

Student Reporter



Kaylyn Wee
Grade 9
Ayala High School

Minhwa: Korea's Roots and Identity



An award-winning Minhwa student, Ashley Park, at one of her art sessions. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Wee]

Recently, I had the opportunity to participate in Minhwa, Korean traditional art. One of my good friends has been active in Minhwa and took me with her to one of her sessions. I had a very fun time and was able to learn about many aspects of the art form, in-

cluding its history, the basics, and what makes it unique from other art forms. I really hope to be able to join her in future sessions and further nurture my understanding of Minhwa.

Minhwa, also known as "people's art," is a traditional art form

that originated in Korea. Most of the art was made from the time period of the Joseon Dynasty, from 1392 to 1910, which was described as the "golden age." Traditional art was usually painted by official painters of the royal court, which caused the art to be highly influenced by China's royal court painters. However, commoners of Korea were also interested in art and also created paintings anonymously, and these paintings were also later classified as Minhwa. Because the commoners had more freedom with their work, Minhwa evolved into a pure Korean style.

Minhwa is a very powerful and unique form of art not only due to its rich history but also because of the materials and methods used. Traditional horsehair brushes are used to create the art and rice traditional paper, hanji, is used as the canvas. Minhwa artists use natural, organic materials from minerals and plants as paint or pigments. Moreover, not only are the materials special, but the images of the art are as well. Many paintings include colorful images of flowers, birds, landscapes, characters, animals, and more proportions.

As mentioned, I was able to participate in this hobby because of one of my close friends. Ashley Park, an award-winning student of Minhwa, suggests, "I recommend other people to do Minhwa if you are really passionate and love Korea or Korean culture. If you are stressed, doing Minhwa will calm you down and be like your 'therapy session.' Overall, it can be a meaningful way to connect with culture and community while expressing oneself artistically." Thus, practicing Minhwa is recommended as it provides a sense of relaxation and peace, as well as an opportunity to learn about Korean culture.

Overall, Minhwa, Korean traditional art, represents a vibrant aspect of Korean cultural heritage. Its unique characteristics, like materials, themes, and pictures, make the art form whimsical and stand out from others. All things about Minhwa are authentic, emotional, and powerful. Minhwa is a great opportunity to learn about Korea's cultural roots, heritage, and identity. Therefore, I hope to participate in Minhwa more, to bring peace into my everyday life and learn about my culture.

Student Reporter



Jane Won
Grade 12
Korea Liberal Arts School

Serving as a Design Club Leader

Serving as the Art and Design club leader this year, I have had the opportunity to explore and work on different art projects with a passionate group of students. Although the club is small, consisting of just nine members, club members have intimate connections and relationships as a team. As the club president, I prepare project ideas and materials for club meetings that take place every week. After coming up with ideas, the presidents of each club write club meeting reports on their plans and get permission from the club teachers.

One of our earliest projects was felt collage making. The members sought inspiration from platforms like Pinterest and added their personal styles to each of their projects. Using large, colorful pieces of felt, we cut and glued them together to create vibrant artwork, such as a scenic sunset or an adorable character wrapped in a cozy muffler.

Another memorable project was tote bag designing, where we used different markers to turn a white, plain bag into wearable art. Some drew flowers while others designed their bags with a combination of various fruits. This activity connected our artistic expression to something practical—what we created became something that could be worn and appreciated in everyday life.



Drying the miniature polymer clay figures the club members made during one of the Art and Design Clubs meetings. [Source: Author, Jane Won]

Currently, the clubs in our school are preparing for KLASSICA Day, a major event that will take place in November. KLASSICA, where all high school clubs in my school, KLAS, head to SICA

(our elementary school) to participate in a fundraising initiative, is a great event where the high schoolers connect with younger students and raise funds for their clubs. The Art and Design Club

decided to organize three booths for fundraising: a bookmark booth, a cotton candy booth, and a bracelet-making booth for the kids.

The bookmark booth, taking place on KLASSICA day for the third time, has become a tradition. Our club members have been cutting sketchbooks and decorating them, filling them out with meaningful quotes. Although there is plenty we still need to prepare, and expecting KLASSICA day to be hectic, I am excited for the opportunity to fundraise and connect with younger students and parents.

