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국제학석사학위논문

**The Influence of “Thai Wave” Celebrities in Korean
Popular Culture on the Thai Peoples’ Image held by
Koreans: Focusing on Thai K-Pop Idols**

한국대중문화 속 태류(泰流) 연예인이 태국인의 이미지
제고에 미치는 영향: 한국에 진출한 태국 아이돌 중심으로

2017년 8월

서울대학교 국제대학원

국제학과 한국학전공

김 은 정

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A thesis Presented by

Eunjeong Kim

to

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master
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Graduate School of International Studies

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Abstract

The Influence of “Thai Wave” Celebrities in Korean Popular Culture on the Thai Peoples’ Image held by Koreans: Focusing on Thai K-Pop Idols

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When the Korean Wave’s sustainability became questionable due to the anti-Korean movements in countries that had formerly embraced the Korean Wave, global entertainment companies began to recruit foreign members for the Korean idol groups under their wings as a strategy for reducing the cultural rejection of K-Pop. Since the appearance of the first Thai K-Pop idol, Nichkhun, who debuted in 2008, many idols of Thai origin are now active in the K-Pop market. Alongside these Thai K-Pop idols, the number of Thai people migrating to Korea, in their admiration of the Korean Wave and Korea’s economic

successes, has also increased. Together, they introduced Thai culture to the Korean society and caused the “Thai Wave (泰流)” phenomenon, thereby exposing the Korean public to the transnational cultural transference of K-Pop and the Korean Wave.

The number of migrants to Korea from Southeast Asia, including Thailand, has been annually growing, causing Korea to rapidly move toward a multicultural society. Unfortunately, Korea has not been able to keep in time with the changing pace of society, and Korean society is still being noted for holding exclusivist attitudes and prejudice against foreigners. In particular, strong, unfounded prejudices and discrimination against Southeast Asian people is highly apparent in Korean society.

Against this background, this paper first explores how the Thai stereotypes have formed in Korean society based on the theoretical discussions of Orientalism and the Advanced Country discourse. Then, using media analysis, this study investigates how the biased images of the Thai people are communicated and diffused among the Korean public by the media. The negative image of Thais created through and by the media is a critical obstacle for Korean society’s progress into a multicultural society, and Korean society’s exclusivity to other countries is cited as one of the largest cause of anti-Korean sentiments overseas, which raises questions about the sustainability of the

Korean Wave. Second, the public perceptions of Thai K-Pop idols are analyzed by looking into online netizen reactions to see whether Thai idols, as a soft power resource, have changed the Thai stereotypes held by the Korean public and raised the national image of Thailand. Through this analysis, this study aims to examine whether soft resources can be transformed into the cultural soft power of Thailand.

Keyword: Korean Wave, K-POP, Idol from Thailand, Thai Wave, Stereotypes, Soft power

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Question and Objectives

According to the 2015 *Global Hallyu (Korean Wave) Trend Report* by the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE),¹ the first image to be associated with Korea is K-Pop (20.1%).² K-Pop also scored the highest percentage (67.3%) as the cultural contents that best represents the Korean Wave. However, although K-Pop has been enjoying a steady increase in its popularity over the years, its growth has been somewhat stagnant in Asian countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, thereby raising questions concerning the sustainability of the Korean Wave. Specifically, when asked about their opinions on how long the popularity of Korean Wave is expected to last, more than 50% of the respondents predicted that the Korean Wave would end within four years, revealing that, in most of the surveyed

¹ This report is based on a survey of 6,500 people in 14 countries around the world (China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Australia, the United States, Brazil, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, UAE, and South Africa) to understand their perception and consumption of the Korean Wave, with the objective to provide a future direction for its sustainable development.

² See Rak-Gun Hwang, Hyoung-Bae Choi, Young-Taek Kim, "K-POP & K-POP Star Influences on the National Image and Korea-Made Goods' Purchasing Intention," *Journal of the Korea Entertainment Industry Association*, 6(4), 2012, pp. 5-14 (in Korean) K-Pop is a term that combines 'pop,' which refers to popular music in general, and the first letter K of 'Korea.' In countries other than Korea, K-Pop refers to Korean popular music in a broad sense. In this paper, K-Pop is used to refer to Korean popular music, with a focus on popular music by Korean idol groups which form the main stream of K-Pop.

countries, the sustainability of the Korean Wave is highly doubted. In addition, in many of these countries, an anti-Korean movement has been forming, and anti-Korean sentiments in respondents were found to arise from reasons that “Korea is critical of other countries” (61.2%), “Protecting country’s own content industry” (60.4%), and “historical and political interests” (59.3%).

In response to growing anti-Korean sentiments, global entertainment companies, as active agents of K-Pop, have been employing systematic star marketing as one of their most basic marketing strategies to reduce such negative sentiments and to strengthen the positive image of Korean Wave in Asian countries. In the case of TV dramas, star marketing takes the form of co-production or co-investment through which Korean Wave stars participate in drama production outside of Korea or local Asian stars in Korean dramas. In the case of K-Pop, members of foreign nationalities have been actively recruited for idol groups, to take part in various activities both in Korea and abroad. This marketing strategy gave birth to one of the elements driving K-pop’s popularity, namely, the ‘production of the (idol) groups with multinational members.’ Recruiting foreign members is no longer an option, but an essential strategy for K-Pop’s sustainability and an increasing number of multinational idol groups have been produced and debuted. Foreign K-Pop idols not only exert influence in their home countries but have been attracting public attention and gaining a

solid fan base in Korea as well. In other words, foreign K-Pop idols now have firm positions as foreign-born K-Pop stars while, at the same time, performing the role as their home countries' representatives who promote and strengthen their home countries' national image and identity.

K-Pop has been noted as a transnational phenomenon that “transcends all things including culture, social environment, and race” (Lee, 2013: 49-50). The transnational nature of K-Pop means that the flow of cultural products and their consumption goes beyond the nation-state or national boundaries (Morley & Robins, 1999). However, most prior studies on the transnational nature of K-Pop and the sustainability of the Korean Wave have stopped at surveying the reactions and perceptions of the Korean Wave in its recipient countries when, considering that anti-Korean movements have been appearing in the Asian countries that once embraced the Korean Wave, it is questionable whether the sustainability of the Korean Wave depends solely on how the Korean Wave is perceived in those countries. In fact, as mentioned above, Korea's critical stance towards other countries has been noted as one of the largest reasons behind such anti-Korean sentiments. In truth, Korean society is not only critical but also exclusivist compared to other countries, with a notably low score in the multicultural acceptance index. The contradiction between K-Pop's transnational elements and Korean society's exclusivist stance towards other

countries suggests that the perception and attitude of the Korean public towards other countries may have a critical influence on the sustainability of the Korean Wave.

In this context, this paper asks the following question: has the Korean public been exposed to K-Pop's transnational elements? In other words, what impact did K-Pop's transnational nature, embodied by the non-Korean K-Pop idols who are active in Korea, have on the Korean public? Against the notable increase in the number of foreign members in Korean idol groups, recruited from China, the U.S., Japan, Taiwan, and Thailand, what this study wishes to explore the image formed among the Korean public about these non-Korean K-Pop idols who now appear on television on a daily basis and, to take one step further, whether this frequent exposure to foreign K-Pop idols have influenced how the Korean public view the foreign migrants in Korean society and foreign countries. This study chooses to look at foreign K-Pop idols as the subject of research because they, in themselves, are embodiments of K-Pop's transnational characteristics. Also, since many previous studies have already identified the significant influence Korean Wave stars have on the public's image formation, abundant literature is available as reference in investigating the research questions set out by this study.

