

KOREA AND SWEDEN

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The first contacts:

During the 1720s Lorenz Lange, a Swede in Russian service, met with Korean diplomats in Beijing and wrote a report on Korea. This must have been the first time when Swedes and Koreans had direct contact with each other. At the same time another Swede in Russian service, Johan Philip von Stralenberg, produced the first Swedish map with Korea included.

Travellers and missionaries:

At the end of the 19th century, the first Swedish travellers went to China and Japan, and some of them visited Korea. One was Amanda Gardelin who stayed at the court of king Kojong in the 1880s and cured a member of the royal family for which she received a valuable tea box as a gift. Others who mainly passed through the Korean peninsula during the 1890s were Herman Trotzig, Alexis Kuylenstierna and G.O. Wallenberg. Willy Ason Grebst visited Korea during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 and published the first Swedish book on the country when he came back, while the legendary explorer Sven Hedin spent some days in Seoul in 1908. Between 1935-36, Hedin's colleague Sten Bergman stayed for a longer period in the country exploring the fauna. Furthermore, missionaries from the Salvation Army such as Erland Richter and Verna Olsson stayed in Korea from the 1910s, the last one even up until 1938.

Royal exchanges:

In 1926 the Swedish crown prince, later king Gustav VI Adolf, went to Korea and took part in the excavations in Kyongju where he found a gold crown from the mound today known as Sobong Chong, the Swedish Phoenix. A year later, the Korean crown prince answered by paying a visit to Stockholm.

Hospital personnel and officers:

At the outbreak of the Korean War, the Swedish government sent a field hospital to help the South, Swedish Red Cross Hospital. In 1951 the first contingent which returned home to Sweden founded Swedish-Korean Society as a friendship organisation. In

1954, the field hospital was transformed into the Swedish hospital in Pusan and closed down in 1957 after having seen around one thousand Swedes serving there.

After the armistice, Neutral Nations' Supervisory Committee was organised and stationed in Panmunjom with Sweden as one out of four participating countries. The committee is still active and in place, and since 1953 close to one thousand Swedish officers have served there. In 1961, officers from the committee founded the Korean association in Sweden - today the most important friendship organisation between Sweden and Korea.

In 1958 the Scandinavian National Medical Centre was set up in Seoul as the then most advanced hospital in the country. The hospital was given to the Korean state in 1968 after having seen the service of hundreds of Swedish doctors and nurses.

Immigrants and adoptees:

In 1950, the first Korean immigrant arrived to Sweden, and in 1963 Korean Association was founded for the Korean-Swedes who today count around 1,000 individuals including first and second generationers. In addition, there are two Korean stores, five Korean restaurants and four Korean churches located in Stockholm.

In 1957, the first adopted child from Korea arrived to Sweden, and today the adopted Koreans dominate the ethnic Korean presence in the country with close to 9,000 individuals. In 1986, the Adopted Koreans' Association was founded as the organisation for adopted Koreans in Sweden.

Koreanists:

From the middle of the 1950s, Korean has been taught at university level in Sweden, from 1968 at Stockholm University. In 1989 a professorship in Korean Studies was instituted, and since 1968 more than 500 students have studied Korean, the majority being adopted Koreans.

Diplomats and businessmen:

In 1959, Sweden and Korea initiated diplomatic relations between each other, and in 1975 a Swedish embassy was also installed in North Korea. At the same time, trade exchange started to grow between the two countries, and today Korean Trade Council has an office in Stockholm and its Swedish equivalent an office in Seoul.