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The Korean Wave and Lao People's Perception of Korea

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Since diplomatic relations between the Lao PDR (hereafter called Laos) and the Republic of Korea (hereafter called Korea) were re-established on the 25th October, 1995, the bilateral relations of these two countries have developed broadly, with close cooperation in matters of state, various kinds of trade, investments, and tourism.

First of all, since the people in Laos have a favorable *perception* of the Korean people and culture due to promotional efforts by the Korean government and business concerns, it seem natural for the *Korean Wave* (Hallyu) to gain considerable popularity in Laos, similar to the situation in neighboring Asian countries (Kim 2005:61-2). Starting from popular culture, and then introducing the refined content of Korea's culture and arts through TV drama, music and cultural activities, it would be possible to enrich the life of the Lao people and develop more cooperative relations between the two countries. Many aspects/features of the Korean Wave are entering Lao society through mass media, and most of those are very popular with Lao people nowadays.

Laos is now accelerating reform of its economic structure and opened local markets to international capital in the 21st century (Rigg 2005:23-5). Therefore, foreign enterprises, organizations, and NGOs have been able to do business in Laos; the number of visitors from overseas is also increasing gradually. There are many kinds of business models, such as FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) and joint venture, which cooperates with Lao partners (Ivarsson 2008:26-7). As one of the ASEAN member countries, Laos has maintained political stability and a sound investment climate, which attract Korean investors as well. These have been key factors in encouraging numerous Korean investors to establish businesses and to conduct project feasibility studies (Chung 2009:196).

The popularity of the Korean Wave in Laos was just getting off the ground in the mid- 2000s. This was later than in neighboring countries due to the lack of network and distribution channels in both countries. However, as

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Korean drama, song, and dance were introduced to Lao people, these Korean entertainment contents won tremendous popularity immediately. This was in sharp contrast to most Western movies and drama, which had shown a great scale, but only through huge investment supported by “Hollywood funding.” However, this Western entertainment content was often incompatible with the Lao people, who seek peace and harmony with their neighbors. Lao audiences have, on the contrary, increasingly shown a greater appreciation for Korean programs, as these audiences identify with the strong display of family values in these programs. Thus Asian cultural affinity and the interaction with Lao people as cultural consumers have influenced the extension of the Korean Wave. On the whole, the Korean Wave appeals to Lao consumers, and this emerging popularity of the Wave has deemed Korean culture and its economic growth as developed and modernized.

The Korean Wave in Laos has had a qualitative effect in the areas of language, food, fashion and national image. Study of the Korean language has gained popularity in Laos because people want to enjoy Korean songs and dramas more effectively through learning the language. Korean cuisine has also received increasing attention by Lao customers. The Korean Wave has contributed to a more positive perception of Korea and has strengthened the nation's “soft power” (Lee 2009:124). There is no doubt that the Korean Wave has presented Laotians with opportunities to experience Korean culture and has provoked their interest in Korea. The Korean Wave has rendered both the culture and people of Korean beautiful, attractive and even fantastic. The Korean Wave has created a favorable “Korea brand,” and this has affected the sales of Korean products to the Laotian market.

The Korean Wave and its Perception in Laos

Korean Entertainment

Korean drama and music

The Korean Wave in Laos continued to expand with the popular *Choanna*, *Couple Trouble*, *Choonje-in police woman*, *Boys over flowers* and *Cinderella Man* through the Lao STAR TV channel (See Table 1 for detail). These dramas, along with Korean pop songs, helped to shape the Wave in Laos.

Table 1. On-Air Schedule of Korean Drama (April ~ December 2009)

Title	Timetable	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Choanna	Wed, Thu 18:00~19:00	on Air	on Air	on Air						
Couple Trouble	Wed, Thu 18:00~19:00			on Air						
Choonje-in police woman	Wed, Thu 18:00~19:00			on Air						
Boys over flowers					on Air	on Air	on Air	on Air		
Cinderella Man									on Air	on Air

Source: Lao Star TV.

These popular dramas and K-pop hits have had an effect on the purchase of general products from Korea as well as products relevant to the specific entertainment contents. For example, the import of Korean products, such as mobile phones, electronics and cosmetics, to Laos has increased along with the growth of the Korean Wave.

Lao people have most often enjoyed watching Korean dramas because they were fascinated by the modern style of living, the peacefulness, and romance depicted in Korean dramas. Due to the high popularity of Korean music, we can listen to Korean songs always and anywhere in Laos. Lao people have been amazed at the lovely lyrics of Korean popular music and the beautiful voices of Korean singers, such as *Shinhwa*, *BoA*, *Rain*, *Se7en*, *Wonder Girls*, *Super Junior* and *Big Bangs*. Lao Star TV executives commented that the channel had been broadcasting Korean songs for over 50 percent of all music programming.

Korean arts and performance

The field of Korean arts and performance is now increasingly activate in Laos. In March 2008, three Korean teams visited Laos to perform traditional music and dance. For the sake of more permanent cooperation between Korea and Laos, four Lao scholars were studying in Korea in the fields of music, art, and cuisine. This program was supported by the Korean government for one year.

Table 2. Korean Performance in Laos

Title	Date	Place	Host/Organizer
B-boy Gambler Crew	2008, Jun. 4 th ~ 8 th	Cultural Hall, Vientiane	Korean Embassy
The display of Korean books, photos, art handicraft	2009, Jun. 15 th ~24 th	Art College, Vientiane	Ministry of Information and Culture
Korean Beautiful Friend Concert	2010, Oct. 8 th	Cultural Hall, Vientiane	Korean Embassy
Asian Food Fair	2010, Oct. 16 th	Lao Plaza hotel, Vientiane	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Seoul Pop Orchestra	2010, Nov. 28 th	Cultural Hall, Vientiane	Korean Embassy

Source: Lao Ministry of Information & Culture, Korean Embassy to Lao PDR.

As shown in, the field of Korean arts and performance had been now activating and increasing in Laos. Table 2, Korean performances continue to be presented annually in Laos. While still rare, they have had an impact in that Lao people experienced the Korean contents directly.

Korean Studies and Language

Korean studies and language are expanding widely in Lao country. In this section, we explain the current situation of Korean studies and language especially in Lao educational institutions.

National University of Laos (NUOL)

The National University of Laos, established in 1995 as the first university in Laos, has a Korean department and offers a Korean language course. The teaching staff of the Korean department now consists of three Korean volunteers from KOICA and two local Lao teachers.

Table 3. Korean Language in NUOL

Level	No. of Student
Year 1	20
Year 2	20
Year 3	4
Year 4	7
Year 5	5
Total	56

Source: National University of Laos (2009).

In 2009, the number of students in Korean language classes totaled 56 students as seen in Table 3. The fact that there were five students in the fifth year of Korean language study, seven in the fourth year, and four in the third year, then an increase to 20 students each in the first two years can be attributed to the increased opportunities to have contact with the Korean Wave year after year. Among younger generations in Laos, Korean language is so popular because they want to see Korean dramas and listen to Korean songs.

The Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS) supports the research conducted by the Asia Research Centers (ARCs), established at NUOL in 2002. The ARCs support a variety of scholarly activities, such as research projects, attendance at academic conferences, and publication of research findings. And now three professors are studying in Korea, sponsored by the International Scholar Exchange Fellowship (ISEF) program. The ISEF program is a one-year program that allows scholars to live in Korea and conduct research there under the auspices of the Korean Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS).

Souphanouvong University (SU)

Souphanouvong University (SU) is located in Luangprabang province, Lao PDR. SU was established in 2003 and then it moved to its new campus through the Luangprabang National University Establishment Project (LNUEP), which was provided by a grant from the Korean government. So now SU has become a symbol of cooperation between Korea and Laos.

Korean Cooperation Center (KCC)

The Korean Cooperation Center (KCC) has contributed to and helped to promote cooperation with Korean institutions (e.g., universities, companies, government) for the post activities of LNUEP (Luangprabang National University Establishment Project) and to develop and provide professional support to SU teachers through research projects, training, and special activities at KCC.

The main activities of KCC are promoting mutual cooperation between several Korean MOU(Memorandum of Understanding) universities (Kangwon University, Woosong University, Jeonju University, Sungsil University, Handong University, and Changwon University) and Souphanouvong University.

KCC has also conducted several research projects with Korean

government agencies, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and the Korean Education Development Institute. As KCC interacted with local SU professors to conducting research in these Korean projects, the research team members could obtain information on Korean politics, economics, society and culture.

Korean Language Course

At SU, there have been two volunteers teaching Korean language since 2008. The enrollment in the language classes and number of participants are shown in the following table Table 4.

Table 4. Participants of Korean Language Course

Year	Subject	Period	Hours/Week	Participants
2008	beginner	March ~ December	48/12	90
	intermediate	September ~ December	48/12	30
2009	beginner	March ~ December	48/12	30
	intermediate	March ~ December	48/12	30
	intensive	March ~ December	48/12	10
2010	beginner	March ~ June	48/12	35
	intermediate	March ~ June	48/12	22
	intensive	March ~ June	48/12	15

Source: Souphanouvong University

All of the courses are being offered free of charge. Most of the participants are SU students, but some professors are also participating in order to learn the Korean language. These professors and students enrolled in the Korean language course because they are very interested in foreign languages despite limited opportunity to learn about other foreign languages, such as Japanese, Chinese, and French.

Champassack University (CU) and Savannakhet University (SKU)

Champassack University is located in Parkse city in the southern part of Laos. The Lao government established CU in 2002 to develop human resource in the southern Lao province (Vatthana 2006:51). In 2005, only one Korean expert, a KOICA volunteer, worked at CU in the field of computer teaching

and developing students IT and internet skills. However, since then there has been no successor to continue this activity. What is worse, CU has had no opportunity to get scholarships or grants for research projects from Korea.

Savannakhet University (SKU) is also a center of education in the central part of Laos. SKU was established in 2009 in the city of Savannakhet city and is expected to develop qualified human resources to enhance the Lao economy and culture. Because SKU is now at the beginning stages, there has yet been no chance for cooperation with Korean institutes and organizations.

Private Institutions

Lao-Korea College

Lao-Korea College, established in 2000 in Vientiane, has offered Korea language classes from the beginning level for local Lao people. There are now about 15 Lao students in this class, which meets for three hours a day, totaling fifteen hours per week.

KP College Information and Communication Technology

The KP College for Information and Communication Technology (KPIT), located in Vientiane, started to teach Korean language classes in 2006. They currently offer four levels of Korean language classes. These classes meet three hours per week, for approximately ten weeks.

Logos Academy and Lao Top College

The Logos Academy was established in 2002 at Vientiane, the capital of Laos. The Logos Academy opens a new session of beginning Korean language classes every three months. During one year, it has offered various kinds of Korean language classes to study the Korean alphabet, prepare for the KOPIK test, and introduce Korean culture. Lao Top College, which opened in Vientiane in 2008, has offered an eight-month long Korean class. There are now ten students in this beginning Korean language course. The College has only one Korean language teacher.

Korean Enterprise

As political and social development in Laos become more stable, Korean companies are extending opportunities for trade, investment and grant

projects. This section introduces the trend and transition of Korean business in Laos.

Korean investment

Korean companies have invested in commercial tree plantations, hotel resorts, and agriculture in Laos. One Korean group opened a commercial bank in Vientiane and other companies have launched businesses areas involved in vehicle assembly and real estate as well.

Table 5. Approved Foreign Investment by Country

Year	2006		2007		2008		2009	
	Pro-jects	Value(\$)	Pro-jects	Value(\$)	Pro-jects	Value(\$)	Pro-jects	Value(\$)
Thailand	30	655,229,967	31	92,720,384	31	375,197,133	33	1,572,403,889
China	54	423,231,606	47	496,055,204	41	107,246,034	37	234,576,597
Vietnam	23	261,176,139	35	155,913,820	39	149,425,319	42	1,363,343,585
France	11	12,143,611	10	13,143,068	2	500,000	5	2,501,567
Japan	2	401,500,000	7	6,110,970	3	846,850	5	2,830,000
Korea	15	163,741,000	24	82,154,400	16	59,932,810	16	29,775,000
India	1	350,000,000	-	-	-	-	2	848,000
Australia	5	1,390,000	5	1,900,000	2	1,900,000	2	666,000
Malaysia	5	3,150,155	3	130,000	2	130,000	6	9,924,582
Singapore	5	43,465,000	4	1,407,500	3	1,407,500	3	5,621,500

Source: Lao Ministry of Commerce

As there is rapid growth of Korean investment in Laos, the total amount of Korean investment reached 298 million US dollars in 2009, so it's not difficult to see and buy Korean products in Laos. From 2002 to 2008, the total amount of trade between Korea and Laos reached 119 million US dollars. In 2009, exports to Korea totaled around 82 million US dollars and imports from Korea were valued at around 37 million dollars. The main exports to Korea have been gold, timber/wooden products, and agricultural products while the main imported items from Korea have been automobiles, medicine, electronics and so on.