Despite the small size of the club, being part of it has helped me feel a stronger sense of community. It's not about the number of members but about the shared love and interest in creating and exploring new art forms. As a leader, I've learned that inspiration can come from even the smallest groups in a supportive environment. As we prepare for KLASSICA Day and for future art projects, I'm excited to continue guiding our members in exploring new art forms and expressing them through those different projects. Leading this club has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my high school life, and I look forward to continuing to explore and grow as an Art and Design club.

Student Reporter



Bailee Kim
Grade 11
Crescenta Valley High School

Composting at Home, It's Worth It!

Many people are aware of the benefits of composting to the environment but choose not to compost themselves due to it being difficult to start. People assume composting is hard because it is a complicated process, but in reality, composting can easily be carried out by anyone and it creates more benefits to households and the environment than we think. Although it may be daunting to start, it's completely worth it.

So, what even is composting? Some people have the wrong idea of composting being an intricate process that requires years of prior research and specific environmental conditions when it is not always that complicated. Industrial levels of composting can be complex to such levels but on a personal scale, composting is a very personalized process that does not require any prior knowledge. To put it simply, composting is a process where organic material is broken down into a nutrient-rich substance, which is called compost. The components can be broken down into greens and browns, with the greens being nitrogen-rich and the browns being carbon-rich materials, but for non-industrial purposes, people generally use

food scraps, leaves, grass, and even cardboard to create compost. Unlike what many believe, the quality of compost does not always depend on the quality of the products one originally uses to start the decomposition process. On an individual household level, there is no need to pay attention to the quality of the organic matter being put in, and it can be thought of as a method to decrease food waste.

Using food waste that would have been otherwise thrown away not only helps the environment by decreasing the food waste in landfills, but it also helps households save money by producing valuable compost that can be used as a source of fertilizer. Although not all food waste, such as cooked foods, greasy foods, and highly processed foods, can be used for composting, much of our other waste, such as produce scraps and tea, is perfect for composting. Any home gardener knows how pricey fertilizer can get, especially when investing in a high-quality one that provides sufficient nutrients to their plants. Compost is an extremely nutritious alternative to fertilizer that not only helps the plants grow faster but also improves the soil quality itself as well. Due



The basic composting bin provided by the state is a great resource for families wanting to garden without the use of chemical fertilizers.

[Source: Author, Bailee Kim]

to the natural process of decomposition, which produces compost, it poses long-lasting benefits to the soil and removes the worry of chemicals getting into any freshly grown produce. The issue of chemical fertilizers is one reason why families choose to grow a home garden, but using chemical or store-bought fertilizers would eliminate the

whole purpose of bringing crops to their backyard.

Composting eliminates the financial and health concerns regarding fertilizers and chemicals in our produce, proving to be an overall beneficial process that requires little knowledge or resources to start. So, although it may seem like a difficult process, it's worth it!

Student Reporter

AI Is Getting Out of Hand



Huichan Kim
Grade 12
Homeschool



Countless shocking incidents occurred due to the advancement of AI. AI is our friend but also our enemy at the same time.

[Source: Author, Huichan Kim]

It is not an exaggeration to say that we are living in an age of AI. There are hundreds of thousands of systems and infrastructures operated by Artificial Intelligence, and

these are increasing day by day. The advancement of AI is making our lives more efficient and easier. Instead of searching and reading long articles, we can rely on AI, like

ChatGPT, to answer our questions or summarize the tedious articles. The same applies to image searches: AI can generate whatever image you want. Driving, analyzing, and signing were fields in which AI replaced humans because they are accurate, fast, and even better than humans at these tasks. But is this ultimately beneficial to human society?

The jobs these days seem different than in the past: fewer people work together in the same room, as many companies are replacing laborers with machines. AI machines reduce labor costs and the expenses needed for laborers, such as salary, educational expenses, and employee benefits. This would benefit those companies but it will cause an increase in unemployment, leading to heightened social unrest. In May 2023, in the United States, approximately 3,900 jobs were lost due to AI, with projections that AI could likely replace around 800 million jobs worldwide in 5 years.

