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An Outline of Sweden-Republic of Korea Relations

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of relations between Sweden and the Republic of Korea (ROK, hereafter Korea). Firstly, contact between Sweden and Korea before the official division of Korea in 1948 is presented with focus on missionaries dispatched and the Swedish field hospital set up following the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Secondly, how diplomatic relations were established is investigated followed by a review of trade relations, the introduction of K-pop and academic exchanges. Thirdly, the last section investigates Sweden's role in the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) since the end of the Korean War in 1953. As the only issue in relations the author has conducted research on, it is given more attention than any other. Finally, main findings are recorded in Conclusions.

Relations prior to diplomatic recognition

Following the opening of ports to Western merchants in the 1880s, it also became easier for missionaries to work in Korea. In particular through American contacts, Swedish missionaries also began their work through missionary societies existing in China or Japan as well as through the American sister communities. Through the Methodist mission the first Swedish missionaries arrived in 1911 followed by others from the mission and the Salvation Army in 1912, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1922, 1926 and 1928. Notably, the dispatches were overall regular. The total number was 20 persons. In the late 1930s, foreign missionaries were regarded by the Japanese colonial authorities as spies and those who met them were regarded as traitors. Both Koreans and missionaries had to adapt to the new cult of the emperor. Consequently, the missionaries left. Through missionaries' letters and articles in Swedish missionary newspapers and lectures held following their return, knowledge about Korea in Sweden improved. Previously, in 1895, Ms. Amanda Gardeline (Gardelin) had been dispatched through the Ella Thing Memorial Mission in the United States. She received a gift from King Kojong in the form of a silver tea caddy with her

name engraved in *han'gûl* since she had treated an ill princess. In 1914, the Swedish Methodist Memorial Hospital was inaugurated in Wônju. The hospital had a good name among poor Koreans.

A few high-ranking Swedes visited Korea in the early 20th century but visits were irregular. In 1908, explorer Sven Hedin was invited to lecture in Japan. He received an invitation to visit Korea and did so in December 1908. Besides lecturing, he was granted an audience by the Korean Emperor Sunjong. He received the Grand Cross of the Order of the Eight Elements. In the 1920s, Crown Prince Gustaf and Princess Louise came to visit Japan where they were invited to visit excavations in the old Korean capital Kyôngju. In 1926, the crown prince participated in excavations and found a king's crown that would become world famous. The tomb subsequently got the name Sôbongch'ong, that is the grave of the Happy Phoenix Bird, but "Sô" also refers to Sweden. He also visited P'yôngyang and saw ancient Chinese graves. In 1927, the Korean Crown Prince Yi Un and his wife made an unofficial state visit to Sweden. In 1935-1936, explorer Sten Bergman was in Korea.

Following the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, the UN Security Council adopted two resolutions pointing out North Korea as the aggressor. UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie and the South Korean Red Cross appealed for support. Sweden wished to take an active part as a new member of the UN but the official policy of "non-alignment in peace aiming at neutrality in war" was interpreted to prevent the dispatch of armed troops. On August 10, it was decided that a hospital would be officially organized by the Swedish Red Cross but manned and supplied by the Swedish Army and funded by the Swedish government. The Swedish Red Cross Field Hospital for Korea arrived in Pusan on September 23. The first patients arrived two days later when the last part of the hospital's equipment also had come from Japan. More than 1,100 Swedes served at the hospital that marked the substantial beginning of Swedish-Korean relations after World War II. Some of the personnel received the United Nations Service Medal for Korea as well as the Korean War Service Medal provided by the Korean government. Clearly, their work was highly appreciated.

The Red Cross hospital continued its work until 1957 and treated more than 25,000 military and civilian patients. If the estimated total number of polyclinic visitors slightly exceeding 200,000 and approximately 25,000 children receiving the Bacillus Calmette-Guérin vaccination during the period 1956-1958 are included, the total number of treated patients reaches 250,000. Work included an anti-tuberculosis campaign.

Korean medical personnel were also educated. In October 1958, the Sweden Memorial Project ended. Following the signing of an agreement between representatives of the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish governments, the South Korean government and the UN Korea Reconstruction Agency, the Nordic Medical Center (NMC) opened in Seoul in 1958. In 1968, the NMC was handed over to the Korean government but Nordic assistance to the hospital continued until 1971. The field hospital is more known in Korea than in Sweden. (Ek, Pettersson and Linander, 1980: 16-20, 42; Iko, 2013: 193, 198-199, 200-201, 203, 204; Jonsson, 2018: 3; Saxer, 2017: 143; Lee, 2006: 14, 19, 25, 34, 37, 41, 48, 132-133, 136; personal communication, 2019; Östberg, 2012: 3-4, 6, 46, 48; Östberg, 2014, 134, 137-138. Original quotation marks.)