Table 6. Approved Korean Investment by Sectors

Year	2006		2007		2008		2009	
Sector	Pro- ject	Value(US\$)	Pro- ject	Value(US\$)	Pro- ject	Value(US\$)	Pro- ject	Value(US\$)
Electricity Generation	13	1,776,702,200	4	360,539,385	3	640,000,000	4	218,260,000
Agriculture	39	458,518,711	43	183,839,207	23	78,490,650	26	208,312,848
Mining	26	73,806,160	22	115,270,631	17	102,066,035	32	2,254,139,092
Industry & Handicraft	31	122,996,955	26	134,186,182	31	156,887,470	29	194,775,156
Services	21	12,098,651	40	181,185,113	18	23,589,318	27	1,048,559,107
Trading	17	86,049,085	15	13,928,465	12	12,888,000	14	10,739,571
Construction	3	130,600,000	0	0	10	66,600,000	8	22,194,077
Hotel & Restaurant	9	32,224,181	14	58,152,550	8	29,430,000	14	40,220,000
Wood Industry	3	1,010,000	6	56,964,864	9	20,991,680	1	1,000,000
Banking	0	0	2	25,000,000	5	43,000,000	7	60,000,000
Telecom	0	0	0	0	1	32,450,980	1	80,000,000
Garment Industry	5	3,885,000	8	5,520,688	5	5,109,232	2	1,200,000
Consultants	4	1,800,000	11	2,318,888	10	4,040,000	14	6,150,000
Total	171	2,699,690,943	191	1,136,905,973	152	1,215,543,365	179	4,145,549,851

Source: Lao Ministry of Commerce

Nowadays Korean technology has become well-known in Laos especially as related to cosmetic surgery, electronics and telecommunications. Extremely popular imported goods from Korea include Kia, Hyundai, and Kolao automobiles (and motorbikes), and Samsung and LG electronic devices and appliances, such as mobile phones, refrigerators, computers and so on. Lao people are satisfied with Korean technology and products because of their refined design and good quality. As products from Korean companies are regarded as much better than those from other countries in Asia, Lao consumers prefer Korean products even if the cost is higher.

Korean Grants

Most Lao people have recognized Korean technology as highly and well developed. Both the Korean government and non-government organizations (NGOs) are increasing the scale of development assistance to Laos.

Table 7. Korean Projects in Laos

Area	No. of Project	Amount(million US \$)
Agriculture	28	57
Commerce	2	650
Industry	16	15
Goods	1	6
Communication	1	7

Source: Lao Ministry of Commerce (2009)

This assistance is giving Lao people an opportunity to have contact with Korean people, their management skill, technology and culture because a lot of Korean companies have taken part in this project. As usual, Lao people have expressed their appreciation for the Korean grants that have contributed in the most undeveloped areas, such as education, medicine, and infrastructure. Korean grants have the associated meaning of Korea as a good neighbor and benevolent friend to the country of Laos.

Table 8. Korean Grants for Laos (US thousand \$)

Year	Amount
2003	2,028.35
2004	3,378.88
2005	2,118.64
2006	4,242.53
2007	7,066.88
2008	8,461.79
2009	8,192.12
2010 (estimated)	8,300.00

Source: KOICA

Annually, the Korean government is providing assistance to undertake various kinds of programs in Laos through KOICA (the Korea International Cooperation Agency), which is actively dispatching Korean volunteers to work in the fields of medical service, education, Taekwondo training and so on. LNUEP (Lao National University Establishment Project), finished in 2008, was funded by the Korea Export-Import (EXIM) Bank. Many Koreans have participated in these grant projects, and the related facilities have been set up using Korean products.

Survey Analysis of the Perception of the Korean Wave in Laos

This section explains the qualitative results obtained from a survey on people’s perception of the Korean Wave in Laos. Each Lao answered the ten questions in the survey in a free and comfortable atmosphere. The survey’s findings provided useful and more detailed insight into what Lao people think about Korean Wave and what their perceptions of the Wave in Laos are.

Survey Sampling

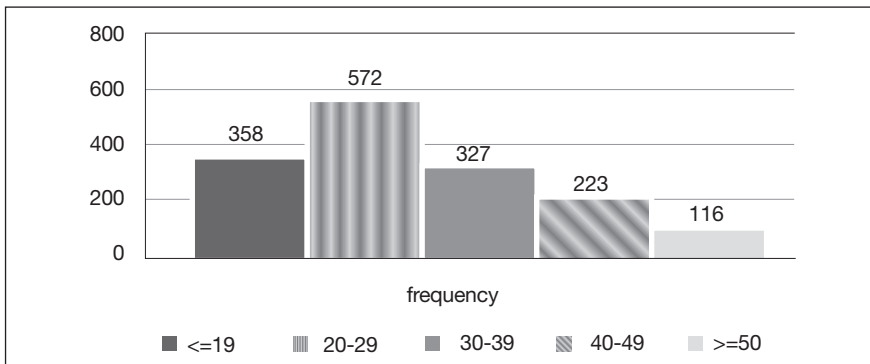
To get fair and exact information, the survey was distributed equally by gender, age, geographic location, level of income, occupation, marital status, education, religion, and ethnicity (National Statistics Center 2005:21-9).

Table 9. Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Female	816	51.1
Male	780	48.9
Total	1,596	100.0

Regarding the gender of respondents, 51.1 percent were female and 48.9 were male.

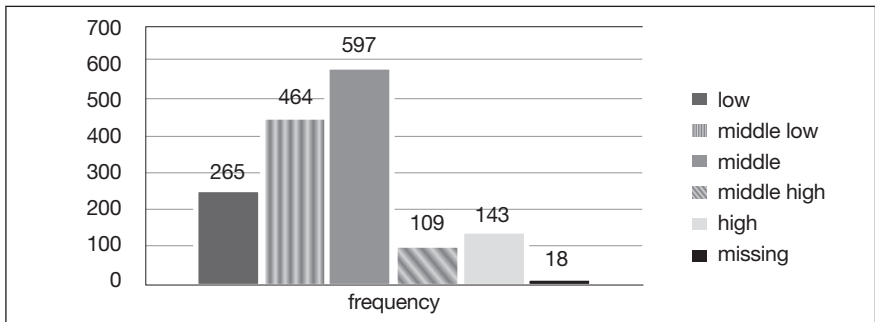
Figure 1. Age of Respondents



The ages of respondents ranged from teenagers to people in their fifties or older. The age range sampled in the survey was designed to reflect current

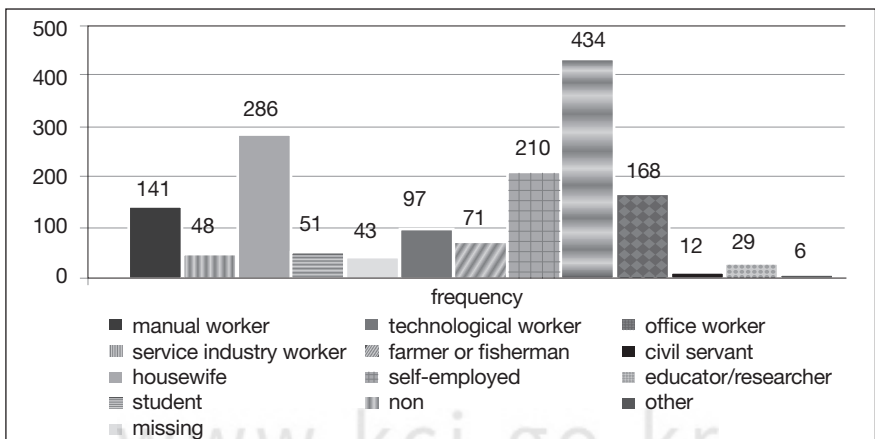
population statistics in Laos. As a result, the largest group sampled was people in their twenties (572 respondents), followed by teens (358 respondents), then people in their thirties (327 respondents), forties (223 respondents), and finally the group of people fifty or older (116 respondents).