Despite the fact that there are foreign K-Pop idols of various nationalities in the current K-Pop industry, this research focuses on Thai K-Pop idols for two reasons. First, despite the importance of Southeast Asia in understanding K-Pop and the New Korean Wave³ that has emerged, this region has been largely neglected in early Korean Wave discourses. Thailand in particular is the largest consumer market of K-Pop and is the only country in Southeast Asia to have K-Pop idols of its nationality. Shim (2013b) presented case studies on Southeast Asians who saw K-Pop's success in Southeast Asian fandom as a symbol of Korean modernity and a hopeful future to be pursued, driving many to migrate to Seoul to become a star. The transnational cultural movement of K-Pop resulted in the Thai Wave in Korea, which begs attention in the field of Korean Wave research.

Second, Korean society has been experiencing a rapid transformation into a multicultural society since the 1990s, but this change has also been accompanied by the intensification of negative prejudices against migrants.

³ The Korean Wave transformed and developed in three stages. Although there are different opinions on the Korean Wave's stages of development and their time periods, it is commonly accepted that the stages consist of the Korean Wave 1.0 period (from 1997 to the mid-2000s), the Korean Wave 2.0 period (from the late 2000s to the early 2010s), and the present Korean Wave 3.0 period. From the mid-2000s, the Korean Wave seemed to become stagnant due to the anti-Korean policies implemented by foreign governments with the goal to protect their national culture, however, in the late 2000s, the global popularity of K-Pop has created a new Korean Wave in China, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

Southeast Asians account for the second largest group of foreign migrants after the Chinese. Compared to Westerners, Southeast Asians are the objects of discrimination facing the strongest prejudicial images in Korean society. Here, the term image refers to the subjective picture drawn by an individual or a group about an object, which are formed based on direct and indirect experiences of the particular group, to often result in a generalized image that raises animosity which are referred to as a bias or stereotype (Allport, 1954).

Not only in popular media but everyday life in Korea, contact with Thai people is becoming more frequent due to the growing number of international students, migrant workers, marriage immigrants, and tourists from Thailand. Kim (2009) posits that the socio-cultural elements related to Thailand that are found in Korean society have significance as a new social phenomenon and named it the “Thai Wave.” In the background of Thai Wave is the Korean Wave. Their admiration of Korea is what led many Thai people to visit or settle in Korea, and their presence in Korean society has led to the transfer of Thai culture. As such, Thai K-Pop idols such as Nichkhun can be defined as both a ‘Korean Wave star’ and a ‘Thai Wave star.’

The objectives of this research are as follows. First, this study aims to analyze the causes behind the Thai stereotypes in Korean society and to examine how these images are communicated and disseminated through the

media to understand the racial discrimination against Southeast Asians. Second, by analyzing the images of Thai K-Pop idols that are shared by the Korean public and how these idols influence the image of the Thai people and Thailand, this research aims to examine whether the Thai Wave is more than merely a phenomenon but contributes to the enhancement of Thailand's soft power as Korean Wave has done for Korea.

1.2 Theoretical Background

One of the recurring concepts in the Korean Wave discourse from its early stages is the concept of soft power. As the Korean Wave attracted global attention, the phenomenon has been accoladed for playing an important role in increasing the power of Korean culture, that is, Korea's soft power. Joseph S Nye,⁴ a U.S. expert in international relations and diplomacy, was the first to introduce the concept of soft power as the opposite concept of hard power, the physical and aggressive power used to coerce others for national interests, such as military power. In contrast, soft power is defined as the power to attract others through charm to induce consent and cooperation. The soft power of a country is largely composed of its culture, political values, and foreign policy.

⁴ Joseph Nye, *Bound To Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (Basic Books, 1990)

Based on this idea, the Korean Wave has been recognized as the cultural soft power of Korea. Using Nye's concept of soft power, Korean scholars and administrators have attempted to evaluate the role of soft power based on the predictable outcomes it produces and to implement strategies for increasing Korea's soft power. However, critics of this approach have argued that, since Korea is a middle power unlike the global power held by the U.S., Korea requires specific targets for applying soft power to utilize it effectively for promoting national interests.

Lee (2009) argued that identifying and fostering soft resources, which can be converted into soft power, should precede such evaluation and application of soft power. While Nye names culture, ideas, and international organizations as soft power resources, he fails to explain how such soft resources are converted into soft power (Lee, 2009). Traditional hard resources, such as the latest military technology, can also attract and gain support from military allies, while soft resources such as international credit rating agencies can be coercive and aggressive by bringing change in behavior and perception through fear in cases where they send credit warnings to a particular country. In other words, Nye's definition of soft power does not depend on whether the resource used is hard or soft, and thus, from this point of view, it becomes difficult to distinguish soft power from hard power. Therefore, the argument is

that the definition of soft power should be limited to the power gained by using soft resources. The process of conversion from a soft resource to soft power involves, as the first step, the application of a soft resource. Here, the applicants deliver images such as fear, attractiveness, safety, and respect to the recipients. The recipients who are affected by soft power may feel that the power is coercive (in the case of fear) or see the power as favorable (in the case of charm or respect). The recipient may also process the applicant's soft power to give birth to new interpretations and calculations. If the recipients form a long-term social habit through this process, it can be said that the conversion from soft resource to soft power has been successfully accomplished.

The Korean Wave is a concrete example of how soft power strategy can be successfully applied. Since the early 2000s, Korea's cultural appeal and excellence have continued to exert global influence, particularly in Asia, through the Korean Wave, increasing in Korean culture and favorably changing the perception of Korea in these countries. The Korean Wave has been long cited by scholars as well as the general public has evidence that shows the strengthened soft power of Korea. From this perspective, the Korean Wave is a soft resource that endows soft power to Korea, and the positive image formed through the Korean Wave is seen as a resource that can be used to improve Korea's national image. According to Lee (2009), popular culture is a means of

enhancing the nation's wealth and image and that the consumption of the Korean Wave creates a specific image and perception of Korea which can become important means for developing Korea's soft power. In particular he explains the huge influence celebrities have on the public using the "heroes and celebrities strategy," which is one of the most successful soft power strategies:

"Koreans are being recreated as charming, warm, and advanced. They encounter less discrimination and often find it easier to penetrate into new societies. Here, what stands out the most is the role of Korean stars and celebrities. They have become the symbols of Korea in the regions where the Korean Wave is popular, and the words and deeds of these stars have huge impact upon the minds of many Korean Wave fans. Therefore, Korean Wave stars are very important soft resources of Korea and are expected to play a more active, though subtle, political roles representing Korea's as well as regional and universal interests."⁵

Based on this theoretical discourse, it can be said that Thai idols in Korea are not simply K-Pop idol singers but represent the people and national image of their home country and, therefore, are soft resources that can increase the soft power of Thailand. Thus, this paper posits that the actions and image of

⁵ See Geun Lee, "Korean Wave, Korea's Soft Power, and Public Diplomacy," *The Annual Report*, Kyushu University Research Center for Korean Studies Vol. 7, 2007. 3, pp. 57-68 (in Korean)

foreign K-Pop idols can affect the perception and image held by the Korean public about their respective home countries, and hypothesizes that Thai K-Pop idols contribute to changing the discriminatory perception of Thai people held by Korean public and that these idols, as soft resources, play a major role in increasing the soft power of their home country, Thailand.

1.3 Literature Review

Research on the Korean Wave has been accumulating significantly over the past 15 years. In this research, studies on K-Pop mainly deal with two topics. The first is the global competitiveness of K-Pop and the factors that drive its success. Most of these studies examine the effect of K-Pop on tourism, business management, and the economy, and more than 80% of the studies are conducted with the objective to suggest policy and industry implications for the sustainable development of the Korean Wave.

The other topic of discussion is the overseas reception of K-Pop. In these studies, the words ‘hybridization’ and ‘transnational’ are frequently used to explain how K-Pop is successfully received by the global audience. Shin (2009) states that K-Pop is not a globalized local culture but are rather a localized global culture that consists of various hybrid characteristics. Similarly, Lee (2006) points out hybridization as the major characteristic of the Korean

Wave, explaining that the Korean Wave's global features contain many aspects that involve imitation and adaptation, mimicking and self-transformation to disable a unique locality. As such, it is argued that, while it is impossible for the Korean Wave to be uniquely localized, its features are not merely copies but can be explained as cultural hybridization.