Diplomatic recognition, trade relations and K-pop

The first visit between a diplomat from Korea and Sweden took place on March 25, 1956. Minister Lee Myo Mook had been dispatched by President Syngman Rhee, who ruled from 1948-1960, to represent his government on the fifth anniversary of the Swedish-Korean Society founded in 1951 by medical doctors returning from their service. Another task was to meet representatives of the Foreign Ministry to which he expressed thanks for support during the Korean War. In August 1957, the Korean Ambassador to the United States informed the Swedish embassy that Korea was very interested in establishing diplomatic relations with the Nordic governments and that it was considering accrediting its ambassador in London or Paris to the Nordic countries.

Since Sweden hesitated to move forward without the participation of the other Nordic countries, it raised the issue at the Nordic foreign ministers' meeting held in September 1957. In October, the Korean Ambassador was told that the Nordic governments would accept the Korean request for diplomatic relations if it is acceptable to their governments, that Nordic ambassadors are accredited to Seoul and that no Nordic embassy for the time being would be opened in Seoul. Since the Nordic countries wanted to coordinate their policies as much as possible because of their joint involvement in the NMC, establishment of embassies was raised in spring 1958 at the meeting of the Nordic foreign ministers. Again, it was decided that the most practical solution would be to let the Nordic ambassadors in Tokyo also become accredited in Seoul. The Korean foreign minister had, due to bad relations with Japan, rejected this position in 1957 whereas Japan had no objections. Korea both wanted to establish new embassies abroad and to see more missions established in

Seoul.

In addition to diplomats stationed in Washington and Tokyo, individuals associated with Nordic participation in the Korean War and Nordic medical staff were also pushing for establishment of diplomatic ties. Carl-Erik Groth, the Swedish head of the NMC, played an essential role in keeping the negotiations going and ultimately leading to an arrangement. Although the issue of accreditation of ambassadors in Tokyo to Seoul continued to be a point of disagreement, the ROK government began to loosen its policy due to rising diplomatic and economic competition with North Korea. The purpose was to enhance trade opportunities and to achieve recognition as the “sole legal government” on the Korean Peninsula by as many countries as possible. Following this policy change, it was decided on March 11, 1959 that Sweden and the ROK would establish diplomatic relations at a legion level. On May 5 the same year, Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Mr. Kim Yu Taik, presented his credential letter to King Gustaf VI Adolf. In 1962, an embassy was established and a Korean diplomat was stationed in Sweden. In 1979, a Swedish embassy was set up in Korea. (Ek, Pettersson and Linander, 1980: 20-21; *Koreanska sällskapets hemsida*; Saxer, 2017: 143-149. Original quotation marks.)

Recorded trade relations began in 1952, but in 1993 trade with Korea comprised only around one percent of total Swedish foreign trade. Imports from Korea consisting of copper began in 1954. In the 1950s, Sweden exported one ship in 1952 as well as cement and, above all, paperboard and products made of paper that comprised almost half of total exports. From 1960-1973, Sweden-Korea trade was dominated by machinery devices, transport equipment and miscellaneous finished products. Sweden exported technically advanced products whereas Korea sold such products as clothes, shoes and tungsten. In 1970, Korea Trade Promotion Agency (KOTRA) established an office in Stockholm. In 1972, Tetrapak became the first Swedish company to establish itself in Korea.

In the mid-1980s, telecommunication equipment comprised almost one-third of exports to South Korea. However, exports subsequently fell to comprise only two percent of total exports in 1990. In contrast, machinery and devices and transport equipment were the main export products comprising 38.7 percent and 19.6 percent, respectively, of total exports the same year. Vans dominated among transport equipment. Similarly, in 2009 Swedish exports to Korea were dominated by machinery, transport equipment, paper, iron and telecommunication equipment. In the same year, Samsung, LG, Kia and Hyundai established offi-

ces in Sweden. In 2015, IKEA had one million visitors five weeks after the first department store opened. Sales exceeded \$300 million. In 2016, 80 Swedish companies operated in Korea whereas ten Korean companies worked in Sweden.¹ Vans are still a main export product whereas cars and tires are imported. Swedish exports amount to \$1.6 billion and imports to \$800 million. It is estimated that Swedish imports from Korean companies in Europe amount to \$1 billion.