Figure 2. Household Income Level



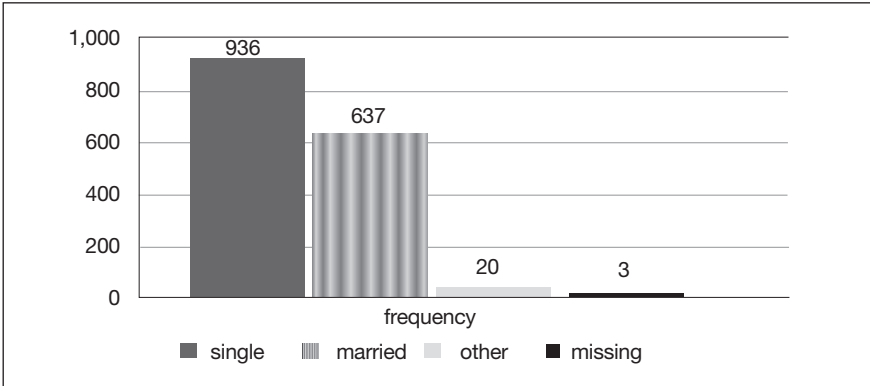
Income levels were divided into five categories: low, middle low, middle, middle high and high. Information related to income level was based on what each respondent reported. No documentation or objective statistics were obtained. As seen in Figure 2, 265 respondents fell in the low income level, 464 in the middle low, and 597 in the middle. A much smaller proportion fell in the middle high, 109 respondents, and high, 109 respondents, with a small number (18) failing to report, or missing, the income level.

Figure 3. Occupation of Respondents



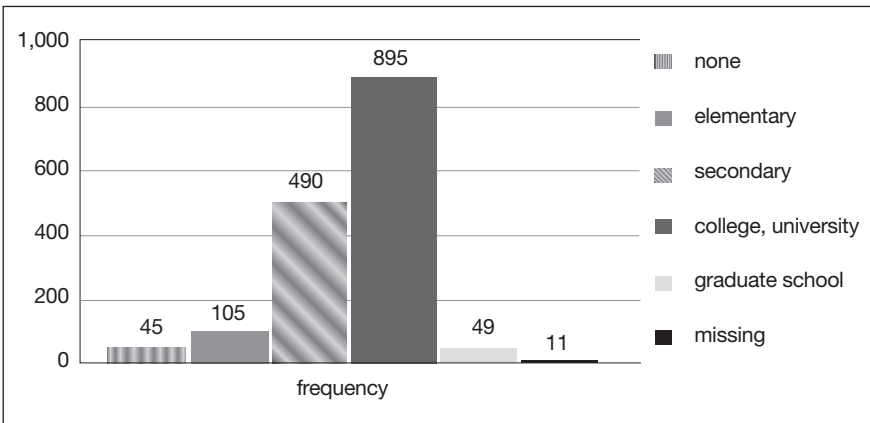
As seen in Figure 3, various occupations were represented, intentionally avoiding a concentration on a specific occupation so that the survey would provide fair results.

Figure 4. Marital



As seen in Figure 4 regarding the marital status of respondents, 936 were single, and 637 were married.

Figure 5. Education

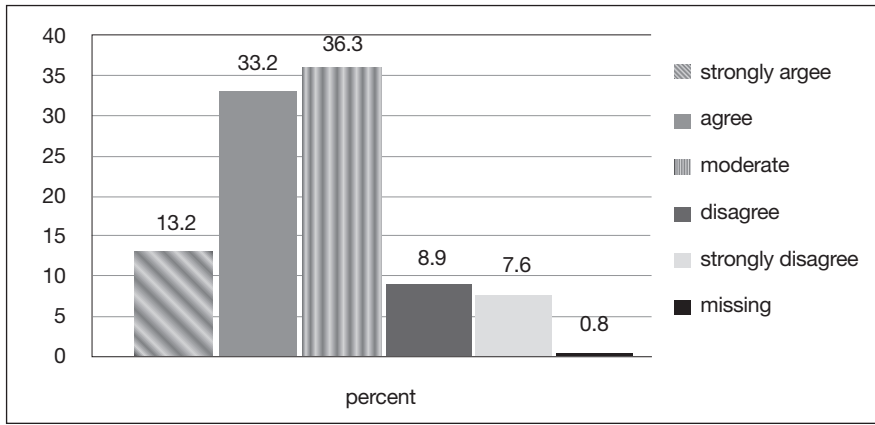


Regarding the educational background of respondents, those with a college or university degree accounted for the greatest proportion, with 896 people. The next largest proportion was respondents who had completed high school, 490 people, followed by the group with an elementary school background, a master's degree, or no educational background.

Survey Analysis

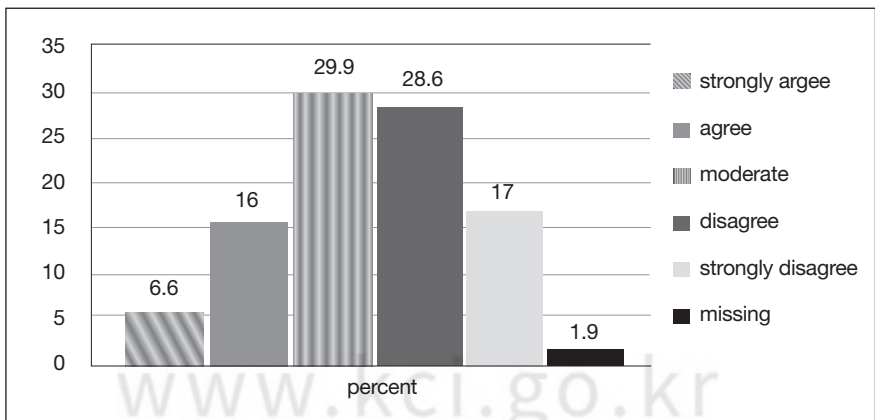
The breakdown of respondents' characteristics having been explained, the results of the survey, from now on, will be reported based on total responses to all ten questions.

Figure 6. I often talk about Korea with people around me.



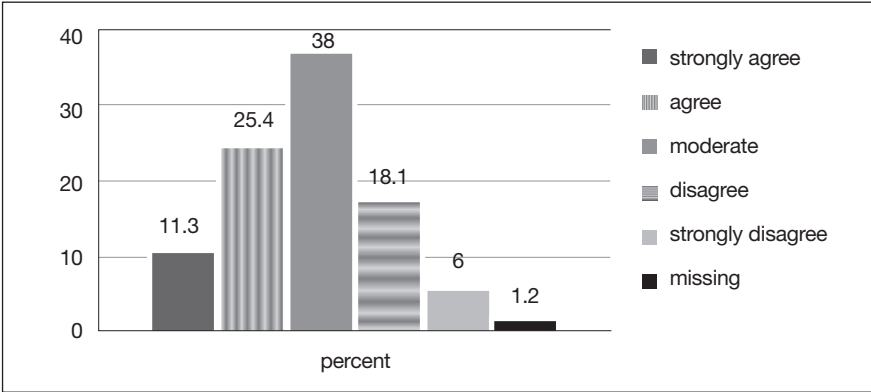
Responding to the statement, “I often talk about Korea with people around me,” most respondents answered positively, 33.2 percent agreeing and 13.2 percent strongly agreeing, for a combined total of 46.4 percent. Respondents who answered moderate totaled 36.3 percent. Negative answers of disagree and strongly disagree responses totaled 16.5 percent.

