

Continuity of Korean Studies in Thailand

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This paper attempts to delineate the continuity of Korean Studies in Thailand. It consists of two parts: First, the history of Thailand – Korea contact dating back from mid–fourteenth century up to the end of twentieth century. This part details a brief account on the Thai relation with the Koryo, then describes the events during and after the Korean War until the end of the 20th century.

The second part, starting from the year 2000, portrays the phenomenon of Korean Wave hits Thailand. In this new age, Korea has become the center of interest among Thais at all levels. Young and old alike, they are exposed to various kinds of Korean pop culture; they then are in search to know and learn more about the “Land of the Morning Calm”. The part will look at the situation not only from the Korean point of view but also from the Thai policy toward globalization, i.e., to expand as well as to exchange knowledge of Asian countries especially among the academia and students. Meanwhile, the increase of trade and investment accelerates bilateral interests and economic cooperation between both sides.

Part I

History

The song “Arirang” (in Thai: *Aridang*), describes a true love between a Thai soldier and the Korean girl he meets in Korea while fighting against communist invasion

during the Korean war. It had a deep impact on Thai people. The song was genuinely popular from the 1960s through the 1970s as it was sung every corner of the kingdom. In addition, the story has been dramatized in TV movie series aired from time to time (the last version was on air in 1999).

This song is one example of the knowledge that Thai people have of the remote peninsula of Korea. Korea and Koreans are not and have not been foreign to us in the past or modern eras.

Tracing back to the ancient time, history professor Cho Hungguk discovered that the first contact between Thailand, then Siam, and Korea was made in the reign of King Kongyang (1389-1392). This contact was recorded in Koryosa (History of Koryo), the official chronicle of the Koryo dynasty. The document revealed that the Kingdom of Xienluohu (or Siam) sent Nai Gong and other men together with some of its native products and a letter to present to the king of Koryo. The king gave them audience and comforted them. A promising start to diplomatic relations was disrupted by Japanese pirates, who killed all members of, the second envoy from Siam. Fear of the sea bandits ended contact between the two countries for over five centuries.

It was only when the United Nations requested the government of Thailand to send her troops to fight in the Korean War that the two countries made contact again. Thailand immediately responded to the plea for help, and was the first country to do so, deploying 4,000 men to Korea on July 23, 1950, under the UN flag.

Together with 16 other ally nations, Thai soldiers bravely fought side by side with Koreans to protect South Korea until the end of the war. After the war's end, until the last unit permanently left Korea in 1972, Thai forces rotationally maintained troops in South Korea. The veterans brought back good memories and stories, like the one memorialized in "Arirang."

On the diplomatic side, the Thai government announced its recognition of the sovereignty of the Republic of Korea in October 1949, and established diplomatic relations on October 1, 1958. On March 1, 1960, the two countries exchanged ambassadors. Since then, Thailand and the Republic of Korea have increasingly enhanced their relationship in all sectors, including trade and investment, as well as visits by heads of states and academic, cultural and tourist exchanges.

The combination of diplomatic and civilian contact with Korea, though slow in the beginning, has had great impact on the desire among Thai people to learn and to understand Koreans.

Special Features of Korean Studies in Thailand

1. Academic and public interest on Korean Studies

The development of a close relationship between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Republic of Korea has become evident in the modern era. Thai perception of Koreans was informed by the exciting stories told by the veterans and soldiers stationed in Korea for over two decades. Many documents and personal experience were published in military journals and yearbooks, and few appeared in daily newspapers. Until the early 1980s, Thai people at all levels saw Korea as a ragged, ruined and war-torn state. The Thai government from time to time supplied grain, food and other assistance to the country during the Korean national reconstruction period.

Thai perceptions of Korea drastically changed in the early 1980s, when this remote country successfully achieved economic development and reached the status of newly industrialized country. As many Korean goods found their way to Thai markets, a new generation of Thai people expressed their admiration of Koreans as hard-working people

who wisely adapted modern technology into production. As a result, they found themselves to eager to learn about Korea.

