lens for comparative inquiry into how multiple imperial logics may intersect in other postcolonial urban contexts. Its significance lies in showing that postcolonial cities cannot be understood outside the overlapping infrastructures of past and present imperial power. Recognizing these overlapping structures is essential for any critical understanding of contemporary urban governance in postcolonial contexts.

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