Lee (2012) found that the hybridization of style is not only found in K-Pop, but that evidence of cultural hybridization can be found in how Western dance music and the group dances of K-Pop idol groups are brought together and how K-Pop's European audience absorbs Eastern values from the way K-Pop idols act and behave. Lee (2012b) mentions that K-Pop's style, including all its elements such as fashion, dance, lyrics, and music, is something that is transnational and global and transforms and references contemporary trends. Lim (2013) specifically identifies the factor behind K-Pop's success in its talent development strategy and states that recruiting foreigners as idols was an effective strategy implemented by Korean music production companies for gaining popularity overseas. In other words, the cultural hybridization and transnational elements of K-Pop are what makes K-Pop globally competitive, by increasing its approachability for the global audience.

The question of how K-Pop is consumed and recognized in recipient countries has been a central topic in this area of research due to its close

connection to the sustainability of Korean Wave. Many studies have analyzed whether the Korean Wave, as a soft power, has improved Korea's national image and drove the sustained consumption of Korea's cultural products in recipient countries. It has been reported that the success of the Korean Wave did not only bring monetary gain from the overseas markets to Korea but also strengthened the positive perception towards Korea and Korea's national brand power (Kim, 2006). More specifically, multiple studies have found that Korean Wave contents, such as Korean dramas and popular music, increase the positive perception of Korea and Korean products and have a positive effect on the national image; and that the likeability of Korean Wave star also has a positive effect on the perception of Korea (Hwang and Cho, 2008; Han et al, 2011; Hwang et al, 2012).

It has been argued that the Korean dramas that caused the Korean Wave in Japan created the important turning point in the Japanese perception of Korea and promoted an interest in Korean culture among the Japanese. Also, studies have shown that the interest in Korean dramas is found among people of diverse classes and has transformed in the ignorance, misunderstanding, prejudice, and negative image toward Korea (Kim and Kim, 2005). Not only Korean dramas but also K-Pop has been changing the perception of Korea among young Japanese women. Japanese women who have been exposed to K-

Pop viewed Korean men as sincere, attractive and nice, while those who have not been exposed to K-Pop did not have a clear image of Korea and regarded Korea as simply a country that sells spicy food and cheap goods (Kozhakhmetova, 2012).

Previous studies have identified the factor behind the success of K-Pop in its cultural hybridity and transnational aspects and have argued that the positive perception of Korea in recipient countries has impacted the consumption of Korean culture to continue and renewed Korea's national image. However, most of these studies have limited their scope to recipient countries and consumers of the Korean Wave in analyzing the sustainability of the Korean Wave, which may have caused a positive bias in the results. It is imperative to discuss the anti-Korean movement that has been occurring as a reaction to the success of the Korean Wave when examining the sustainability of the Korean Wave. However, research on anti-Korean movements has so far been "quantitatively and qualitatively limited" (Kim and Kim, 2015: 41). Although Korea's exclusivist attitude and nationalism has been pinpointed as the main causes of the anti-Korean movements, few studies have been conducted on these movements from a self-reflective stance that the anti-Korean movements may be a negative reaction rising from Korea's overemphasis on national pride through the Korean Wave (Lee et al, 2009).

Based on the findings of previous studies, the present study aims to contribute to existing literature by exploring areas that have yet to be discussed in this field of research. This study is the first of its kind to perform an analysis on the Korean public and their exposure to K-Pop's transnational elements. This paper discusses the sustainability of the Korean Wave by examining Koreans' exclusivist attitude toward other countries, which has been singled out as a reason behind the anti-Korean movements overseas. Furthermore, this study focuses specifically on non-Korean K-Pop idols, Thai idols in particular, as the transnational aspect of K-Pop experienced by the Korean public to see how these idol stars have influenced Thai stereotypes that are deeply rooted in Korean society. Through this analysis, this paper hopes to provide a positive prospect for Korea to move into a multicultural society.

1.4 Research Methodology

1.4.1 Media Discourse Analysis

The main methodology employed in this study is media discourse analysis. Nam (2015) explains the reasons for the negative image of Korea in Western Europe as stemming from the selective media coverage on Korea in Europe which tend to report unfavorable events in Korea or report events from a negative perspective. That is, the image of Korea in Western Europe is not

formed via direct experience but indirectly through the images of Korean and Koreans in media coverage.

The media is a means of easy information access in everyday life and has considerable influence on the perception and value judgment of Koreans. Especially in the Korean society where internet usage is high with well-developed infrastructure, most forms of media, including news coverage, TV broadcasting programs, and films, have become accessible via smartphone. The ease of accessibility to the media is further enhanced by its reproduction through social network systems (SNS). The media does not force people to believe and follow particular value or behavioral systems, but in the process of storytelling, it utilizes techniques that emphasize and reduce, select and exclude, and extend and omit certain contexts so as to induce the public to share the beliefs presented in its contents (McCombs & Ghanem 2001; Scheufele 1999). Consequently, by structuring events or objects in a particular way, the media influences the formation of a common perception in its audience.

Many Korean media reports contain contents that can lead to the formation of negative images of foreign workers, migrant women, and multicultural families. These social groups are also presented as social minorities in films and TV dramas, which reproduce them as being foreign and separate from Korean society. In this way, the media discourse communicated

on online as a medium of social reconstruction draws a negative and exclusivist image of objects or groups, this value and behavioral systems become embedded in the perceptions of its audiences. Therefore, to analyze the image of the Thai people in Korea's media discourse, this study conducted an internet search using 'Thai (people)' as the keyword at a major domestic search engine to collect all news articles on Thai people over the past ten years and investigated how the image of the Thais are presented in the media.

1.4.2 Analysis of Online Netizen Reactions

Since most opinions on the Korean Wave and K-Pop idols are created and disseminated quickly among online netizens, it is essential to analyze their reactions to achieve the objectives of this research. First, to find out how Thai K-Pop idols' images are communicated to the public, a search was performed to collect the netizen responses on media reports that were released since their debuts as well as the online comments that were made after the idols' appearances on popular TV programs. Due to the difficulty in setting an objective and clear criteria for selection, data collection concentrated on collecting the maximum number of posts that were deemed relevant for this research. Second, to examine the netizen reactions to Nichkhun's driving-under-influence (DUI) incident, their comments on related media reports were

collected. In 2012, Nichkhun, at the height of his popularity, refrained from appearing on TV for a while as a self-disciplinary measure after his DUI incident. Analyzing the netizen reaction to this incident will show whether netizens' criticism of this specific incident reflects the prejudice against Thai people held by Koreans.

2. The Formation of Thai Stereotypes

2.1 The Image of Southeast Asians

According to the *2015 Study on Multicultural Acceptability in Korea*⁶ conducted by the Korea Ministry of Gender Equality and Family on 4,000 ordinary citizens resulted in a score of 53.95 out of 100 points for multicultural acceptance. Although this scores 2.78 points higher than the results of the 2011 survey, the overall level of multicultural acceptance among Koreans is notably low. The findings of this survey also showed that higher frequency of exposure to (sightings of) foreigners, overseas travel, multicultural education received, as well as the duration of overseas stay, leads to a higher level of multicultural acceptance. The survey results show that, with the increased exposure to migrants on a daily basis, Koreans have been feeling threatened by the growing number of migrants and is advocating their identity as Koreans of one nation and one bloodline.

