



Foreigners look at job postings at a job fair for international students in October 2022.

Young foreigners share experience working in Korea

Being 'different' poses both opportunities, challenges, they say

BY STUDENT REPORTER
KIM YOUNG-MIN

Borders between nations have become blurred, and more and more international students and migrants are flocking to Korea with unique dreams and goals. As of 2022, more than 2.26 million foreigners are residing in Korea, according to Ministry of Interior and Safety data released in November. International students account for 8.4 percent of them, and their numbers are rising as the total international student population in Korea saw a 5.8 percent jump from 2021 to 2022, the data showed.

More international students means more young adults looking to map out a future in Korea for careers and beyond. To hear some of their experiences and thoughts, the Korea JoongAng Daily sat down with three international students currently studying and living in Korea.

Billgesu Alkan from Turkey

Alkan is an international student from Turkey at Sookmyung Women's University, majoring in media communication. Alkan, a senior, came to Korea her junior year and is currently preparing for graduation. Outside school, she is also working part-time at an interactive art exhibition in Seoul as a customer service assistant. Her primary task is to check the booking status of the visitors and give them instructions.

She looked for the job using well-known part-time job-seeking platforms in Korea, Albamon and Alba Heaven, looking for job postings that said, "We hire foreigners."

"Use the keyword [we hire foreigners, or *wagukin ganeung*] when you search for jobs. Many of the workplaces still prefer native Korean workers, so you'll get more replies if you aim [for] the jobs that specify they hire foreigners," she said.

She said her Korean skills made her job search easier, as she can talk and write in Korean fluently, as demonstrated by her Test of Proficiency in Korean level 6. This is an advantage as many customer-facing roles require Korean fluency.

However, she said she still takes

time to deepen her knowledge of the Korean language and culture.

"Even if you are good at Korean, the culture can also be an obstacle."

In terms of the working culture, she said Korea's co-worker relationship is individualistic.

"In Turkey, it is natural to get close with the [people] you work with. But, in Korea, [I think] it is not that common to get close with your co-worker or make a work friend."

Nouha Benjelloun Andaloussi from Morocco

Andaloussi is a graduate student pursuing a doctorate in international cooperation at Korea University. She did an exchange program back in 2015 and had a part-time job at a major corporation during the winter vacation.

Her main job was working on a tender for an engineering project in her home country, Morocco. She was a specialist because of her language proficiency and nationality.

"As a Moroccan person, I could go over articles in my mother tongue and let them know about any news that was relevant to the project. I also double-checked some information because I know my country better than everyone else on the team. I also did

some translations," she said.

"In my opinion, the main benefit of working as a foreigner in Korea is the opportunity to bring something new to the table."

She said "being different" is one of the benefits of working in Korea, adding it means one can bring a different perspective to the team, though it might sound scary.

Nowadays, she is focusing on job seeking on platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook. She also mentioned that she constantly checks international organizations' websites and K-campus, the Korea JoongAng Daily's community and news platform for international students.

Ecem Nur Almurat from Turkey

Almurat is a graduate student at Sogang University majoring in philosophy and working as a global marketing intern at a skin care company, Jumiso.

She decided to come to Korea because she is interested in K-Culture content such as K-pop and Korean television shows. Her experience of studying in Korea for five months previously also led her to make the decision.

"[Korea] is secure, and people are really nice," she said. "I have really

good memories with Korean people."

Almurat said she got her current job in a unique way.

As she was interested in Korean beauty brands, she worked for a K-beauty company in Turkey for a year. One day, she went to a beauty fair where many brands participated and got an opportunity to introduce herself to Jumiso's CEO.

"I was lucky," she said. "[Jumiso] already knew the company I worked for in Turkey, so I could meet the CEO [and tell them] I am going to Sogang University and gave my business card."

She added, "After I came to Korea, I emailed my resume and cover letter."

She noted the importance of networking when looking for a job in Korea and said students should take advantage of many networking events and job fairs provided by their universities or relevant institutions.

Almurat added that foreigners working in Korea should put in effort to know their rights.

"One of my friends was underpaid and also treated badly compared to other workers, but she didn't even know that she was in an unfair situation because she thought the different work environment and cultural differ-

ence were the reasons."

She added, "[my friend couldn't really protest against the [low] salary even though she knew [about Korea's minimum wage] because of her income instability," noting that discrimination still exists at some workplaces.

The minimum wage for 2024 in Korea is 9,860 won (\$7.35), and foreign workers are legally protected to earn the same wage as Korean workers.

"Talking about the salary, you should not forget about the year-end tax settlement."

The process and schedule of year-end tax settlement of foreign workers are mostly similar to that of Korean workers. However, foreign workers can choose between the general tax or 19 percent flat rate for five years from the day they start to work in Korea.

The tax rate depends on the job, so it is better to look for more information in NTS's official English website or call the English-language call center (1588-0560).

kjd.kcampus@joongang.co.kr

Learn more about student life in Korea on the campus website



Sunnong Forum offers students room for growth with Leadership Academy

BY STUDENT REPORTER NOUHA
BENJELLOUN ANDALOUSSI

The Sunnong Culture Forum's Leadership Academy Program, a series of weekly lectures, is designed for international students to help them understand and learn from Korea's economic and industrial development.

The program opens its doors to students twice a year and has attracted a total of 537 participants over its eight editions.