On the academic side, the publisher of the social studies textbook, used for the secondary school level in Thailand, has begun to put information on Korea as a separate topic in the chapter of East Asia countries in the 1980s. The history and geography of the Korean peninsula are briefly summarized. The establishment of the two Koreas is discussed until the period after the Korean War. However, China and Japan of course are described in more detail and dominant the chapter.

A textbook for university students majoring in History, entitled History and Analysis of Contemporary Asia, provides a lengthy chapter on Korea. First published in the mid-1970s, the data largely relied on English textbooks. However, several mistakes in translation were found, and misspellings were rampant. As a result, teaching materials at this level were then drawn from English textbooks when discussing Korean Economy, Politics, and International Relations.

In response to the unavailability of Korean Studies resources in Thai, the Korean Overseas Information Service published a translated book on Facts about Korea in 1974 and sent it out to many educational institutes and to the general public. However, it had little impact on the knowledge of Korea among Thai people due to the small number of copies in distribution.

The first and most comprehensive book in Thai on Korean history, entitled Korean Modern History, was written in 1978 by Bhuwadon Songprasert, a then lecturer in the Department of History at Ramkhamhaeng University. The author focused on the history of the Korean peninsula from the early period of Tangun until the Park Chung-hee regime by drawing materials from reliable sources and references in every topic, so that the book offered the most accurate information on Korean history. However, the book strongly criticized the South Korean government. During the 1970s, the mood against the

totalitarian regime was widespread and this young author no doubt also found himself against the dictatorship. The book was later reprinted in 1987 with no revision and is now out-of-print.

The second half of 1980s saw a rise of publications on Korean Studies in Thailand in response to the need to learn more about Korean economic development. Sukhothaimathirat Open University published two books, written by this author, the first of which devoted a lengthy unit of study on “Governments and Politics in North and South Korea” while the second included a chapter called “Political Doctrine and Economic Development Strategy of Republic of Korea” for students majoring in Political Science. Ramkhamaheng University also published a chapter on Politics of Korea for students who taking a class on East Asian Politics; while this author wrote South Korea: The Role of Government in National Development. Besides textbooks, A Note from South Korea was written by Prapon Ruangnarong, who spent a year teaching Thai language at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. This book later won first prize for non-fiction at the Thailand National Book Festival in 1990.

More publications on Korea flourished in the 1990s as research centers, to be discussed later, continued to explore Korean studies in various fields. Two master degree theses, under this author’s supervision, were done on Korean Unification. Meanwhile, Trace on the Ginsaeng was written by H.R.H. Princess Sirindhorn who compiled the accounts from a daily notebook maintained during the royal visit South Korea (18-22 March 1991). The content of this valuable royal publication mainly dealt with culture, presented both in pictures and description, of places visited, so that readers could easily understand and appreciate the content as if they too had traveled along with the Princess. Here...South Korea was another narrative book written by a Thai person while living in Korea as an exchange professor. And Inside Korea: New Asian Tiger provided 46 short articles, formally published in a leading newspaper throughout 1990-1991, analyzing

Korean social context in order to answer how Koreans managed to successfully develop their country within a short period of time. The writing was fiction-like in style, using “Su-yon”, a Korean female whom he met on his trip, as a symbol of Korean character to discuss with him in dialogue in all topics throughout the book.

2. Foreign language teaching

Thailand established the formal modern school system in the reign of King Rama 5 (1868-1910). According to Professor Narumol Leepiyachart of Burapha University, there were some English language schools and other schools teaching Chinese and Hindi. Due to political factors-- nationalism in particular, coupled with differing ideas on language teaching-- the teaching of foreign languages was banned at times until the situation changed.