The number of foreigners settling in Korea for marriage and employment has been consistently increasing since the 1990s, and as a result, ‘multiculturalism’ has become a frequently-used expression in Korea, a country which has so far been regarded as a single nation with a single culture. The rapid changes made in a short amount of time created animosity, giving birth to

⁶ On this, see the *2015 Study on Multicultural Acceptability in Korea* conducted by the Korean Women’s Development Institute, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family

abhorrence and discriminatory attitudes toward foreigners. Since most of the foreigners who have settled in Korea for employment or marriage originate from Southeast Asia, racism in Korea has been showing a pattern in which Koreans, a colored race, discriminate other Asians, who are also of color.⁷ In a study that measured the social distance felt towards foreigners among college students across the country, it was found that, overall, Korean students felt less distance towards white people (Jang, 2001). Lim and Kim (2011) investigated the image of foreigners held by university students, where ‘the image of foreigners’ refers to the image that comes to mind about a particular group as opposed to rational and social judgment. The image of multicultural groups was measured using a 9-point scale where a higher score means a better image. Among the groups, the Chinese (4.43) received the lowest mean score with all items scoring less than 5 points (see Table 1). In particular, the results showed that the Chinese were viewed to be untrustworthy, loud, and dirty. Black people followed the Chinese with a low mean score (4.75), scoring under 5 points for all items except for the measures for ‘diligent’ and ‘nice.’ The overall mean was also low for Southeast Asians, who were viewed as dirty, untrustworthy, and ignorant.

⁷ See Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination periodic reports 2014. the result is presented by Prof. Kim Hyun mi from Yonsei University on her presentation, “인종주의 확산과 ‘국가 없음’, 2014 (in Korean)

<Table 1> The Mean Results of the Survey on the Image of Races (Nationalities)⁸

1 point	Chinese	Japanese	Southeast Asians	Caucasian	Black	9 point
Dirty	3.84	6.29	4.06	5.14	4.61	Clean
Ignorant	4.54	5.92	4.24	5.43	4.77	Intellectual
Loud	3.39	5.84	4.54	4.77	4.28	Quiet
Unsophisticated	4.19	6.05	4.71	5.35	4.79	Kind
Lazy	4.66	6.15	5.23	4.89	5.07	Diligent
Untrustworthy	3.35	3.54	4.10	4.07	4.20	Trustworthy
Bad	4.78	4.63	5.44	4.97	5.12	Nice
Scary	4.61	5.09	4.84	5.03	4.11	Friendly

An image is a kind of bias that an individual has about a particular group and is a key factor that causes conflict among members of a multicultural society. Prejudice against other groups is often based on emotional, social, and racial categories rather than being based on facts and thus, is illogical and irrational (Sears, Freedman, & Peplau, 1985). Prejudice is also a cause of racism, which is a form of violence that expresses hostility simply based on the external indicator of race. Allport (1954) defines prejudice as the antipathy based on erroneous and rigid generalization towards the whole group or its members. He categorized prejudice into three categories – cognitive, emotional,

⁸ <Table 1> is from Lim and Kim, “A Study on Korean College Students` Perception of Multi-Cultural Society and its Antecedent Factors: Focusing on Social Distance, Image of Foreign Residents, and Qualifications for being a Korean”, *KCA*, Vol. 19, 2011. pp.24, <Table 11> (in Korean)

and active – and viewed stereotypes as the most typical form of cognitive biases. Stereotyping refers to the process of over-generalizing the characteristics of a particular group based on false or inadequate information (Yang, 2000).

Due to the lack of prior studies on the image of Thais, this study looked into the research on the images of other nationalities and races. Most existing studies have confirmed the existence of racial and ethnic prejudices among Koreans. Racial discrimination in contemporary Korean society is a new trend created by the historical accumulation of racist thinking and the experience of having migrants as part of society. By selectively using and exaggerating the evidence and cases associated with the presence of migrants, racial prejudices and racial thoughts that were accepted without question in the past are still being justified through different forms of violence. At the center of Korea's racism is the pseudo-imperialist mentality that was born from Korea's economic growth.

In a study on the stereotypes of foreigners held by middle-school, high-school, and college students, it was found that these students perceived white people as superior and rational; black people, Indians, and Southeast Asians as irrational and inferior; and Indians and Southeast Asians as very submissive (Lim, 2003). Another study captured the double-sided attitudes of Koreans and the way they categorize foreigners as coming from an advanced or developing

country based on skin color, English language ability, the economic power of their home countries, consequently forming an attitude of admiration toward white people and an attitude of ignorance and contempt toward Southeast Asians (Lew and Lee, 2006).

The majority of research has found that Koreans have a strong positive perception of white people but consider Southeast Asian countries as being less advanced than Korea, thereby having a low preference for Southeast Asians. The fairly high negative assessment of blacks found among Koreans also reflects their discrimination and prejudices about race and color. A study on the racial stereotypes held by elementary school students showed that young Koreans view white people and Northeast Asians as relatively likable and are unopen to becoming friends with black and Southeast Asian people who were perceived as violent, foolish, unsanitary, low class, poor, lazy, and unfriendly (Ko, 2005). Another study conducted an in-depth investigation of the social discrimination of children from multicultural families among elementary school students and found that Southeast Asian children faced greater prejudice and discrimination than Northeast Asian children due to their skin color and appearance (Cho and Song, 2011). Also, in a study measuring the social distance felt towards foreigners, it was found that there was little difference in the social distance felt by Koreans towards Chinese Koreans, the Japanese,

North Korean defectors, and Americans while there was a significant difference in the social distance towards the Chinese and Southeast Asians (Kim et al, 2011).

To summarize, the prejudice held by Koreans and the social distance they feel towards Southeast Asians are more prominent than those towards other races, and Southeast Asians are experiencing discrimination in Korean society based on unfounded, generalized negative images formed about them among Koreans. Although such stereotypes can be traced back to Korean idea of “one nation” argued by the nationalist discourse, this study places the origins of these stereotypes in the pseudo-imperialist mentality born from Korea's economic growth and explains the formation of stereotypes based on Orientalism and the Advanced Country discourse.

2.2. Orientalism

Discrimination stemming from the prejudice against Southeast Asian migrants in Korean society is a major obstacle for Korean society to transform into a multicultural society. The number of Southeast Asian migrants to Korea, for various reasons such as study abroad, employment, and marriage, is constantly increasing, and Korea's rapid shift into a multicultural society has been accompanied by negative perceptions and fears among Koreans

concerning the non-Korean members in their society.

The influx of migrants has created an opportunity for Koreans to become the subject of Orientalism, the core of imperialist discourse (Eom, 2008). Orientalism establishes a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and deepens the perception of dichotomy (Said, 1979). In Europe, ‘Europeans’ and ‘non-Europeans’ are distinguished, where non-Europeans as a whole are defined as ‘Muslims.’ In such dichotomous categorization, there exist narrow-minded perceptions regarding the ‘non-Europeans.’ Korea's “Orient” is Southeast Asia. That Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Nepal are different countries is not important. There is only exists ‘Southeast Asians’ who are distinguished from the idea of us. Moon (2006) suggests that the concept of Orientalism can be useful not only for understanding the dichotomy of the West and the East but also for analyzing how the dominant group in society places and discusses other groups as the other. Lee (2002) points out that Korea’s uncritical acceptance of Orientalism has created its own copy of Orientalism:

“It may be that, to us, India is the ‘Orient’ that must be denied or the other name for the hurtful memories we wish to erase. This may be why we have uncritically adopted and copied the imperialist discourse surrounding India structured by the West and the British. We view the less-developed India as our Orient and the other, becoming accomplices to the British Empire that once ruled the world as a

sort of psychological compensation. ...By placing India as the other consisting of the the inferior East, we identify ourselves with the developed West. Our fear of becoming grouped together with 'other East' or India is much greater than our fear of the differences we have to the West.”⁹

Stereotypes render groups composed of diverse people that differ from each other into just a few characteristics, to define the whole group into overly simplified terms. Historically, negative stereotypes were used by Nazi Germany when they persecuted the Jews, in order to manipulate the Germans' view to see the Jews as inferior and impure, thereby creating the logical basis for isolating or massacring the Jews to separate them from the unproblematic Germans. In other words, the simplified characterization of a group can be the basis of racism.