The forum was established in 2010 by the graduates of Seoul National University High School, and generous donations from Korean academics and business leaders gave birth to the Leadership Academy in 2017.

At the helm of this educational initiative is professor Cho Whanbok. He has served as Korean Ambassador to Mexico and consul general in Hong Kong. After retirement, he assumed the role of commissioner of international cooperation at the Korea Saemaul Undong Center and chair professor at Yungnam University. Additionally, Cho held key positions at the Korea International Cooperation Agency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He also worked as an advisor in the private sector. All these experiences Cho has explained why he is not only a seasoned public servant but also an academic with an understanding of various issues in Korea and the world.

Cho witnessed Korea's economic development with his own eyes as he was born during the Korean War to a family of refugees in Busan.

In an interview with the Korea JoongAng Daily, he said he saw Korea's journey from a nation dependent on international aid to a highly developed country.

"At the time, thinking of economic development was a luxury," he said.

"As I was outside Korea for 25 years and I lived in developing countries in Africa and Latin America, I realized the contrast with Korea when I came back", he added. "I was curious about differences between Korea and developing countries in terms of economic [developments]."

Referring to the lessons from the Saemaul Movement launched by President Park Chung Hee to revive the rural sector and empower farmers, he said: "What I learned is the importance of mindset. The two keywords are leadership and sense of ownership."

Cho made a distinction between macroeconomic issues like overall development and aid dependency and microeconomic issues like changing people's sentiments.

"Everyone can understand macro[economic] issues, but for micro[economic] issues, people feel rather than understand them," he said. "The challenge is to convert feelings into action."

Cho said international students can play a role in tackling such a challenge, recognizing the sacrifices they had to make to be in Korea, calling them important "drivers of passion and ambition."

"They came to Korea motivated. They had to sacrifice something to be here [and faced challenges such as] culture and language differences and being away from their families," he said.

He said that he wants the students in the program to remember one or two of his sentences or the small messages that he shares throughout his lectures. The program is oriented toward realities lived by the participants, which makes its content more approachable.

"There is no wrong perspective. But we aim to inspire a broader perspective among students and help them develop critical thinking", he said.

He added that the program delves



Participants of the Sunnong Culture Forum's Leadership Academy Program in 2023 pose for a photo.

into the specific needs of the respective countries of participants rather than only discussing Korea.

The program provides real-world insights that resonate with the participants and encourages them to foster relationships through the program. It quickly gained traction among international students as well by featuring top-class lecturers fluent in English and organizing various events.

At the end of the program, participants are awarded certificates and presents from the president of Sunnong Culture Forum, with additional gifts for students with perfect attendance and coming from far away.

Cho, noting there was a Peruvian student coming all the way from Jinju, South Gyeongsang, to attend the lectures, said, "As long as I have a student like him, I feel motivated."

He also offered advice for interna-

tional students from developing and emerging countries, saying they should focus on themselves instead of worrying about larger issues.

"If you focus on yourself and grow, the time will come for you to make a change," he said.

He hopes that students now have a mindset of "despite" rather than "because of," meaning admitting there are issues in their countries and having a sense of responsibility.

Boussoussen Ayoub, a student at Yonsei University and a participant in the 2023 autumn edition of the program, said he joined the program to learn about Korean history, acquire new knowledge and make friends.

The student from Morocco found several lectures particularly stood out, including a presentation delivered by the CEO of a major construction company in Korea.

Ayoub said, "His lecture was unbelievable, unique and iconic. It was extremely useful because I got to meet a successful entrepreneur and understand how his company became one of the most successful companies in the world. I feel that we share the same mindset in terms of entrepreneurial skills. And I was so happy that we were able to ask him many questions."

He also said Cho's friendly attitude and messages for the students made a big difference for the program.

"Professor Cho is a leader with a long experience. He is a friend more than a professor. He is open to interactions with everyone. The best aspect of his lectures is that he always shared with us a [...] message but with a huge amount of advice."

Ayoub added he made meaningful connections through the program and enjoyed many opportunities.

"People who attend the classes are also very unique. We may have different thoughts, but at the end of the day, we are all a family. Through the program we had the opportunity to visit the [demilitarized zone] and we created so many memories there and improved our relationship."

Van Tha Ceu, 27, is a student from Myanmar who earned a master's degree in agricultural and resource economics at Seoul National University. He participated in the 2022 autumn edition of the program, and said his experience was great and helped him understand leadership and development better.

"There were many reasons why I joined the program. First, it was due to the program courses. Even in a short period of time, it covers a wide range of topics. Second, it is designed for foreigners studying in Korea — mostly scholarship recipients from the Korean government, providing an opportunity to meet diverse students interested in leadership and development. Finally, the lecturers are experts in their respective fields," he said.

He chose Cho's lectures as the most helpful parts of the program.

"The lecture on how South Korea achieved its current development, given by the program coordinator, is always on my mind and really inspiring. Through his lecture, we learned how every Korean citizen supported the country during times of bankruptcy by donating their belongings, the Saemaul Movement and various other efforts [that] lifted the country 'from [an] aid recipient to aid donor.'"

He recommended others to apply to the program.

"Just join it! I am sure you won't regret it. However, do not miss any lectures. The program is designed with different weekly topics."

kjd.kcampus@joongang.co.kr