

4. Yonsei University: Korean Language Institute

a. Shawn Thacker, Summer 2019 Final Report

Landing in Korea, I was excited and full of expectations. Having studied Korean at Yale for two semesters and self-studying the language for about another two and a half years prior to that, I was looking forward to finally learning Korean through firsthand experience. Having done another summer immersion program for a different language before coming to Yale, I knew that this would be an invaluable experience. Landing in Incheon Airport, I was ready for language progress, cultural immersion, new friends, and memories to last a lifetime. After such a long flight, above all I was looking forward to my first meal in Korea.

This past summer I spent 10 weeks at Yonsei University's Korean Language Institute, taking four Korean classes and trying my best to engage outside of class with anyone and everyone that would talk to me to improve my proficiency. In the following few paragraphs I will detail four aspects of my time in Korea: academics, living arrangements, life outside of class, and transportation/travel.

Academics:

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Yonsei KLI. In terms of the class itself, I was in level 5 and my class was composed of some 10 other students of various backgrounds/ages from countries ranging from Italy and the UK to Vietnam and Japan. Each day class was divided into four 50 minute sections with two different teachers. During the first two sections we went over grammar and vocabulary from the textbook and did exercises/created sentences with the material we learned. Much of the time was devoted to detailed explanation of the usage and nuance of the words and grammar structures we learned, and after trial and error on the part of the students, the teacher would explain what made the grammatically correct sentences we constructed sound unnatural to native speakers. We often also learned vocabulary applicable to our interests or in-class discussion that was not found in the textbook.

The latter half of the day was devoted to reading and speaking practice, and an elective course which I will explain afterwards. For the reading/speaking periods another teacher comes to the classroom and we read passages from another textbook. Although these passages have key

vocabulary to learn they are often extremely technical and use very context-specific words and phrases (at least in the advanced levels). However, the teacher went over each reading sentence-by-sentence, explaining any difficult points and vocabulary. We often stopped after certain paragraphs or sentences to summarize and talk about our own opinions on the text in group discussion. Some days the afternoon portion of classes were rather unstructured and we spent the majority of the time having natural discussions guided by the teacher. We also went over Korean proverbs and adages.

All students taking advanced levels are required to take an elective course taught in Korean that meets during the third period time slot three times a week. Topics range from Korean political history and essay writing to history and learning the basic Chinese characters used in Korean. With the elective class you are put into a new classroom with students from other sections of the advanced classes. I personally chose the Korean political history class and really enjoyed my time. We learned about different presidential eras in modern Korean history, important historical events like the Gwangju Uprising, and even got to watch two relevant films.

Overall, the academics were fairly balanced, and this program was the only one that offered elective courses as part of the curriculum. We also completed several projects and debates over the course of the program. I never felt overwhelmed by the amount of homework, and in my level lots of the work was optional for the students to decide to do at their own discretion. The teachers went above and beyond simply teaching out of the textbook and gave the best explanations and examples of difficult grammar points I've ever encountered. I felt like I got to know the students in my class quite well and also formed close connections with my teachers.

Living Situation:

For the majority of the time, I chose to live in an apartment in a neighborhood called Changcheon-dong, directly across from the Yonsei campus and in the heart of the bustling center of Sinchon. I lived with two other Yalies who were in Korea for language programs. We booked our place through Airbnb and each had our own rooms plus a shared living room and kitchen. We were in a very residential area that was surprisingly quiet considering its proximity to the heart of Sinchon. Even on weekdays, there would be dance performances and concerts in the middle of Sinchon, with college students frequenting the many restaurants and bars until the early hours of the morning. One of my housemates went to Yonsei with me and the other commuted to Seoul National University. From what he told me and my personal experience, there is no comparison between the diverse range of opportunities, restaurants, and events

happening in and around Sinchon and the scene around SNU in Gwanak-gu. The apartment was well within walking distance of the language institute.

Since our programs were on different schedules, we moved out of the apartment in August and I stayed for the remainder of my time in a gosiwon right off the main road through Sinchon leading to Yonsei University. This spot was surprisingly affordable and even closer to the school than our apartment was. I had a small room on the third floor with all the necessities for living as a student in Korea. It contained a small bed, a desk and chair, a TV, a private bathroom sectioned off within the room, a closet, and enough storage space for two suitcases. The room also had intermittent air conditioning on a schedule supplemented with a fan. The shared facilities included a stocked kitchen and a washing machine. This was a unique and surprisingly comfortable experience that I recommend if you want to save some money. The only drawback is the small size and necessity for quietness given the close proximity of other guests combined with rather thin walls.

Life Outside Class:

The campus of Yonsei itself was beautiful. In the heart of Seoul, Yonsei had copious amounts of greenery and its buildings near the original quadrangle centered around Underwood Hall seemed to have more ivy than the entirety of the Ivy League combined. I often found myself studying at the two main libraries at Yonsei. As an admitted caffeine addict, I spent lots of my time searching for cafes in Seoul and was encountered many enjoyable coffee shops ideal for different activities like studying, conversing, or simply drinking coffee. Living in Sinchon, I was also right next to Hongdae, which is also known as a center of activity for college students and youth. There was always something going on between the two locations and I never found myself bored. There was an abundance of great restaurants in the Sinchon area, and I always was able to try new foods at different restaurants and savor the many flavors of Korean cuisine.