In Korea, it was the growing number of multicultural families that led to the emergence of the multicultural discourse. In this multicultural discourse, the interests and attention of Korean society and Korea are apparent, rather than concrete information about the cultures of the migrants, who are defined as the 'other.' Here, the culture and history of the migrants are defined in extremely simple, abstract, and uniform terms that mirror the logic behind racism and orientalism. The media presents the children of multicultural families as having

⁹ See 이옥순. 2012. 『우리 안의 오리엔탈리즘』, 푸른역사, pp. 26

poor language skills, low sociability, and as having high potential to grow up into dangerous, problematic adults (Kim et al, 2007). Despite that these children are no different from Korean children and that all students naturally have different characteristics and abilities, they are given one overarching image which distorts reality. Also, media reports on marriage migrant women objectify these women as wholly dependent beings without their own means of survival. For example, male and female migrants shown in TV programs such as *Love in Asia*, *Stories of Multicultural Mother and Daughter-in-Law* [다문화 고부열전], and *In Search of a Father 3000 Miles Away* [글로벌 아빠 찾아 삼만리] are presented as objects of pity for Koreans.

2.3 The “Advanced Country” Discourse

It has frequently been argued that Koreans’ discriminative perception of foreigners stems from the “Advanced Country” discourse, which is the Western-centered and developmental cognitive system of Koreans that divides the world into ‘advanced countries’ and ‘underdeveloped countries’ (Kim and Han, 2013). The Advanced Country discourse is one of Korea's dominant discourses which emerged during the Park Chunghee administration under the influence of the global trend of developmentalism after the mid-20th century. It

has been argued that this discourse can provide insight on Koreans' discriminative perceptions that cannot be explained by nationalism or cultural supremacy. That is, the Advanced Country discourse argues that Koreans' exclusivist attitude toward foreigners is not consistently applied to all foreigners but that Koreans prefer foreigners from developed countries over those from underdeveloped countries. This discourse, centering on the concept of 'advanced country' and its opposing concept of 'underdeveloped country,' is a dichotomous system of thought through which an idealized advanced country places developing countries as its marginalized other." Therefore, this discourse shares a western-centric developmentalism by viewing the social changes that occur from economic development as a linear development process from an underdeveloped country to an advanced country.

The Advanced Country discourse is a typical Western-centric discourse in which advanced countries usually refer to Western countries and are idealized. (Kim, 2012a: 153). This discourse that divides the world into 'advanced countries' and 'underdeveloped countries' projects various negative values to the latter and thus contains inherent factors that can lead to discriminative perception. As illustrated above, Koreans feel little social distance and show minimal discrimination towards foreigners from advanced countries while, on the contrary, their perceived social distance and

discrimination towards foreigners from developing countries are apparent from the numerous negative images they hold about these foreigners. Korean society defines its identity as being at the threshold of becoming an advanced country and thus, expresses great respect for advanced countries but disregards or despises developing countries. In the structure of the Advanced Country discourse, Koreans feel inferior to foreigners from advanced countries and superior to those from developing countries, and such feelings may lead to racist prejudices against the latter.

3. Stereotypes of the Thai people seen through Media Discourse Analysis

A search was performed using the keyword 'Thai' on Korea's main search portal Naver News, which resulted in a total of 4,000 news articles published over the last ten years. Among these articles, those with little or no relevance to the research topic were excluded, and one article was singled out per event. Table 2 summarizes the main keywords of the articles found in the nineteen media outlets that were analyzed.

<Table 2. The Keywords associated with 'Thai' in Media Reports>¹⁰

Media Outlets (19)	Time Period	Keywords
Yonhap News	2007-2017	1) Illegal immigrants / illegal employment 2) Crimes by foreigners 3) Drug trafficking 4) Habitual gambling 5) Illegal massages 6) Sex trade / prostitution 7) AIDS 8) Fake passport 9) Fake marriage 10) Transgender 11) Murder
Newsis		
Maeil Business News		
The Dong-A Ilbo		
JoongAng Daily		
The Kukmin Daily		
The Kyunghyang Shinmun		
Money Today		
Herald Business		
Star News		
Financial News		
No-cut News		
Kuki News		

¹⁰ The media outlets are listed in order based on the amount of analysis performed, and the keywords were also listed in the order of frequency.

Segye Ilbo		12) Gangs
Kangwon Ilbo		13) Sexual harassment / sexual assault
Simin Ilbo		14) Terrorism
The Asia Economy Daily		15) Knife attack, arson, murder of work colleague
Kyeongin Ilbo		
Joongboo Ilbo		

As can be seen from the keywords, the most frequently appearing keyword associated with ‘Thai’ in the media reports is "illegal immigrants / illegal employment." The other keywords are also related to crime, which points to the possibility that the exposure to these media reports may induce fear and antipathy, which can turn into abhorrence. Due to the sharp decrease in revenue from Chinese tourists (*youke*) as a result of China’s retaliation to Korea over the THAAD deployment, duty-free shops and tourist markets in Korea have shifted their focus in full-fledge to Southeast Asians including those from Thailand. Despite the increasing numbers of tourists, foreign students, and migrants coming to Korea from Thailand, influenced by the Korean Wave, these media reports are playing a role in reinforcing the prejudiced, negative image of Thai people. A post written by a blogger about Thais staying illegally in Korea recorded more than 4,000 views, and the comments left by netizens on the post were, as expected, extremely negative. In this post and the comments, the Thais are regarded as a single, uniform group of illegal immigrants. The content of the post is as follows:

“The size of illegal Thai immigrants really seems to be beyond imagination. I look up an article, and it said that, with each plane that lands in Korea, tens of Thai people enter our country and disappear. Whatever measures the government says it is taking now to control illegal immigrants from Thailand, the number of Thai people that come without a visa and go under the radar is certain to be much greater. Unless we stop allowing the Thais to enter Korea without a visa, whatever we do is going to be like pouring water in a bottomless well. However I look at this situation, it’s serious as hell, but it seems the government is intentionally ignoring the issue under the justification that we need to receive tourists.” (Tolino [톨리노], posted on 22 April 2016, 08:41)¹¹

The following are a couple of the representative comments among many that were left by netizens as a reaction to this post:

“Half of the Thais that come into Korea are illegal immigrants...”
(Magrit [마그리트], commented on 22 April 2016, 09:43)

“I saw someone who I was certain was Thai in Gangnam the other day, and she was so white. I don’t know how she got that complexion. But ultimately, there’s a very high chance that she’s a prostitute...” (Naite

¹¹ http://www.gasengi.com/main/board.php?bo_table=commu07&wr_id=1108550
(Accessed on 2017.06.28.)

[나이테], commented on 22 April 2016, 09:25)

Media reports wield greater impact by being shared on SNS. This partially explains why a survey¹² conducted on 1,200 Korean adults aged 20 and over to examine their perception and attitude towards foreign migrants showed that the discrimination based on occupation, class, and country of origin is still strong among Koreans. In this survey, respondents welcomed increases in foreign businessmen, investors, and international students but unwelcomed increases in female marriage migrants and North Korean defectors; and welcomed the increase in highly-skilled and skilled manufacturing labor and workers from developed countries but unwelcomed the increase of migrant workers from developing countries.

¹² Excerpt from 윤인진, 송영호 외. 2010. 『한국인의 이주노동자와 다문화사회에 대한 인식』 이담북스. The survey was conducted by the social survey agency, Research21 Inc. and was performed through one-on-one interviews using a structured questionnaire during a one-month period (December 1-31, 2008).

