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Bridging the Gap: Learning from South Korea's KOCCA Model to Build a Concrete Public-Private Partnership Framework for Soft Power Promotion in Thailand

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the public-private partnership (PPP) institutional framework for soft power promotion in Thailand and to derive actionable reform principles through focused comparative analysis with South Korea's Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) model. Since 2023, Thailand has intensified efforts to transform its cultural assets into global influence, primarily through the 'One Family, One Soft Power' (OFOS) initiative and the National Soft Power Strategy Committee (NSPSC). The analysis finds that, despite significant political commitment and investment, Thailand's PPP framework remains fragmented, legally ambiguous, and weakly institutionalized, marked specifically by the absence of a statutory lead agency, diffuse budgetary responsibility across more than fifteen government units, and the structural marginalization of private-sector actors to a consultative rather than co-governance role. At the same time, Thailand's findings reveal genuine foundational strengths, including a rich portfolio of internationally recognized cultural assets, cuisine, performing arts, festival culture, and a rapidly growing entertainment sector, alongside demonstrated political will and existing subcommittee structures that provide a basis for institutional reform. Drawing on comparative institutional analysis of South Korea's Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), the article identifies three governance elements from these comparators that are most transferable to Thailand's institutional context: the establishment of a unified statutory lead agency with directive authority, the creation of a co-governed creative investment fund with structured private co-financing, and the implementation of a formal interagency

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coordination protocol supported by systematic impact measurement. The article argues that selectively adapting these regional models to Thailand's administrative culture and political economy, rather than wholesale replication, offers the most viable pathway to converting Thailand's existing cultural strengths into coherent, accountable, and internationally competitive soft power outcomes.

Keywords: Soft Power, Public-Private Partnership, Creative Economy, National Soft Power, Strategy Committee (NSPSC)

Introduction

The concept of soft power, a state's ability to shape preferences and attract cooperation through cultural attraction, political values, and foreign policy legitimacy rather than through coercion or payment, has occupied an increasingly prominent place on the policy agendas of Asian governments since the early 2000s (Nye, 2021). Thailand's engagement with this concept has intensified substantially since 2023, when the Pheu Thai government formally established the NSPSC and launched OFOS, a flagship initiative to develop 20 million skilled creative workers across 11 priority cultural industries.

Thailand possesses significant soft power resources, including its cuisine, martial arts, festival culture, and entertainment industries. Notably, the 'Boys' Love' (BL) television drama genre and K-influenced Thai popular music have attracted substantial international audiences and generated economic value (Jin, 2024; Yoon, 2023). However, a persistent gap exists between governmental ambitions and implementation capacity. This gap arises from the lack of a coherent, legally grounded, and mutually accountable framework for public-private partnerships in soft power promotion.

This article addresses this institutional gap by arguing that the primary constraint on Thailand's soft power trajectory is not a lack of political will or cultural resources, but rather deficiencies in the institutional design of the PPP architecture. Accordingly, it proposes a reform agenda comprising three integrated pillars: establishing a unified statutory agency as the central authority, creating a co-governed creative investment fund to mobilize public and private resources, and developing an interagency coordination protocol to align efforts across ministries and private-sector stakeholders. Section two reviews the theoretical literature on soft power and creative economy governance. Section three examines Thailand's institutional landscape and its framework limitations. Section four examines South Korea's KOCCA model as a comparative institutional reference, selected for its documented success in building a coherent, agency-led PPP framework for soft power promotion. Section five develops the three-pillar reform framework. Section six considers implementation challenges, and section seven concludes.

This article employs a qualitative, document-based research design organized around three complementary methodological components: systematic literature review, policy document analysis, and comparative institutional analysis. Together, these methods enable a rigorous examination of Thailand’s soft power PPP framework and the derivation of reform principles grounded in both theoretical scholarship and empirically documented institutional practice.

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Soft Power, Creative Economies, and Public-Private Partnerships

Nye's (2021) retrospective account of soft power's conceptual evolution clarifies an important analytical distinction: soft power is a relational outcome—the capacity to shape others' preferences by attraction—not simply a stock of cultural assets. A country can possess abundant cultural resources while failing to convert them into influence if the institutional infrastructure for such conversion is absent. Nye emphasizes that credibility, consistency, and narrative control are essential intermediate mechanisms; cultural products that circulate without a coherent state narrative or enabling institutional architecture generate appreciation but not necessarily influence.