Figure 7. I frequently make contact with Koreans.



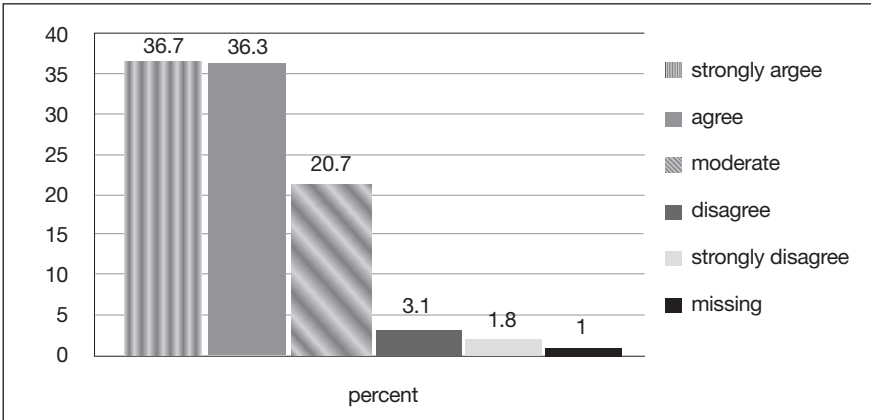
In response to the statement, “I frequently make contact with Koreans,” the positive answers (strongly agree and agree) totaled 22.6 percent while 29.9 percent of respondents answered moderate. Negative answers (disagree + strongly disagree) totaled 45.6 percent.

Figure 8. The Korean lifestyle is quite similar to ours.



Responses to the statement, “The Korean lifestyle is quite similar to ours,” were quite positive, with the total of strongly agree and agree answers totaling 36.7 percent, with moderate answers amounting to 38.0 percent. Negative answer (disagree and strongly disagree) totaled 24.1 percent.

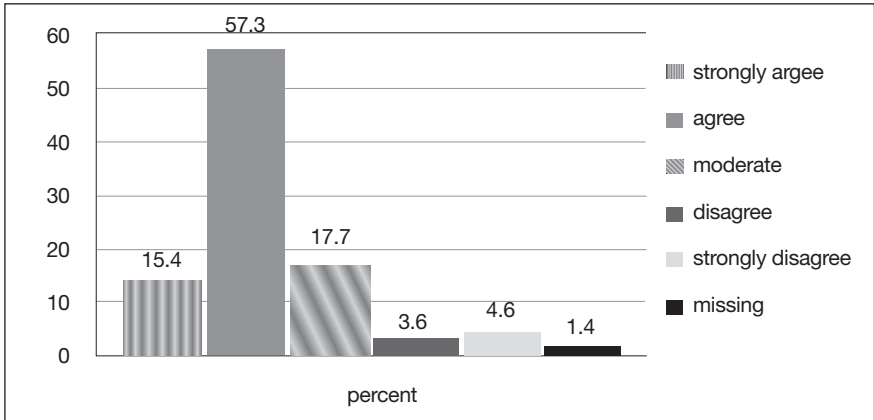
Figure 9. I like Korean pop culture (TV dramas, movies, and pop music and/or computer games).



Responding to the statement, “I like Korean pop culture (TV dramas,

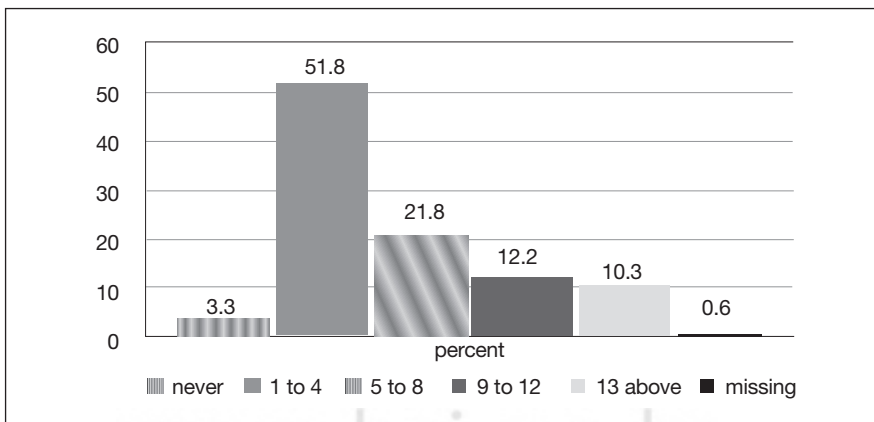
movies, pop music, and/or computer games), positive answers (strongly agree and agree) totaled 73.4 percent with moderate answers amounting to 20.7 percent. Negative answer (disagree and strongly disagree) totaled 4.9 percent.

Figure 10. Of the following forms of Korean pop culture, which do you enjoy the most?



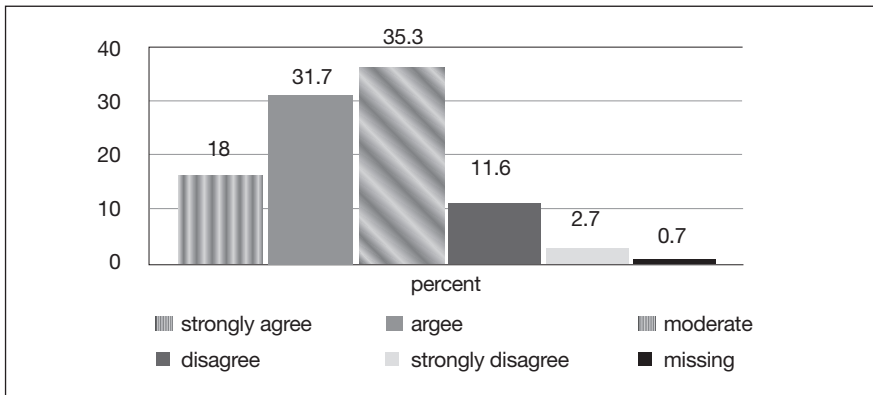
Responding to the question that asked respondents to select the form of Korean pop culture that they liked the most, TV dramas received the highest response, with 57.3 percent. Second came pop music, with 17.7 percent, and movies, third favorite, with 15.4 percent. Computer games was lowest, having been selected by only 3.6 percent of respondents.

Figure 11. How often do you enjoy Korean pop culture (TV dramas, movies, pop music and/or computer games)?



