

Second Korean Waves in Thailand

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Jinda, a female bureaucrat working in an educational institution in Bangkok, clears up her works and reaches to her seat before TV set to watch *Dae Jang-Guem* (Jewel of the Palace), a Korean TV series, in the evenings of Saturdays and Sundays. She immensely enjoys the movie , arguing/talking with colleagues about the development of the story as well as giving comments on what she saw in the scenes. Jinda, not alone but a large number of young Thais, have positively embraced Korean pop culture in recent years. It was a very similar phenomenon to the interest of Thais in 1950s when the people obsessed to the Thai version of Aridang songs and TV drama on True Love during the War.



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 for decades

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. 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.

It was 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 in modern time. 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." However, Thai people at all levels then 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.

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 new millennium saw again a rise of Thai interest in South Korea when television stations broadcast series of Korean TV movies. Especially starting from early 2001, Thai viewers have been exposed to Korean modern life-styles from such movies, along with the TV documentary films shown during the World Cup and the Asian Games. Young generations wholeheartedly embrace Korean culture, so the desire to learn about Korea, and the Korean language in particular, is prevalent.

TV drama however is not exclusively featured as Korean Wave but also the wide-ranging activities and products of Korea and Koreans, i.e., music, games, Taekwondo, food, commercial products , cultural studies and language. To elaborate, ‘My Sassy Girl,’ aired in May 2002, was considered the first successful movies on the Thai TV screen while ‘Autumn in My heart’ the most successful one. The heroin in the latter drama, Song Hae-Gyo and her image made a long lasting impression on the Thai people. The same was true for the actor, Song Seung-Hyun, as his poster became very popular among Thai youth. Later, ‘Chef’s Proposal,’ ‘Hotellier,’ ‘Winter Sonata’ also gained high popularity.





The first Korean singer group invited to the Kingdom was Baby V.O.X. and made a success by selling more than 200,000 CDs. The Se7en and Rain, top singers, also gained popular in 2003 and then became 'Se7en Syndrome'.

Online game has been winning recognition. The first Korean game to enter Thai online market was 'Ragnarok'. Later, 'Mu' and 'Laghaim' entered the market. The games became over popular to the teenagers, thus Thai government had to impose a ban on some games.

On the language and cultural side, three state universities provide BA degree in Korean Language while over six higher institutions offer the language as Electives. The courses, for example, Korean Society and Culture, Modern Korean History, and Korea Politics are regularly taught in most universities. In addition, four Centers for Korean Studies are established in order to do research on societies of Korean peninsula and of East Asia region.

Korean products are flooded in Thai market as well. They include mobile phones/equipments, cars, electric household appliance and durable goods. The export of Korean movies

is worth over one million dollars per year whereas 700,000 Korean tourists annually visited Thailand before the tragic tsunami event. Korean restaurants spring up in many major cities.

This second Korean Wave in Thailand, as well as in elsewhere throughout Asia, is immense and really goes beyond imagination. It shed a new light to Thai people on the 'Land of Morning Calm,' as compared to fifty years ago. Such phenomenon is an attempt of both Korean public and private sectors to pursue the 'Dynamic Korea' policy. In this regard, it is a golden opportunity to extent it into mutual cooperation among nations and create peace and prosperity worldwide.

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Girl Generation