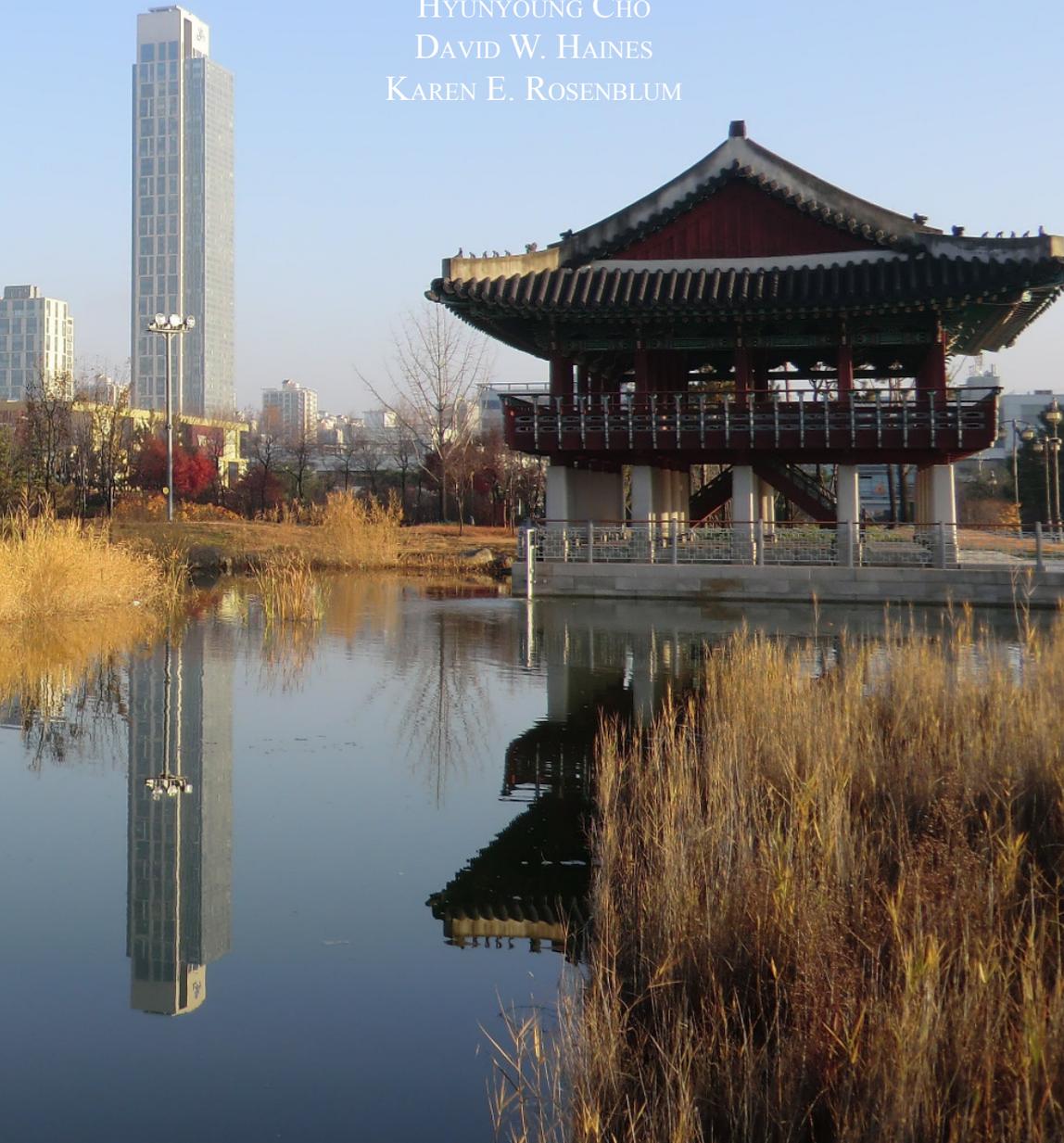


DIVERSITY AT MASON

A NEW KIND OF INTERNATIONAL

EDITED BY

HYUNYOUNG CHO
DAVID W. HAINES
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A George Mason Publication on Diversity

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From the Diversity Research Group, the Offices of University Life,
and Mason Korea

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SERIES PREFACE

Founded in the spring of 2004, the Diversity Research Group (DRG) has changed with time. Its initial structure involved once-a-semester meetings of the many faculty, staff, and administrators across the university who shared an interest in the topic of diversity. Recognizing that the university was both highly diverse and diverse in unusual ways, the DRG seemed a good location from which to consider the impact of diversity on higher education.

Over the years, members of the group collaborated on focus group sessions with students, analysis of institutional data, presentations at professional meetings, professional publications, undergraduate research projects, and the *Diversity at Mason* series, which included *Student Reflections* (2006), *Valuing Written Accents* (2007), *The Fulbright Experience* (2008), *Student Research on Student Identity* (2009), and *The Pursuit of Transformative Education* (2011).

This sixth edition in the series explores the evolving meaning of “international” from the perspective of freshmen students at the university’s new Mason Korea campus. In so doing, this edition of *Diversity at Mason* acknowledges vital dimensions of domestic diversity that have been explored in previous DRG projects – including, most recently, the Science of Diversity project – while exploring the intersection of diversity and internationalization in higher education.

The Science of Diversity Project (2012-2014), another collaborative project emerging from the DRG, engaged over 25 undergraduates as active participants in all aspects of a social science research project focused on how diversity manifests itself and is experienced by undergraduates at GMU. The results of interviews, surveys, and a mapping project yielded important themes including: (1) a shared understanding of diversity as a “surface level” feature in our context, (2) a habit of self-segregation among peers, and (3) the generally supportive nature of encounters with faculty and staff. The implications of these findings for local considerations of diversity are extended by the current volume’s focus on the experiences of Mason Korea students.

“A New Kind of International” opens and closes with reflections from the Peer and Residential Advisors who were in residence at Mason Korea for its inaugural year (Spring and Fall of 2014); it also

includes essays from several Fairfax students – also freshmen – who pursued “study abroad” at the campus. The editors of this volume – Hyunyoung Cho, David Haines, and Karen Rosenblum – were part of Mason Korea’s instructional faculty in its first year. Together, these powerful student reflections challenge the DRG and the university to continue to work toward understanding diversity in our community.

Karen Rosenblum

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Convener, Diversity Research Group

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Department of Psychology
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FOREWORD

We were extremely fortunate to be the first international peer advisors attending the inaugural semester of the Mason Korea campus. Receiving the invitation to be an international peer advisor was an honor as well as a great responsibility, and we were excited to begin! We both have background and experience with South Korea and Korean culture which proved very useful to us. We were able to overcome culture shock fairly quickly and move on to focusing on being a link between Mason in Virginia and Mason Korea and fostering the Mason spirit in the students at the Songdo campus. We made many great memories while at Mason Korea and would like to relate some of them to you so that you can get a feel for what it was like to be a part of something so new and special.

We did not have many expectations before we went to Mason Korea. The campus was new not just for us but also for Mason, so we knew there would be a lot of things that would need to be accomplished when we got there. We went to several training sessions in preparation for our roles as international peer advisors, but even so we were not really sure how our roles would play out. In essence, we left the U.S. with few expectations but a lot of excitement and anticipation. Upon arriving, our initial feelings were right: the brand new venture that was Mason Korea needed a lot of nurturing. Mason Korea's inaugural semester would be the semester where we laid down the foundation and steered the campus in the direction that GMU wanted it to go. Looking back, we realize that our position as international peer advisors played a large role in that.

Opening week truly marked the beginning of our Mason Korea experience. It started off with orientation, where we got to meet all of the newly admitted Mason Korea students and bond with the faculty, staff, and more. This all culminated in the most memorable part of opening week, the inaugural ceremony, which both President Cabrera and Provost Stearns attended (we even got selfies with them!). We met a lot of people, ate a lot of good food, and listened to discussions among some remarkable individuals. At one point, Rachel was even escorting our Mason Patriot mascot around because he couldn't see through the head piece; she then became the photographer, as stu-

dents and families took pictures with him. Although it was a chaotic day, Gabrielle remembers that alongside the cake commissioned for the event, there was a rice cake decorated with the Mason logo in green and gold – a seemingly small moment, but it signified to her the unique blend of culture present in the new campus. The inaugural ceremony was busy, crowded, exciting, and even a little bit stressful; it showed us just how much went into getting Mason Korea ready for take off. It was inspiring to see how much dedication the faculty and staff had in making the new campus and its students successful!

The semester itself was filled with making new friendships and increasing our own knowledge by learning from the personal experiences of our fellow students. In order to foster our bonds with the students and the students' bonds with one another, one of our most important jobs as international peer advisors was to create and plan events where the students could have fun and feel like a part of the Mason community. Students who travel from Mason in Virginia to Mason Korea have to be aware that there are a lot of material differences between living in the U.S. and living in Korea, not just cultural ones. This difference was even bigger for us as international peer advisors since we required specific supplies for the different programs we created. We quickly realized that the resources that were readily available to us in the U.S. were not so easy to come by in Korea. Something as simple as cookie decorating required extensive research online and a trip into one of the only places in Seoul (in a small alley) that sold baking goods such as frosting and sprinkles. A tie-dye day required a trip to a specific arts and crafts store in Seoul; it had only a limited selection of clothing dye, and white t-shirts had to be ordered online. These were things that we could not have anticipated while we were in the U.S., but provided that much more gratification when we were able to accomplish them. Of all the programs we created, our favorites were Tie Dye Day, Uno Night (we had several of them throughout the semester), and a service trip. The service trip was a great way to get students involved in the local community, let the community get to know us, and help us bond together. We started the day by cleaning up a local hiking spot with other volunteers, and finished it with a movie at the local theater. We got to know the students better and gained an appreciation for the complexity and beauty of the world that we live in through the stories that we shared with one another.

Aside from appreciating Korean culture and the Songdo campus, we wanted our students to learn about the main campus in Fairfax, where they will spend a year over the course of their college careers. In order to accomplish this, we hosted events such as the campus's popular I-Cafes and Mason Day. At the I-Cafe our students presented pictures and stories from their experiences in countries such as Russia, New Zealand, and China. Mason Day was also a great way for us to connect Mason Korea's students to the Mason spirit and community. While not on the same day as Mason Day in Virginia, we were lucky to be able to host it as spring descended upon campus. We had students invite their friends and families for a day of fun and celebration. We even had a churro truck and a taco truck! Some of the faculty brought their children, and Rachel was a popular figure as an animal balloon artist. Mason Day was a great way for us to share what student life is like at Mason in Virginia.

Just like the students, the campus itself was also incredibly unique. There are five universities from around the world sharing the same physical place. Coming from the suburban Fairfax campus to a campus surrounded by skyscrapers was interesting. Our dorm rooms were on the 25th floor; we were even able to see the twinkling of the U.N. building and other places half a mile from campus. We met other international students who were attending the other universities and gained even more knowledge about other parts of the world. We took frequent trips into Seoul to explore, eat, and shop. We were able to take a class trip to the Cisco Experience Center in Songdo to see technological developments that would soon appear in households across Korea. Our visit to Cisco was a great experience, since we attend a university that promotes innovation. Since we were also students in a Korean culture class, we went on field trips with our professor to historical sites in Seoul and got our own private tours. It was fascinating to read about a palace or village and its history on Monday, and then take a trip to see it on Wednesday! As a student at Mason Korea, not only do you learn about other parts of the world and the people who have lived there, but you also learn a great deal about Korean culture itself. While we already had extensive experience with Korean culture prior to attending Mason Korea, there was always something new to learn from the Korean students themselves. We hope you will learn some new and exciting things from the students whose essays have been included in this compendium just as we have, and we are confident

that these students will show you just how precious and unique Mason Korea is.

The essays contained in this collection are representative of the diverse backgrounds and life experiences of students at Mason Korea. They remind us that no matter where in the world George Mason University is, its students are its most important asset.

Rachel Rockrohr, Class of 2015

Gabrielle Hanley, Class of 2016

I

BECOMING INTERNATIONAL

Jinah Hong

THANKFUL FOR CHANGE

Koreans' passion for education was one of the leading impetuses of Korea's economic success. Many experts, including President Obama, have noticed the positive outcome of Korean education and encouraged others to emulate our passion for education. However, just like the old saying "every coin has two sides," the overwhelming competition involved in achieving academic success has brought serious problems for the current generation of Koreans.

