



## A Study on the Status of Language and Cultural Exchange between Korea and Thailand: focusing on Literature Translation and Language Learning

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### Abstract

This study briefly examined the characteristics of the mutual acceptance of the languages and cultures of both Korea and Thailand, focusing on the translated literature and the spread of Korean and Thai languages introduced in the Korean and Thai cultures. If the characteristics of cultural exchange between the two countries can be summarized in one word, it can be said to be in a state of 'unbalanced'. For the continuous spread of *Hallyu*, Korean Wave, it is necessary to break away from the cultural commercialism and pay attention to the aspect of cultural exchange.

Therefore, in order to alleviate the imbalance between the two countries' linguistic and cultural exchanges, the most urgent considerations are as follows: 1) Why is the translation of Thai literature, including Korean, into foreign languages sluggish?; 2) Needing to share and raise awareness of the necessity of introducing/translating Thai literature into Korean within the advanced Korean learners group; 3) Selecting of representative translation works centered on the canon of Thailand reflecting the preferences of Korean readers and the public, and implementing of translation work; 4) Making a list of simultaneous introductions of literary works and video content such as movies or dramas; 5) Actively seeking ways to collaborate on foreign language translation of Thai literature; and 6) Establishing of a collaborative system for translation projects centered on mutual cooperation universities.

**Keywords:** Korean Literary Translation, Thai translation, LTI Korea, Sejong Hakdang, TOPIK; Cultural Imbalance, Kati's Happiness

### Introduction

More than 60 years have passed since Korea and Thailand established diplomatic ties in 1958. Thailand, in particular, is a major consumer country of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*), and it has been a long time since it emerged as a base for it in Southeast Asia. Recently in Korea, it has started to break away from the cultural commercialism and place more importance on the cultural

exchange aspect in relation to the Korean Wave. Rather than unilaterally spreading the Korean Wave to the target countries, it can be said that a diversification of perspectives is being made in terms of mutual exchange between the two countries. Although research on *Hallyu* in Korea and Thailand has been accumulated, it is difficult to find a full-fledged discussion on language and cultural exchanges through literature between the two countries.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the aspects of cultural exchange between the two countries, focusing on the translation status of Korean and Thai literary works introduced to both countries. Based on related statistical data, it is decided to diagnose the characteristics and aspects of literary translation between the two countries, and to seek ways to build an infrastructure that can expand bilateral cultural exchange.

And the writer would like to discuss matters to consider in order to maintain the continuity of mutually beneficial cultural exchanges between the two countries using the following relevant indicators: 1) the current translation status of Korean literatures' into Thai, which shows the aspects of cultural exchange between the two countries; and 2) the number of establishment status of King Sejong Hakdang Institutes; 3) the actual status such as the number of test takers for TOPIK (the Test of Proficiency in Korean). It is intended to provide an opportunity for the expansion and development of the extent and scope of mutual acceptance of the language and cultural contents of both countries, and to lay the foundation for actual content development in the long term.

### Current Status of Translation of Korean Literature Works into Thai

First, we will examine the status of translation of Korean literature into Thai. According to the 2020 Annual Report of the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea), the translation status of Korean literature books for the year 2020 is as follows: 1,511 books have been translated and published in 40 languages. Among them, 496 books were translated from 15 Asian countries, accounting for about 32.8% of the total, but only 4 books were translated into Thai, less than 1% in Asian countries.

Reviewing this in more detail focusing on Korea and Thailand, we can see that 60 books of the Thai translation statistics list among Korean literature works from 1900 to October 2021 provided by the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea) > Digital Library of Korean Literature. As shown in <Table 1> in 'Translations of Korean Literature Books by Language' from 1892, when statistics were collected, the translated languages were English > Japanese > Chinese > French > German in order, and in the case of 2021, Japanese > Chinese > English > French > Thai, and Thai translation has been very noticeably active recently.

**Table 1** Translation of Korean Literature Books by Language

Total			2021		
Rank	Language	Number of works	Rank	Language	Number of works
1	English	1128	1	Japanese	46
2	Japanese	1102	2	Chinese	36
3	Chinese	947	3	English	22
4	French	590	4	French	17
5	German	429	5	Thai	10
6	Russian	349	6	German	9



Total			2021		
Rank	Language	Number of works	Rank	Language	Number of works
7	Spanish	230	7	Italian	9
8	Vietnamese	168	8	Vietnamese	9
9	Italian	89	9	Arabic	6
10	Czech	87	10	Turkish	6

And in <Table 2>, the 'Translation of Korean Literature Books by Country' in the overall order of Japan > France > China > USA > Germany, the situation

in 2021, however, is Japan > Taiwan > France > USA > Thailand. It is very noteworthy that the rapid increase of Korean literary translation in Thailand.