This conversion problem has attracted growing scholarly attention. Yoon (2023) examines the discursive construction of soft power in the Korean Wave context, demonstrating that state-sponsored framing and institutional investment interact dynamically with organic fan community activity to shape the international reception of cultural exports. The implication for policy design is significant: state institutions do not simply produce soft power; they create enabling conditions within which private creative actors generate it. The policy architecture must therefore be enabling, not directive.

Ohnesorge (2020) offers a complementary institutional analysis, arguing that the operationalization of soft power in practice requires states to develop what he terms "soft power infrastructure", the agencies, funding mechanisms, and interorganizational networks through which cultural attraction is systematically cultivated and deployed. This infrastructure conception directly informs the institutional reform agenda proposed in this article: soft power promotion is not simply a question of choice.

Research on the creative economy identifies a central tension: while states provide strategic direction, creativity emerges from bottom-up processes. UNCTAD (2023) demonstrates that South Korea's post-1997 model was effective because the government adopted a "developmentalism" approach in partnership with chaebol, establishing priorities and providing funding through agencies like KOCCA; yet private actors maintained creative autonomy, as state-driven content initiatives were less successful due to the sector's need for "freedom and flexibility needed for artistic and cultural creation" (citing Otmazgin, 2011), whereas market-oriented and investment-based support yielded positive outcomes. This dynamic aligns with Thailand's challenges, where excessive state direction risks stifling private innovation.

Jakonen and Renko (2023) studied Finland and found that emphasizing industry outcomes fragments coordination when many ministries claim authority; Finland's split between the Education, Culture, and Economic ministries mirrors Thailand's situation and stresses the need for a single lead agency. The governance literature further differentiates between different modalities of PPP in creative industries. Casady et al. (2020) define PPPs in the new public governance (NPG) paradigm as arrangements characterized by genuine co-ownership of strategic objectives, shared risk and reward, and mutual accountability mechanismsม thereby sharply separating them from the more common consultation model in which private actors advise but do not govern. Thailand's current NSPSC subcommittee architecture resembles a consultative model: private-sector expertise is formally incorporated, but decision-making authority and budgetary control remain exclusively with the government.

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Kim and Jin (2016) analyzed cultural policy in the Korean Wave context through a discourse analysis of presidential speeches, finding that explicit governmental framing of cultural industries as strategic national assets created durable political commitment that survived changes in administration. Their data show that the rhetorical and legislative embedding of soft power policy—not simply executive-level championing—is a prerequisite for the institutional continuity that effective PPPs require.

Thailand's Soft Power Institutional Landscape: Structures, Gaps, And Failures
Governance Architecture and the NSPSC

Thailand's formal soft power governance architecture centers on the NSPSC, constituted by Prime Minister's Office Order No. 230/2023 in September 2023. The NSPSC is a forty-nine-member inter-ministerial body chaired by the Prime Minister, with representation from the Ministries of Culture, Higher Education, Tourism, and Commerce, among others. Its strategic framework identifies 11 priority soft-power industries and sets targets for the OFOS program, which aims to develop 20 million skilled creative workers, each earning at least 200,000 baht annually.

The NSPSC model reflects a state-centric conception of soft power promotion that sits in tension with the enabling-conditions model supported by the academic literature. As Yoon (2023) argues in the Korean Wave context, state-directed soft power promotion is most effective when it focuses on structural enablement, market access, co-financing, and infrastructure, rather than content prescription. The NSPSC's assignment of specific programmatic tasks to private-sector subcommittee members, as illustrated by the resignation of the fashion subcommittee in February 2024, suggests that Thailand's governance model has not yet resolved this fundamental design tension.

Institutional Fragmentation and Budget Diffusion

The Thailand Creative Culture Agency (THACCA), intended to serve as Thailand's equivalent of South Korea's KOCCA or Taiwan's TAICCA, has operated informally through the Strategic Transformation Office since early 2024, lacking formal legal status, an independent budget, and an established legal identity. In practice, THACCA has functioned as a budget distributor rather than a strategic actor, distributing funds to pre-existing government departments: film initiatives to the Department of Cultural Promotion, food programs to the Ministry of Industry, and so on across 15 or more organizational units.

