

Rural South Koreans' Global Links Grow, Nourished by a Satellite Crop.



Satellite television dishes cover the home of Lee Si-kap, a farmer. Mr. Lee owns 85 dishes, the most of any South Korean.

By CHOE SANG-HUN Published: June 29, 2009

YEONGJU, South Korea — Lee Si-kap, a shy farmer living in this central South Korean town, holds a record: He owns more satellite dishes than any other South Korean — 85 of them, receiving 1,500 satellite television channels from more than 100 countries, some as far away as South Africa and Canada.



Satellite dishes give Yeongju's foreign brides a taste of home.



Mr. Lee's 85 dishes receive 1,500 satellite television channels from more than 100 nations.

To passers-by, Mr. Lee's home stands like an exclamation mark in the otherwise nondescript countryside dotted with apple orchards and ginseng fields. Satellite dishes cover his roof like giant steel mushrooms.

They spread into his front yard and blossom in a field behind his house, some as large as 16 feet in diameter.

Once dismissed as a local eccentric, Mr. Lee has more recently emerged as something of a hero of modest fame, featured on national television as "antenna man." Since late last year, he and thousands of fellow satellite enthusiasts — including the husbands of foreign brides and a few dedicated souls searching for signals from extraterrestrial life forms — have started a campaign to install free satellite dishes for poor foreign brides living in rural South Korea, so they can receive broadcasts from their home countries.

"Thanks to Mr. Lee, I now miss my country, my mother and father less than I used to," said Bui Thi Huang, a 22-year-old bride from Haiphong, Vietnam, who now lives here in Yeongju, about 100 miles southeast of Seoul.

In recent years, the South Korean countryside has had an influx of brides from poorer countries like Vietnam, China and the Philippines. Like Ms. Bui, they marry South Korean farmers who have difficulty finding a spouse because so many young Korean women have rejected rural life and migrated to cities.

In towns like Yeongju, these young foreign brides have become a bedrock of the local economy. They work alongside their husbands in the fields and have brought back a sound that was fast becoming a distant memory among the aging farm population here: crying babies.

In South Korea, which had once prided itself on being a homogeneous society, 4 out of 10 women who married in rural communities last year were foreign born. In Yeongju alone, the number of foreign wives increased by 28 percent in the past year and a half, to 250, half of them from Vietnam.

"These women have a hard time fitting in. The local governments, and the husbands, often focus only on making them 'Korean,' teaching them the Korean language and computer skills," said Mr. Lee, 39, who has never married. "They don't quite understand how isolated these women feel."

When Mr. Lee, who lives with his 80-year-old mother and 97-year-old grandfather, is not toying with his satellite equipment, he tends his pepper and sesame fields or makes the rounds of nearby villages to see if the foreign brides are having any problems with their television reception.

Mr. Lee and his friends still encounter objections from husbands who are determined to shield their foreign brides from any reminders of their native lands, for fear these might only magnify their homesickness. But they are encouraged that many families have reported that watching satellite broadcasts from home actually helps the women to overcome their loneliness and better adjust to life here.

Mr. Lee says his sympathy for foreign brides stems in part from his own experience of feeling cut off from society. He felt deeply hurt when his father abandoned him and his mother when he was a small boy, and, lacking self-confidence, had trouble making friends in his neighborhood and at school. He rarely ventured outside his village, and said he still feared making phone calls.

What saved him, he said, was “music — and satellite television.”

“Music was my only friend,” said Mr. Lee, whose dream is to meet his idol, the American heavy metal rock musician Ronnie James Dio. “And because I couldn’t get much rock music on Korean television, I turned to satellite television.”

Satellite television introduced him to the wider world — to Japanese baseball, life on Pacific islands, Russian folk music and religions in India and Nepal.

He installed his first satellite dish in 1992, when he was 23 and had already returned to farming after receiving a vocational college degree in electronics. Collecting secondhand satellite dishes has since become a hobby that verges on an obsession. When most farmers here look to the sky, they read clouds for weather. When Mr. Lee looks skyward, he says, he imagines satellites in earth orbit. To him, the air is filled with broadcast signals, “like seeds from thistles.”

Farmers here at first did not know what to make of their bachelor neighbor, who listened to heavy metal music, often belting out the lyrics in English, sometimes in Japanese. They would see him on the roof under the blazing sun of summer or under the starry winter sky, fiddling for hours with his satellite equipment.

Although he does not understand most languages on the broadcasts he receives, Mr. Lee said: “It gets addictive. The more dishes you have, the more channels you can get.