A recent means of contact is the introduction of K-pop. Since the first K-pop fans came out in Sweden in the late 1990s, their numbers have risen steadily to an estimated 4,000-5,000 in 2015. In September 2012 the first Swedish K-pop club named KpopNonstop opened at the Cultural Center in Stockholm. A subculture consisting of dedicated K-pop fans has emerged. Swedish songwriters cooperate with Korean companies to produce music for Korean artists. Finally, in 2009 roughly 10,200 Koreans resided in Sweden, including adoptees, whereas around 300 Swedes lived in Korea. Through adoptees there is a direct contact between thousands of Swedish citizens and Korea. (Jonsson, 2004: 70; Jonsson, 2016(a): 12; Knutsson, 2015: 2, 13; Lee, 2010: 21, 27, 28, 29; Svennewall, 1995: 7, 13, 27, 29, 32-33, 50.)

Academic exchanges

Academic exchanges have become increasingly active since the author began working at Stockholm University, Department of Oriental Languages in 1987 (renamed Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies in 2015). It became possible to study Korean in Uppsala in the late 1950s. During some years in the 1960s, Korean was taught both in Uppsala and Stockholm. However, since 1969 Stockholm University has been the only university in Sweden teaching Korean language. When a professorship was established in Japanese Studies, efforts to also set up one in Korean Studies were intensified. Eventually, in 1989 the first professorship in Scandinavia was established. In Korea, it has been possible to study Swedish since the late 1970s. Student exchanges between Sweden and Korea have become more active throughout the years.

During the author's studies at the East Asian Studies Program from 1983-1987, adoptees comprised the majority of all students learning Korean at the department and normally continued to do so until around ten years ago when native Swedes began to dominate. One reason is the

¹ There is no doubt that the numbers reflect the different size of the two countries' economies and populations.

impact of *Hallyu* – referring to the diffusion of Korean pop music, drama and film outside Korea – but there are also students who have been to Korea or who have Korean girl or boyfriends. Since a target of our education is to teach students about Korea, there are, besides language studies, courses in Korean history, North and South Korea's relations, Politics and Economics on the Korean Peninsula, Political Leadership on the Korean Peninsula, Contemporary South Korean Society and Culture, Regional Culture, Film and Literature. The non-language courses are open to students from other departments. Also, these courses have attracted a rising number of students in recent years, partly because of the media reporting extensively about recent developments in inter-Korean relations.

Stockholm University has exchange programs with three Korean universities: Seoul National University, Han'guk University of Foreign Studies and Dankook University. Consequently, students can study there without paying university fees. On a non-regular basis, Korean scholars as well as other specialists on Korea are invited to lecture in the humanities as well as social sciences. The department cooperates with other institutes such as the Stockholm Institute of International Affairs and the Institute for Security and Development Policy. Occasionally, requests from the media to comment on developments on the Korean Peninsula are directed to the author. Requests for external lectures are also part of work. (Personal communication, 2019; work experience.)

Sweden's role in the NNSC

Sweden has a unique position among EU member states by having embassies in both North and South Korea as well as presence in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) through participation in the NNSC. Through these channels Sweden has the confidence of both states. By lacking own interests on the Korean Peninsula and maintaining a policy of balance between the two Koreas, Sweden can as a mediator contribute to preserve peace. According to the 1953 Armistice Agreement, the NNSC consisting of Sweden, Switzerland, Poland and Czechoslovakia supervises, observes, inspects and investigates sub-paragraphs 13(c) and 13(d) prohibiting reinforcements of military personnel and military equipment. Only replacements are allowed at the five ports of entry in North Korea and the five in South Korea. The results of its work through inspection teams are reported to the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) set up to supervise the implementation of the agreement and to peacefully settle any armistice violations. The NNSC also makes, at the request of the MAC, special observations and inspections at places outside the DMZ

where armistice violations have been reported to have occurred.