This fragmentation is analytically significant. Jakonen and Renko (2023) identify 'barriers across administrative branches' as the primary structural impediment to effective creative economy policy, noting that fragmentation prevents cross-sectoral synergies and renders systemic impact assessment structurally impossible. Thailand's institutional architecture exemplifies this failure: parliamentary analysis found that total government expenditure on soft power initiatives across fiscal years 2024 and 2025 approached eight billion baht when all ministerial programs were aggregated, yet this figure was not visible in any single agency's accounts, making enforcement of accountability and planned prioritization effectively impossible.

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Private Sector Engagement: Structural Marginalization

A central paradox of Thailand's soft power governance is the structural gap between the government's rhetorical celebration of the private sector as a source of cultural creativity and its practical exclusion of private actors from meaningful governance authority. The NSPSC subcommittee model includes private sector figures as domain experts or technical advisors, but does not grant them co-governance authority over strategy or budget. This arrangement reproduces what Casady et al. (2020) identify as a 'pseudo-PPP': a form of private-sector engagement that creates the appearance of collaboration while retaining exclusive governmental control over substantive decisions.

The consequences of this governance design are evident in program outcomes. For instance, the OFOS program aimed to train 10,000 Thai chefs in 2024 but achieved only 1,300 completions, representing approximately 13% of its target. Over the first two years of the four-year program, total training completions reached about 20,355, far short of the 20 million targets. This substantial gap reflects, among other factors, the absence of genuine private-sector co-ownership in program design and implementation. Industry professionals involved in consultation phases, but lacking governance authority, were unable to adjust program design when implementation challenges emerged.

Legislative Ambiguity: The THACCA Bill

The Thailand Creative Culture Agency Bill, drafted during the Srettha administration and held public hearings in 2024, represents the most important legislative effort to address Thailand's institutional fragmentation. As currently drafted, the bill would establish THACCA as a full statutory agency, transformed from the Creative Economy Agency, with authority to create strategic plans, administer a soft-power development fund, establish tax benefit frameworks for creative industries, and collect market intelligence.

However, the bill's passage has been repeatedly delayed by political transitions. Following the Constitutional Court's August 2024 ruling removing Prime Minister Srettha, THACCA's legislative trajectory was disrupted for several months. As of early 2026, the bill remains pending Cabinet approval and Council of State review. Kim and Jin's (2016) finding that legislative embedding—not simply executive championing—is a prerequisite for institutional continuity acquires particular urgency in this context: until THACCA achieves formal statutory status, Thailand's soft power governance architecture is essentially fragile.

The KOCCA Model: Institutional Lessons from South Korea
Institutional Architecture and Mandate

South Korea's Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), established in 2009 through the consolidation of three previously independent agencies, represents the most directly appropriate institutional comparator for Thailand's aspirations. KOCCA is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and carries a unified mandate to support Korean cultural content industries across gaming, animation, television drama, film, music, and related sectors. UNCTAD (2023) characterizes KOCCA as the operational centerpiece of South Korea's neo-developmental cultural policy—the institutional node through which state strategic direction is translated into industry-level support.

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Jin (2024) documents KOCCA's changing role in the digital platform era, analyzing how the agency has adapted its PPP model to address the increasing role of domestic and global internet platforms in cultural production and distribution. This adaptation is instructive for Thailand: an effective soft power agency cannot simply replicate mechanisms designed for the pre-streaming era, but must develop institutional relationships with global content platforms, streaming services, and digital distribution networks. KOCCA's formal co-production agreements with Netflix, Disney, and other global platforms—enabling Korean content producers to access international distribution at scale—illustrate what such institutional embeddedness can achieve.

Co-Investment and Financial De-Risking

KOCCA's most distinctive PPP feature is its co-investment model, which operates in partnership with the Export-Import Bank of Korea to provide direct loans to small cultural content companies. This model—in which the state structures and partially guarantees private investment rather than simply subsidizing state-directed production—produces a fundamentally different incentive structure from Thailand's current approach of distributing government budgets through government departments. Casady et al. (2020) identify co-investment risk-sharing as a defining characteristic of high-performing PPP arrangements, discriminating them from models in which risk remains with a single party.