4. The Image of K-Pop Idols from Thailand

4.1 Netizen Reactions towards K-Pop Idols from Thailand

Nichkhun of 2PM, who made his debut in 2008 before the trend of recruiting foreign members emerged in K-Pop, is recognized as the model example of a foreign K-Pop idol. Compared to other idols of non-Korean nationality, Nichkhun attracted popular attention soon after his debut. While other foreign idols were positioned as peripheral members in their respective groups, Nichkhun became a key member of his group, 2PM, and led the group's popularity by performing actively in all fields including singing, acting, and participating as MC in variety shows and gaining wide public recognition. More than anything, Nichkhun attracted interest due to his background as a citizen of a developing country and became the turning point for the Thai people to form a distinctive image that is separate from the uniform image of 'Southeast Asians' held by Koreans. Following Nichkhun's footsteps, Thai K-Pop idols are actively making their mark in Korea with the dream to become the 'second Nichkhun.' BamBam (Kunpimook Bhuwakul) of GOT7, Lisa (Lalisa Manoban) of BLACK PINK, Sorn (Chonnasorn Sajakul) of CLC, and Ten of NCT are some such Thai idols who have gained a solid fan base in Korea.

<Table 3. Currently Active Thai K-Pop Idols>¹³

Company	Group	Name	Debut Year	No. of Fans
JYP	2PM	Nikhun	2008	1,116,020
JYP	BLACKPINK	Lisa	2016	1,551,008
YG	GOT-7	BamBam	2014	3,170,028
SM	NCT	Ten	2016	1,042,855
CUBE	CLC	Sorn	2014	173,160

Among these idols, apart from Nichkhun, the remaining four debuted around the same time and are active members with solid fan base under a large talent agency. Lisa, the Thai idol who debuted in 2016 as a member of BLACKPINK under YG Entertainment, is the first non-Korean idol to be recruited by YG. As BLACKPINK gained popularity, Lisa appeared in many popular programs and started to become well-known, and her popularity has been steadily rising. BLACKPINK has more than 1.5 million fans, and their V LIVE¹⁴ videos have been recording more than 2 million views per clip, proving their status as the hottest girl group in the music industry. More recently, Lisa has been gaining more and more public attention through her appearance with her members on MBC's *My Little Television*, where she makes and introduces

¹³ Information based on their profiles on Naver (Accessed on 29 June 2017). Table 3 lists the Thai K-Pop idols who are currently active in the K-Pop market.

¹⁴ Naver V LIVE is an online application that allows idol stars to stream live personalized videos through which they can communicate with their fans.

Thai food.¹⁵ The netizen reaction towards Lisa largely shows two patterns: one that expresses interest toward BLACKPINK and the other that shares their affinity for Lisa, the individual. The following is the reaction of one particular netizen:

“Thai food is so yummy, I’ve had it every day these days... Thanks to Lisa, I’m more interested in Thailand now.” (osun**** 28 May 2017, 00:24 Like 23 Dislike 1)

Among the many comments by netizens, there were also a few that expressed disgust over Lisa’s Thai background, but those comments did not receive much empathy from other netizens.

“Ugh, she stinks of foreign migrant workers...;; Maybe a Japanese is okay but a Southeast Asian member in a girl group... that’s stretching it”(over**** 28 May 2017, 00:24 Like 5 Dislike 18)

Lisa plays a role as a private ambassador for Thailand, communicating with fans and exposing them Thai cultures by uploading live videos taken with her group members at her hometown in Thailand, which she visited on the

¹⁵ 박슬기. 2017. 「 ‘마리텔’ 블랙핑크 리사 “태국소스 매키 없으면 못 살아” 」. 『텐아시아』, 5월 27일. Url: <http://tenasia.hankyung.com/archives/1219116> (Accessed on 2017.06.28.)

occasion of their Thai concert, through V LIVE. Lisa's airport fashion, cosmetics, and styling have become a topic of interest every time, the information about which has been disseminated via SNS and blogs in the form of video clips titled “Lisa’s Makeup Video” and “Lisa’s Airport Fashion” so that they can be imitated by the public. The analysis of online comments on media reports and broadcasting appearances of BLACKPINK since their debut in 2016 showed almost no reactions that referred to the negative images of Thai people propagated through the media. Rather, Lisa was seen with admiration as an idol by the Korean public.

JYP entertainment’s GOT-7, who debuted in 2014, has more than 3 million followers in Korea to compete at the top among all boy groups that are active in Korea. BamBam, the Thai member of GOT-7 who is also known as “the second Nichkhun” and the “Prince of Thailand,” has been making his presence felt by appearing in various popular TV dramas and variety programs. Like Nichkhun, BamBam has been playing a role as a private ambassador for Thailand while also acting as a promoter of K-food in Thailand. Through *Bammin TV*, a live V-App program, BamBam teaches Thai language on a weekly basis. His appearance on the Thailand episode of JTBC’s *Where is My Friend’s House* also directed greater interest among the Korean public towards Thailand. This episode recorded more views compared to the episodes filmed in

other countries, and the netizen comments about this show consisted largely of those expressing how well they liked BamBam and their interest in visiting Thailand. Even his lack of understanding about Korean culture and somewhat lacking fluency in the Korean language, which was apparent in his appearance on MBC's *Real Men*, brought favorable comments as being a part of BamBam's cuteness from the netizens.

Online netizens' opinions about BLACKPINK's Lisa and GOT-7's BamBam were generally very positive and showed an open, receptive attitude towards the Thais and Thailand. Of course, such positive results may stem from the fact that there is little reason to criticize these idols who emphasize their good images on popular TV programs just because they are foreigners. Also, the majority of netizen reactions consist of those made by the large fan base held by these top idol groups. However, what is interesting is that this reaction to Lisa and BamBam is greatly different from when Nichkhun made his debut in 2008.

Nichkhun made his debut in 2008 as a member of the boy group, 2PM, under JYP Entertainment. As the very first idol star to come from a developing country, Nichkhun quickly attracted public attention. Soon, all of the popular TV programs wanted him to appear on their shows, and Nichkhun made the headlines daily to a point where it became impossible to not know Nichkhun if

you are in Korea. Even Nichkhun's visit to his hometown to undergo a physical examination for his mandatory military service in Thailand was reported live by the Korean media. However, the comments made by netizens on the article about Nichkhun enlisting to the Thai army to perform his military duty were as follows.

"Take care, foreign laborer. You have become indispensable to our national economy." (klea**** 02 April 2009 15:55)

"He was Thai?? Why are there so many foreign labors in the entertainment industry?" (h587**** 02 April 2009 16:36)

"I'm fine with foreigners appearing on TV but really hope they would learn proper Korean" (arka**** 02 April 2009 16:49)

"Basically, he's a foreign worker, please deport him^^" (dog_**** 02 April 2009 19:18)

Negative comments about Nichkhun's nationality were made without reserve and were liked by other netizens. As another example, when Nichkhun appeared on MBC's variety show *Three Turns*, comedian Kim Hyun-chul threw a comment about illegal immigrants to Nichkhun, which became a heated

issue.¹⁶ Nichkhun’s fans filed a civil lawsuit over this comment, and netizens’ reactions became clearly divided over this case, with most of the opinions stating that the fans filing a lawsuit over a discriminatory remark about foreigners is going overboard.

“TBH... so many Southeast Asians stay in Korea illegally... There’s no need to make a fuss over this” (ultr**** 10 May 2009 11:36)

“Weirdos... A joke is just a joke” (byso**** 11 May 2009 13:29)

“They’re making a big deal out of nothing!! These netizens (weird viewers) have nothing better to do! This really is nothing to fuss over... please shut up and let us live quietly. So frustrating.. --;” (bday**** 11 May 2009 13:08)

“Honestly, these people who are going mad over this, that comment was objectively just a joke made for laughs, it’s not even that bad. Isn’t it completely okay to make a comment like that just for fun?...”