Korean students generally spend most of their time studying, and parents encourage students to achieve better scores by putting them into various private tutoring institutes or academies (*hagwon*) and hiring private tutors. Because of this academic pressure, Korean students nowadays become very stressed by trying to satisfy their own and their parents' expectations. Parents also get stressed, just like the students. Many television documentaries have shown the daily lives of "Gangnam" mothers (Gangnam is the richest district in Korea). These moms devote their time to meeting numerous instructors and other mothers to create study groups and identify better private academies for their children. Thus, mothers and their children have little or even no time to talk to and understand each other, or for the children to bond with their siblings. They hurt each other by expressing their own mental tiredness.

No matter how many times Korean news and TV programs report and prove the flaws of the current education system, in reality it has not changed a bit but is getting worse. Among OECD nations, Korean students occupy the lowest position on the happiness factor and the highest on the suicide rate, but parents still seek more and better education under the doubtful label of "for my child's bright future."

My parents are typical Korean parents. Because I was the first child, they had massive expectations for me and my success. They believed that my siblings looked up to me, so if I became a good example in every aspect, especially in academics, they would follow the path I walked on. When I did not do well on my exams, my parents were mad at me and asked me to study more to recover from bad grades. I was so stressed that I had migraines. From when I was five or six years old, I spent five hours at school and five hours in private academies. When I got back home I had to study six subjects, and as I got older I had to deal with more subjects. However, compared to other kids in metropolitan areas, the amount of education my siblings and I received was nothing.

Thankfully, my parents started to change when I left Korea to study. After I graduated elementary school, I went to Los Angeles to attend elementary school for two weeks. There I was amazed by how freely students walked around the classroom and how close teachers and students were, and also that students seemed not to be stressed about learning. I asked my parents to send me to America, and they accepted my request easily. Thus, as soon as I turned fifteen, I started my freshman year in America.

My parents did not change their minds and thoughts overnight. However, over four years, they gradually changed their views on education and applied the change to their behavior. Before, when I lived in Korea, I would return home after midnight. For that reason, I did not have a lot of time to talk to my parents. Also, the short conversations between my parents and me were primarily about exams and quizzes and other academic materials, which made all of us tired. I was bored with hearing my parents' advice on academics so sometimes my parents and I even argued and yelled at each other.

However, when I lived a far distance away from my parents, alone with completely new people and in a new area, what my parents asked me about were my health, daily life, and my relationships with the host family and my friends. They sometimes asked me about my grades, but the frequency of asking me about academics was a lot less. Their concern about me was changed and, therefore, we argued less and we started to have more pleasing and longer conversations. By having more talk, both my parents and I realized that current happiness and family bonds are just as important as running for my future. Thus, my parents no longer forced me to study, and we had more time

to travel and talk every summer when I got back home. Even when I made plans to go to an SAT preparatory school or a TOEFL academy during summer, rather than actively searching for a good place, they just watched me make plans and study.

Living in the United States also changed who I hang out with. I had a few close friends from middle school. However, once I left for the States, the only time I was able to see them was the summer vacation. Furthermore, my friends were busy studying to get into universities and I attended the private academies, so we barely had time to meet. This was not a big problem. The biggest problem was that we realized that even when we met, we shared no commonalities. When my friends talked about how to prepare their college application or gossiped about their classmates, I could not join them. Also, when I talked about my life in America, I felt like they no longer blended in with me. While my friends were at high school, I attended an SAT preparatory school or a TOEFL academy. In those, I met many friends who had been studying in America. I was able to be friends with them quickly because we shared so many experiences. Even though I did not go to the same high school with them, what we experienced at school, in the dorm, or with host families was similar. Moreover, I had a wider range of friends, because at school I was able to meet diverse ethnic groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Swedish, Czech, and many more.

The original purpose of my parents sending me to the United States was to make me more globalized and widen my perspective. I am not sure if I satisfied my parents' goal or not. However, the change in my parents' views of education and stronger trust in me helped me to be more motivated and think positively. Furthermore, by spending time with a diverse group of students, I was able to absorb and share ideas with them. While everyone makes an effort to develop themselves in some ways, I believe this experience of positive change that I had will help me accept difference and change more easily than others, which is the necessity of becoming a globalized person.

Saemi Park

GOING TO NEW ZEALAND

English means a lot in Korea. I wanted to learn and be good at English. That was my only reason for going to New Zealand after my middle school graduation. Until then, I had been just a typical Korean middle school student who only studied English to get a good grade in school. English was nothing more than any other subject. However, this one simple idea that I wanted to be good at English made my life completely different than I would have imagined when I was young.

It is largely because of my family and friends that a small frog in a big pond could see the broader world. When I was in middle school, I had friends who were diligent and hard working. Because of them, I could study well and get decent grades throughout my school years. When I was about to graduate middle school, some of my friends went to the United States to study. That made me think that I would be behind my friends by the time they came back to Korea after their study in America. That was my motivation to study English harder and my decision to go abroad to experience something new. My parents always taught me to try and learn as many things as I can. They were worried at first when I told them that I wanted to study abroad, but they soon changed their minds. Once they decided to send me abroad, it didn't take that much time to prepare and get on the plane. Just like my friends, I wanted to go to the United States to study, but because my parents had an acquaintance in New Zealand, my destination was decided to be New Zealand, not America.

My four years of New Zealand life was the turning point in my entire life. I consciously and unconsciously learned a lot of things during that time and it paved the way for me to grow up as an independent person. I went to New Zealand all by myself and stayed with a homestay family for the first two years. Before I went to New Zealand, I was a very family-oriented person and had never stayed away from my family more than a week. Therefore meeting new people and living with strangers was very difficult for me to adjust to. Also, even at school I had to make new friends, because there was not even a single person that I knew at first. I learned how to communicate and socialize with other people who were not my family. Therefore that was, in

a way, the first experience of making my own relationships with other people in the society without anyone's help. At first I was not good at talking with people that I met for the first time but, as time went by, I learned from people and improved little by little.

I also learned how to be responsible. Because there was no one to take care of me like my parents, I had to do a lot of things by myself, from choosing what classes to take to even managing money. When I lived with my parents, I always asked their advice for every single thing, and they did almost everything for me. However, since my parents were not there, I had to think and decide what was best for me starting when I was fifteen years old. In addition to that, two years later my younger sister came to New Zealand, so then I also had to take care of her. Even though she was not that young, because there was only her and me, I was almost like her parent/caregiver. At the same time, my sister gave me comfort too. Before she came to New Zealand, I always felt I was alone even though I had my host family to live with. Once my sister and I lived together, I felt that I always had someone next to me to talk with, which made me enjoy my high school life even more.

After I graduated high school, I had to come back to Korea because of several reasons. Of course, as an international student in New Zealand, university tuition was a lot more expensive than high school tuition. Moreover, that was the time when my parents started their own business after my dad retired from the company that he had worked for more than twenty years. For those multiple reasons, I couldn't pursue my education continuously in New Zealand and came back to Korea. After that, I had a hard time preparing for Korean universities. For my high school years, I had a hard time adjusting to New Zealand culture and lifestyle, but by the time I got accustomed to New Zealand, I came back to Korea. When I came back to Korea I had to re-adjust to the Korean lifestyle.

There were a lot of differences that I did not expect. It was, in a way, another culture shock to me. I, who had gotten used to a laid-back lifestyle in New Zealand, had to live with a busy schedule and study until late at night in Korea, and also I had to compete with Korean students who are well-trained to study and get good grades on tests. In New Zealand, I learned English naturally, without that much pressure. It was even fun and it even made me proud. However, when I studied for university in Korea, English was not like something I learned

naturally and felt proud of. I had to study English harder to get good grades from tests and it gave me stress. It became just a means to get into a university to me.

By the time I became accustomed to such a life, by chance, I heard that there was going to be an American university founding a campus in Korea. I had not heard about the school before, but because I was getting tired of studying to get higher scores, I applied to George Mason University without much of an expectation of getting in. Luckily I got accepted, and that became the second turning point in my life. My life in New Zealand was international because I stayed in a foreign country with foreigners and learned a foreign language. However, my life at George Mason University is also international, but in a different way. After such a hard but precious experience, there was a complete change in my mindset. I broadened my perspective and ways of seeing the world. I became a person who puts effort and value into what is in front of me.

Caren Poon

INNOVATION IN EDUCATION AND CULTURE

In November of 2013, I made one of the biggest decisions of my life. I decided to study abroad at George Mason University's global campus in Songdo, Korea. I learned about Songdo through a series of coincidences, and didn't even know about it until a week before I decided to go. And I didn't really know very much about Korea even after I made my decision. I wasn't sure if studying in Songdo would benefit me because I knew absolutely nothing about the campus. Now after two semesters in Songdo, I will say that coming to Songdo was one of the best decisions I have ever made. At Mason Korea, I have experienced a whole new learning style and also learned a new definition of "international."

I was an ordinary girl who didn't really stand out and wasn't really sure what I wanted to do with my future. I have always been fairly "international" but having a multicultural background like mine is not that unusual in America. I was born in the United States, went to kindergarten in China, elementary school in Hong Kong, and middle and

high school in the United States. The only thing that was special about me was my love for foreign languages and my skills with them. I am able to speak five languages including Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, English, and conversational Japanese and Korean.

One of my high school teachers told me that my language skills would help me, and that I should do something like Global Affairs in college. Therefore, I declared my major as Global Affairs at George Mason University in Virginia. During my first semester there, the majority of my classes were the required core classes, so I experienced much about what the Global Affairs major is like. But the only class that I was truly interested in was Korean 101, and that particular class led me to the opportunity that I so greatly appreciate now. Switching to Mason Korea has been a life changer for me. My biggest reason for going to Korea was to discover what I really wanted to do in life. I felt like I needed to change my life and give myself a challenge to know myself better.

At Mason Korea, I had many opportunities for experiences. The campus provides a unique learning environment for the students. Mason Korea shares the Incheon Global Campus with a few other universities and the global campus of Yonsei University is also very close. The location allows Mason Korea students to interact with native Korean students and also with foreign students from all around the world. (The universities that are currently at Incheon Global Campus include George Mason University, Ghent University, the University of Utah, and the State University of New York.) In Virginia, Mason students also have the opportunity to meet students from other universities but they rarely have the chance to get to know them well. In Korea, however, Mason students share dormitories with the other universities. Instead of just knowing other students, Mason Korea students can actually live with them. Since these universities with students from all over the world share one campus, students at Mason Korea have the chance to learn about not only American culture but cultures all over the world.

The students can be divided into two groups. One group includes the American students from Fairfax, and the other group includes the native Korean students. Since Mason Korea is an American university, many of us assumed that the American students would need to help the Korean students get used to the American education style. I thought so before I went to Korea but, after spending a few days at Mason

Korea, I changed my view. The majority of the Korean students have some experience of studying abroad in foreign countries. Therefore, they barely need any help studying in English. But both Korean and American students need to work together to get used to the education style at Mason Korea. The unique location and staff diversity make the education style a fusion of American-style and Korean-style education. This interesting education mix makes students work together to create a unique learning style.

The two semesters that I spent at Mason Korea allowed me to know more about myself and expand my knowledge about other cultures. In America, foreign students often come to experience American culture. But at Mason Korea, both native Korean and American students work together to create a culture of their own. Even though Mason in Virginia has a very diverse student body, Mason Korea students have more opportunities to interact with each other because of the small number of students. Since students come from different cultural backgrounds, we are able to learn from each other and create a new culture of our own. The establishment of Mason Korea is a challenge in many ways. The organization of the students, courses, and resources has had to start from scratch. As a member of the founding students of Mason Korea, I grew with the school. My stay in Korea did not only teach me book knowledge but also life knowledge.

The word “international” can have many meanings. To me, “international” means to learn and understand other cultures. At Mason Korea, I not only learned about other cultures but helped start a new culture. The opportunity to be in the founding generation of a school is not common; helping to set up a new school is a wonderful experience. Working and knowing people from different cultural backgrounds allows students to be more prepared for a globalizing society. Through study at Mason Korea, I learned more about myself and also new ways of thinking. “International” is no longer just learning and understanding other culture, it is creating new culture with the knowledge of existing culture. The innovative idea of Mason Korea has given “international” a new definition.