The institutional logic of co-investment is that it simultaneously subjects cultural projects to market-discipline tests that pure government grants cannot impose and enables private investment in high-risk creative projects that market actors alone would not fund. UNCTAD (2023) traces this logic through the evolution of Korean cultural policy following the 1997 crisis, demonstrating that the government's willingness to absorb downside risk while preserving private sector creative autonomy was central to the Korean Wave's commercial success. The T-Wave Thailand's nascent cultural export phenomenon could similarly benefit from institutional arrangements that de-risk private investment without directing creative content.

Impact Measurement and Strategic Intelligence

A further distinguishing feature of the KOCCA model is its systematic investment in impact measurement and industry intelligence. KOCCA conducts annual surveys of global Korean content consumption, generating longitudinal data that inform strategic management and enable public accountability reporting. Jin (2024) analyzes how this intelligence function has been adapted to the digital platform era, with KOCCA developing new methodologies to track Korean cultural content across streaming platforms, social media, and global fan communities.

Thailand's current institutional architecture lacks a systematic intelligence function. Without baseline measurements of the international reach, audience profiles, and economic value of Thai cultural content, it is not possible to assess the return on public investment in soft power promotion or to make evidence-based strategic decisions. This gap, marked by significant investment and minimal accountability infrastructure, is precisely what an institutionalized THACCA with a formal intelligence mandate could address.

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Toward A Concrete PPP Framework: A Three-Pillar Reform Agenda for Thailand

Building on the theoretical and comparative analysis presented in previous sections, this section proposes a three-pillar reform framework for Thailand's soft power PPP architecture. The framework is intended to address Thailand's specific institutional deficiencies while incorporating internationally validated governance principles.

Pillar One: A Unified Lead Agency with Genuine Legislative Mandate

The foundational reform is the expedited passage of a strengthened THACCA legislation. The current bill requires amendment in at least three respects. First, it should explicitly confer on THACCA not simply coordinative but directive authority over other agencies' soft power activities—meaning that ministries with partial soft power mandates must operate within THACCA-approved strategic systems. This is the mechanism by which South Korea's KOCCA achieves institutional coherence: its mandate from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is sufficiently specific and influential to coordinate the activities of multiple sector-specific agencies).

Second, the legislation should consolidate all government soft power expenditure under a single THACCA budget line, even if funds are subsequently delegated to implementing agencies. The discovery that Thailand's total soft power investment approached eight billion baht across 2024-2025, yet remained invisible in any single agency's accounts, signifies a fundamental accountability failure that only consolidated budget authority can remedy. Casady et al. (2020) identify unified budget accountability as a prerequisite for effective PPP governance: without it, incentive alignment between public and private partners is structurally impossible.

Third, THACCA's governance board should include private-sector representatives with genuine co-governance authority—not simply advisory status. This means private-sector board members should be able to initiate budget proposals, block programs incompatible with industry realities, and hold THACCA management accountable for delivery. This structural redesign would convert THACCA's current 'consultation PPP' into the 'co-governance PPP' identified by the academic literature as most effective for creative industries (Casady et al., 2020).

Pillar Two: A Co-Governed Creative Investment Fund

The second pillar addresses Thailand's financing architecture. The current model, in which NSPSC budgets flow from government-to-government departments, with private-sector actors as recipients rather than co-investors, excludes the market discipline and co-ownership dynamics that the KOCCA model indicates are central to best-performing creative industry support. Thailand should establish a National Creative Culture Investment Fund structured around the co-investment principle.

The fund should require private sector co-financing for major project grants, analogous to KOCCA's Export-Import Bank partnership, with government contributions matched by private investment at a structured ratio. An investment committee with private-sector majority representation should govern the fund under a published investment policy statement that specifies sector allocation criteria, project selection methodology, impact measurement metrics, and exit provisions. Tax incentive mechanisms should be integrated

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into the fund framework, creating a reinforcing incentive stack that makes private co-investment financially attractive. UNCTAD (2023) shows that this integrated incentive architecture—combining co-investment de-risking with beneficial tax treatment—was central to Korea's ability to attract sustained private investment in culturally valuable but commercially risky creative projects.