Another issue arising from AI technology is deepfake. Recently, South Korea has been in an uproar over deepfake incidents. Deepfake is video editing that uses AI technology to synthesize a person's

face or other features. Approximately over 780 deepfake-related cases have been reported by September 2024. Since deepfakes can be created from a video using just a single photo, people use pictures of others they have or found from SNS. This could lead to serious social turbulence. A celebrity or ordinary person's face synthesized into a video invades their privacy. There are many victims of AI who are suffering mentally and socially due to false information and fake news being spread. AI can use celebrities' and politicians' voices and faces to make videos with absurd statements, tarnishing reputations and causing social confusion. The recent revelation that both the victims and perpetrators of deepfake videos are young has caused a significant shock in Korean society. The Korean government has started to consider and make laws related to AI deepfake.

With the advancement of AI, we are experiencing many benefits, but we have to remember that there are many cons of developing AI. How can we coexist well with AI? We have to study and always be aware of it. If we let our guard down, AI could turn our friends into an enemy.

Student Reporter

International Perspective on the Presidential Election



Christine Baek
Grade 11
Western Reserve Academy

Four years ago, when Joe Biden won the presidential election over Donald Trump, I was a middle school student in New Zealand. I still remember the heat surrounding the election happening thousands of miles across the globe. For us, it was almost like entertainment, trying to guess who would win the so-called "most important presidential election of the century." Besides, it didn't really matter to us anyway.

Now, four years later, I'm a junior in high school - this time living in the United States as an international student. Now, the heat surrounding the election is at its peak, and it seems to engulf every news outlet around it as if it were a conflagration. The presidential election day, November 5th, is right around the corner. This time, the stakes feel different.

As an international student, I didn't expect to be engaged in U.S. politics at all. To me, it seemed like a distant realm - something outside my reach and responsibility. But as election day draws closer, I can't ignore the anxiousness building around me. It has become clearer how much this election can affect our lives. Immigration policies, visa regulations, and job opportunities are all shaped by political decisions. By attending a school where people have diverse backgrounds, I've seen teachers and friends struggle with these uncertainties. Very recently, a faculty member had to leave the country due to visa complications,



Free Speech, WRA's student-led political magazine where students express their opinions on political events, including the upcoming presidential election.

[Source: Author, Christine Baek]

while another celebrated his hard-won citizenship after waiting for more than two decades. These

personal experiences make it impossible to ignore how policies trickle down to influence even

those of us who aren't citizens.

Over the course of living in the States for the past three years, it was not hard to notice the country's deeply rooted political engagement. When I talked to a few of my friends who are also international students, a common theme that came up was the exposure to political content, whether through media or in real life. Even outside of election season, posters are often seen around the town supporting either one of the parties and the coverage of political events is overflowing in the media. Specifically, Trump's reference to communities in Springfield, Ohio, when discussing immigration, has been constantly appearing on the internet as well as talked about in school, especially since I'm attending a school in Ohio. As a student from abroad, this openness in discussion offers both inspiration and challenges; it's empowering to see ideas discussed freely, but the unpredictability of outcomes creates uncertainty about the future and raises concern about being pushed down by the overwhelming information overload from social media.

While the 2024 presidential election is designed to involve citizens, it extends its influence far beyond. The U.S. election has become more than just a news event to me, as I realize it affects not only the direction of this country but also the lives of those within it, including the journeys of students like me.

Student Reporter

The Five Minute Newscast - Behind the Scenes



Jenna Kim
Grade 11
Pacifica Christian High School

When I first started a podcast club, Five Minute Teen Newscast, in my Sophomore year, all I had was a microphone, a borrowed audio interface, and a love for listening to (and hopefully hosting) podcasts. During much of the pandemic, one of the ways that I felt I could connect to the community was by listening to podcasts and interviews, where I could empathize with and feel included in the conversations or advice of speakers. Jumping forward to this summer, I took a college class in Media Studies and was specifically interested in the news today, our consumption of it, and how convoluted it has become for the newer generations.

Around 54 percent of American adults get their news from social media, meaning that most of the news is subject to misinformation and cherry-picking practices. Cherry-picking news is a term used to describe how social media platforms "cherry-pick" news and information that support a viewer's pre-existing views or what is mass-followed online. This can be dangerous as it discourages creative thought and healthy arguments.

Even though it will take a uni-

versal effort to slowly decrease the effect of cherry-picking on social media, I wanted to dedicate the Five Minute Teen Newscast to advocate against these harmful practices. Thus, the podcast's mission is to deliver the news in a short five-minute format on topics such as Sports, Entertainment, Science, Politics, and Economics each week, but in a formal and non-polarized fashion. We employ trusted sources, such as the New York Times and NPR, so that teen viewers can receive the news without the filtering of social media's cherry-picking.