Kelly Jiyeon Han

A SPECIAL BLENDING OF CULTURES

This is a story about my life at Mason Korea (MK) and how it changed my life and me. I joined Mason Korea in September of 2014 as a management major. Even though I have been at MK only for a semester, I can see how much MK has affected my life and how much I have changed through schooling.

Before I joined MK, I went to high school in Adelaide, a main city in South Australia. Adelaide does not have a large Korean community like some cities do, so I was surrounded by “total Aussie culture.” My host mum was Australian, and I always ate Aussie food, went to an Aussie school, hung out with Aussie people, and even had an Aussie boyfriend. To familiarize myself with my new life in Australia, I naturally had to learn to live my life in English. I wasn’t in Adelaide for too long, but during the stay, I had no chance to speak Korean at all. Though I enjoyed my life very much in Adelaide, I had some difficulties when studying because I was the only Korean in the school, so there was no one who could help me fully understand the classes. I had to struggle every day to learn the school materials, and it was sometimes really hard to tolerate. It would have been more bearable if there had been anyone I could rely on. Since all of my family members were in Korea, I eventually came back to Korea and took a year off despite the good times I had had in Adelaide. At that time, I was too young and wasn’t ready to abruptly adapt to a completely new culture while being separated from my parents at the same time.

For me, MK was a place to start over. I knew that this was the last chance given to me, so I promised myself that I would go to every class on time and finish all assignments in a timely manner. Since I knew how much trouble understanding the class materials had been back in Adelaide, I was not expecting to do well, but I still would do my best. At MK, however, there were two things that I did not have when I was in Australia. The first was that I was able to visit my parents whenever I wanted, which was very important to me. As there was a bus that went directly to my home in Seoul from school, I could visit my family during the weekend or even after school. My parents are the first two people I look to when I need to calm down and relax. Thanks to MK’s location, I could prevent my mental health

from becoming devastated. The second thing I had and liked about MK was that, when there was anything that I could not fully understand, my classmates were able and eager to help me. The people at MK are multilingual, able to speak English and Korean very fluently. This helped me satisfactorily catch up on the courses. More than anything else, these two factors helped me adapt to the new school and prepared me to become more independent.

Starting over also meant a new kind of life with new kinds of people. When I was in Adelaide, my life was complete Aussie: people, food, language, and everything were Australian. Before Australia, when I was in middle school, everything was complete Korean: language, culture, food, and people. However, life at MK was like a combination of these two. Despite MK's location in Korea, I could see many foreigners on campus who were non-Korean speakers. We shared every facility, and sometimes had some unexpected interactions. For example, when I first went to the gym I was surprised that half of the people exercising were non-Koreans. At first, I had no idea where they came from or why they were there. However, as time went by, we had some chances to have small conversations. Some were exchange students at other universities, some worked at companies like Posco or Samsung, and some were staying temporarily while traveling or for the Asian Games. At first when I saw these different kinds of people in one place, I thought it was weird. I unconsciously separated myself from them and tried to be "only Korean." However, little by little, I started to adapt myself to these "weird" situations and came to see them as a special blending of cultures. Because I had seen no such place before in Korea, this special blending broadened my capacity for cultural understanding and adaptation.

My grades for the first semester were pretty successful. My dad has always told me that having 100 percent attendance and turning in all of the assignments on time would naturally lead to good grades. However, I knew that I had not accomplished all of this by myself, and believe that MK's supportive environment and students were crucial in helping me get there. The campus surroundings contributed to my grades as well. For example, even though Songdo is currently rising as a new global city, MK is located quite far from the actual town. I was insulated from the loud, distracting noises of the city and concentrated more on school work. Moreover, because George Mason is a USA-based university, I had to use English inside and outside

of the class. The English-speaking environment greatly improved my language ability over time. Due to such factors, I found myself more independent and confident than before, even though I had been at MK only for a semester.

I gained many things through this institution. I learned and refined the essential values necessary for success, starting from the very basic things like punctuality, patience, and confidence and then on to things that only MK could provide me, such as independence, the ability to adapt, and an understanding of different people from various countries. I have no doubt that when I go to Mason's Fairfax campus in my third year, I will be even more developed than now. I am also confident that I will not repeat the mistakes that I made in Australia. In the future, I will be able to adapt to and excel in whatever environment is given to me, whether it is in an academic or corporate setting.

One of the most important things that should be taken into consideration when choosing your university involves your future career prospects. To be honest, before I joined MK, I had not given much thought about my post-graduation goals; I simply thought of working at an office. However, I now have a specific dream and am paving the road that will take me to it. I want to work as a manager of a Korea-based multinational fashion company, which is a career that aligns very well with my major.

Mason Korea was established only a year ago, so regardless of GMU's reputation in the United States, MK is not well known in Korea yet. However, I do not see this as an obstacle, but as a way to prove myself. The reputation of MK is dependent upon us students, and from what I have seen in my helpful and hard-working peers, I believe that the school has a bright future.

Sarah Heaton

RELATIONSHIPS STUDYING ABROAD

Studying abroad is defined as students attending school outside of their home country and receiving academic credit toward their major. Out of the 17.7 million students in the United States who enrolled for undergraduate education in 2012, only 289,000 chose to

study abroad. However this number increases by 12 percent each year. There are many factors to consider when students choose to study abroad; they must consider their mental capability as well as their ability to adapt and accept new environments. There are also many positive reasons why students should study abroad. Janice Wood, editor of *PsychCentral* summarizes the research this way:

Students who studied abroad showed improvements in five core traits compared to their peers who did not study abroad: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability. (2013, July 5)

My own personal experience also suggests that studying abroad allows students to understand new cultures, become global thinkers, and expand their understanding in ways not possible without studying abroad.

However, there are also many setbacks and challenges that come with studying abroad. One of the most important is the establishment of new relationships and friendships. Students studying abroad will be distant from their families and, in some cases, will step completely out of their comfort zone for the sake of traveling and reaching a brighter future. This can result in emotional and physical turmoil which requires support from outside sources. This is where characteristics such as comfort, trust, and speed of friendship development become significantly different for students who are studying abroad versus those who are not. I have now studied abroad three times and have experienced culture shock and homesickness, as well as developed new and interesting relationships with people that I never expected to meet. I wanted to understand why I built specific and strong relationships with Koreans and other foreign students, and why I also encountered situations where I could not build a strong bond with them. I wanted to understand why relationships and making new friends abroad could be so vastly different from and also similar to the relationships I made in America. In this essay, I explore those questions by looking back at my interactions with other students during the fall 2014 semester at Mason Korea.

After living alone in my dorm on the Incheon Global Campus for about a week, I went to an event where I met other foreign students from SUNY (State University of New York). My immediate reaction was one of comfort. It was warming to speak to students who spoke English and also had some of the same interests as I do. We were from

a variety of countries such as India, Iran, America, and Kyrgyzstan. I felt immediately connected with them and I thought these people could easily be my best friends. For lack of another term, I will call this “pre-attraction”: a sort of instant gratification for feeling comforted in a place where I would otherwise have felt lonely or misunderstood. My friend Christian at George Mason in Fairfax, with whom I keep in close contact, told me that his classes were very large, and that it was rare for him to make a new best friend on the first day of class. This may be due to class size, but also reflects that students studying in their home countries do not have the same needs or desires as students who study abroad. Based on my observations, students studying abroad seek close contact with others because of their desire for comfort and familiarity (for example, the gratification of eating foods from the home country). Students studying in their home country do not experience nearly as much frustration with lack of contact or comfort. Their environments tend to be the same as what they experienced growing up. Students who study abroad have to manage the obstacles of culture shock and language in order to feel as comfortable as they would at home.

Although there are many challenges that come with studying abroad, there are many uplifting and welcoming moments. These reflect the same “pre-attraction” and how students can find comfort in each other no matter how diverse their backgrounds or lives are. Central to that process is the way they come to the realization that having friends to communicate with on campus is important and that holding grudges against each other is counterproductive. This can be seen in my own experience. After meeting those first foreign students, I met many more. It wasn’t long before we began socializing and learning more about each other. I discovered that almost no two people were from the same country with the exceptions of India and China. I became close friends with people from Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Senegal, Rwanda, Russia, and Myanmar. They were all between the ages of 17 and 24 and had various majors in college. We used Facebook chat to communicate with each other in English, Spanish, French, Korean, Kinyarwanda, and Kirundi. Some people might find it hard to believe that such different people could become so close so fast – yet it happened. The first time we went to dinner together we instantly learned (and made fun of) each other’s accents and the strange, individual mannerisms we had. On that first night,

we knew more about each other than even some of our best friends at home knew about us. Over time we learned even more about our differences. It was clear that no one seemed to care about how different we looked or how we dressed or our funny accents. The only characteristic that really mattered was that we were here together and building our college lives as a group.

As a result of our closeness and friendship, we shared a special degree of mutual acceptance and forgiveness. If someone made a mistake or did something to upset the group, we would always move past it. Rarely did we hold a grudge, and if we did so it was short-lived. I asked my friend from Ecuador, Victor, if he was embarrassed by one of our friend's actions while drinking at another friend's birthday party. He said, "As long as she is safe and she is more careful next time, I don't have any problem." I believe this attitude towards drinking is different among friends who have not felt the same bond as foreign students studying together. Foreign students tend to stick together and build relationships quickly. We don't have many people to look out for us who understand and will protect us. We don't usually have the luxury of a specific friend selection or testing system like we would if we were studying in our own countries. For example, a friend of mine from James Madison University told me about how a lot of people don't want to put up with people who can't control their alcohol consumption, even if they are friends. Similarly, a friend from George Mason's Fairfax campus told me that if someone drinks too much on consecutive occasions, that person is usually uninvited from the next event or party. This never happened in our group of foreign students in Korea. I believe this has to do again with the importance of our ties and relationships with each other. We don't want to lose these bonds with each other. Students who study abroad have a different selection process when it comes to friends as well as closer bonds to other foreign students. Because we are all in a new school and new environment, we are feeling the same curiosities and experiences with one another. We accept each other and protect our friendships while living in a foreign country.

Choosing to study abroad means choosing to be bold and unafraid, and willing to adapt to a whole new way of living. As a result, the interactions among students abroad are very different from the interactions among students studying in their own country. There is more forgiveness and understanding among students abroad because they

must rely on each other for support. These are the crucial pieces of studying abroad that model how our lives change as we grow with new people in foreign places. Perhaps the attitudes and goals of students who study abroad represent an appropriate model for the lives we can lead as global thinkers, adventurers, and humans.

Yulia Lee

MY DIVERSITY

The mission statement at my high school encourages students to become “globally enlightened citizens who are able to bridge the gap between the East and the West” and that is what I want to achieve. I do not see my life as a typical Korean student. Coming from an international background has not only opened up opportunities for memorable experiences, but also has helped me to grow up to be a very open-minded person who is willing to appreciate diverse cultures and ready to meet dramatic changes.

I was born in a small city named Ula-nude in Russia where the temperature plummets to negative sixty degrees Celsius during the wintertime. Although I do not have many memories of that period of time, I spent the first three years of my life playing with many of my *matryoshka* dolls and eating a lot of *borsch* (beet soup). Then I moved to America and stayed there for two more years, as my family had to move there because of my father’s job assignment. Memories of living in New York outnumber those of Russia. As a young child from Russia, I was impressed by the big houses and wide roads of New York. After two years in New York, we moved to Canada where my schooling started. I retain vivid memories of my life from this point on.

I started my pre-schooling and then moved on to an elementary school in Vancouver. I really loved the school but I cannot say there was no hardship. My lack of confidence in English was the primary challenge. During the first grade, I was not entirely comfortable waiting in line and telling the lunch lady what I wanted to eat because of my shaky command of English. Being a naturally shy girl did not help either. However, I now see this was a petty problem as it did not take me long to get comfortable with my English as I attended

school. I loved school and was grateful for the opportunity to get a Western education and to get acquainted with the Western culture. So I was devastated when my parents said we had to move to Korea. After finishing the sixth grade and with many tears, I took my first step in Korea not knowing I would live a life so different from the typical Korean student.

My parents sent me to an international school and I was very surprised to see that the school was exactly like an American school but just located within Korea. I loved my teachers and the students all knew how to speak English. Coming to Korea did not seem bad at all, because I was able to find an international environment even within Korea. Mason Korea offered yet another international setting and made me see that I am not the only one who has a diverse background internationally.