During my time in Korea I also ended up completing an internship at an educational foundation/think tank, performing policy research and helping coordinate international educational conferences. At one point I even met with Dean Chun, as he came to the institute for a conference we planned. This meant that a lot of my free time was consumed by both the internship work and the 50 minute commute on the Line 2 subway all the way to Gangnam. In general, I think this was a really good experience for me as I was able to see what an actual Korean workplace was like and put my language skills to use in the real world in a professional setting. I don't think doing an internship is for everyone, or even most people, but I got lucky in

that I was able to balance this opportunity with my academic and social life and use it as another means of language learning and cultural immersion.

Travel and Transportation:

Since I was so close to the language institute, it wasn't necessary to take any public transportation to get to class, although I did end up taking a bus occasionally for convenience. It was also possible to enter the main Yonsei campus and take a bus from their underground parking area to get to the language institute, which was admittedly a little removed from the center of the university. Yonsei is located between Ewha University, Sogang University, and Hongik University in a very happening area. There are two close subway stations from the university and many bus stops to get you anywhere around the city. I recommend downloading Naver Maps for convenience. Similarly, there is a Kakao taxi app that works as basically the Uber of Korea. It's vital to purchase a T-money card, which serves as a universal payment system for public transportation and taxis and can also be used in convenience stores as payment. The Yonsei student ID actually already includes the function of a public transit card, and can be topped up at any subway station like a normal card. The ID they provided us with also came with a free account at Woori Bank and thus was able to be used as a debit card, too. I found this extremely convenient compared to carrying around cash.

Over the summer I also traveled to Jeollabuk-do to the beach in Buan and took the KTX high-speed train to go to both Busan and Gyeongju. Traveling by rail and by bus in Korea is very easy and generally concentrated at the terminal of Seoul Station. It was awesome to be able to experience different parts of Korea and arrive in such little time. Gyeongju is very cultural and includes historical sites such as temples and monuments from the Silla Kingdom, while Busan is a coastal metropolitan city more reminiscent of Seoul, although with its unique flavor and local accent and food.

Conclusion:

I can't thank the Richard U. Light Foundation enough for their generosity in providing me this wonderful, engaging experience in Korea this past summer. I was able to improve my Korean language abilities, engage with and learn firsthand about Korean culture, live in one of the most happening parts of Seoul, immerse myself in a real Korean workplace environment, and eat some of the best food in my life. I'm truly grateful for this experience and hope that you choose Yonsei too!

b. Jennifer Yoon, Summer 2019 Final Report

The last time I went to Korea was 15 years ago. Coming back to a country my family once called home felt odd and foreign. My first day in Korea was fun yet scary. I got to the airport and immediately had to navigate my way through the large space using only Korean. After finally getting my luggage, I had to figure out how to get to Hongdae from Incheon. Thankfully, I'd watched some Youtube videos about how to take the AREX from Incheon, and just followed some screenshots I took in order to board the train.

The problems started right when I got off the scenic subway ride. Hongdae is a bustling, touristy area and with all the people crowding the area it can be hard to navigate your way around the neighborhood. My data wasn't work yet, and I couldn't use Naver Maps to find my apartment, so of course I got lost. It took me at least an hour after getting off the train to find my apartment which should've only taken me 10 minutes to walk to from the subway exit. After getting settled in my apartment, I explored the area and felt a little less anxious about my upcoming months in Korea.

I chose to live in an Airbnb with two other Yale Light Fellows. We lived in the half-basement of a small apartment complex in the middle of Hongdae. Our living situation had its benefits and pit-falls. The good thing about living here was that it was so close to everything from shopping centres, markets, to schools. My roommates and I all chose different programs, but our apartment was pretty equidistant from all of the schools. The bad thing about living in Hongdae was that it could be loud sometimes on the weekends and that it was pretty expensive to live here than expected. The area our schools were located in had higher rent prices than that of the neighborhood near SNU, so we ended up spending a lot of money on rent in comparison to other Light Fellows.

My first week was spent unpacking, exploring Seoul, and seeing family that I hadn't seen since I was in elementary school. One good thing about Korea was that buying items for living were pretty cheap. Thanks to Daiso and supermarkets like Homeplus, I purchased towels, clothes hangers, and groceries for shockingly low prices. Daiso literally has everything you need ranging from toilet paper to dishes to shoes. I had not as much trouble as I thought I would settling in because everything was so accessible and affordable. Also, getting to places was fairly easy due to navigating apps like Naver Maps or Kakao Maps. Naver Maps provided me with detailed directions to all the places I needed to go to; the app even told me which subway exit to take. It didn't take my friends and I too long to figure out how to get to the tourist attractions. Additionally, since Yelp does not work in Korea, I found places to eat using Naver Blog and Mango Plate. There are many helpful apps that make traveling in Korea a lot easier.