The National Education Act of 1999 mandated that the Ministry of Education establish a curriculum that incorporates foreign languages into schools as follows: (1) primary school level: students in grade 5 and 6 must study English; (2) lower secondary school level: students can choose one of 4 foreign languages to study (English, French, Japanese and Arabic); (3) upper secondary school level: students can choose one or more of 8 foreign languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Arabic, and Pali); (4) university level: undergraduate students should have the ability to use English for communication but also have the opportunity to study a second foreign language. Also, the university/institution should provide majors and the minors at the undergraduate level for different foreign language groups as prioritized according to its goals: English, languages of the neighboring countries (e.g., Laos, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Burmese and Malaysian), oriental languages (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Japanese), and western languages (e.g., German, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian).

It appears that Korean language is one of the oriental languages the Thai government pays attention to. So far, Korean language teaching has already been taught at the university level, as to be discussed later.

3. Aspects of Korean Studies that interest Thai people

Economic development has been the major topic discussed among Thai scholars, while general knowledge of culture, society, history, science and technology, as well as sports, are discussion issues among the general Thai populace. The Korean war has never been forgotten by the Thai people, who support Korean unification.

Language and Korean Studies

1. Korean language

In 1986, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani campus became the first university to offer Korean language as an elective subject. Chulalongkorn University followed in 1991 and Burapa in 1995. The rest began offering the language as elective subjects from the second half of 1990's: Sri Nakharinwirot University, Thammasat University, Naresuan University, Mahasarakham University, Ramkhamhaeng University, Silpakorn University, and Prince Songkla University- Phuket campus (and -Hadyai campus in 2006). Some Rajabhat Institutes, formally Teachers' colleges, have offered courses in Korean language taught by Korean volunteers dispatched by KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency): Rajabhat Nakorn Pathom (1993-1999), Chandrakasem (1994-1998), Chiang Mai (1995-1999), Chiang Rai (1996-1998), Lampang (1996-1998), Suan Dusit (1997-1999),

and Ubol Ratchatani (1996-1998). However, when KOICA stopped providing staff, the institutes no longer provided classes.

The above institutions are public colleges and universities. No private higher institutions (except University of Thai Chamber of Commerce having a cultural class in 1980's) at present offer Korean language and/or Korean-related classes to their students.

2. Korea-related courses

In 1978, the Department of History at Ramkhamhaeng University became the first to offer a course on Modern Korean History as an elective subject for students majoring in History. In 1995, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the same university became the first to provide an elective course on Korean Society and Culture. In the case of Korean economy and Korean politics, those topics have been taught as part of East Asian Studies courses offered in Departments of Economics and Political Science (such as East Asian Economies and Politics of East Asian Countries).

The class on Modern Korean History at Ramkhamhaeng University shrinks from 70 to 5-9 students per semester due to the decline of students majoring in History. Surprisingly, there were 1,056 students enrolled in the first Korean Society and Culture class, an elective subject, in early 1995. Enrollment kept rising and currently reaches nearly 10,000 students per class per semester (the course is offered three times a year: First semester, Second semester and Summer). Over 100,000 students have taken this course since it was first offered. With such a high number of students, new textbooks and research papers are likely to find an audience.

3. Research Institutes and Center for Korean Studies

There are two formal Research Institutes in Thailand: the Institute of Asian Studies of Chulalongkorn University and the Institute of East Asian Studies of Thammasat University. They employ Thai researchers as permanent staff to conduct research. The Institute of Asian Studies was established in 1967 in response to the need for knowledge of Asian countries, especially of Southeast Asian Countries, during the Vietnam War. It is closely affiliated with the Department of International Relations. The first Institute director, a specialist on China, as well as the subsequent Directors, was from the Department. He was an able person who encouraged a number of scholars, including this author, from various universities to produce research works on countries in Asia and Southeast Asia, Japan and China in particular. The Institute produces publications such as the Journal of Asian Review, and Yearbooks and Newsletters on Asian Studies. Seminars have had been arranged from time to time on the current issues of each country and/or sub-region. Very few works were done on Korea, however, due to the lack of specialists on Korea. There was an attempt to build up the capacity in the field by sending a young female to pursue her post-graduate degree in Korea. The endeavor failed as the scholarship recipient gave up her study, after spending over a year in Korea, to get married. At present, the only person writing the Newsletters and Yearbooks is a junior researcher specializing in nearby countries.