Throughout the years of growing up in such culturally diverse environments, I have built many relationships with many different people and have friends all over the world. For example, I still regularly keep in contact with my best friend from elementary school, though she is far away in Canada. Most of my high school friends are now in America for college and I have also made many friends in Korea. Thanks to technology, I am able to communicate easily with people from thousands of miles away. I can say that my circle of friends is very different from that of a typical Korean student. It is my experience of growing up in different countries that has allowed this international network of friends.

There are many people who are scared of change but I do not see myself as one of those people because I have already had to deal with big changes, from changing schools multiple times to making transnational moves. I admit I did not like change as a very young girl but I have learned that change can be good and can open more doors for better opportunities. I am not scared anymore that I might be moving to another country or that I may be changing schools because those changes are what made me experience a small part of the diversity the world has to offer.

I have also learned to embrace the chance to travel and learn about other cultures. Many people prefer to travel with groups but I like traveling alone as it helps me focus more on learning about the cultures of the places I visit. I have set foot in Japan, China, England, and France. I was able to visit these countries because of the annual class

trips that my international high school organized. Traveling is one of my passions and I have built up the courage to jump out of my comfort zone. This would not be the case if I had not grown up in such an international atmosphere.

Being comfortable in both the East Asian and Western culture has also helped me be fluent in both English and Korean. This has opened up opportunities for me to work as a translator and tutor many students in Korea who wish to learn English, helping me to build good work experience. In addition, this enabled me to be useful to other people. When I see a foreigner struggling to communicate with a Korean, I am always willing to help and am grateful that I am capable of doing that.

My background has also had a big influence on what I want to pursue as a career. My ultimate goal is to be a global leader and I definitely see myself traveling and working with other internationally mobile people. My love for learning new languages is a skill that I want to use in my career. My past experiences have made me want to continue working in an environment where I am meeting new people and communicating with them even if they are on the opposite hemisphere.

Coming to Mason Korea made me see that there are many other people just like me who come from diverse backgrounds. It is nice to be connected with them. I see Mason Korea as a place where you can definitely sense the international vibe. It is a place for people to experience the international world and to continue to widen their global circle of connections.

II DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

Gloria Yehyeon Soon

AMERICAN AND KOREAN STUDENTS

Students at Mason Korea can be divided into two big groups: American students and Korean students. Those students who are born in America speak English as their first language or are immersed in it once they enter the educational system. On the other hand, there are students who are born in Korea, studied in English-speaking countries, and speak English as their second language. In terms of culture and language, these two different groups of students behave differently on campus. Study habits, etiquette, relationships, and daily lives all show many differences between these students. It is important to know the differences to avoid unnecessary conflicts between students and to develop an effective educational process.

The basic cultural differences between these two groups are amplified by the students' experience in two very different educational systems. Studying at Mason Korea means American education in a Korean place. Students are staying in Korea and yet receiving American education. Some Korean students go through struggles because of the difference from Korean education. These students expect an easier and more fun college life, going off campus to drink and hang out every night. However, the unexpected workload means students are not able to have the college life that they expected.

Korean students are also used to comparing grades and discussing them with each other. In the Korean education system, teachers make students' grades known to everybody in class. They make students compete with each other by showing everyone's grade in front of the whole class. At Mason Korea, whenever professors hand out test grades, Korean students turn to each other and check each other's score. Korean students are used to this system of comparing with each other and push themselves to study harder (or sometimes not to study

harder). However, American students do not compare their grades with each other like Korean students do. American students have their own privacy about grades. Professors in Mason Korea have had to go through this culture difference. One time in class, one professor was handing out tests to students and she stopped Korean students sharing each other's scores. The professor called it "the Korean thing."

There are even sharp differences in how American and Korean students dress for class. Compared to American students, Korean students seem to care more about clothing etiquette. For example, Korean students do not wear pajamas to class. Wearing pajamas to class is considered to be rude to professors. However, students from Fairfax do not consider this rude or disrespectful to professors. When there are Mason Korea professors who grew up in Korean culture, this gives a good reason for Korean students not to wear pajamas to class. Another thing about clothing is flip-flops. Korean students and professors think that wearing flip-flops to class is rude. Coming to class, students need to put on socks and closed-toe shoes instead of flip-flops. Would professors from Fairfax care about students wearing flip-flops to class? I do not think so. Ella who is an American student said "why would anybody care what I wear and what other people wear" but Christine from Korea said "I need to look nice every day because people see what I put on every day." To American students, appearance is not something to be considered too seriously. In contrast, for Korean students, appearance is considered very important.

The difference between Korean and American students is also seen in relationships with professors. In the beginning of the semester, every single professor mentioned one thing that every student should follow. It was to communicate with professors and keep a good relationship with them. Professors are always available for students to come into their offices and talk to them. There are different perspectives on this between American and Korean students. To most Korean students, talking to professors means that they have problems that need to be solved. As soon as the problems are solved, there is no other reason to sit down in the office with the professor. But to American students, talking to professors can be casual, sometimes just like friends. On this point, there is a very strong cultural difference between how Koreans and Americans treat adults. In Korean culture, young people can never be friends with adults, especially since the Korean language can cause a huge gap in relationships. The language becomes different

when talking to older people, with different words and word endings to show respect. English has one form of language, and it does not separate younger people and older people. The language itself makes it a lot harder (or easier) for students to keep a close relationship with professors.

It is also interesting to see how students use their free time with each other. I have seen groups of students from America and how they hang out with each other during free time. American students gather together on the grass or sit down on the stairs to sing, play the guitar, and throw Frisbee with each other. American students like being outside and enjoying nature. Just the opposite, Korean students like to be inside. Korean students tend to enjoy indoor activities more than staying outside. When free time comes, most Korean students at Mason Korea call a cab and go to “Dream City” in downtown Songdo to hang out. There are few choices for them in Dream City, but one is to go eat somewhere, and the menu usually is barbeque. Other options are bowling and karaoke.

When students hang out in groups, there are also differences. American students tend to be more inclusive than Korean students. Korean students prefer to be in smaller groups with people they feel comfortable with. They like to keep a close relationship with a certain group of friends and thus feel included. For example, Fred, who is a Korean student, always went to Dream City whenever there was free time. Going out for drinks helped him get over the stress of campus life. He also said that through drinking with friends, they were able to become closer and share what they went through in their personal lives. By contrast, instead of spending most of their free time in Dream City, American students would often sit down in Linko (the on-campus snack bar) and chat.

One of the main differences between Korean and American students is that American students introduce themselves to other students when they first meet, but Korean students do not. It normally takes longer for Korean students to become friends with each other than American friends. This may make Korean students look like they don't want to be friends with others; however, they are just being careful because the other person may be older. The Korean language makes them be more careful in making friends because they need to use respectful language to older people. To Korean students, age takes a big part in their relationships. It is interesting because American

students do not ask each other's age. To Korean students, asking each other's name may be considered rude in certain circumstances, but just the opposite, not telling each other's name may be considered rude to American students. For example, Ellen is a Korean student who is younger compared to other Korean students. She would always have to bow to say hi to older students and use respectful Korean language. She says that it is somewhat uncomfortable and makes her feel like it is hard to get close to older students and hard to become friends. For Mike, who is an American student, age is not a problem. He is able to be friends with anybody on campus.

Many differences between Korean and American students at Mason Korea come from basic cultural differences. Understanding the differences between cultures is very important. Mason Korea is a global campus where students from all over the world gather together and form a little society. However, it is interesting to see how the students still act differently according to their culture. The global campus should be the perfect place for students to understand and experience these cultural variations.

Jane Lee

FOBs AND TWINKIES

I still remember the time I approached two different groups of Koreans in American public high school: one group of Koreans spoke in English, and the other group of Koreans spoke in Korean. As a Korean who is able to speak both English and Korean fluently, this separation between the two groups seemed surprising to me. However, later, I realized that I had never seen the two groups – or even individual members of the two groups – getting along together. These two groups are generally identified as “FOBs” and “Twinkies.”

These two groups of Koreans in modern American public high schools have various (even numerous) differences between them. The major difference is whether one is Americanized or just strictly Korean. The common identification of the Koreans who have just come to United States to study abroad is “FOBs,” an abbreviation for “Fresh Off the Boat,” which is terminology used to describe immigrants who

have arrived in the United States and who keep the culture of their original nationality. The term is widely used among Asian immigrants, and perhaps especially among Koreans. On the other hand, those Koreans who were born or raised in America tend to be Americanized. The most common terminology for these Koreans is “Twinkies” or, depending on the region, “bananas.” The idea of this terminology is that Americanized Koreans have Asian (“yellow”) characteristics, but follow American (“white”) culture. When Americans who are not familiar with this terminology (usually because they do not have much experience of congregating with Asians) ask the meaning of this terminology, most of the Asians respond with the saying, “yellow on the outside, white on the inside.” Although this terminology may seem to involve racial discrimination, Asians seem to be extremely accustomed to these terms. I have seen and heard Koreans using them and attaching great importance to them.

Student A and B are Americanized Koreans discussing the “category” of a new student.

Student A: Hey, I have heard that there is a new Korean student in our class.

Student B: Really? Have you seen her?

Student A: Yes.

Student B: Is she a “FOB” or “Twinkie”?

Student A: I’m pretty sure she’s a “FOB” because I saw her notebook at the study hall that said “Lovers all you need it.” And “it” was spelled with “ti.”

Student B: No, please. I really can’t understand some of the “FOBs” buying those kind of notebooks with grammatical errors written on it. I really don’t like that about Korea – I mean, I do really love their “cool” pencils, but

As indicated by the dialogue, the distinctions between the two groups are noticeable. In public high schools, each group normally dislikes the opposing group and tries to criticize the opposing group’s culture. In general, Americanized Koreans follow the culture of the

United States while rejecting many aspects of Asian culture and stereotypes. I have seen some Americanized Koreans even boast to others about how “American” they are, and try their best not to follow unfamiliar Asian practices. For instance, I have noticed that many Americanized Koreans don’t even try to eat seaweed (an important Korean food) because seaweed consumption is not common in America. Their attempt to follow American culture, however, brings difficulty to Americanized Koreans when it contradicts their parents’ views. Because not many Korean parents in America are familiar with American culture, the Americanized children tend to face pressure from their parents. Those Koreans who are not yet familiar with the American culture – the FOBs – have many difficulties in becoming part of American society. On the other hand, they usually hold and follow the Korean culture. Because Koreans tend to have strict boundaries around themselves and to follow their traditions, Koreans who move to foreign countries to study abroad have the belief they need to follow Korean culture even when they are not in Korea. That may be the reason why the two groups go against each other, since one follows the culture of the region they are in, and the other follows and respects their original nationality.

The personalities of the two types of Koreans in America are also different from each other. FOBs tend to be socially conservative and have boundaries around their FOB group. They tend not to associate with anyone but other FOBs, and mainly speak Korean within the group. This demonstrates that they bond strongly together and are open only to a limited number of people, usually close friends. On the other side, Twinkies are more open and do not have boundaries against associating with other races; usually, they like to associate more with Americans. This also causes differences in entertainment between the two groups. Because FOBs only associate with FOBs, they enjoy Korean entertainment. On weekends, many go to karaoke to sing along to recorded music using a microphone and speakers, or they go to a *PC bang* (room), a common place for gaming in Korea. In contrast, Twinkies enjoy associating with other groups and do not have such specific entertainment, since it varies with their hobbies and interests (similar to Americans).

The environments of FOBs and Twinkies also contradict each other. Since Americanized Korean students are mostly born or raised in the United States, they have their own houses in which they live

with their families. Most of their transportation is by cars, either owned by themselves or provided by their parents. However, since FOB students usually have come to the United States by themselves to study abroad, they are independent, living in dormitories, homestays, or the houses of their relatives. Since FOBs normally don't live with their own nuclear family, they desire to go back to their country, and some are home-sick. They tend to feel lonely in the United States, being apart from their parents. Also, even FOBs who have stayed in the United States for a quite long-term period still mostly prefer to eat Korean foods. Numerous FOBs can be found at Korean food stores and Korean markets. On the other side, Twinkies usually eat Korean foods only at home. Furthermore, they prefer to speak Korean only at home, because of their parents' belief that the ability to speak the language of their nationality is important. But, even if they can speak Korean, they do not favor speaking Korean in public. They feel the most comfortable speaking in English, while FOBs feel the most comfortable speaking in Korean. Thus, FOBS tend to have bad pronunciation of English, while Twinkies speak English just as well as the native speakers. That may be why FOBs have difficulties speaking in English, and therefore mostly speak in Korean. On the other hand, although Twinkies may be best in English pronunciation, they are not so good at Korean pronunciation. It is easy to notice whether students are FOBs or Twinkies when they speak since they are noticeably more or less fluent in Korean or English. Even on Facebook, all of the posts I have seen written by FOBs were in Korean and all the posts written by Twinkies were in English.