Pillar Three: A Formal Interagency Coordination Protocol and Impact Measurement Framework

The third pillar addresses coordination failures and accountability gaps. Even with a unified statutory agency, the multiplicity of government actors with legitimate roles in soft power promotion necessitates formal coordination mechanisms. Thailand should establish a Soft Power Interagency Coordination Protocol requiring each participating ministry to designate a senior soft power focal point with resource-commitment authority, and mandating THACCA to maintain a real-time soft power budget registry aggregating all government expenditure across agencies.

The impact measurement component should draw directly on KOCCA's annual intelligence model, adapted for Thailand's specific cultural asset profile. Thailand should invest in an annual Thai Creative Industries Survey measuring export revenues, international audience reach and demographics, employment generation, and the contribution of soft power initiatives to tourism and foreign direct investment attraction. Ohnesorge (2020) argues that systematic impact measurement is not simply an accountability mechanism but an essential strategic enabler: longitudinal data on cultural influence enable evidence-based strategy adjustment and provide the credibility signals that distinguish genuine soft power from mere cultural promotion.

Implementation Challenges and Political Economy Considerations

The proposed reform framework faces significant political economy obstacles that institutional design alone cannot resolve. Ministries and departments with established stakes in soft-power budget allocation will resist the consolidation of financial authority in THACCA, and the creation of a genuinely directive lead agency will require them to cede bureaucratic autonomy. This challenge is not unique to Thailand; Jakonen and Renko (2023) document similar ministerial resistance in Finland's experience with creative economy reform, but it requires an explicit political strategy alongside technical institutional design.

A second challenge concerns institutional continuance across political transitions. Thailand's THACCA legislation has already experienced a delay attributable to government change; the larger soft power agenda has been recalibrated with each new administration. Kim and Jin (2016) demonstrate that the Korean Wave's institutional durability depended on legislative embedding—the formal codification of institutional mandates in statute rather than executive order—which bound successive administrations to continued investment. The same logic applies to Thailand: THACCA's mandate and funding commitments must be embedded in primary legislation with cross-party support to achieve the multi-year implementation horizon that effective soft power institutions require.

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A third challenge concerns the risk of institutionalizing cultural conservatism. Yoon (2023) observes that state-sponsored soft power framing can narrow the range of cultural production that receives institutional support, privileging commercially legible representations of national identity over more experimental, diverse, or politically complex creative work. Thailand's 5F framework and the NSPSC's prioritization of traditional and marketable cultural forms reflect this tendency. The reform framework must therefore incorporate explicit provisions for independent creative sector representation in THACCA's governance, making certain that the agency's mandate supports enabling conditions for creative ecosystems rather than prescribing cultural content.

Finally, the conceptual boundary between soft power and creative economy must be resolved at the institutional design level. Nye (2021) insists that soft power operates through the attraction of values and political legitimacy, not simply through the commercial success of cultural products. An institutional mandate defined primarily around economic metrics—export revenues, employment, tourism contribution—may successfully develop Thailand's creative economy while failing to generate the reputational and relational influence that constitutes soft power in the authentic sense. THACCA's legislation should explicitly mandate attention to the non-economic dimensions of cultural influence, including governance credibility, international partnership, and values projection.

Conclusion

Thailand possesses substantial soft power resources and sustained political commitment to their deployment. However, the country currently lacks the institutional infrastructure required to transform cultural assets and political will into coherent, accountable, and verifiable outcomes. The three-pillar reform framework proposed in this article—a unified statutory lead agency, a co-governed creative investment fund, and a formal interagency coordination protocol—offers a concrete strategy for addressing this gap, drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship in creative economy governance and comparative analysis of South Korea's successful KOCCA model.

The South Korean experience documented by UNCTAD (2023), Jin (2024), and Kim and Jin (2016) demonstrates that these institutional outcomes are achievable within a single policy generation, provided that political commitment to institutional quality, rather than mere institutional creation, is sustained. Thailand's THACCA legislation, if strengthened as proposed and enacted with sufficient legislative robustness to withstand political transitions, could initiate a comparable trajectory.

Further research should examine the implementation of the THACCA legislation once enacted, comparing outcomes against the reform principles articulated in this article, and should develop a comparative institutional analysis of soft power governance across ASEAN contexts. The conceptual distinction between soft power and creative economy, central to Nye's (2021) retrospective critique and directly relevant to Thailand's policy design choices, warrants sustained theoretical attention as scholarship on Asian soft power continues to evolve.

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