The Korean Studies Center of the East Asian Institute at Thammasat University is more active. Since its inauguration in 1984, one or two research projects a year have been done by two junior staff. To date, five projects so far have dealt mainly with the topic of Korean Peninsula Security and Unification. The Institute has devoted more effort to offering Korean language courses to the public while arranging at least one seminar per year on Korean Affairs. Still, in comparison to the Centers for Chinese Studies and

Japanese Studies of the same Institute, the Korean Studies Center is less active, and produces fewer research works. At present, the Institute plans to change its name to the Institute of Asia Pacific. Its objectives will therefore be broadened to exploring and researching more countries. The concentration on East Asian countries will probably lessen.

Burapha and Prince Songkla - Pattani campus Universities created the Centers for Korean Studies in order to assist their language teaching largely for the degree programs. Cultural shows and special lectures have been regularly organized. Each had published a few basic Korean language textbooks, together with diskettes, for their own students.

In order to respond to the nation-wide interest in the Korean peninsula and to focus on the success of Korean economic development, as well as to shed light on Korean society and culture, the Center for Korean Studies of Ramkhamhaeng University (a semi-open university providing both in-house instruction and long distance teaching) was formally launched in January 1995. The Center, which is affiliated with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, attempts to create interest in and to seek understanding of Korea and Korean issues, as well as build up a wealth of knowledge on Korean Studies in Thailand. Research in all areas (for example, socio-cultural features, economy, politics, history, geography and current affairs) concerning the Korean peninsula are arduously conducted and published in the forms of books, occasional papers and research works. To date, 20 books have been published while over 100,000 copies have been sold. Many of the books/academic papers are used as textbooks for the nation-wide higher educational institutions. Since 1985, the senior researcher has been a regular commentator in radio and television programs on Korean Affairs while over 100 articles published in daily newspapers and academic journals. More details are available on the Center's website: www.ru.ac.th/korea. The shortage of manpower in this field, however, is no exception for

this Center, although attempts have long been made to create genuine interest among scholars from related fields of study. The success rate, however, has been low.

Part II

The new millennium saw a sharp rise of Thai interests on the Korean peninsula in general and on South Korea in particular. Due to the expansion of Korean pop culture to Thailand, the increase of trade and investment as well as of tourist industry among both sides, for example, these have led a dramatic change in Korean studies in the Kingdom of Thailand.

Korean Wave

The trend of the Korean pop culture in Thailand as a major cultural input can be traced from 2001. Presently this trend is quite visible on TV drama, movies, pop music etc. Tear jerking Korean movie *Autumn in My Heart*, healthy and aesthetical image of Jeon Ji-hyun in *My Sassy Girl*, glamorous trendy music and dance of Korean singers - Se7en and Rain drew the attention of the Thai teenagers to Korea and Korean pop culture. Korean online game programs are also extremely popular among the Thai youth. It may be mentioned here that playing of one popular online Korean game program *Ragnarok* was prohibited after midnight by the Thai government in 2003 as younger people became over attached to the game. Influence of the Korean pop culture can be seen in other areas too. More and more people, for example, are developing a taste for Korean food. Purchase of Korean gift items, Korean dress, *Insam*, decorative items, mobile phones, electronic goods etc. are growing. One thing that needs special mention here is the growing interest in Korean martial art *Taekwondo*.