Already in August 1953, inspection teams dispatched to North Korea were prevented from undertaking their tasks but they could not take any counteraction. In April 1954, restrictions similar to those that had been implemented in North Korea were imposed on South Korea. No original documents were shown any longer and inspections of rotation of personnel as well as replacements of combat material could only be made following application. Due to North Korea's rearmament, South Korea and the United States wanted to dissolve the NNSC and cancel the Armistice Agreement in order to be free to modernize the combat forces and restore the military balance. However, rearmament was also carried out in South Korea as paragraph 13(d) was doomed to fail. Eventually, at the MAC meeting held on May 31, 1956, the United Nations Command (UNC)/MAC Senior Member declared that the validity of all provisions in the Armistice Agreement regulating the NNSC's work in South Korea was suspended. Although the NNSC protested the decision, controls of military enforcements ended in June 1956 with the withdrawal of all inspection teams leaving both sides free to rearm without any interference. The NNSC could only maintain a purely symbolic presence. Its work would now consist of evaluating reports on the rotation of personnel submitted by both sides and falsified combat material reports submitted only by North Korea. When the UNC/MAC on June 21, 1957 unilaterally cancelled Paragraph 13(d), the NNSC's tasks were further reduced.

Nonetheless, as a third party the NNSC has played a role in maintaining peace that no other body could have undertaken. Its mere presence has helped to reduce tension in Panmunjom and maintain stability. The NNSC has long maintained informal contacts with both North Korea and China as well as the UNC. It was during the global Cold War era the only body with access to military headquarters in both Kaesŏng and Seoul. The maintenance of informal contacts until the Korean People's Army closed the Military Demarcation Line for the Commission on May 3, 1995 was the most important contribution the NNSC could make towards maintaining peace after the events in 1956-1957. Such a contribution differed from the prescriptions of the Armistice Agreement. If the NNSC had been dissolved, the armistice regime would have been further undermined. Equally important, the Commission continued its work in spite of North Korea's policy to undermine the Commission from 1991. Following the end of the Cold War, Czechoslovakia and Poland were no longer regarded as neutral and North Korea increasingly hindered their work from 1991 onwards. North Korea's unilateral expulsion of the

Czech Republic in 1993 and Poland in 1995 violated the Armistice Agreement and weakened the Commission, but Poland, Sweden and Switzerland have since repeatedly expressed their willingness to maintain the armistice. In 2018, the opinion in the ROK was that the NNSC has made a great contribution towards maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsula. (Jonsson, 2004: 71; Jonsson, 2009: 19-20, 22-23, 24, 27, 34, 66-67, 82-83, 87, 88, 89, 94, 98, 365, 453, 523-525; Jonsson, 2018: 3.)

It is worthy to add here that Swedish officers who served in the NNSC founded *Koreanska sällskapet* (Korean Association) in 1961 with the purpose to diffuse knowledge about and interest in Korea as well as to promote exchanges between Korea and Sweden. It is a non-profit organization based on voluntary work and membership fees. The association issues the quarterly bulletin *Yoboseyo* containing articles about Korea, including its own activities. The association annually gives a scholarship to one young Swede intending to pursue studies related to Korea in the country.

Other associations working on Korea are *Koreanska föreningen* (Korean Residents' Association in Sweden) whose predecessor *Koreans in Sweden* was founded in 1963 by Korean guest students. It has issued bulletins and arranged joint activities primarily for Korean residents in Sweden, but membership is open also to Swedes. Considering that many Swedes interested in Korea are members of the two associations, it can be assumed that both have contributed towards improving knowledge about the country. *Adopterade koreaners förening* (Adopted Koreans' Association) was established in 1986 and arranges seminars, thematic days, courses and social activities to exchange experience and knowledge about adoption issues. The association promotes interest in Korea and Korean culture. Finally, the cultural association *Hannuri* ("big world") is a non-profit organization established to promote interest for Korean culture in Sweden. It was established by people working with hallyu.se and Kpop Nonstop på [at] Kpop In The Park during spring 2013. (Jonsson, 2016(b): 3; the author's participation in activities since 1983.)

Conclusions

Sweden and Korea have maintained contact in various areas for more than 100 years. Prior to the official division of Korea in 1948, the dispatch of Swedish missionaries was the main means of contact. Dispatches were regular from 1911-1928 whereas visits by high-ranking Swedes were irregular. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, a Swedish Red Cross Field Hospital was established that continued its work until 1957

which is still appreciated today. It was replaced by the Nordic Medical Center (NMC) that became an impetus for establishing diplomatic relations between Sweden and the ROK in 1959. Since recorded trade began in 1952, there has been a great expansion. A recent means of contact is K-pop that has raised interest in Korea in Sweden. A personal-level contact area is the more than 10,000 Korean adoptees in Sweden. Academic exchanges have risen since the 1980s and education on Korea has expanded. Sweden has the confidence of both Koreas by having embassies in both states as well as presence in the DMZ. Sweden has contributed towards maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsula since 1953 through the NNSC. There are a few associations working successfully to make Korea more known in Sweden and to promote mutual exchanges.

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