The difference between the groups extends into many other areas. The characteristics and style of clothing worn by FOBs and Twinkies are different for both men and women. There is even a difference between the two groups in the appearance of the face. It may be difficult to tell whether someone is a FOB or Twinkie for Americans, but Koreans easily tell the difference. There are differences in style of interaction. Because of the Korean tradition of respect to the elders, for example, FOBs act more or less formal depending on their age. A freshman FOB girl in high school would call a senior FOB guy *sunbae* or *oppa*, signifying their respectful position. Twinkies, on the other hand, do not follow seniority between the classes or ages. The distinction between the two groups even appears in the churches. Both FOBs and Twinkies are often Christians but in Korean churches the min-

istries are often separate for the two groups with a Korean Ministry and an English Ministry. The two ministries have services in different styles and the two groups can seem to have an invisible boundary between them.

These distinctions between FOBs and Twinkies show that culture plays a big part in how students present themselves. Two cultures colliding with each other can produce problems and conflict. Although many say that “everyone’s different,” that is not enough when two types of groups that lean on their own cultures collide. That is especially so when the two cultures, like those of Korea and the United States, are so different, with one having strong social control and the other with more personal freedom.

Grace Lee

FOREIGNERS: KOREAN AND NON-KOREAN

It has been almost a year and a half since I moved to South Korea from Los Angeles, California. Being a Korean American from one of the most Korean-populated cities in the United States, I never thought to expect how different the cultures would be. Moving to Korea was extremely difficult at first, and it still is now. There is such a difference in mentality, point of view, and even style. It all made me very uncomfortable. I first thought that I was the only one harboring such concerns but after asking other Koreans who are from other countries, I realized that they, too, felt the same way. So my question is this: Do other foreigners in Korea also share the same concerns or do they find living here easier?

Songdo has become a very international city. There are more foreigners entering the city every year. According to the Incheon Free Economic Zone (IFEZ) Authority, the total number of foreign residents in Songdo was around 1,500 as of June 2014. You can see many different people from many different countries walking around the city. I attend an international church here in Songdo where we have members from countries from all over the world: Nigeria, Ireland, Mexico, and many others. As I got to know them within my first few months in Korea, I asked them if they liked it here. I asked around

six people and to my surprise, all six of them said that they do. They have all lived in Songdo for at least a couple years, which was even more surprising. Of course they all miss their home countries, but to them, Korea is an exciting new experience. Even my older brother, who has been living in Songdo for about four years now, loves it here. According to him, he would never go back to America just because of how convenient and safe it is here. I was surprised to hear this from him, since he is a Korean American who does not know the Korean culture and language very well.

However, this was not the same reaction I received from other Koreans that I have asked. Their general response was that they do not like it here. Their reasoning for this is the huge gap between cultures. Though we are all Korean, growing up in different cultures inevitably causes different points of view. There are many differences between Koreans from other countries and native Koreans. When walking down the street, it is fairly easy to differentiate between foreign Koreans and native Koreans. Foreign Koreans, for the most part, dress somewhat differently than native Koreans. This is especially prevalent among the younger people as they follow different fashion trends. Even the way they walk is different. Native Koreans tend to walk in a more reserved manner compared to the foreign Koreans. One other big difference, especially among the younger people, is how pictures are taken. "Selfies" (or "selcas") have become very popular these past few years. However, the picture-taking process between foreign and native Koreans is very different. Foreign Koreans usually take a very simple picture with a normal smile whereas native Koreans pose with peace signs and interesting faces. This, to me, was one of the bigger culture shocks that I experienced coming to Korea. It is small differences such as these that can make it difficult to live in Korea. There have also been a few cases in the past year where I have been confronted by native Koreans for speaking English when I should be speaking Korean. Just because we look Korean, native Koreans expect us to behave the way they behave and live the same lifestyle when that is not the case.

For foreigners living in Korea, I have noticed many differences in how they are treated. I was eating dinner in a restaurant with a friend who is also Korean American. As we were about to sit down, four foreigners walked in and sat down at the table right next to us. My friend and I ordered before they did, but when our waitress heard us speaking

in English, she gave us a dirty look, as if she was thinking, “Why are you speaking in English?” A few minutes later, we noticed that as the foreigners were speaking English to the same waitress, she was laughing with them and attempting to speak in English to them, all in a fun manner. This is just one of the many instances where I have noticed the difference in treatment towards foreigners and foreign Koreans.

One friend of mine, who is from Pakistan, moved to Songdo this past September. Already, she has received special treatment many times. When we go to a restaurant or even a small boutique on the street, she is the one who receives the special services, such as a free small appetizer or a free small item from the store. I asked her recently how living in Korea has been and she loves it here. According to her,

Mostly everyone I met has just been so welcoming and made me feel like this is my home. Even the random *ajumma* (older Korean women) who own small stores offer me free food all the time. Before I came here, I was worried that people would stare at me because of the color of my skin, but they don't even do that and it's amazing.

I know that some foreigners do tend to receive different treatment, but I wanted to find out if maybe this was not the case for others. So, I proceeded to ask a few foreigners that I met on the street. For example, I came across a Caucasian couple in their mid-twenties and asked them how long they had lived in Korea and to briefly describe their experience. The man moved to Korea in March 2013 while the woman moved in August 2013. The man explained how for him, it was difficult in the beginning due to how the native Koreans would take advantage of him not being able to speak Korean. This was a big problem when he tried to find an apartment. However, as the months went by, he said that people were generally very polite and very interested in him because of his English speaking abilities. He said he now enjoys living here because of how convenient it is, though he still wishes to move back to America one day. His girlfriend had a much more positive story. From the very beginning, she said that people were very nice to her and, to her surprise, she did not have much difficulty even in the first few months. She still enjoys it very much and, unlike her significant other, does not want to leave Korea. Others I met from Africa, Mongolia, and the United Kingdom also gave similar responses: Korea is fun, people are nice, and they plan on staying here for at least another year.

I have also met many foreign Koreans from countries such as New Zealand, the Philippines, and Cambodia. Though they have grown to like Korea more and more, they all said that the beginning was very difficult. Sometimes, I have come across foreign Koreans in the same restaurant or convenience store. If there was even the slightest hint that they were not native Koreans because of their pronunciation, there would always be some type of negative reaction. Again, I'm sure this is not always the case, but this is what I witnessed. So I asked several foreign Koreans that I met on the street what their experience was like, living in Korea. Two men from the United States expressed how much they do not like it here and how living in Korea is not what they expected. According to them, natives would stare at them all the time whenever they spoke in English and some would even mock them if they spoke English on the phone. However, one girl from the United States was very similar to my brother. She loves it in Korea, despite all the negative reactions she receives. She said,

I think they have such negative reactions because they're jealous that I can speak English so well. Koreans struggle a lot to learn the English language and I do believe that I am very fortunate to have learned it as my first language.

Two others were less positive. It was not the negative reactions that bothered them but rather how different the culture is. A Korean from Mexico most missed seeing diversity in his everyday life. He was not used to seeing Koreans everywhere he went. A Korean Filipino said that she missed the open-mindedness of the people from her home country, although she found Songdo a little easier to live in because of the large international population.

As a Korean American, I expect I will be moving back to the United States in a few years. Though living here has become easier over the past year and a half, the criticisms and negative looks I receive when I speak English still bother me. My own experience led me to expect that non-Koreans would enjoy Korea while foreign Koreans would not. Had I asked more people, the results might have been different, but these discussions suggest that pattern is the general case.

Chloe Sohyun Kim

THREE KINDS OF KOREANS IN AMERICA

The United States of America is a country of great diversity, and Koreans are one important part of that. Many of the students at Mason Korea share this experience of being Korean in America but, depending on which group they belong to, may behave differently and have their own way of living. The Koreans in America who come back to Korea for education can be divided into three groups, which are Korean Americans (mostly adoptees), immigrants, and Koreans who move to America to study. All the groups share the same ancestors and belong to an overall group called “Koreans.” The most common thing is that they left their country and moved to another country to achieve their different goals. Korean Americans are in America because the United States is well known as a country where people get second chances and that applies in a special way to adoptees. The immigrants are those whose parents already adapted to the American culture, and the children naturally develop American characteristics as they grow up. Last are the students who went abroad to study in the United States mostly aiming for going to college. These three different Korean groups in the United States have their own goals in life and that affects them when they return to Korea.

The people I call “Korean Americans” are usually the ones who were adopted when they were little, so they have grown up in an American family. They receive the same education as other American kids. Unlike kids who are raised in Korean families with a strong emphasis on academic education, they focus more on sports such as football, basketball, field hockey, tennis, cross country, lacrosse, ice hockey, swimming, baseball, and soccer. Their way of thinking is like Americans and they get along with the American kids. They are fluent in English and have no problems communicating. Based on what I saw when I was living in America, Korean American kids do not, however, get along well with immigrant Koreans or Koreans who move to the United States for study. They do not share the same kind of characteristics and the ways they manipulate things are different. For example, when there is a class project that takes a big portion of the final grade and the project group includes both Korean Americans and students from Korea, the students from Korea give a lot of effort

to make a better grade, but the Korean American students just let the others do the work. This is where the conflict starts. After the project their relationships worsen so that the gap between them becomes even greater. Furthermore, when Korean American kids become friends with other Korean kids, they do not even understand the culture of bowing to elders. Some are confused about when to bow and sometimes bow every time they have to talk to someone who is older than them. Others are so Americanized that they do not even bother to bow at all when they go to a Korean community event or Korean church. They act just like American kids and, since they are used to American-style home cooked meals, they make funny faces whenever they go to a Korean restaurant and try kimchi. Even though they look just Asian, the way they dress and put on make-up is very different. If their faces are erased, the rest is just like other American kids.

The second group are the immigrants. They mostly come for economic reasons or for their children's education. I would divide them into two groups: Korea-born immigrants and "American wannabe's." The first group puts a lot of effort into academic studying because they do not want to disappoint their parents. They often get along with the Korean students from Korea, and get closer as they do their work together. They hang out with the Korean students on the weekends. However there is a time when those students collapse. Their intention is to meet and study together; however, they will eventually find other interesting things to do instead. For example, if they live in a state where marijuana is legalized, they will spend their time doing that. The other group of immigrants, the "American wannabe's," will find American kids and second-generation kids to hang out with to be better at English. They admire how Americans behave toward their surroundings, teachers, and friends. They behave and talk in exactly the same way as the American kids in their group. This is how immigrant kids learn slang better than proper English. For example, I knew an immigrant kid who spoke good English with friends and teachers, so I thought that she would be good at writing essays. However, when I was a junior our school had a project in English class called "junior paper." It was the paper that concluded the junior year and was considered the most important thing during the junior year English class. Every student had two months to write the paper and when the teacher returned our papers, that student was the one who got a failing grade. So I would say that she was the worst case of someone learn-

ing slang from Americans kids rather than learning proper English. Nevertheless, such immigrant kids will often behave well at home because their parents still teach them how to behave to the elders and how to have a strong mind for keeping the Korean culture. Most of these parents could not imagine how their kids behave at school. The kids have to act in two different ways; in their position, I would be confused about what words to use in front of my parents and elders and what words to use in other situations.

Last, but not least, are the people like me and many others at Mason Korea. We are the ones who moved to the United States by ourselves without parents just to learn English and to get an American education. Most of the people know us as international students, foreign students, or students who are studying abroad. In Korean, we are *yuhaksaeng*. Most of us know Korea very well, but when first arriving in the United States, face some problems in learning how to navigate American society. The American way of thinking is somehow different and, in my case, I was not able to contribute well for the first few years. Yet international students try to develop their goals and get along with teachers and friends. They learn English step-by-step and realize that the English they used to use in Korea was just a basic version that pre-kindergarten kids use in the United States. They will also face new situations at school while doing sports and are often amazed about how talented Americans kids are in adapting to sports. Some of them become engaged in sports, gain motivation from American students, and can sometimes be the captain on their team. The community of these international students in the United States is so small and connected they will know many of the other people when they attend Korean student association events. The most exciting thing is visiting someone's Facebook page, seeing many mutual friends, and spending hours and hours talking about many new and interesting things. This kind of conversation continues when international students meet in Korea.