1. Movie TV. Drama and Pop music

Professor Kim Hong-Koo advocates that *My Sassy Girl* (May 2002) was considered the most successful Korean movie on the Thai silver screen. After its screening, interest in Korean movies grew substantially. Many Korean movies made entry to the Thai market. For example love story *Wanee and Junah*, action comedy *Guns and Talks*, action fantasy *Volcano High*, action movie *Musa*, action comedy *Kick the Moon*, romantic movies *White Valentine*, *Who are you*, *Nabi: The Butterfly*, and *Tell Me Something*, erotic movies *La Belle*, *My Boss*, *My Hero*, *Oh! La La Sisters*, and *The Way Home*, romantic movies *Calla*, and *Ghost in Love*, action movie *The Legend of Ginko*, *2009 Lost Memories*, *No Blood No Tears*, *On the Occasion of Remembering the Turning Gate*, *Public Enemy*, etc. Among them, *Nabi: The Butterfly*, and *Tell Me Something* fail miserably to attract audience. Erotic movie *La Belk*, was criticized for its poor quality. Other movies like *No Blood No Tears*, *On the Occasion of Remembering the Turning Gate*, and *Public Enemy*, were exported basically as VCDs and thus, not screened in a regular theatre.

Korean TV drama made its debut in Thailand with *Everything about the Eve* but the most successful one was *Autumn in My Heart* that was broadcasted on iTV. This drama was extremely popular and rose to number one position, beating other Chinese and American ones broadcasted on iTV. The heroin in this drama, Song Hae-Gyo and her image made a long lasting impression on the Thai people. Other actor Song Seung-Hyun's poster became a very popular among the Thai youth. The theme song of the drama *Autumn in My Heart* struck some finer strings in Thai people's heart. Following this new trend, dramas like, *Chef's Proposal*, *Hotelier*, and *Winter Sonata* gained high popularity.

Again, the most popular TV. drama that hit Thai audience at all levels in 2005 was *Jewel of the Palace (Taejanguem)*. The fans of the show daily talked with colleagues about developments in the story and commented on what they saw in the scenes.

Not only various movie and TV. drama have captured the hearts Thai audience but also the hero and heroine of the successful shows. They have been invited to visit the Kingdom in several occasions and welcomed by a large group of Thai Fans.

The first Korean singer group invited to Thailand was Baby V.O.X. This group was invited by Thailand's largest production company, GMM. Baby V.O.X. succeeded in selling more than 200,000 CDs in Thailand. Also, Korean singers Se7en and Rain, for example, have gained popularity in Thailand.

2. Online game

Among the various Korean cultural media, online game is also leading the Korean Wave to new heights. The first Korean game entering the Thai online market was *Ragnarok*. The Korean game enterprise Gravity, exported this game that created a wave of multiplayer online playing. However, as the game became over popular with the Thai teenagers, it became a social problem. Thus, the Thai government had to impose a ban, barring children under 18 from playing this game at night by cutting off access to game provider server or outside internet café. However, this ban was partially lifted to allow adults over 18 to have some restricted access to online gaming, which proves the fact that *Ragnarok*, and other such online Korean games were extremely popular in the Asian region. On becoming a paid service since the beginning of 2003, average contact of online users of *Ragnarok* at any time rose to a level of 40,000.

After *Ragnarok*, *Mu* and *Laghaim* entered the Thai market. The Korean game company Webzen entered into a contract with a Thai company called New Era to settle issues related to 3D online game environment.

The Korean Wave has had a great impact into Thai people, especially the youngsters. They seek to obtain pictures, to buy CD as well as to follow story of their favorite stars and their works. The entertainment magazines become a vehicle to enhance the fad as they portray the personal accounts of the super stars. The fans also create websites, for instance, www.popcornfor2.com, drawing up 34,949 as registered members while 1,489,395 visiting the website.

Bilateral trade, investment and tourist industry

Korea has increased her export to Thailand by 6.66 % between 2004 – 2005 as she enjoyed trade surplus over the Kingdom of Thailand. Thailand was ranked 16th in terms of Korean export destination. Korean investment to Thailand has dramatically increased by six-fold between 2001 – 2006 but slightly dropped in 2005 due to Thai political cloud of government instability.