Now for the fun part: what is the process of podcasting like? Each week, the podcasting club at my school, separated into different groups, rotates shifts in recording episodes. They write scripts derived from different trusted articles on assorted topics. Then, at the end of the week, we go to the recording room and record the episode, which is posted the next Monday on Spotify along with its promotional media content.

At the end of the day, I could not have done this on my own. It is all thanks to the heavy help of our school, who made the record-



The Five Minute Teen Newscast Spotify and Instagram Page, where you can find all of the current podcasts.

[Source: Jenna Kim, Author]

ing room for us, and other creative students, as well as my immensely talented peers, who have helped me lead and produce content I would never have imagined to be possible. So, if you have something that you are passionate

about, and think that maybe, even a small group of people would be helped from it, I encourage you to try. Because it's definitely been difficult, but even more rewarding to find and serve the Five Minute Teen Newscast.

Editors Column



Audrey Park
Grade 11
Northwood High School

It All Started with “Spanish or Vanish”



The mascot behind Duolingo, a popular language-learning app, is often portrayed in an eccentric way on its social media pages.

[Source: Author, Audrey Park]

When having the privilege of being the head of publicity for a large company, one would likely expect to oversee the production of professional social media posts that highlight product updates or app features; however, in recent years, individuals in these posi-

tions have normalized posting short videos with single images, overwhelming “audios,” and references to out-of-place characters in the hopes of addressing the coming generation’s seemingly random humor. Companies have always had a difficult time appeal-

ing to younger generations, as their humor seems to be fleeting and intangible. Many found the solution to be easier than initially thought with Generation Z. Companies that have adapted to the rather absurd, nonsense humor of Generation Z have found a jackpot in social media marketing.

One app’s social media page, Duolingo, is filled with such content: feigned infatuations with random celebrities, unhinged depictions of its mascots, and under-the-radar inside jokes. Duolingo has been recognized as a free language learning app that offers high-quality lessons and employs informal social media posts to address its younger users. These posts pop up on several platforms, such as TikTok or Instagram, in the form of short content and include references to trends and pop-culture symbols.

For companies like Duolingo, this marketing may have come automatically through content that the audiences and younger generations themselves create. A few years back, a user may have associated Wendy’s burgers and fries with crude Twitter posts, where its social media accounts could be found starting lighthearted banter with rival fast-food franchises. Prior to this, when various Twitter users popularized one snarky post that a Wendy’s employee made, the company’s publicity team devoted themselves to making entertaining

beef with Wendy’s haters and rival companies to create marketing leverage against competitors. Using Medium, Justin Thorne reported the statistics of Wendy’s financial growth immediately after the peak of this attention by writing, “[the posts] proved to be an ingenious marketing move by Wendy’s as their net income increased from \$129.6 million to \$194 million.” A similar thing happened with Duolingo’s mascot. A few years ago, the internet placed an ominous presence behind the owl, urging others to believe that bird would come and find their family if they did not finish their daily language lessons. Most youths remember the phrase “Spanish or vanish.” Now, when scrolling through Duolingo’s catalog of Instagram posts, a user will find depictions of their signature, highlighter-green mascot acting borderline psychotic to encourage completion of lessons alongside genuine content that formally showcases new features of the app. It’s no coincidence either, as it seems that the stark contrast between professional posts and playful ones highlights the self-awareness of the publicity team, which only humors audiences even more.

As companies fight to get a firmer hold on younger generations, these informal methods of generating short-form content may need to be integrated into marketing practices.

Student Reporter



Jason Lee
Grade 9
Northwood High School

Korean Graveyards: Symbols of Tradition and Belief

Throughout the hills and valleys of South Korea, thousands of ancient burial sites provide spaces where people can silently respect and honor the deceased through their unique burial traditions. These traditions have shaped the nation from the dolmen structures of the Three Kingdoms era to the carved markers of the Joseon dynasty. The weathered gravestones offer insight into Korea’s reverence for the afterlife and its connection to its past.

The origins of Korean graveyards can be traced back to the emergence of complex societies in the country. One of the earliest forms of gravestones was the dolmen—massive stone slabs propped on top of boulders to form a tomb-like structure. These mysterious monuments served as final resting places for elite members of the society. The sheer scale of labor required to construct these tombs speaks to how much the early Koreans respected the afterlife and felt the necessity to honor the dead.

