

Editors Column



Summer Park

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Thousands Protest Korea's New Gender Ministry

Thousands of protesters march with their hats and umbrellas in extreme heat with over 70% humidity on July 12th in Seoul, Sejong-ro.
[Source: Author, Summer Park]

Seoul - On July 12th, thousands marched against the new Korea Ministry of Gender Equality and Family near City Hall and Blue House, South Korea's version of the White House. Leaving a musical show at the Sejong Performing Arts Theater in Seoul, I saw thousands of protesters. As a high school newspaper reporter, I couldn't pass up on this opportunity to find out what was going on.

What is the protest about?

The newly elected South Korean President and his cabinet have proposed transforming the 여성가족부 (Women and Family) to the 성평등가족부 (Gender Equality and Family) department. This move aims to shift the focus from women-only issues to equitable treatment for all genders. Overall, the shift would highlight gender inclusivity and broader government accountability and service for violence prevention, family support, and economic empow-

erment, such as workforce inclusion, addressing wage gaps, discriminatory hiring, and the glass ceiling for marginalized genders, flexible work hours, and more.

One of the protesters, a woman in her 50s, said, "We are out here today to vehemently oppose modifying the current ministry of gender equality and family that promotes radical gender ideology." Many of the protesters belonged to the National Alliance Against Same-Sex Marriage and various Christian organizations. These protestors voiced concerns about the legalization of same-sex marriage as well as the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights. Multiple trucks were filled with men and women with microphones loudly proclaiming how the new ministry would undermine traditional values, exacerbating the already low birth rate in the country. A family came with their two children, and the mom said, "I don't want my kids to grow up with a government undermining nuclear family models and indoctrinating my kids to condone homosexual marriages."

The passionate, loud protesters marched peacefully, waving their signs and banners in the oppressive heat, made worse by humidity levels of over 70%. Many protesters held ice water bottles

or umbrellas in one hand while holding signs in the other.

However, there were supporters of the new policies. One young couple in their twenties at a nearby bus stop disagreed with the protest, saying, "We believe the government should protect its citizens regardless of their gender and sexual identities. There is a lot of prejudice against the LGBTQ+ and trans community in Korea."

According to Human Rights Watch (2022), Koreans part of the LGBTQ+ community face deep social, legal, and institutional discrimination. Common forms of discrimination occur in the workplace, at home, in schools, and in religious institutions. Legally, same-sex marriage is not recognized, and gay soldiers are banned from the military. The National Assembly, South Korea's version of Congress, has repeatedly blocked anti-discrimination legislation. Although celebrity influencers and pride events in Korean cities have raised awareness, Confucian values continue to shape Korean society with an emphasis on traditional structure, filial piety, and heterosexual marriage. Will the younger generation be able to combat silence and stigma with the mission of the New Ministry?

Student Reporter

Together in Pink: My Family's First K-pop Concert

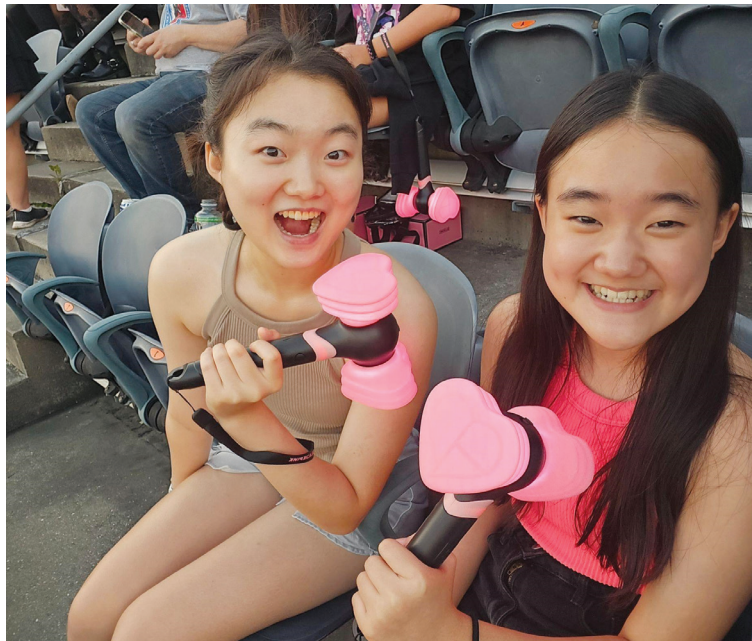


Irene Kim

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When I woke up on Monday, July 14, the only thing on my mind was the upcoming BLACKPINK Concert. BLACKPINK, YG Entertainment's four-member girl group, was set to perform at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, only four days later as part of their Deadline world tour. That afternoon, my family and I packed into the car for the three-hour drive from Champaign to Chicago, headed for our very first K-pop concert. None of us knew exactly what to expect.