Over 850,000 Korean Tourists visited Thailand in 2004 while 61,479 Thai went to the Land of Morning Calm in the same year. Compared to 35,605 Thai tourists visiting Korea in 1999, this phenomenon was indeed resulted by the Korean Wave. Several mentioned they wanted to see the locations where *Taejanguem* was taken, or known as *Follow the Taejanguem's trail*.

Trade, investment and tourist industry, together with Korean Wave, considerably contribute to a good image of Korea among Thai people. At the same time, more job opportunities in relation with Korea/Koreans have incrementally aroused. It is beyond all doubt that Korean studies has greatly altered in many respects.

Korean Education

1. Korean Language. At the height of *Taejanguem* screening Center for Korean Studies of Ramkhamheang University had, each week, a number of interrogation on where

to offer personal tutoring, and what institutions to have degree programs on Korean language. The same was true for those posting advertisement on their interest in giving private teaching the language. The Webboard of the Center's website, to be mentioned only one out of several other webboards, became a central point where the demand and supply were met.

To date, six universities in Thailand have programs on Korean language that lead to a bachelor's degree. Burapa University's program began in 2000; the program at the Prince of Songkhla University at Pattani campus began in 2001 as well as Silpakorn and Rajapat Chiangmai universities; while Sri Nakarinwirot and Mahasarakham Universities in 2005. Number of students of the Major, Pattani campus for instance, increases two-fold between 2001 – 2004. However, the number has been designated by Ministry of Education. The real increases is shown in classes of the Minor and the Elective subjects. Taking Ramkhamhaeng University (a semi-open university) as an example, 79 students enrolled KO.101 as Elective subject in 2002 while 168, 233 and 279 took the same class in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively. Two-to three-fold of number of students had in addition "sit-in" in classes with no formal registration.

Apart from the mentioned 6 universities, there are another 7 universities¹ providing Korean language as the Elective subjects in 2005. Among all of them, only 7 universities² are filled with 1 to 3 Thai staff: the rest depend on temporary teachers from

(1) Chulalongkorn University, Thammasart University, Naresuan University, Ramkhamhaeng University, Rajapat Universities (formerly Institutes) of Nakorn Pathom, of Chiangrai, and of Phuket.

(2) Prince of Songkhla University - Pattani campus and - Hadyai campus, Burapha University, Mahasarakham University, Burapha University, Srinakarin University, Chulalongkorn University and Ramkhamhaeng University.

KOICA, Korea Foundation and Korea Research Foundation as well as temporary (year-to-year basis) hiring Korean or Thai teachers with the University budget. Those Korean teachers spend 1 – 2 years teaching on courses of language. Such courses cease to exist when they leave.

The program leading to BA. degree in Korean Language generally consists of core courses: Korean 1, Korean 2, Korean 3, Korean 4, Korean Listening–Speaking 1, Korean Listening–Speaking 2, Korean Phonetics, Korean Reading 1, Korean Reading 2, Korean Writing 1, Korean Grammar 1, Korean Grammar 2, Korean–Thai Translation, Korean Society and Culture. The Electives of the Major are History of Korean Literature, Korean Language and Culture, Oral Interpretation and Reading, Korean Listening–Speaking 3, Korean Listening–Speaking 4, Korean Morphology and Syntax, Korean Contemporary Literature, Korean Prose, Korean Poetry, Korean Writing 2, Comparative analysis of Korean and Thai, Korean Plays, Korean History and Economy, Thai–Korean Translation, Translation for Specific Purposes, Korean in Mass Communication, Korean for Business, Korean for Secretariat Works, Korean for Tourism and Korean for Hotel Business.

(source: Pattani campus curriculum, 2006)

Private Institutions regularly offer Korean language classes are: Language Institute of Ramkhamhaeng University, Korean Cultural Center of Embassy of the Republic of Korea, and Korean Language Education and Cultural Center. For other private tutoring, they provide classes upon requests and/or upon the availability of Korean teachers.