As Korean civilization evolved through the centuries, styles and customs regarding burial prac-



A mound of earth and dirt above a gravestone reminds us of cultural markers.

[Source: Author, Sooyoon Lee]

tices also changed drastically. For example, the Gogryeo developed

a tradition of rock-cut chamber tombs. The walls were decorated with bright murals depicting the deceased’s life and status. The Silla people, meanwhile, are renowned for the iconic “rock-pile” style of grave markers, where carefully stacked boulders form an abstract representation of the deceased.

During the Joseon dynasty, however, Korea’s gravestone traditions reached their pinnacle of artistic expression and symbolic meaning. The table stones from the Joseon era featured strikingly carved designs and inscriptions, providing rich details about the deceased’s identity, such as accomplishments and family relationships. The markers were aligned with the landscape nearby to guarantee a balanced integration between the world of living and dead.

In modern-day Korea, burial practices are evolving due to limited burial space. While traditional subterranean interment with geomantic site selection was once common, cremation is now the predominant method, with over 80% of funerals

involving this method. Cremated remains are often stored in columbariums, interred in tree burials, or buried in natural burial sites. This shift away from the traditional burial system reflects the practical challenges of land scarcity, though the cultural significance of ancestral graves remains important. Koreans continue to carefully consider the placement of graves, believing the location can impact the fortune of the deceased’s descendants.

As Korea continues to modernize, the necessity to honor and learn from burial traditions has become even more urgent. Understanding deep spiritual meanings and aesthetic sensibilities from Korean gravestones allows us to gain priceless insight into values, beliefs, and views that ancestors have sustained throughout the change. During an age when cultural markers are fading away from relevancy, these hallowed graveyards stand as immovable reminders of the timeless rhythms and connections that lie at the heart of Korea.

Student Reporter



Claire Lee
Grade 11
La Canada High School

How College Rankings are Determined



Heather Kim, a junior, browses the U.S. News & World Report Rankings as she explores various college options for her near future.

[Source: Author, Claire Lee]

The process of choosing which colleges to apply to can be challenging, and many, if not most students and parents turn to college rankings for guidance. Heather Kim, a fellow junior, claims that she feels “inclined to look at colleges that rank highly, though [she does] take into consideration

other factors.” Among the various available rankings, annual rankings published by U.S. News & World Report are especially popular. These rankings often sway people to believe that one college is superior to another, but are they truly objective and accurate?

The U.S. News & World Report

rankings are based on 17 factors, with some carrying more weight and importance than others. For instance, graduation rates account for 27% of the ranking; that is, the higher the graduation rate, the more likely the college will be ranked at a high level. Another 20% of the ranking is determined by peer assessments—opinions from college administrators. Though their reputation might seem important, these factors do not reflect the true college experience.

Other factors include financial resources spent on each student (8%), first-year retention rates (5%), standardized test scores (5%), the student-to-faculty ratio (3%), faculty salaries (6%), and the number of full-time professors (2%). While these statistics might imply smaller class sizes and well-paid faculty, these results compelled me to consider how they are relevant in determining a school’s ranking. Research and publication-related factors account for only 2.5%, suggesting that the actual academic impact plays a menial role. Financial factors, like borrower debt (5%) and how much college graduates earn compared to high school graduates (5%), are also considered. Despite highlighting the financial

impact on students, they fail to measure more important factors like academic quality, sense of communal identity, and campus life of the evaluated colleges.

Some of the greatest critiques of these rankings are that they prioritize graduation rates, reputation, and finance over academic quality, student satisfaction, and depth of academic programs. Though rankings might appear to be a strategic indicator, they often place a burden of pressure on students to apply to highly ranked schools without considering if it is the ideal choice. There’s no doubt that a lower-ranked school might offer better programs, quality education, and more academic resources. If academic and scholastic value is a student’s priority, they should search for colleges with superior academic reputations. If, in contrast, they prioritize a morale or reputation boost, they might look into higher-ranked colleges. Nevertheless, when researching and committing to particular colleges, it is essential to delve into factors beyond rankings, such as extracurriculars, academic programs, campus, and geographical location. While rankings merely offer a superficial overview of a college, the official decision comes down to the student themselves.