**Table 2** Translation of Korean Literature Books by Country

Total			2021		
Rank	Region	Number of works	Rank	Region	Number of works
1	JAPAN	688	1	JAPAN	46
2	FRANCE	530	2	TAIWAN	27
3	CHINA	442	3	FRANCE	17
4	UNITED STATES	378	4	UNITED STATES	14
5	GERMANY	281	5	THAILAND	10
6	RUSSIAN FEDERATION	235	6	CHINA	9
7	TAIWAN	221	7	ITALY	9
8	KOREA	196	8	VIET NAM	9
9	VIET NAM	146	9	GERMANY	8
10	SPAIN	134	10	TURKEY	6

Reviewing the Thai translation of 60 Korean literature books, it started to become more prominent in the 2000s, when the Korean Wave began in earnest, and the distribution is as follows:

The number of translated books made in 2013 and the last three years (45 books) accounts for 75% of the total. And by genre, there are 51 essays and novels, accounting for 85% of the total.

**Table 3** Translation of Korean Literature Books into Thai by Year and Genre

Year		Genre	
Year	Number of Translated Book	Genre	Number of Translated Book
2021	10	essay	16
2020	14	novel	35
2019	11	Children & Adolescents	1
2018	1	Poetry	3
2015	2	Collection of Short stories	1
2014	1	Language	1
2013	10	Social Science	1
2012	5	Art	1
2010	1	Japanese Literature	1
2009	1	Total	60
2008	2		
2006	1		
2003	1		
Total	60		

In addition, Korean literature translated into Thai is mainly composed of a large number of well-known writers at home and abroad, such as Shin Kyung-sook, Gong Ji-young, Ahn Do-hyeon, and Eun Hee-kyung, among modern literary works. In addition, Kim Ho-sik's *My Sassy Girl* and Cho Nam-joo's *Kim Jiyoung-Born 1982 (82)*, which were made into movies, also stand out in terms of recognition and popularity. On the other hand, Lee Moon-hyuk's *Moorim Solver, Kobongpal* series does not receive much attention in terms of the number of books sold or the recognition of the author in Korea, but it has distinctiveness in that the translation is made by selecting works that directly reflect the preferences of local readers in Thailand.

In particular, LTI Korea's 'Translation Support Contest Project' supports translation of some Korean literature works and then makes financial funds translation of the rest of the works for which contracts with overseas publishers have been signed, providing a systematic and timely introduction to Korean literature overseas. This is because it is being implemented to lay the groundwork. In addition, for works that have passed the first foreign screening, focusing on proficiency in the language and the style and readability of the translated manuscript, the second Korean judge will focus on evaluating the equivalence of the source text (ST) and the translated manuscript and understanding of the ST. It can be inferred that the above-mentioned works generally met these criteria for selection.



## Current status of Korean translation of Thai literature

Meanwhile, *The Happiness of Kati* (Kati's Happiness), an English translation of *Khwam Suk Khong Kati*, which is recognized as having achieved both quality and popularity (*Khwam Suk Khong Kati*) is a representative example among the Thai novels introduced to Korea. The story of Katy, a 9-year-old girl who lives with her maternal grandparents away from her mother who is battling a disease, was awarded the 2006 South East Asian Literature Award (The SEA Write Award), and it has been translated in English, German, French, and Japanese.

The English version, *The Happiness of Kati*, translated by Prudence Borthwick won the John Dryden Translation Competition organized by the British Comparative Literature Society and the British Literature Translation Center in 2005, and selected as a recommended book by American Librarians of the Junior Library Guild in 2006.

*Kati's Happiness*, a Korean version of *Khwam Suk Khong Kati*, was published at Wisdom House in October 2009 and introduced to Korean readers. It was introduced to Korea at the same time as the Korean translation was published as an invited film for the 'Asian Cinema Window' section of the Busan International Film Festival. As of October 2021, if you search for 'Kati's Happiness' on Korea's leading internet portal site, a significant number of blogs and cafes are found, indicating that there is a significant readership. However, it seems that there are very few cases in which a comparable Thai literary work has been translated and introduced into Korean. In fact, the Korean translation of *Kati's Happiness* was also not directly

translated from Thai to Korean, but was directly translated from Thai to Korean as an indirect translation that went through the translation process of Thai → English → Korean (Shin 2017: 42-43). Other representative Thai literary works are even more difficult to find.

Why the translated Thai novel is so low compared to that of other Asian countries? If you refer to the University of Rochester's Translation Database, which provides statistics on literary translation works (mainly original sources) published in the United States (2008 - 2018), 80 source languages provided by statistics by language. Among them, French (16.82%), Spanish (13.92%), and German (11.13%), and Korean (1.92%), but Thai is not included in the statistics at all. Looking at the pattern of Asian countries among 135 countries in national statistics, 225 books in Japan (4.54%), 159 in China (3.21%), and 94 in Korea (1.90%) are found. As a result of a search centered on book title to understand the translation status of Thai literature works, we searched for the relevant items among 4,951 books, but could not find them. Of course, there are many books in Thai that are sold at online bookstores such as Amazon, but they are not found in official data related to translated literature books. This suggests that a comprehensive review of Thailand's translation policy or urgency or atmosphere or approach to the need for translation is necessary.