Every summer, many Koreans (including all three of these groups) visit Korea to see their families and relatives. There are specific places where many of those students go. Apgujeong (in Gangnam) is the most famous and popular place where students love to hang out. So sometimes there I would get confused about whether I am still in the United States or in Korea. Another cause of confusion is that the most common language I hear in those places is Konglish (Korean mixed

with English). It is funny when some of the students talk about people sitting right next to them assuming that they will not know what they are talking about. Unfortunately, this is when the fights sometimes start. However, the majority of international students help each other when someone else is struggling and work together to solve the problems. I personally think that the last Korean group knows the best way to cooperate with others because they are all standing by themselves without their families.

These three groups are thus both somehow different and somehow similar. They share ancestry but have been shaped by different environments and surroundings. Even though they have similar appearances, each group of people and each person in each group is different. It would be a big mistake if they are seen as all being the same.

Jaehyo Lee

WHEN STUDENTS ARE WORKERS

Students graduating from high schools all over the world, whether from Korea, America, Australia, France, Malaysia, or the Philippines, come to Songdo in order to study at George Mason University Korea. One of the particularities about Mason Korea is that the proportion of student workers is high at almost twenty percent of the total students. What happens to international students at Mason Korea when they become student workers and how do they differ from ordinary students? In this essay, I will look at their profile (especially its internationality), how they manage the use of language between English and Korean, and how they act as a buffer between Korean-culture-oriented students and American-culture-oriented students. Also, the student workers' internal network will be considered. A comparison of Mason Korea student workers with student workers at a French university completes the discussion.

In this paper, "student worker" refers to students who are employed by their university or by organizations located on their campus. These student workers are referred to as "interns" by Mason Korea. They are normal full-time students who got their job through either Mason Korea or the Incheon Global Campus and, during Mason Korea's first

year, were all freshmen. What are their characteristics? At the end of 2014, there were a total of 12 student workers, 5 male and 7 female, employed on campus. Their age varied from 19 to 25 with the average age of 21, higher than the typical freshman age of 19. Older students were more likely to be hired as student interns and forty-five percent of them commuted to the university – a higher rate than among students overall. Their work hours varied due to their class schedule. Mason Korea has provided customized time schedules for each student intern; to fulfill the weekly hours, they go to work when they finish their last class or in between their classes.

The main characteristics of these student interns come from the high percentage who commute and the way their work environment involves Korean and English. The fact that student interns commute – some of them have to travel more than an hour each way – indicates that they are more attached to their environment at home. This attachment often reflects their strong attachment to Korean culture. In fact, only two of the twelve interns felt more comfortable talking in English than in Korean (and of those one was from a non-Korean background). Moreover, working at Mason Korea involves conversation in Korean with some staff who have difficulty communicating only in English. Therefore student interns must be able to communicate in Korean to be efficient at work. Furthermore, the Korean cultural importance of respect for superiors often orients student interns to use Korean with Korean staff because it is relatively easier in Korean to indicate degrees of respect.

Although student interns are more anchored in Korean culture, they also feel comfortable working with both American and Korean faculty and staff, acting as a buffer between American-oriented and Korean-oriented students. Student interns value their idle time highly, because they have it less than ordinary students, but their second preferred way of using that time (besides sleeping) is to interact with students. By participating in social activities such as student organizations, student interns maintain a flow between students coming from diverse cultural backgrounds. All of the Mason Korea student organizations' presidents in 2014 were student interns and they were often also the organizers of university events such as gaming competitions. Student interns connect students because they feel comfortable facing students with different cultures and they harmonize students. Even the third most favorite way of using idle time by student interns involves inter-

action with students: going to Linko (a convenience store on campus sometimes called “Linko University”) where many students gather to buy coffee or snacks, or just to chat. The visits at Linko also allowed student interns to be a buffer between students.

In order to act as a unit, the interns developed a strong bond. They were often called “Dobbies” by the other students, after the house-elves who did chores for evil families in the Harry Potter series. Dobbies are bound to the family and cannot disobey the commands of their masters. Similarly, student interns are bound to the university and have to work for it. The underlying meaning may be that their “masters” are the university staff. The student interns are closer to staff and professors than other students, because their working location is the university. Being designated by the same name, student interns feel that they are closer to each other than to other students; the same designation by other students also shows that the student interns are perceived as a group. The student interns often help each other in doing assignments, and they often visit each other at their working place to co-study. On Kakao Talk, the most used smart-phone messenger in Korea, the student interns had a group chat called “Dobby Alliance” where they talked about the troubles in their work. It could also be used to call a student intern in case of need. This group chat was also important because most of the student interns were active and willing to organize university events; the group chat was the first way to find volunteers and organizers for events.

With a little exaggeration, we might claim that student interns are central to the flow of the university by connecting students with faculty and staff. But is this Mason Korea experience typical of university life or somehow unique? Mason Korea is still in its formative stage, with fewer than a hundred students during its first year. My own experience at the Institut National des Sciences Appliquées de Lyon (INSA de Lyon) in France, suggests a different pattern. During my two years at INSA de Lyon as a student librarian, I had few contacts with other student workers and didn’t even know who the other student workers were. Unlike Mason Korea interns who see each other at least once per day walking the corridors, INSA student workers had no common places or special connection. Furthermore, INSA student workers’ pay differed considerably depending on the job: tutoring a group got the highest pay and working at the cafeteria got the lowest pay. Clearly, INSA student workers’ roles were more diverse, from swimming coach

to DJ, but their working environment didn't differ much. After the class, student workers went to work, but they always had some spare time, about one to two hours per working day, to study or rest. Also, as there were many jobs, student workers could choose which time to work. Their employer, INSA de Lyon, knew that the students' priority was to study and not to work. And there was a GPA requirement in order to apply for jobs: only about twenty to thirty percent of the students qualified for jobs exceeding six hours per week. At Mason Korea, there was no GPA requirement in applying for a job. Overall, the most important differences of Mason Korea compared to INSA de Lyon are that Mason Korea student interns are more accessible to students and there is also greater communication between them; on the other hand, there is less diversity in the kinds of jobs they can do.

Student interns at Mason Korea would seem to have only a single difference from other students: they work. But this single difference has created a very different lifestyle for the student interns with a well-planned weekly schedule using smart phones and diaries, a strong bond with other student interns, and good relations with faculty and staff. This Mason Korea pattern may be distinctive, at least compared to my other experience in France. A good international university must consider this special group of student workers and the ways they can maintain the flow of the university among faculty, staff, and different kinds of students.

III

THE FUTURE AND THE PAST

Yuna Kim

GETTING THE PICTURE OF WHERE I AM

I chose to attend Mason Korea in the hope to be understood. I started inline skating when I was three, and I spent my childhood seeing myself only as an athlete. I won prizes in speed skating and was a member of a city skating team. My classmates used to make fun of my sweaty T-shirts. Still, I did not mind wearing them every day because nothing could beat the thrill of speed skating. Right after my parents decided against my becoming a professional athlete, my family moved to Canada and we lived there for a year. I have been exposed to Western culture since then. When I came back to my home country, I did not share common cultural ground with my classmates, which gave them enough reason to trip me and make me fall over. I was expected to be a “Korean student,” but I had not learned what it means to be one. Even though I had stopped skating, I was still wearing the invisible T-shirt that was smelly to a lot of people. I could not stay longer than one single semester at each of the four high schools that I attended.

On my first trip to Mason Korea, I sat nervously in the backseat of the car and prayed not to be judged by how much I am non-Korean or non-American. At Mason Korea, I came to realize I don’t need to pretend to be a “Korean.” After all those years, at Mason Korea I could finally identify myself as an international student. I believe international universities like Mason Korea will be the “comfort zone” for people like me.

The reason I stay at Mason Korea is quite different from the reason I chose to attend Mason Korea in the first place. I’ve chosen to stay because Mason Korea offers plenty of opportunities to be exposed to the world. Through my experiences of international education in a Canadian public high school, a Canadian international high school in China, an international high school in Korea, and a Korean public

school, I came to learn there are so many different people and different places, all over the world, each with unique characteristics. Considering my international background, it is no wonder that it has become important for me to feel like I am a member of the international society where I am willing to build my career.

Last summer, I heard about a Korean mother hiring an interpreter for a meeting with an American teacher at Chadwick International in Songdo, the town where Mason Korea is located. I took the chance immediately because it was something I could do well thanks to my “international” background. The mother told me that she hardly attends school meetings because of the language barrier. When I introduced my experiences at various international schools, she realized I would not only translate but also deal with the situation with a good understanding of international education. She told me that she was really relieved. After the meeting, she paid me more than agreed on and invited me to her house. The teacher even asked if I could stay on for the day and help with translation in meetings with other parents. I had to leave for my classes, but they gave me one of the greatest compliments I have ever earned for my “international” background. On that day, I realized my background doesn’t have to isolate me from others but rather could work as my strength that enables me to mediate between two different cultures. I was so glad that I could be useful to other people because of my background.

I could get such an opportunity because I was at Mason Korea and in Songdo, an internationally oriented town. This is not the only hopeful potential that my two semesters in Songdo showed me. The biggest surprise I had during my time in Songdo was how natural it seems to be international here. Among Korean students at Mason Korea, there has been an implicit agreement that we speak English even in informal gatherings outside campus, out of consideration for others who do not speak Korean. We could do this, however, because we are in Songdo that boasts a culture tolerant of diversity. It was such a shock to me because I had known that my foreign friends never speak their own mother tongues in conventional Korean neighborhoods because they are afraid of potentially negative reactions from local Koreans. Newcomers to Songdo might not notice it, but this simple example proves that Songdo has become an island with a unique, if not readily noticeable, culture of diversity and tolerance.

The keys to succeed at Mason Korea are to evaluate your own academic preparedness, to understand what the school expects of you, and to motivate yourself for the hard work. When I was not paying attention to the school and myself, I was not able to get the picture of where I am, let alone where I am heading to. Awareness of what to do comes from a thorough analysis of the present situation. I came to realize that appropriate academic behavior doesn't need to be learned from a role model. Once I started to think about it, it was obvious it has just a plain meaning, which is to try one's best to understand the subjects.

In order to have a better understanding of the school, students also need to make the effort to be more engaged in school programs so that they can be on the right track. Moreover, paying attention to the opportunities the school offers can motivate students themselves to come up with new ideas to differentiate the school from others. By the second semester, most of the Mason Korea students came to agree on the need to shape the school with our own ideas instead of waiting for others to do so for us. As a result, student clubs like a sports club, a volunteer club, and even a relaxation club were organized for the first time at Mason Korea. It is a great example that indicates the recognition of "what we need" has made a positive influence on students' lifestyle. I have benefited from the clubs as I have been motivated by the idea of getting more chances to make positive changes rather than wasting my time idly. It was undoubtedly one of the reasons that helped me improve my academic performance.

Looking back on Mason Korea's first year, I see there have been dynamic changes, and I expect to witness even more changes in the future. Like everyone else, I don't know yet how the future will turn out for Mason Korea. However, such unknowns are also the exciting potential that Mason Korea and the international society share.

Tiffany Kornegay

THE BUBBLE AND BEYOND

When I first arrived at the airport and left the terminal, I was caught off guard by a little bit of culture shock. The airport was big and lively, very chaotic, which was something I was not used to. In fact, I come from a small, quiet town. This trip to Korea was my first time traveling by myself and also my first time abroad. Needless to say, I dived right into the study abroad experience.