Prior to entering the stadium, we had to get through layers of security measures similar to ones you would see at an airport: bag checks, metal detectors, and long lines. (Tip: It's important to pay close attention to the stadium's rules regarding what can and cannot be brought in. In my case, only clear bags of a specific size were allowed, which we were able to prepare ahead of time.) However, unlike TSA, everyone here was excited and dressed to celebrate. While many wore casual clothes, others went all out with their black-and-pink-themed outfits. One couple even dazzled up their hair and beard with pink glitter—iconic. There was no official dress code, but my family and I later regretted not being bolder with our style.

My sister and I show off our BLACKPINK light sticks—our bbyongbong (뽕봉).
[Source: Gyeong Mi Doh]

Inside, we found another line—this time for merchandise. My sister and I were determined to get BLACKPINK light sticks—the bbyongbong (뽕봉), named after the Korean toy hammer (뽕망치)—so we hurriedly got in line before it grew any longer. Soon enough, the line doubled behind us, and we were glad we acted quickly. (Tip: There are usually multiple merchandise stands; if

the line for one looks too long, keep walking—there might be a shorter one. Same goes for bathrooms!)

While waiting, a fan offered us freebies. She presented a small box of BLACKPINK-themed washi tape, photocards, and stickers, welcoming us to take one. Making and giving away freebies is a beloved tradition at most K-pop concerts. My sister and I, despite being

introverts who were new to K-pop concerts, each excitedly picked one out and chatted with her. I was surprised at how naturally K-pop could bring people together.

Though the stage was hard to see from our seats up high, the energy overflowed. As the sun set and the lights dimmed, the stadium became a glittering ocean of pink light. We screamed, sang along, and danced as one. No longer strangers, no longer individuals, but just fans—together.

After the fifth act, the stage lights turned off, and some fans began leaving. However, most of the pink lights blinked in place, waiting. Sure enough, a few minutes later, BLACKPINK returned for the encore. I was glad I wasn't fooled by the "last" song. I knew it was really over when each member signed off and waved the crowd goodbye. As the members descended beneath the stage, the pink waves glittered brighter than ever.

Walking out of the stadium, my family didn't say much, each of us savoring the last bits of the magic. The concert was our first step into a new part of our culture, and it meant more because we experienced it together. As we stepped outside, tightly hugging our bbyongbong, we shared a promise: that we'd go again.

Student Reporter

Library Volunteering Fuels Language Passion



Kevin Jeong

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Most of the time, volunteering feels like a duty. But for some international school students in Korea, reading to Korean elementary students at public libraries has become a meaningful way to give back.

As the English language continues to dominate, becoming the world's lingua franca, more Korean families are seeking ways to expose their children to the language in more natural and engaging settings. That's where student volunteers come in, bridging that gap by reading fun, age-appropriate English books to young Korean children in public libraries.

I first became interested in the English Reading Volunteer Program at my local library after volunteering once for the volunteer hours. The role was simple: read English books to elementary students, translate some sentences into Korean, and ask them a couple of questions. I never knew what started as a light volunteer opportunity would turn into something much more meaningful. At first, I worried the children would not bother to read English books. But to my surprise, many

of them excitedly brought their favorite books and asked me to read them. What makes this program unique is that it isn't just about reading; it's about seeing the kids' faces shine as they learn new languages with their favorite books. One volunteer, Hyunwoo Chung, a fellow International high school student fluent in both Korean and English, shared, "When I saw the kids laughing at the silly parts of the story or repeating words out loud, I realized they weren't just learning—they were enjoying it! Parents, who sat next to the kids, were also having fun watching their kids get excited over their favorite books."