¹⁶ 김겨울. 2009. 「 ‘세바퀴’ , 닉쿤 “불법체류자” 발언..게시판 시끌」. 『스타뉴스』, 5월 10일. Available: <http://star.mt.co.kr/stview.php?no=2009051010015974778&outlink=1&ref=http%3A%2F%2Fsearch.naver.com> (Accessed on 2017. 06. 25)

(hell***** 10 May 2009 16:57)

In 2008 when Nichkhun debuted, the Korean public was curious about this very first foreign idol who came from a developing country, and this curiosity brought Nichkhun a popularity that matched that of any other Korean idol. Nonetheless, many netizen reactions exhibited a uniformly biased image, such as 'foreign worker,' 'illegal immigrant,' 'Southeast Asian kids,' when speaking of Nichkhun. Despite Nichkhun's uncontroversial social behavior, the analysis of one hundred news articles on Nichkhun revealed comments of a discriminating nature made about Nichkhun merely on the grounds that he is from Thailand. In contrast, netizen comments on media reports about BLACKPINK's Lisa and GOT-7's BamBam since their debut had few such comments, and even the occasional negative comment that formed a very small minority were refuted and received little sympathy from other netizens. To understand netizen reactions more closely, the most representative event in which a non-Korean idol caused social controversy in Korean society was chosen for deeper analysis, namely, Nichkhun's DUI incident in 2012.

4.2 Netizen Reactions towards Nichkhun's DUI incident

Nichkhun's DUI incident refers to the accident that occurred on July 24,

2012, when Nichkhun was driving under the influence of alcohol and hit a motorcycle, resulting in the suspension of his driving license and Nichkhun's disappearance from the public view as a self-disciplinary measure for a significant period of time.¹⁷ Twenty media reports on Nichkhun's drunk driving were analyzed, and it was found that netizen comments were heatedly divided into two: on the one side were those who were sympathetic to Nichkhun and on the other, those who criticized Nichkhun's behavior. First, the reaction of sympathizers to Nichkhun appeared as follows. Those who showed sympathy to Nichkhun often mentioned Nichkhun's image, saying that it is sad how his good image became tainted by one mistake and mentioning other celebrities who made mistakes to argue that anyone can make a mistake. On the other hand, those who criticized Nichkhun called him a 'foreign worker' and made violent, discriminatory comments. First, below are the netizen comments that expressed sympathy over Nichkhun's situation.

“I had such a good image of Nichkhun because he seems so pure and innocent and had such good behavior... but drunk driving is a little... (...)

Anyone can make a mistake, but since he's a public figure, I hope he

¹⁷ 고승희. 2012. 「[속보] 2PM 닉쿤, 음주운전 교통사고...면허정지」. 『헤럴드경제』, 7월 24일. Available: http://news.heraldcorp.com/view.php?ud=20120724000035&md=20120726003313_BL (Accessed on 2017.06.12)

will quietly reflect on his conduct for a while and that this kind of incident will never happen again..” (Chohyeo**** 24 July 2012 07:21 Like 34 Dislike 3)

“Even Nichkhun now... Sigh... Dude, you’re supposed to be better than this” (powe**** 24 July 2012 07:03 Like 21 Dislike 1)

“I really thought that he was well educated and had a good personality...” (ryul**** 24 July 2012 07:17 Like 19 Dislike 0)

“It wasn’t a good thing that he did, but since his image so far has been good, I hope he doesn’t get too much bashing over this.” (kin0**** 24 July 2012 07:22 Like 10 Dislike 3)

“His family is often on TV and I had a good image of him, so it’s a pity..” (pin_**** 24 July 2012 10:45 Like 16 Dislike 0)

“Khun, this was a wrong move... You had such a good image so far but it all went down the drain because of this one incident. Reflect on your behavior and let this never happen again.” (rose **** 24 July 2012 07:05 Like 22 Dislike 4)

Below are the netizen comments that criticized Nichkhun:

“Southeast Asian bastard, you come to our country and this f***ing happens. Take your kin and get out of here, you shake the foundations of our country.” (anyh**** 24 July 2012 07:06 Like 23 Dislike 22)

“Nichkhun should retire from the entertainment industry and go back to his home country Myanmar.” (hfgfgh887 24 July 2012 08:47 Like 4 Dislike 14)

“Pathetic Southeast Asian bastard, this is why underdeveloped countries are doomed.” (gkst**** 24 July 2012 07:17 Like 14 Dislike 16)

“Goodbye, Southeast Asian bastard zzzzz.” (shs7**** 24 July 2012 07:08 Like 15 Dislike 12)

“Even a rubbish Thai foreign worker drives a car... Get the f*** outta here” (apc6**** 24 July 2012 07:04 Like 13 Dislike 11)

“This dude is worse than Jaebeom. After coming from a poor country, where does he think he is? This dude is ridiculous.” (mygl**** 24 July

2012 07:33 Like 4 Likelike 7)

“This Thai foreign worker thought Korea was f***ing easy” (view****
24 July 2012 10:07 Like 10 Dislike 6)

“Crimes by foreigners are increasing more and more, it’s a real
problem”(wind**** 24 July 2012 07:16 Like 18 Dislike 0)

“Thai worker LOL He should just disappear and go to the U.S. like
Jaebeom...” (sopu**** 24 July 2012 07:19 Like 1 Dislike 4)

“Tell this Southeast Asian bastard to go back to his country.” (gkst****
24 July 2012 07:18 Like 10 Dislike 5)

“He pretended to be so f***ing polite on TV but this is his true color
zzzzzzzzzzzemeldj Another Southeast Asian worker comes to an end
zzzzzzzzzz” (6bon**** 24 July 2012 07:23 Like 26 Dislike 12)

“His head got too big for a Thai worker. Thought Korea was so easy
because we were all so nice to you? Deport him immediately.”
(jwka**** 24 July 2012 10:00 Like 11 Dislike 2)

“The f***... A good citizen got hurt because of a drunken rotten

Southeast Asian. Go back to Southeast Asia.” (kang**** 24 July 2012 07:26 Like 11 Dislike 2)

“Send all the foreign workers out of our country! There’s no end to the problems and accidents they cause.” (ones**** 24 July 2012 07:25 Like 2 Dislike 0)

“Are Southeast Asian bastards normally this thoughtless?” (poly**** 24 July 2012 07:58 Like 5 Dislike 1)

The online reaction of netizens at the time of the 2012 incident was very negative. There also were vast criticisms of fans who advocated or sympathized with Nichkhun. Most of the comments criticizing Nichkhun were racist, expressing disgust over Nichkhun’s nationality rather than being focused on the DUI incident.

In 2016, Nichkhun appeared on TvN's variety program *SNL* where his DUI incident was made into a comedy skit.¹⁸ Netizen reactions about this show greatly differed from that of 2012. It is true that four years have passed since the incident, however, that cannot fully account for the fact that netizen

¹⁸ http://tv.naver.com/v/1105066/list/91052#comment_focus (Accessed on 29 June 2017)

reactions markedly contained less racist comments and mostly criticized the DUI incident itself, the social controversy that was caused, and the program itself for treating the incident lightly. A handful of comments alluded to Nichkhun's status as a foreigner, such as mentioning "foreign criminal" but they only formed a very small minority with little sympathy from other netizens.