Each lecturer from those institutions makes his/her own language teaching materials especially on the Korean Language Foundation in forms of publication, cassette, multi-media and etc. for their class. These materials can also be found on shelves of several bookstores. The number at present is prevalent.

2. Korean Studies. As mentioned earlier, the demand from the public of all level on Korean society and culture become greater. Students often ask where and how to learn

language studies and the scholarships while housewives request on Korean food recipe. The academia and graduate students as well as middle class focus their attention on national development of South Korea. The topics on religion, games, national costume, interesting places to visit as well as Korean ways of life are often interrogated. Books, magazines, websites and staff of the Centers for Korean Studies are consulted.

This author published two books on Korean Society and Culture (new edition) in 2001 and Korean Politics in 2003 while the articles were written for two textbooks of the Sukhothai Thammathirat University. They were “Governments and Politics of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and of the Republic of Korea” (2005) and “Development Strategy in South Korea” (2005). History of Korea: From Tribal Societies to the Last Dynasty was written by Paiboon Pitasen and published in 2002. Five translated books were done; the first was Korean Politics (2004) by Kietchai Pongpanich, and four by Uraiwan Jitpentham Kim, i.e., Children of Kwaeng-I-Bu-Ri Village; BaBo’s Adventure; YoYo’s Dream; and The Moon Knows It. All, being children literature book, came out in 2004. Numerous articles in newspapers journals and magazines were printed in the age of new millennium.

Network

Korean Association of Southeast Asian Studies (KASEAS), in collaborating academically with the ASEAN University Network (AUN), was established in September 1999. The activities under the program include academic Workshops, International Conference, Exchange Fellowship Program and Joint Research Projects. With a success of the Korea–ASEAN Academic Exchange Program in 1999, the AUN member universities agreed with KASEAS to launch another Exchange Program in 2001. Then the Joint Research Program under the title Relationship between Korea and Southeast Asia in the

Past was one of the notable projects and finally published in 2005. Some Thai academia had actively participated in those activities.

The Political Science Associations of Thailand and of Korea have launched the third International Conference in 2003 in Thailand while Korean side alternately hosted the following conference. Some research projects were continually made by professors of both sides in order to strengthening a close cooperation in the field of political science.

Attempts have also been made to establish network between Korean language and Korean Studies Centers in Thailand. Such endeavor was actively made by the core members of Korea–Australia Research Center (KAREC), who want to extend their network to Southeast Asian universities. Several international workshops were made in each country of the region. These events have had provided the golden opportunities for language teachers to meet and to exchange views and knowledge of Korea. However, with huge workload in teaching of language and Korean related subjects, Thai staff are unable to actively participate in these activities. Thus far, only 8 active personnel are permanently employed in 7 universities located in different regions of the Kingdom. Thanks to the modern IT system, messages and information are regularly exchanged, however the network is rather personal and informal.

Major Obstacles for Further Development of Korean Studies in Thailand

Despite a favorable environment due to positive Thai perception of Koreas, both North and South alike, Korean Studies in the Kingdom is still in an infant stage. Many blame the shortage of qualified Thai teachers of Korean language, as discussed at length in seminar in the Korean Studies Workshop in Southeast Asia, organized by the Korea Australia Research Center at Burapha University in early July 2002. Unfortunately, only quantitative measures of the state of Korean Studies were addressed, while the quality of the existing work and program were rarely mentioned. In addition, prominent factors

dealing with the limitations of Korean Studies were discussed. We therefore would like to elaborate as follows:

1. There has been no strategic plan for sustainable growth of Korean Studies in Thailand from either the Thai or Korean side. Each agency/institution embraces their own objectives, then evaluates their success in terms of figures- how many students enrolled, how many activities/programs offered. There has been no concrete overall nation-wide assessment, nor have the existing ones addressed the limitations of resources (budget and positions)

2. In the past, there were rivalries between Universities as well as among Departments of the same university. The cooperation, therefore, between research institutes and Department of language of Faculty of Liberal Arts/Humanities, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Political Science and Faculty of Social Studies was still limited. Each tended to confine itself to its own activities and staff.