“Nothing compares with the joy of catching a new broadcast channel from a faraway country,” he said. “It’s like pulling in a big fish. It’s the excitement of discovering something from outside the boundaries of your usual world.” (ASAS kabisa -Dejumbo)

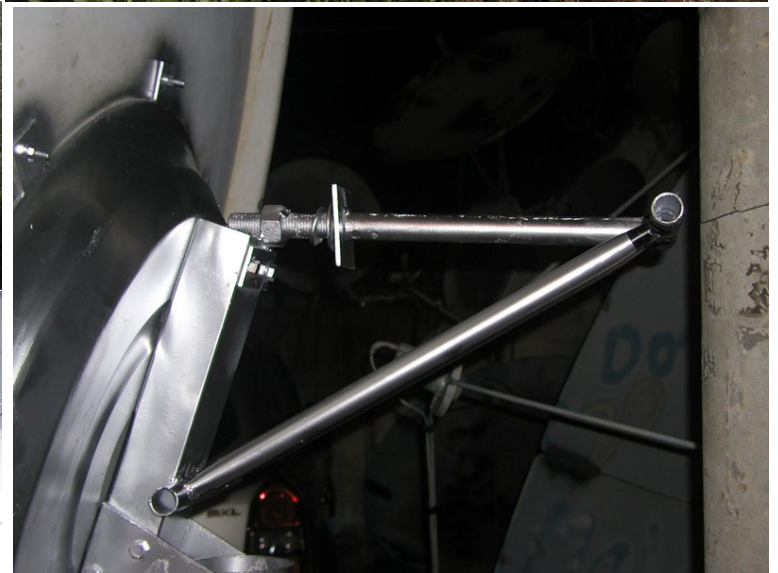
A version of this article appeared in print on June 30, 2009, on page A7 of the New York edition.

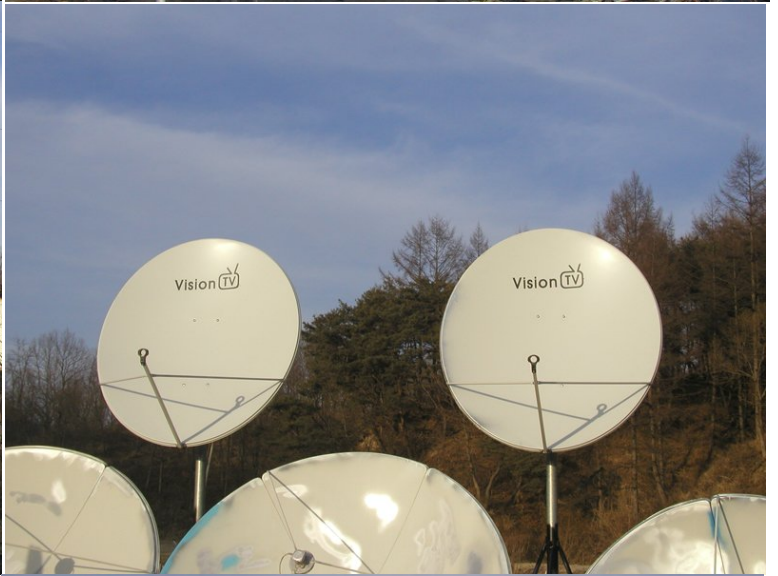
[HASAKATANO DISHES IN KOREA](#)

I have read in some European sat forum about this ASAS addict and here below are pictures of some of his dishes:

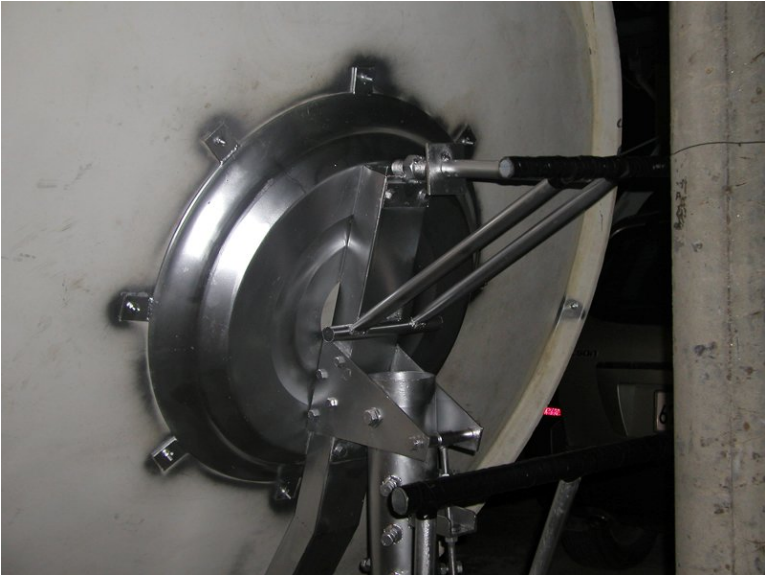












And this is how his control centre looks like:



Collected by Dejumbo