When I think back about my overall experience, I would not have chosen another place to have my first study abroad experience. Mason Korea allows for the ability to experience anything that I would like to experience, and even to create the type of experience that I want. This is perfect for anyone who goes to live overseas for the first time or is not exactly used to Korean culture. I like to think of our campus as a little bubble within Korea. Within the campus there are hundreds of students from many different countries, making the campus more international than it is “American” or “Korean.” This is absolutely perfect, especially for Mason Fairfax students, because our environment back in Fairfax is also described as “international.” I considered our “little bubble” within Korea to be a relief zone. It was the place where I could be most comfortable when interacting with people or after being mentally exhausted from having to constantly think in Korean when out in public. This is why the Mason Korea experience is exactly what you make it. If I ever wanted to stay in a comfortable environment that was almost like home, I would stay on campus and interact with people there. However, if I wanted to really experience the Korean life, that was just as easy as stepping off campus, outside of our “bubble.” In this way, I felt like I had the best of both worlds and I enjoyed the times I spent both on and off campus.

Being at a place like Mason Korea was a privilege I really enjoyed. The campus itself is American, Korean, and international all at once and that is an interesting mix to have in such a homogenous country. I also felt special going to this campus because I was the start of something brand new. I loved being able to talk about the campus and the concept of the campus to people who only know about study abroad programs. In such programs, students go to a foreign university and learn what they teach within the country, immerse themselves into

a foreign culture, and overall try to fit into their society. At Mason Korea it was totally different. I could absolutely be myself around others, allow myself to be immersed into the culture however much I wanted, and still receive the American education many people fight for.

At Mason Korea, I was no longer just an American. I was becoming part of an international whole as this campus changed my social life. Before my trip to Korea, my life was no more international than most other Americans. I knew people of a few different backgrounds and occasionally ate food from different cultures. One thing I enjoyed so much about my experience at Mason Korea was that I did not get to know only George Mason students or only Koreans. I became friends with people from the other universities that shared the campus and also came from different areas of the world. Whether it was Kenya, India, Ecuador, or Japan, I met students who had lives and experiences different from mine. The fact that I could meet students from different universities so easily (which is not as easy in the U.S. due to the scale) was an opportunity that is still affecting my life. Even within Mason Korea we had Korean students who had come from New Zealand, the Philippines, or Canada, and it was great to have that dynamic. The campus became a huge mixture of all the cultures we had ever experienced in our lives and that is not something that can be found often, even in America. Off campus there were even more people to meet. During my stay at Mason Korea, I found myself getting acquainted with many students from the Korean university next to ours, Yonsei University. The number of people we could meet there seemed unlimited. The size of my network of friends doubled and I could share experiences with all these different people.

The highlight of the trip was being able to explore other countries without the expense of traveling from America. During my trip I decided to go to Japan during its “Golden Week” (the week that begins with the Emperor’s birthday in late April). I never thought that living in Korea could open up such possibilities for me to travel to other countries (and for a cheaper price!). It was not just me who took the opportunity to travel, but also many other students. I came back feeling like I was really just beginning to see the world. It is not often that I get to leave America for another country for one of my breaks. The fact that I could make such decisions and then act on them so easily completed the circle of my experience. I also did some

traveling within Korea. Luckily for me, Korea is relatively small and inexpensive, so big trips were doable. I really wanted to make the most out of my experience, so I explored areas other than Incheon and Seoul. I decided to travel across the country to Busan; then I decided to do something out of the norm and travel to an island just to visit an observatory from which I could see North Korea.

On all these Korean trips, the most important factor was language. When I visited places in Seoul, everything was fine because there were numerous people who were willing to use their knowledge of English to help me. In places like Ganghwado (the island near North Korea), fewer people spoke English so it was very important to know some Korean. Having to communicate in Korean made me very nervous for a really long time, and I initially refused to go anywhere unless I knew exactly how to get around. Somewhere along the line, I became confident enough in my Korean language survival skills to travel alone. But, for a long time I was not comfortable having to go out and communicate in Korean. This had kept me on campus unless I was traveling with someone more experienced. Once I learned how to say a few necessary things in Korean (like how to order food, direct a taxi, and read bus routes), I was ready to be out and about. Although it is possible to live in Korea for years, especially on a campus like Mason Korea, without speaking Korean, I would never recommend it. Knowing how to communicate in Korean enhanced my experience. It has made me less anxious and more willing to talk to people. I met many people just through speaking Korean, including people in Busan who could barely speak English but who still became good friends. Being interested in Korean culture and language really helps with meeting new people and making friends from many places. Although there are accommodations for English speakers, it is very hard to use resources like Naver without knowing some Korean (and Naver is a huge help with maps).

Stepping onto the campus of Mason Korea, I had many positive expectations and they were thoroughly exceeded. When I left, I had come to realize that this was no ordinary study abroad program and that I had experienced a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The number of people I met, the education I received, and the life experience I gained, all created great personal growth and a great expansion of how international my life has become. It all started with Mason Korea. If I had the choice I would do it again, a million times over.

Young Hyun Choi

STAGES OF DIVERSITY

I have been going to George Mason University in Korea for over two semesters now. A few years ago, I could not even imagine myself surrounded by people speaking English, and now I am part of Incheon Global Campus sharing the campus with students from Ghent University, the University of Utah, and the State University of New York. Students who are studying at these four universities have very diverse backgrounds. In my own case, I have experienced two levels of diversity: New Zealand and now Mason Korea.

Most of my childhood was spent in Korea. It was very hard at that time to find people who were not Korean: only Koreans were found on the street. Then I was given a chance to study in New Zealand. It became my second home, but at that time it was not a familiar country to me. I was excited to learn a new language, English, and a new culture. When I first got off the airplane, I realized that the world is bigger than I had imagined. People spoke not only English but also many other languages of which I had been unaware. When school started, I was very surprised to find myself taking classes with students from different countries such as the Netherlands, India, Taiwan, and a few others. Soon, I needed to adapt and change a few things to become a more globalized person. First, I had to adapt to the smaller size of classrooms. Korean elementary schools had about forty students in a class at that time. But in New Zealand, there were fewer than twenty students in a class. Second, I had to change my attitude. The Korean teachers I met rarely let the students speak in class. However, teachers I met in New Zealand encouraged students to speak in front of other students and share their thoughts. As a student who was not used to this kind of situation, I had to force myself to speak. After a few weeks of being uncomfortable, I found myself comfortably sharing my opinion in class. To become a part of a new place, I changed myself into a new person by adopting new ways.

Language – whether English or Korean – has played a big role in my life. First, languages have given me chances to experience different educational styles. For high school, I studied a year in New Zealand and three years in Korea. I experienced both Western and Eastern styles of education and could see the pros and cons of both

education styles. Second, because I was able to speak English, I could apply to Mason Korea, which has guided me to another stage of diversity. In my senior year, I applied to a few Korean universities and Mason Korea and I made my final decision to study economics at Mason Korea. I chose to study at Mason Korea because it was offering me a chance to study in the United States for a year. Over two semesters at Mason Korea, I have met students who studied in various countries: Singapore, France, the Philippines, and so on. By talking to these students, I could partially experience the places they have been and understand how people from those places think and behave. Since the four universities of the combined Incheon campus are located together, they can hold campus activities and invite each other. Some of the events that happened in 2014 were chips 'n dips, the Halloween party, and the winter wonderland party. I got to meet new people and see how Americans celebrate events like Halloween.

In the near future, I will be going to George Mason's Fairfax campus. I have heard from many people that the U.S. campuses of George Mason University have students from all around the world. When I go there, I may meet people from a country I have never heard of. Most of my friends do not think of getting a job outside Korea because of the language. However, I am willing to work in countries other than Korea. Also, since I have practiced adapting to a new culture already, it would not be a problem for me if I had to live in another country. I have thus been through two stages of diversity so far and am waiting to experience the third stage of diversity – at George Mason in the United States. I look forward greatly to that next stage of diversity.

Michelle J. Lee

ALL STILL KOREAN

Korea is my motherland even though I have generally lived out of the country since my early childhood. However, because of my mixed experience I can serve as both an inside and outside observer. Compared to foods such as kimchi, and the rise of K-pop that has attracted people around the world, the Korean ancestral ceremonies seem unrecognized. This could be because many Korean Americans

no longer participate in these rituals, or because they can be held differently depending on your religion, location, and lifestyle. In this paper I consider these different ways of holding ancestral ceremonies, particularly families who want to hold on to traditional values versus those who do not participate in them or greatly simplify them. These ancestral rites are generally called *jesa* in Korean. *Jesa* has two main types: *charye* and *kijesa*. *Charye* honors all ancestors four generations back. It is normally performed on major holidays like Seolnal (New Year) or Chuseok (Thanksgiving Day). *Kijesa* is traditionally performed at midnight on the eve of the ancestor's death. This paper will focus more on the ritual of *kijesa*.

Jesa started at the time when Confucian ideals were very important. The nobles were careful to follow rituals, with *jesa* being part of them. At first, the rituals had a deep meaning: to think of our ancestors and thank them for what they have left us. However, *jesa* is now often just a tradition. According to many Mason Korea students, the percentage of families buying food for "serving the ancestors" is constantly increasing while the time spent in the actual practice is decreasing. To some people, there's something uneasy about taking time off from your schedule to witness a moment of silence so the deceased can eat in peace. Furthermore, to leave the house doors open so the spirits can enter may seem unusual.

One observation I had was with a family friend, Jasper, who invited me to see his family's more traditional version of *jesa*. I saw how he and his family perform their *jesa* with more organized structure. It was done differently from my family. The *jesa* took place in his home as his father is the eldest son in the family. Due to family matters, he says the setting has changed significantly. From the grandparents' home the setting moved to the living room of the eldest son. Each member prepared generous amounts of food beforehand. While watching the preparations I was amazed at how much thought went into everything. Preparations often begin the day before the ceremony. From whole cooked chicken, to fish, to a variety of *jeon* (Korean "pancakes" such as *pajeon* and *kimchijeon*), every set of food was prepared. "We prepare the food to be offered to the ancestors: soup, beef, fish, three different colored vegetables, fruits, rice cake, Korean traditional snacks," a family member mentions.

It was interesting to note how the food was laid out and presented. On the day of the gathering around nighttime the table is set and all the

food is placed in order. “We set up the shrine. We place the *jesa* table on the side where the food and utensils go, facing north,” says the grandfather. I also noticed that the family began to prepare the *shinwi*, a memorial tablet placed at the center which consists of a name or photo that represents the spiritual presence of the ancestor. Once everything was ready, the door was opened to invite the spirits. All the men knelt before the shrine, while the women kept their distance at the back of the room. The grandfather lighted a stick and set the incense in the holder. The grandfather then held a cup with both hands, and the uncle poured some wine into it. A circle was then made over the incense three times and the cup put on the table. The two eldest sons stood and bowed twice together, both offering their ancestors a drink. In the end, the entire family and relatives enjoyed the food and each other’s company.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who do not hold so tightly to the customs of the traditional rites. For them, it is common to hold ceremonies for only two generations of ancestors, and many just hold the rituals for their parents. More people are also having the rituals at whatever time suits their schedule. Another friend says this has a lot to do with busy schedules and location. The distance between the home and where *jesa* is held is important and nowadays, depending on the specific living condition and personal convenience, people may perform ancestral rituals in the house of a different relative than the one who is appropriate according to tradition. For example, if the younger son’s house is more spacious and with more convenient transportation for the majority of the family, then it is possible to switch the setting to there.

For many Koreans today, the ceremonies for honoring the ancestors are quite simplified. For a modernized version, my own family serves as an example. I came frequently to Korea after the age of twelve during summer and winter breaks. On my father’s side of the family are four brothers, with very different religious backgrounds, who attend our family *jesa*. In our family we have Buddhists, Catholics, Christians, and atheists. Though most are active in the ceremony, it is my family who actually hosts the event. The setup of *jesa* can differ from region and family, but there are certain rules that are always applied. We just help with the preparation of food before the ceremony. But, due to their faith, in other families there are people who will not participate

in the ceremony at all. They claim that *jesa* represents the ancestors in a god-like manner and that is a problem for them.

Still, in most Korean families today, ancestral rituals remain an important part of their culture. These ancestral rituals, in spite of revised forms, continue to exist in modern Korean society. I suspect that my family's *jesa* protocol will change again even in my lifetime. Once we no longer lived overseas, the ceremonies began to change, depending on where the four sons of the family lived. A change of location from the rural countryside to the city had to be made. If there is one thing that still holds true to tradition it would be the role of women. In the past and present, the women prepare all the food and their lack of participation in the ritual itself shows how certain aspects of Korean culture tend to remain the same in a once male-dominant society. Women's jobs are to serve the family on major holidays and be responsible for preparations.