3. Korean Studies publications are mainly based upon personal experiences of a short term basis. There is little continuity in writings on Korea by the same author. Unless the language program instituting and/or Korean related courses offering, a long-term interest is rather sustainable and incremental.

4. Job opportunities for graduates in Korean language/Korean Studies are still very limited. Teaching posts in the state universities are few due to the small number of students enrolled in Korean Studies courses. No private universities, to date, offer Korean Studies degree programs or Korean language programs. There is no system of adjunct teaching posts and/or part-time lecturers. Some Korean companies operating in Thailand recruit a few graduates in the field of study. Those with double majors tend to have better chances in finding jobs.

5. Many universities rely heavily on KOICA volunteer teachers to teach basic language classes. Such dependency does not make for long term faculty stability.

6. Last but not least, some Thai and Korean national characteristics differ. Many Thai, after originally fancying Korean Studies, give up their interest on Korea probably due to such cultural differences.

Suggested Solutions

1. The number of state educational institutions offering Korean language courses should be reduced to 3-5. At the same time, the quality of the programs must be upgraded. In this way, limited resources can be channeled to selected schools. Other countries have adopted this approach; for example, in Korea, only Hankuk and Pusan Universities of Foreign Studies award degree programs in Thai Studies/Language.

2. There are at present some translated books, for example, Fact of Korea, Hello from Korea, and Korean Folk and Fairy Tales, sponsored and printed by the Korean Overseas Information Service. The purpose is to provide information on the Land of Morning Calm to Thai readers. However, they merely offer a skeletal sketch of Korean society. They are, so to speak, government documents promoting Korea. Readers need more in-depth analysis, especially from Thai perspectives. Hence, Thai scholars should be strongly encouraged to write about this country.

3. A permanent networks of Thai specialists of Korean Language teaching/Korean Studies should be established and maintained across university boundaries. Despite all mentioned obstacles, the network has to be made in order to sustain the interest and to in-depth understanding of Koreanology.

In conclusion, the favorable atmosphere between the two countries provides us an opportunity to enhance Korean Studies in Thailand. Let's work together to achieve mutual understanding an establish a good relationship between the two countries.

Appendix

Center for Korean Studies, Ramkhamhaeng University

The Center was inaugurated, under the decision of the University Council, on January 5, 1995 as an internal organization within the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities of Ramkhamhaeng University. The prime objective of this Center is to create interests and seek understanding, as well as to build up a body of knowledge of Korea in Thailand.

The Center focuses on its activities as follows:

1. To be a Center providing assistance on Korean Studies in all areas, i.e. socio-cultural features, economy, politics, geography, history, and current situations of the peninsula;
2. To be a Center to assist teaching materials in the area of study for faculty, and to provide knowledge of Korea as well as of Japan, China and Mongolia to the public;
3. To be a campus of knowledge on Korean Studies and also to build up an academic strength in this field through research and publication;
4. To be a Center for coordinating academic exchanges in Korean studies with internal and international institutions.

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Over 100 articles on Korean Studies published in academic journals, textbooks, newspapers, and Ramkhamhaeng university newsletters.

Teaching

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities of Ramkhamhaeng University has regularly offered a course on the *Korean Society and Culture* (as well as two classes on the *Japanese Society and Culture* and the *Chinese Society and Culture*) while Department of History on the *History of Modern Korea*. Faculty of Political Science has a course on the *Politics of Korea* whereas Faculty of Economics on the *Economies of East Asian Countries*.

Department of Thai and Oriental Languages, Faculty of Humanities, regularly offers courses on Korean Language as KO 101, KO 102, KO 201 and KO 202.

Institute of Language, Ramkhamhaeng University also offers Korean language teaching on 3 levels to the public on weekends.