After exploring Seoul day after day, classes began. Yonsei started the program by first holding an orientation to allow students to become acquainted with the campus and each other. I

met people from Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan here. We also took a placement test before this. Yonsei's KLI felt well organized from the start, providing students with detailed maps of the campus as well as brochures regarding potential extracurricular activities to participate in during the school term. Overall, first impressions wise, Yonsei seemed organized and fun. I was very excited to start school.

The first day of class was a bit awkward. Everyone in my class, a class of 12, was pretty quiet, but everyone seemed nice. However, as the summer progressed, we all got really close and went out to eat lunch or hang out at cafes. I really enjoyed my classroom atmosphere and getting to know the people I met through the program. Everyone came from a different part of the world and had different reasons for taking Korean. It was fun listening to all their stories and creating bonds that hopefully last for the next few years.

Aside from the bonds I formed with the people in the program, I enjoyed the academics of the program. My teachers were very passionate about teaching Korean and followed a very structured lesson plan that allowed me to learn a lot in a short amount of time. They were encouraging and enthusiastic, which made attending class enjoyable. I felt comfortable making mistakes and was able to polish my Korean through their thoughtful constructive criticisms.

Although there were many good things about the program including its efforts to facilitate friendships in class as well as comfortable learning environment, there were some weaknesses in Yonsei's KLI program. The language school itself is a bit removed from the main campus of Yonsei University. This made interacting with actual Yonsei students a bit difficult. I felt that I had to go out of my way to make friendships with Yonsei students, unlike at SNU where they assign you a buddy who attends SNU. The physical barrier did pose a challenge in making Yonsei friends, but it wasn't impossible to make such friends. The director of the program actually helped me meet native Korean students. He was very sweet and helpful. It seems that if you ask the administration to put you in contact with Yonsei students, they will. This is not written anywhere formally though, so if you want to make Yonsei friends, you have to seek this out actively.

Other than that, Yonsei's KLI met and exceeded some of my expectations. I didn't expect to become so close to my classmates and form such fond memories. I also didn't expect to improve my speaking skills as much as I did. Before Yonsei's KLI, I believed that my speaking skills were good enough because I spoke Korean at home for so long. However, I learned of my unconscious mistakes I made when I spoke and was able to correct many of my bad habits in Korean speech. I chose the program to help with my writing skills because of its strong focus on written Korean and grammar, but I left also improving my speaking skills. I also chose Yonsei's KLI for its central location. I felt that SNU, the other program I was highly considering attending, was removed from places in Seoul that I wanted to explore. Because Yonsei University is close to so many other universities and hubs for activities, I was able to learn Korean not only in the classroom but also outside. In Korea, I wanted to be able to interact with other native students and learn more about the modern culture. Sinchon, the city Yonsei

University is located in, is connected to many important parts of Seoul through the line 2 subway, making my goals very feasible. Ultimately, I felt that I made the right decision for myself in choosing KLI over another Korean program.

Although I was unsure about studying abroad in Korea this summer, I'm glad I did. I learned a lot about the language and feel more confident in my Korean language abilities now. I felt that I not only learned a lot about the language but also learned about Korean culture and the culture that my family is embedded in. I also gained a better sense of my identity as a Korean-American from spending such an extended period of time in Korea. I was able to learn about the nuances in Korean culture through exploring Seoul and the peripheral provinces. Because of this wonderful and eye-opening experience, I am more excited to learn about Korea this year in my seminars and hope to contribute meaningful insight in discussions.

For future Light fellows, my one piece of advice is to be open to anything and everything. One thing that I wasn't used to doing before Korea is prioritizing experiences with the people around me. At school, I always felt so pressured to focus solely on my academics, especially as a pre-med. However, in Korea, I didn't feel that same academic pressure and really had a chance to enjoy the country and the company around me. I said yes to going out, to traveling to a different neighborhood no matter how far it was, and sometimes missed class for once-in-a-lifetime trips with friends. I think that taking chances is the most important thing and that you should be open to everything whether it's going to a new place or trying a new food that you initially might not like. I think my favorite memory in Korea was camping in Ganghwado with my family and some friends. I'd never camped before and always turned down previous opportunities to camp because I didn't want to spend a night in the wilderness. But at the request of my mom, who happened to be in Korea for a few days on a business trip, I went camping near Incheon. I didn't want to be outside in the humid heat surrounded the biggest bugs I'd seen in my life, but I ended up having so much fun. I got to see an outdoor market that I'd learned about in class, went hiking on a mountain trail that led to the beach, saw the North Korean shore, and explored a historic Buddhist temple. I felt like I experienced so many different parts of Korean culture in that short 3-day trip and will never forget the memories I made there. Anything you do in Korea will be a great experience, even if you don't see it at first, so just take a chance and try to be open-minded. Korea is so beautiful, in so many different ways. Take any chance, whether solo or with a group, to explore it during your time there.