While the tradition will survive, I hope it does so in a more reasonable form. Once ultimate responsibility for this tradition falls fully to the next generation, I would like to see people use the occasions as opportunities for valuable off-line family gatherings in this age of relentless online communication. Learning about *jesa*, and about the modernization of Korea, raises a crucial point: the unity of Koreans. From my perspective at the middle of two different value systems, I have come to acknowledge that there is now a new kind of international pattern that affects all aspects of daily life and traditions. There are families who hold true to tradition and families that have adjusted to modified ceremonies. But, in the end, these rituals still unite Koreans and make all kinds of Koreans recognize the commonality of being together.

In the United States, Thanksgiving and Christmas are often the big holidays that unite people, but it's interesting to note that many other cultures have similar customs. Rituals are meaningful in many ways and families try very hard to hold on to them. The act of honoring and remembering our ancestors will always be around, although many feel uneasy that *jesa* is becoming less significant with time. That is not to say that preserving the ritual solely involves its formal structure. Sometimes just meeting family members and sharing a common purpose is what matters the most to people. This goes to show that as long as people hold on to this thought, no matter your culture or faith,

occasions that unite family and bring loved ones together will always be valued.

Hanna Yoon

MY GRANDMOTHER

One of the many things I looked forward to about moving back to Korea was the fact that I was going to live with my grandmother. Because I had spent the majority of my lifetime in America, I had only had a few interactions with her on the phone and I had not physically seen her since I was a small child. The only information I knew about my grandmother was her name, hometown, and that she is my mother's mom. Before leaving America, when my mother told me that we were going to stay with my grandmother in Songdo, I was excited because I knew living in Korea would definitely give me the opportunity to establish a deeper relationship with her. Not only that, I decided to interview her to know more in-depth about her life as well as to hear how Korea had transformed from an underdeveloped nation to a developed nation. I am very thankful for the opportunity to interview her (in Korean) because I was able to learn about who she is as a human being, and not merely as someone I know as "my grandmother." Also, I was able to understand more about Korean culture and Korea's changing societal roles.

I officially moved to Korea in February 2013. My grandmother came to pick us up at Incheon International Airport and it was the first time I had seen her in a long time. When I reflect back to that time, I can see our relationship has gradually strengthened since then. Interviewing my grandmother gave me the wonderful opportunity to get to know her personal stories of pain, hope, and love, and it also helped me to appreciate my country and my cultural heritage.

My grandmother's name is Ha Jeong-Ja and she was born on September 12, 1940 in Gangwondo, Korea. My grandmother has one older sister, two younger sisters, and two younger brothers. Her father was a policeman and he was married twice. She mentioned in the interview that her father's second marriage made a tremendous impact on her as a child because she grew up under a stepmother who

mistreated her and her siblings severely. Even to this day, when she watches Korean dramas or movies that involve the storyline of stepmothers, she curses at the screen because she is familiar with the pain associated with having a strict stepmother. Because her father remarried another woman and she had to live separately from her biological mother, my grandmother firmly believes that a father ought to be committed to his first wife and family only. My grandmother is a strong believer in family and desires for me to raise a loving family in the future.

Because of this stepmother, my grandmother had to mature quickly. She was six years old when she was first introduced to her stepmother. Her stepmother was a stern person who frequently neglected to take care of my grandmother and her siblings. Therefore, at such a young age, she learned how to cook, do house chores, and take care of her younger siblings. She became an independent and determined person who has an optimistic outlook on life. Despite her harsh childhood circumstances, she was determined to persevere through the hardships because “she knew there were many opportunities ahead of her.”

When my grandmother was nine years old, the North Koreans invaded the South. I asked her if she specifically recalled the day when the war broke out and she responded,

I was coming home from school one summer day when my neighbor told me that the North Koreans had invaded the South. I rushed home to ask my stepmother what was going on. I thought we were going to escape to a place far away but we missed the opportunity to do so. The North Koreans were already in town and our family had no choice but to hide in the basement. It was a terrifying moment that I vividly remember.

My grandmother described the experience with much passion, frustration, and anger. Since her father was a policeman, he left to go fight in the war and so, for a long period of time, she was separated from him. She moved from place to place with her stepmother and her siblings to hide from the North Koreans. My grandmother told me she lived in the mountains and also in a train for several days in order to flee from the invasion. At such a young age, she had to fight the cold, hunger, and poverty in order to survive. In the end, the North Koreans retreated but the division of the country was made permanent. When

I asked her what her personal thoughts are on the Korean unification, she answered,

I am for the unification. I long for the day when our future generations will remember Korea not as a divided nation but as a united nation. I hope for a day when fighting will cease and the division will be permanently mended.

In addition to her childhood experiences, I also asked my grandmother about the changes in Korean society. Korea is a nation that has rapidly advanced and developed in recent years and I wanted to hear my grandmother's personal views on the country's transformation. She explained that Korea's rapid social and economic developments were only possible because of the Korean people. She referred to Korea as

. . . a nation that is built because of determined and willing people who are motivated to succeed. Because Korea was under the influence and oppression of outside countries for many years, Koreans know what it feels like to be the underdog. Hence, the discrimination and injustice we faced in the past have shaped us to become a strong nation and to show other countries that we can make our way up.

Moreover, she believes that Korean society now is too self-centered compared to the past. Many years ago, the Korean people put heavy emphasis and importance on the concept of family. The Korean society in those days used to be very family-oriented but nowadays, because of the many social changes, the Korean people are putting their individualistic goals and motives (education, employment, finances, etc.) before raising a family. When my grandmother was in her twenties, it was the norm for a woman of that age to find a spouse and become a mother.

My grandmother is also very concerned that not many babies are born now compared to the situation in the past. She firmly believes that babies are extremely important in order to connect the family together and also to strengthen the bond between husband and wife. Not only do babies improve the relationship between husband and wife, but babies also link different families together. For example, the birth of a healthy baby (preferably a boy, since Korea is rooted in Confucian values) can solidify the relationship between the husband's side of the family and the wife's side of the family. My grandmother expressed extreme sadness at the fact that the number of families is

decreasing in comparison to the past. When I asked her specifically why the importance of family used to be higher, she replied,

I think it's because the war and poverty had a tremendous impact on the lives of the family members. We realized that it was very important to stay together and survive together. The Korean people were very family-oriented because they knew they only had each other for comfort, security, and provision. Unfortunately, many of the family-oriented values have largely disappeared in the modern era. I believe technology and global education are important, but if something is gained then something must be lost. Our culture is definitely changing and I miss the old days.

I had come to understand that the small, old woman I had met in the Incheon airport a few years earlier was not just a fragile person who needed our family's care and support. In the beginning, I was somewhat relieved that we moved to Korea because I believed that she needed our help because of her age. However, the more I live with her and get to know who she truly is, the more I realize that she is not fragile but rather very strong and resilient. We have developed a mutual relationship in giving support, love, and care to one another. I am extremely thankful to have her in my life and I am glad I moved to Korea. If I had stayed in America, I would have missed this chance to know someone very special. Not only was I fortunate enough to develop a thick bond with my grandmother, but returning to my motherland has given me the great opportunity to understand and appreciate my Korean heritage more deeply.

AFTERWORD

We were fortunate to be the second group of international peer advisors to go to Mason Korea. Looking back, the whole experience was a life changing one. When we learned we had been appointed peer advisors, the feeling was surreal. We knew we wanted to study abroad and be exposed to a different culture, but the speed with which the Mason Korea opportunity emerged was astonishing. It was unreal for both of us until we actually arrived at the Incheon International Airport and realized we were now thirteen hours away from home.

Growing up in the United States, we both were surrounded by people from all over the world. Tijani has friends from Bolivia, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and Palestine, and Charlotte has friends from Iraq, Mauritania, Egypt, and Colombia. Since our friends were from all over the world, we were naturally very interested in their cultures and in countries we hadn't seen. Yet even though we knew a diverse group of people, we had not been able to really experience those cultures. We realized that studying abroad would be an opportunity to experience a culture by living it. Going to Korea, we were already excited and ready to face the challenges that were ahead. Having been exposed to so many cultures in the United States helped us navigate the differences we experienced in South Korea.

The first thing that we had to learn in South Korea was how to say pork. This is because pork is one of the staple foods in the country and Koreans eat a lot of it. Because of our religious background, eating pork is forbidden for us. We quickly learned how to distinguish the different types of meat. This is a problem that we did not foresee, so we had to quickly adjust. Even without the pork, the food was delicious. The essays in this volume show the cultural and ethnic diversity of the students at Mason Korea, but as our story about pork shows, we were also part of that diversity. Like most of the students at Mason Korea, we were "already international" when we arrived at the university, since we both were born outside of the United States. Charlotte was born in West Africa, Senegal and Tijani was born in West Africa, Sierra Leone. We migrated from our birth countries to the United States. Tijani fled Sierra Leone with his family due to the

gruesome civil war that plagued the country from the late 1990s to early 2000s. Fortunately, Tijani's sibling resided in the U.S. at the time and was able to file for refugee status for the family so that they could avoid the dangers associated with the war. Although moving to the United States meant that he would have to start all over again with his family in a different cultural environment, Tijani is grateful for where he is now. These past experiences sparked his curiosity about other cultures. Charlotte grew up in a very diverse environment in Senegal. Her school had people from many different countries which helped her develop a global mindset and an interest in cultures at a young age. When she moved to the United States, she lived in the D.C. metropolitan area which is known for its diversity, adding to her curiosity about cultures.

While we did not know each other until we were both hired to be peer advisors for the Fall 2014 semester, our similar upbringings helped to bridge our differences. When we met, we knew we were starting a long term friendship. We both were excited about the trip; when we arrived, we knew that we had made the right decision to travel to South Korea. Being at Mason Songdo exceeded all of our expectations.

Our favorite moments range from being featured in a video marketing the Incheon Global Campus, to attending the Asian Games, visiting Ganghwado, Ilsan, the Namsan Tower, and the Gyeongbokgung Palace, and seeing shopping districts like Myeongdong and Hongdae. We also visited Busan, the second largest city in Korea after Seoul. One of our friends invited us for a homestay in Yangpyeong, a beautiful city with amazing mountain views and with the Han River running through it. Tijani also got the opportunity to meet the Incheon mayor during one of the mayor's visits to the Global campus. Our utmost favorite part of living in Korea was learning the Korean alphabet (Hangul) and the Korean language. The professor engaged us in and outside of class by making us use the language with our friends and when we were out shopping. That helped us learn the language faster than we could have each imagined.

Back in the United States, we are better able to interact with Koreans and Korean Americans. For example, Koreans do a slight bow to greet each other and people are also treated differently depending on standards such as age. Having an understanding of this helps us avoid cultural prejudice and disputes. It has also become easier for us

to adapt to different cultures in general. We believe we have become more open minded and tolerant than we were before.

As Global Affairs majors, our career paths will require us to be able to work with different populations. Our Mason Korea experience helped us learn about other cultures and be in a better position to understand the world's social, cultural, economic, political, and gender problems. We sought an adventurous way to study abroad and Mason Korea was the perfect opportunity, since Korean culture is very different from what we were used to in the United States.

In these essays, the students describe Mason Korea as a place of meeting others like themselves. They have traveled the world, and seen and experienced different things. In coming back to Korea, however, they often feel disconnected from Korean students their age who have not left the country. We shared some of that experience when we returned from South Korea. At first, our friends in the United States thought our behavior was strange. Tijani found himself bowing his head to greet people. The food we were used to eating in the United States seemed foreign; it took a while to adapt to it because we had gotten so used to kimchi and the Korean delicacies.

Our Mason Korea experience was both eye opening and culturally pleasing. We feel fortunate that we were able to travel and live in South Korea for an entire semester. Our time there helped us create lasting relationships with both the students at Mason Korea and students from the other universities on the campus. The fact that we were able to share our cultural identities with them while also learning about theirs, is what made this experience spectacular. The relationships and memories we formed will last a lifetime.

Tijani Musa - Class of 2015

Charlotte Gueye - Class of 2016

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At Mason Korea, a new kind of international is forming. This volume of essays explores this emerging and evolving diversity from the perspective of students during the inaugural year of the new campus. Topics include the different ways students were already international when they came to the campus, how they navigate the complex national and ethnic categories of being American, Korean, and international, and how they are conceptualizing their futures.

A New Kind of International is the sixth volume in the *Diversity at Mason* series.



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