"It's not cool to laugh over a DUI incident. Being a celebrity must be so nice. Stop having criminals on SNL, please..."(Shin Hyojung 2016-09-10 23:56 Like 1606 Dislike 300)

"I think all drunk drivers are potential murderers... Koreans are too lenient about DUI and think it lightly. I really don't understand the fans that put up a shield for Nichkhun... If he's so genuinely sorry about the incident, how can he use it as a material for a skit;"(Strawberry Jam 2016-09-11 00:02 Like 1203 Dislike 153)

"The writer who wrote this skit for laughs should wake the hell up. This is really trashy." (890704 2016-09-11 00:04 Like 1021 Dislike 44)

"I'm a fan myself, but I don't like that this incident is used as a material. This only makes people bash him more kk What's wrong with SNL kk" (GSSH 2016-09-11 00:08 Like 587 Dislike 19)

5. Conclusion

In sum, this study explores the following two aspects. First, this study examined the formation of Thai stereotypes using Orientalism and the Advanced Country discourse and reviewed the role of media and journalism in creating unfounded prejudices against Thais and objectifying them into a uniform image. It was identified that the image of Thai people, which had spread through the media, was that of illegal criminals who adversely affected Korean society. Despite the growing number of Thais who are migrating to Korea due to the influence of Korean Wave and K-Pop, Korean society still perceives them as a problem and as outsiders. Such perception is not only an obstacle to Korean society's progress toward a multicultural society but also directly affects the sustainability of the Korean Wave, especially since Korean society's exclusivist attitude is pinpointed as a major reason behind anti-Korean movements.

To propose a solution to this problem, netizen reactions to Thai K-Pop idols were analyzed to see whether they contributed to changing the prejudiced image of the Thai people among Koreans by elevating the image of the Thais and Thailand. Additionally, this research attempted to predict whether these Thai idols can contribute to the soft power of Thailand as a soft power resource

that can cause a Thai Wave craze in Korean society. It was expected that investigating these two questions will provide a guideline for the sustainable development of the Korean Wave.

The implications of this study are as follows. First, unlike most of the studies on the sustainability of the Korean Wave which analyzed the recipient countries' perceptions, this paper examined the perception of the Korean public who experienced K-Pop's transnational aspect. Since opinions about the Korean Wave and K-Pop idols are generated and quickly disseminated by and among online netizens, the analysis of online netizen reactions conducted in this study provides an alternative perspective for understanding public perceptions. Next, concerning the transnational element of K-POP, this study gave a spotlight to the introduction of non-Korean idols in Korean idol groups as its special focus. In particular, this study presented a case study on the netizen reactions to Thai K-Pop idols who are being subjected to the prejudices of Korean society. Through these methods, it was possible to draw the following conclusions.

First, a meaningful difference was found between the images held of Thai K-Pop idols and the images of Thai foreign workers, marriage migrants, and children of multicultural families that Koreans meet in their daily lives. Idol stars such as Nichkhun, BamBam, and Lisa represent their home country, Thailand, and strive to create a good image of the Thai people in Koreans. As a

result, they were able to induce the Korean public to hold an admiration and appreciation for them, as well as foster greater interest in visiting and knowing more about Thailand. However, at the same time, apart from these Thai K-Pop idols, there still existed negative perceptions towards Thai people in general, who were associated with negative qualifications such as “illegal immigrants.” Thus, while Thai K-Pop idols were able to create a distinct image of Thailand among Koreans, away from the uniform image of Southeast Asia, there existed two distinct groups of Thai people within this image.

However, it would be overreaching to argue that Korean society has not changed at all in its exclusivist attitude towards the Thai people and their negative Thai stereotypes. A large difference was found in the public perception of Nichkhun, who was the first-generation Thai K-Pop idol, in 2008 and that of the second-generation Thai K-Pop idols in the present day, and even between the netizen reactions toward Nichkhun’s DUI incident in 2012 and four years later in 2016. In 2008, netizen comments about Nichkhun were largely prejudiced, including terms such as “illegal migrant,” and focused on his Thai nationality; at present, such comments are almost nonexistent and even when they are made, they receive very few likes. And while most criticisms of Nichkhun's DUI incident in 2012 were based on racial prejudice, most of the criticism made now take an objective standpoint to treat the DUI incident itself

as a problem.

Although this research was unable to uncover whether Thai K-Pop idols had a significant impact on enhancing the image of Thai people, compared to the past, Korean society has experienced a meaningful change, as can be seen from the mere fact that non-Korean K-Pop idols are welcomed by the Korean public. Thai K-Pop idols embody the transnational cultural movement of K-POP. Alongside the increase in Thai people who visit and stay in Korea and their role in spreading Thai culture in Korean society, these idols have been playing the role of Thailand's national representatives and are creating a Thai Wave in Korea. The effect is still small, but in time, it is expected that Thai K-Pop idols will have a tremendous impact on raising the image of Thai people and contribute to Thailand's soft power as a soft power resource.

This study has a few limitations that should be considered by subsequent studies. First, this paper looks at the online reactions of the netizens as its main methodology, however, online comments on most blogs, online cafes, and social networks included comments made by blind fans which were difficult to differentiate. Since such opinions cannot be said to represent the overall public perception, alternative methods such as questionnaires or in-depth interviews should also be conducted to supplement the data.

Also, further research is necessary to discern whether, like the Korean

Wave, the interest in Thai K-Pop idols will indeed lead to an increase in the consumption of food, music, films, and culture of Thailand among Koreans as well as in the number of visitors to Thailand, consequently to affect Thailand's national image and develop into a soft power. The present research explored only a part of the netizen reactions to Thai K-Pop idols, thus, was unable to investigate deeper into this area of research. Therefore, it will be beneficial for future studies to consider these limitations to contribute further in presenting a new perspective to the body of literature on the Korean Wave.

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요약(국문초록)

한류 수용국가들에서 한류의 지속가능성을 희망적으로 보지 않고 반한류 운동이 일어나자 글로벌 엔터테인먼트 기업들은 문화적 거부감을 줄일 수 있는 전략적 방법으로 한국 아이돌 그룹 내 외국인 멤버 영입을 필수적으로 추진하고 있다. 2008년 데뷔한 최초의 태국 출신 아이돌인 닉쿤에 이어 현재 K-POP 시장에는 많은 태국출신의 아이돌이 활발히 활동하고 있다. 태국 아이돌 뿐 만 아니라 한류에 대한 동경과 한국의 경제적 성공사례를 따라 한국에 이주해오는 태국인들은 한국 사회 내에서 태국의 문화를 전파하며 ‘태류(泰流)’ 현상을 일으켰고, 한국 대중들은 K-POP과 한류의 초국가적 문화이동을 경험하게 되었다.

한국사회는 태국을 포함한 동남아시아에서 건너온 이주자 수가 매년 증가하고 있으며, 빠르게 다문화사회로 나아가고 있다. 불행히도 한국은 사회의 변화속도에 맞춰 나아가지 못하고 여전히 타 국가에 대한 배타적 태도와 인식을 버리지 못했으며, 특히 동남아시아인에 대해 근거 없는 편견과 차별이 뚜렷하게 존재하고 있다.

이러한 배경을 바탕으로 본 논문은 첫째, 한국사회가 가지고 있는 태국인에 대한 스테레오타입 이미지의 형성 배경을 오리엔탈리즘과 선진국 담론에서 찾고 미디어 분석을 통해 언론에서 태국인에 대한 편견적 이미지가 대중들 사이에서 어떻게 소통되고 확산되는지 분석한다. 미디어를 통해 생성된 태국인에 대한 부정적 이미지는 한국사회가 다문화사회로 나아가는데 큰 걸림돌이 되고 있으며, 반한류의 가장 큰 원인으로서 ‘한국사회가 타 국가에 배타적이다’ 라는 의견이 있어 한류의 지속가능성에 의문을 제기할 수 있다. 둘째, K-POP에서 활동하는 태국 아이돌에 대해 갖고 있는 대중의 인식을 온라인 네티즌 반응 분석을 통해 알아보고, 태국 아이돌이 한 국가의 소프트 파워 자원으로써 한국 대중들이 가지고 있는 태국인에 대한 스테레오타입 이미지를 바꾸고 태국 국가이미지 제고에 영향을 미치는지 알아본다. 이로서 소프트 자원이 태국의 문화적 소프트 파워로 변화할 수 있는지 전망하고자 한다.

주요어: 한류, K-POP, 태국 출신 아이돌, 태류, 스테레오타입 이미지, 소프트 파워

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