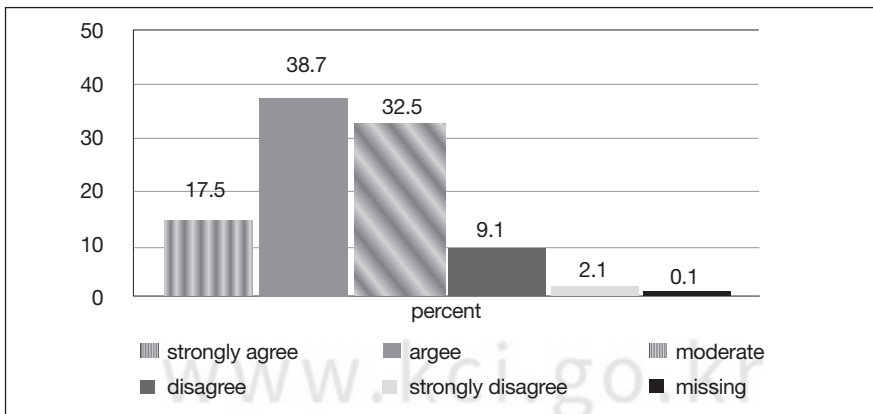
Responding to the question of frequency of involvement with forms of Korean pop culture (TV dramas, movies, pop music, and/or computer games), the strongest response was 1 to 4 hours per week, with 51.8 percent. The second greatest response was 5 to 8 hours per week, with 21.8 percent of respondents involved with Korean pop culture to a greater degree. Even more involvement, of 9 to 12 hours per week, and 13 hours or more per week, received fewer responses, 12.2 percent and 10.3 percent respectively.

Figure 12. Korean pop culture is more fun and touching than ours.



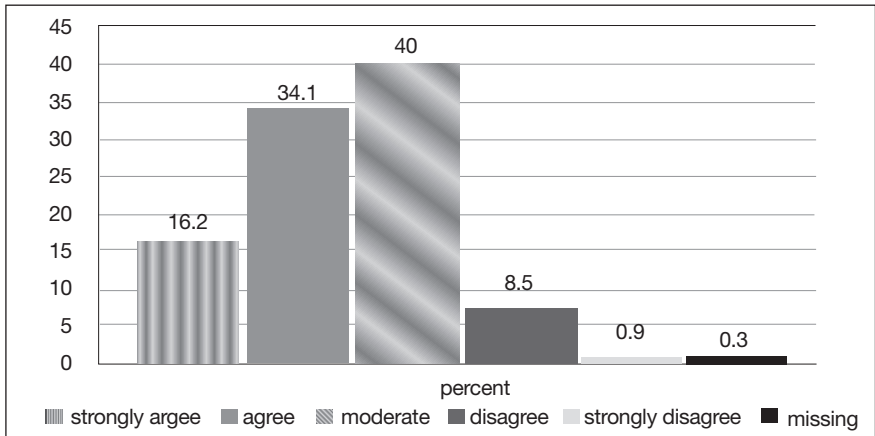
Responses to the statement, “Korean pop culture is more fun and touching than ours,” were very positive with strongly agrees and agrees totaling as high as 49.7 percent, and moderate answers amounting to 35.3 percent. Negative answers (disagree strongly disagree) totaled 14.3 percent.

Figure 13. The popularity of Korean pop culture will be sustained in our country.



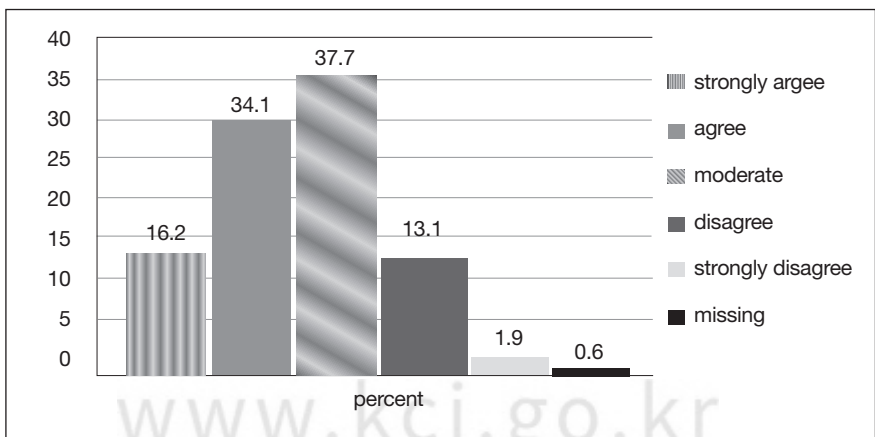
Responding to the statement, “The popularity of Korean pop culture will be sustained in our country,” positive answers (strongly agree and agree) were as high as 56.2 percent, and moderate answers amounted to 32.5 percent. Negative answers (disagree and strongly disagree) totaled 11.2 percent.

Figure 14. I like Korean pop culture more than pop culture of other Asian countries.



Responding to the statement regarding respondents’ preference for Korean pop culture over pop culture of other Asian countries, positive answers (strongly agree and agree) totaled 50.3 percent, and moderate answers amount to 40.0 percent. Negative answer (disagree and strongly disagree) totaled 9.4 percent.

Figure 15. Korean pop culture has positive effects on our pop culture.



Responding to the statement, “Korean pop culture has positive effects on our pop culture,” , positive answers (strongly agree and agree) totaled 46.7 percent, and moderate answers amounted to 37.7 percent. Negative answers (disagree and strongly disagree) totaled 15.0 percent.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Korean Wave and its Perception in Laos

Based on the previous sections, there are differences in people’s experience with and perception of the Korean Wave in Laos. The Wave has simultaneous strong and weak points in Laos, which will be summarized in this section.

Strengths

Cultural affinity

Several key factors constitute the spread of the Korean Wave and its perception in Laos. First and foremost, it could be pointed out that there are cultural affinities between Korea and Laos, which have assisted in attracting Lao consumers. A specific strength of Korean dramas is that love stories are portrayed without the violence and sex shown in Hollywood film; this is a better fit with the customs of Lao culture. It is natural that Lao people prefer the peaceful and human stories told in Korean drama compared to western films or TV programs. Given the cultural similarities, Lao people not only understand the story grammar of Korean dramas but also sympathize with the feelings of Korean actors and actress. Due to similar values between the two countries, the Lao audience easily agrees with the attitudes toward love as well as the conflicts and conclusions shown in Korean dramas.

Table 10. Comparison between Korean Wave & Western Culture

	Korean Wave	Western Culture
Structure	family-oriented	individualism
Atmosphere	peace & harmony	war & conflict
Style	traditional & modern	modern & free

As shown above in Table 10, the Korean Wave has the family-oriented contents which Lao people have sought. Western dramas and movies had previously been used to develop the story of an individual hero/heroine. Normally the hero/heroine in a western film has superpowers to save a city, nation, or the world. Even if the western film is interesting and exciting with its huge scale and excellent graphics, it often fails to leave a deep impression with the audience because it was so different from their reality.

