

American Seoul

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Although Koreans tend to put a lot of emphasis on a person's physical appearance, the constitution of a person's being is much more than his or her exterior qualities. The exterior is actually the least significant part of a person because the interior contents of one's soul reveal much more about who someone actually is. And thus you have people like me who look very much Korean on the outside but actually are very much American on the inside. At first glance people are tempted to think I am of Korean constitution simply based on how I appear, but once they get to know me they soon realize that I have a very American soul. And so the Koreans have a term for people like me, we're referred to as "Gyopos". The word "Gyopo" refers to ethnic Koreans that were born overseas, such as Zainichi Koreans or Korean-Americans like myself.

Having been born and raised in the States, many of my ideological influences are very American in origin and I've just now come to realize how my western education has tremendously shaped my psyche. The maxims I value are in strong contrast to the Korean maxims that are steeped in Confucianism. I value critical thinking, whereas Koreans value tradition. I value my individualist ideas, whereas Koreans value the collective mind of society. And with this self-awareness that only came to light in these last three years of my life, I took it upon myself to explore and learn more about my Korean ancestry. This desire to explore the other half of my cultural identity then has led me here to Seoul, South Korea where I am currently working at In Chang Middle School as the Native English Teacher. The cultural experience has thus far been a pleasant one because not only am I teaching my students English, but my students are teaching me about what it is to be Korean.

However, I must iterate that certain terms like "Korean", "American", and "Korean-American" are all mere words people ascribe to others in order to conveniently categorize them. Because what I'm finding is individuals like myself do not always fit into the collective categories, rather individuals are first and foremost a person unto his or her self. Thus I'm averse to being categorized simply as a Korean-American; rather I am Richard Yu, a person of various cultural influences. But on the flip side what teaching English in Seoul, South Korea has done for me is that it has allowed me to grow in my inner consciousness and explore the wonderful influence Korean culture has had on my life. What has happened then is that I am

now less American than I was prior to arriving here in Korea and I am now more Korean than I was prior to leaving America. That is to say, I'm no longer who I once was as I'm developing in my internal psyche and that's what my hope is for those who would come to Seoul, South Korea after me.

English teachers are hired to teach English, but the opportunity to live and work here is so much more than just that. It's not only an opportunity to teach English to Korean students, it's an opportunity to explore and grow in your psyche as you develop as a human being. I'm sure the many that will come after me will not have a Korean ancestry, but there is still ample opportunity to grow. As you begin to teach English and English culture to your students, you'll find that they are very much teaching you. Command presence, classroom management, compassion, and patience are some of the things I learned here while teaching my students. The teaching experience is a two way channel where not only are you as the teacher imparting to them but they as the student are imparting to you. My sagacious impartation to those who would come after me is to relax and enjoy the experience. Allow the positive aspects of the culture to beneficially shape your inner constitution while critically thinking about the negative aspects of the culture so as to have a greater understanding and by the time you leave this job and proceed to your next venture, you'll find that you have a greater awareness of humanity.