## Current status of language learning in Korea and Thailand

### 1.. Current status of Thai learning in Korea

Regarding the current status of learning a foreign language in both Korea and



Thailand, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and Pusan University of Foreign Studies offer Thai language undergraduate and graduate programs are opened in Korea. In addition, as exchanges between Korea and Thailand increase, more and more Koreans are learning Thai through on & offline methods centering on private academies and clubs. In the context of the expansion of exchanges between Korean companies in the field of international cooperation and exchange (including the MICE industry), and between companies and the private sector such as tourism, Koreans' understanding of the Thai language and its culture is a very important variable. However, it can be said that it is still limited to the introduction stage. Therefore, it is expected to remain at this stage for a considerable period of time unless there is a fundamental opportunity to reduce the need for Koreans to learn Thai.

## **2. Current status of Korean language learning in Thailand**

As of June 2021, King Sejong Institutes Foundation has established 234 institutes in 82 countries and 5 King Sejong Institutes are located in Thailand out of 129 in Asia as follows: King Sejong Institute. MahaSarakham; King Sejong Institute. Bangkok; King Sejong Institute. Chiang Mai; King Sejong Institute. Korean Education Center in Thailand; King Sejong Institute. Korean Cultural Center, Thailand.

Korean language courses were opened at Thai universities in 1986. National Songkhla University adopted Korean as a liberal arts subject, and the Korean language department was established for the first time in 1999. It was the beginning of the university curriculum in Thailand.

As of December 2020, the Department of Korean Language is being subdivided into Korean Studies, Korean Culture, and Korean Language Education at 13 campuses of 12 universities across the country, including King Chulalongkorn University and Rangsit University, which received its first freshmen this year. Uttaradit University offers in-depth lectures in the field of Korean language education, and Rangsit University specializes in providing focused education on Korean society and culture in addition to the Korean language. In 2018, the Korean language course was implemented for the first time in the university entrance exam in Southeast Asia. Around 46,000 students from 165 schools across the country are learning as a second language from more than 200 Thai teachers.

The Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) is a test used by overseas Koreans, foreigners, and immigrants to enter, graduate, and find employment at domestic universities. The TOPIK test, administered by 152 nationals from 80 countries worldwide, started with 2,692 people taking the test when it was first implemented in 1997, 106,953 in 2010, 208,448 in 2015, and 329,225 in 2018. The number of applicants has steadily increased. As of 2019, Thailand ranked ninth in the number of applicants by nationality for the TOPIK test for the past five years with about 24,000 applicants.

So far, we have briefly reviewed the aspects of the acceptance of each other's languages and cultures in both Korea and Thailand. Similar to the current situation of asymmetry in literary translation examined in Chapter II, it is easy to find that there is an excessive imbalance in the acceptance of the languages of the two countries.



This imbalance is exacerbated by the explosive popularity of K-pop, Korean movies, Korean dramas, Korean cartoons, and Korean games in Thailand.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

This study briefly examined the characteristics of the mutual acceptance of the languages and cultures of the two countries, focusing on the translated literary works of both countries and the spread of Korean and Thai languages introduced in the Korean and Thai cultures. In the case of literary translation, this study was limited to statistics through the government's translation support project, so it was not possible to cover all the books have planned and published by private publishers.

In addition to general-purpose Korean language learning materials, Korean language interpretation and translation curriculum and teaching materials have been developed in order to meet the needs of Korean language learners abroad, as well as Korean language learning for employment purposes, including international exchanges and cooperation, thanks to the wide spread of the Korean language. The development project is in full swing in Korea. In relation to the subject of this paper, on the contrary, this situation can be very positive in terms of securing the infrastructure of human and material resources to more actively introduce Thai literary contents to Korean readers.

Therefore, in order to alleviate the imbalance between the two countries' linguistic and cultural exchanges, the most urgent considerations are as follows: 1) Why is the translation of Thai literature, including Korean, into foreign languages

sluggish?; 2) The need to share awareness and raise awareness of the necessity of introducing/translating Thai literature into Korean within the advanced Korean learners group; 3) Selection of representative translation works centered on the canon of Thailand reflecting the preferences of Korean readers and the public, and implementation of translation work; 4) Writing a list of simultaneous introductions of literary works and video content such as movies or dramas; 5) Actively seek ways to collaborate on foreign language translation of Thai literature; and 6) Establishment of a collaborative system for translation projects centered on mutual cooperation universities.

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