However, the Korean drama portrays a hero/heroine as an ordinary person, someone who can be seen in daily life. The hero/heroine in Korean contents has the same feeling as common people who meet with hardship, struggle with human relationships, and often make mistakes-- as we all do. From the Laotian perspective, this common character in Korean drama is more sympathetic than characters in western films. Laotians can relate to the emotion of the hero/heroine because when the Korean hero/heroine makes an important decision, he/she almost always give the family the first priority. Therefore whenever the hero/heroine laughs or weeps in a drama, Laotians might laugh or weep together. This affinity can be found in the survey, according to responses to question 3: "Korean lifestyle is quite similar to ours." Over 30 percent of the Laotians in the sample answered positively, that lifestyles of the two cultures are quite similar.

Different from the western contents that are dominated by war and conflict, Korean dramas show a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere (Chua 2008:151). Even if Korean contents also portray conflict in human relationships, these conflicts are not solved with violence and weapons like in western movies. The actors in Korean dramas/movies avoid these extreme ways to solve problems, rather seeking to find a more peaceful way through compromise and mutual concession. This is comfortable for Lao people who seek peace and harmony due to their religion and national traits. The sympathy for the Korean Wave in Laos seems to have stemmed from this cultural affinity between Korean and Lao cultures.

High Perception and preference

The Korean Wave functions as an alternative culture rooted in a new trend of Lao society. Since the younger generation in Laos has enjoyed Korean dramas, Laotians have been quick to show their esteem for Korean stars and the country's natural environment. Lao young people have quickly adopted

Korean clothing and hairstyles; these changes indicate, namely, a desire to imitate the lifestyle depicted in Korean Wave contents.

The quality of Korean contents has improved through a comparative advantage in format and technique (Shim 2010:142). Laotians have admired that the Korean Wave offers “new and unique ideas, strong performances, beautiful natural environment, leaving a strong impression,” a noticeable difference from contents from other countries. According to question 7, “Korea pop culture is more fun and touching than ours,” nearly half of the respondents (49.7%) answered positively. Furthermore, according to question 9, “I like Korean pop culture more than pop culture of other Asian countries,” over half of the respondents (50.3%) answered positively. These results prove that, for Lao people, the Korean Wave has competitive power with local contents and contents from other foreign countries.

The high perception of and preference for the Korean Wave on the part of young Laotians means a green light for the future of the Korean Wave because the young generation has the potential to continue its preference for the Korean Wave into the future.

The growth of relations between the two countries is also a strong factor in the popularity of the Korean Wave in Laos. It is certain that the Korean government and firms have more concern for Laos because of its important diplomatic and economic and potential (Mya and Joseph, 1997:251-52). Above all, Lao people have developed a great respect for the Korean economy in that it has reached such a highly developed level in a short period in spite of inferior natural resources and limited capital and technology. Lao people earnestly wish to learn from the Korea development model, which they regard as the most appropriate model to apply to the less developed economy of Laos.

Thus, Korean investment, assistance and cooperation will increase as in the current trend unless the current friendly relationship between the two countries changes. It is expected that the Korea-Laos friendship would be a strong threshold to continue and extend the Korean Wave and its positive perception in Laos.

Weakness

The absence of a systematic approach

The Korean Wave and its perception in Laos have been obviously extended

through various kinds of language and cultural exchange as well as trade and grants as already noted above. Yet this study has also found that the Korean Wave and its perception in Laos has a crucial weakness to improve in the following sector. While a lot of Korean language classes have opened and many Lao students are enrolling in these courses as mentioned before, the level of Korean teaching staff was found to lack of experience and the qualifications needed to teach Korean language. Most of the Lao educational institutions that offered Korean language classes had the common difficulty of inviting good Korean teachers. It should come as no surprise that due to their low level of preparation, the Korean language teachers were not able to develop sufficiently the Lao students' fluency in the Korean language.

Aside from NUOL, whose Korean language faculty had been dispatched by KOICA, most private institutions offering Korean language instruction could not obtain well qualified faculty. When one author of this study visited private Korean language institutions in Laos, their common complaint was about the indifference of the Korean government. All owners of Korean language institutions would like to continue to offer Korean classes despite the lack of profitability because such courses could pave the way for Korean culture to be better experienced by Lao people. Given the current situation, if study of the Korean language depends mostly on private institutions, the quality of instruction may remain at a low level. This renders it even more difficult for private institutions offering instruction in Korean to compete with other languages such as English, Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese. Moreover, private institutions are limited in their ability to develop appropriate Korean curriculum and syllabi for Lao people. Most private institutes have suffered from the lack of experienced teachers, well-developed curriculum and available textbooks for Korean language study. The low level of Korean language classes may be one of most serious problems that that could undermine Lao interest in the Korean Wave and its perception in Laos.

The other important problem related to the Korean Wave and its perception in Laos is the lack of coordination in efforts to promote the Korean Wave. The Korean government as well as Korean enterprise and private agencies currently rely on an independent approach and have no cooperative system to create synergy effects in their efforts to promote the Korean Wave, despite the need to further develop and improve their outreach and operations. This is one reason why several projects and programs related to the Korean

Wave failed to maximize the outcomes in Laos. Under the current non-system, there is a geographic imbalance in the promotion of the Korean Wave in Laos. As noted already, most Korean Wave activities concentrated excessively on specific places/institutions (e.g., the National University of Laos in the capital, Vientiane) in contrast with scarcity of such activities in other places/institutions (e.g., Savannakhet University or Champasak University).

Vulnerable network

Now Korean contents in Laos are more expensive than Thai, Chinese and even western contents. This has been attributed to the absence of an effective Korea-Laos distribution network. Thus Lao companies import Korean contents indirectly through the existing Thai network, which, as usual, has made Korean contents high priced. As a result, Lao channels can hardly provide enough Korean programs to meet the desire of Lao people. Further, while the popularity of the Korean Wave in Laos remains high, market principles indicate that the expensive price of Korean contents in Laos may reduce the demand.

Until now, the Korean Wave in Laos has operated in a one-sided direction. Since the Korean culture was first ushered into Lao society, there has been no attempt to establish a local network to create a permanent channel. In other words, so far the delivery of the Korean Wave derives from the programs sponsored by the Korean government and Korean firms conducting business for temporary periods. As the concern of Korean institutions has focused mainly on business, Lao institutions have no permanent channel to cooperate in the promotion of the Korean Wave and its perception.

Without a local network, it is always possible that changing the program and investment is left up to each Korean institution. Thus, one-sided activities have critical limitations to continue the Korean Wave in Laos (Ko 2006:12). Needless to say, for the future of the Korean Wave, there should be a way for the local person/institution to take the initiative and share in the promotion of the Wave in Laos. By all means, Korean institutions need to develop the local people/institutions friendly to the Korean Wave, and thus the Korea-friendly Lao person/institution can more stably share and promote the Korean Wave in Laos.

The previously mentioned geographic imbalance also should be pointed out as a weakness of the Korean Wave in Laos. Most programs and activities

have been conducted in a limited environment, especially in the capital, Vientiane. Noticeably, most language institutions are located in Vientiane, too. The different results from different provinces as noted in this study's survey of the Korean Wave survey attributes this imbalance to the overemphasized efforts in Vientiane. Thus, it is time to focus more attention upon other provinces where there has been less contact with the Korean Wave, especially because this survey indicates that most provinces are ready to welcome the Korean Wave programs.

Conclusion: The Proposal for Korean Wave and Perception in Laos

Is the Korean Wave able to grow in Laos or will it be submerged by other cultures sooner or later? Even if other scholars' views differ, this analysis has offered some observations to predict the future of the Korean Wave in Laos. It can be asserted that the Korean Wave and its favorable perception by Lao people continues to traverse the whole country of Laos. However, the Lao people's excitement for the Korean Wave may be phased out unless it can be supported and continued through practical endeavors by the Korean government and related institutions. As has been seen, the interest in the Korean Wave has decreased in major Asian countries, such as Japan and China (Hep 2002:501-2). The trend of gradual decline in Japan and China could be previous instances of the future of the Korean Wave in Laos. Thus, by way of conclusion, some strategies to promote and extend the Korean Wave in Laos are proposed below.

Strategic Promotion

As remarked before, the effects of the Korean Wave are not been restricted to cultural influences. The Korean Wave is certainly contributing to improved perception of Korean people and products, even to the enhancement of the Korea national brand in Laos. For this reason, promotional methods are not restricted to culture, but are extended into economic, social and education arenas.

The current approach of basing promotion of the Wave on the effort of

only one institution or organization is not enough to mobilize Lao continued interest in the Korean Wave. Therefore, it is now necessary for the promotion of the Korean Wave to become a cooperative effort among relevant Korean institutions in Laos. For example, government and private institutions have to cooperate together so that when a private institution offers a Korean language course, the Korean government may assist it through providing language textbooks and materials. Similarly, when the Korean government plans to conduct a program or project in Laos, private institutions may offer the information and advice to produce good results. As presented below Table 11, the establishment of a Korea-Laos cross-cultural committee composed of Korean and Lao participants from government, enterprise and education sectors could create an effective forum that would lead to increased success of a variety of programs and projects.

Table 11. Korea-Laos Cross-Cultural Committee

Sector		Institution
Korea	Government	Korean Embassy to Lao PDR, KOICA, Korea EXIM Bank
	Enterprise	KOLAO, Booyoung, Korean Media Firms
	Education	Korean Professors, NGO Volunteers
Laos	Government	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information & Culture Ministry of Planning & Investment, Ministry of Education

Even though a lot of Korean programs and activities have been conducted in Laos, they have had limited effect due to the fact that most of these have been independent efforts, scattered and temporary without a system, activities offered by an individual program that had no cooperation with other institutions. The lack of follow-up activities to support the success of existing programs related to the Korean Wave undermines the effects and perception of the Korean Wave in Laos. To solve this problem, it is necessary for the Korean government or non-government organizations to set up a committee to organize and coordinate activities promote and further extend the Korean Wave in Laos. Members of the committee would come from the education sector, such as universities and institutes in Laos, as well as the government sector, possibly including representatives from the Korean embassy to Lao PDR, KOICA, and the Korea EXIM bank. Members from the business sectors could be business managers who may have the experience and expertise to

offer practical solutions to the needs of Lao society. Committee members can evaluate outcomes of activities and suggest the follow-up activities to improve on previous programs. This system will make Korean programs in Laos more effective and will contribute to the offering of qualified and verified contents to Laos.

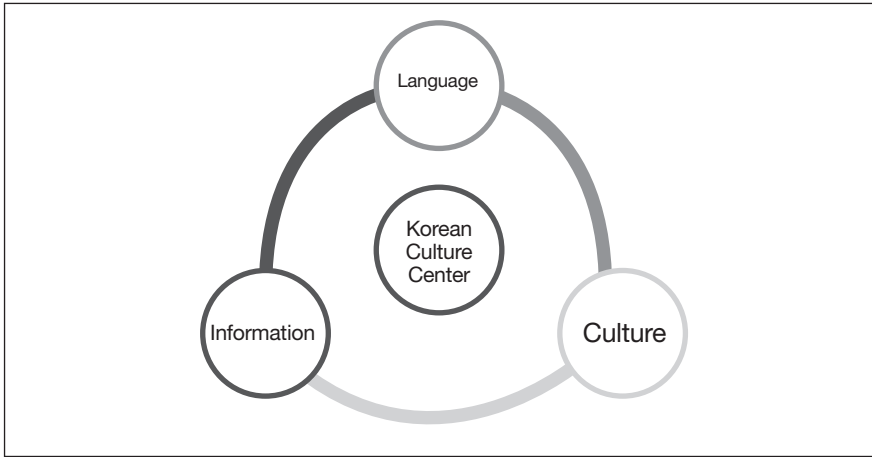
Establishment of a Korean Cultural Center

Finally, it is proposed that a Korean culture center be established to provide permanent Korean language and culture programs to the people of Laos. The role of center would be to develop qualified curriculum and syllabi to overcome the low level of existing Korean language programs. The culture center will provide a permanent channel for Lao people to have contact with Korean contents. The center can introduce Korean cultural contents such as Korean dramas, movies, music, the writing system (Hangul), fashion, and Taekwondo. Anyone who has an interest in Korean culture can learn more about through the programs offered by the center.

The center would also be able to coordinate Korean language programs and provide useful information and share experience to produce more effective outcomes. This center could accumulate basic information on Korean activities and set up a network to provide opportunities for each institution to benefit from the resources available. The center will play an important role in collecting lessons and the experiences of each activity; then it will disseminate this information to institutions related to promoting Korean language and culture as well as business and design, in other words, any and all aspects of the Korean Wave. This system will facilitate finding solutions to the problems and difficulties of less-experienced institutions in Laos, thus saving time and money through reducing trial and error and avoiding overlapping activities related to the Korean Wave in Laos.

The participants of the center should be composed of Koreans and Lao people because it is necessary that the Korean Wave in Laos develop local human resources. The Korean Wave in Laos should be a localized institution to develop the staff and experts who know Korean language and society, i.e. Korean Studies.

Figure 16. Function of Korean Cultural Center



Localization develops human resources for the Korean Wave and is also the best way to create a long and permanent effect in Laos. Korean volunteers have fundamental limitations in that all of them have temporary tenure, so they have to return when they complete their contract period in Laos. Now many programs and activities are said to be offered, but since they are staffed by Korean volunteers, these programs may be phased out as soon as the volunteers return to Korea. Localization of the Korean Wave and related resources may be a unique solution to overcome this problem. For localization, a refined curriculum for Korean Studies training programming should first be set up. Thus the most important role for the Korean culture center is to develop local staff and experts on every aspect of the Korean Wave.

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