Another volunteer, Roy Bae, added, "It's not only a language experience and learning for the kids, but for us too. We learn communication skills and, ultimately, how to be patient with younger students. I didn't expect it, but it improved my patience and talking skills."

The sessions usually last about 3 hours, and volunteers are expected to arrive early, prepare the book for that day, and wait in the aisle for children to

Elementary students are gathering around the volunteer with a handful of books that they want to read on the side.
[Source: Author, Kevin Jeong]

walk in. My friends and I, due to the meaningful experience it gave us, made a club and officially partnered with the local library to gather more people and further volunteer with more libraries. For now, it is a school club, but as we expand, we will be able to gather volunteers from different international schools in Korea! For high school students who are looking to make an impact during the school year or

breaks, be on the lookout for any volunteer opportunities, because we are very close to making this club public.

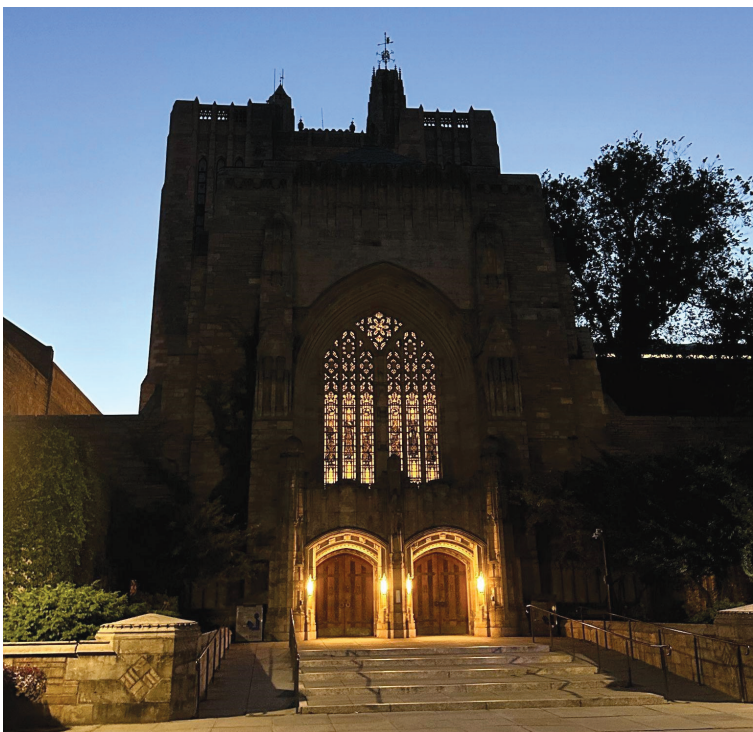
Lastly, in a country where English education often feels like a stressful race, this program offers something more fun: a joyful, low-pressure way for kids to fall in love with English. And for us, the volunteers, it's a chance to share something we know with a new generation of readers.

Student Reporter

Everyone Has a Home at YYGS



Angel Song
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Harvard-Westlake School



Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library is one of the places where many students go to study and work on projects during YYGS.
[Source: Author, Angel Song]

Last fall, I was looking for a summer opportunity that would allow me to further my own interest in politics and law while letting me meet brilliant peers from all around the world. After doing some research, I applied early to Yale Young Global Scholars (YYGS)

for the Politics, Law, and Economics (PLE) track for this summer. Now, as I'm in my dorm writing this article, I realize how much of a transformative experience this program was, considering the wide range of information and experiences I absorbed from it.

Separate from Yale Summer Session, which is often referred to as Yale Precollege, YYGS began in 2001 to enrich rising high school seniors and juniors from all over the world in four specific categories for two weeks. The program offers specialized sessions for scholars with all interests. Their tracks include Innovations in Science & Technology (IST), Literature, Philosophy, & Culture (LPC), Politics, Law, & Economics (PLE), and Solving Global Challenges (SGC). During the application process, applicants are able to rank up to three tracks in order of preference, although there is no guarantee that one will get their first choice. I chose PLE considering my background in speech as well as my interest in international relations.

A typical day at YYGS is packed with both fun and learning. Students get their breakfast at their residential colleges, head to family time with their designated family time leader and a group of peers referred to as a family, then go to a track-wide lecture. Afterwards, students are given the opportunity to go to a seminar, which is a small-group discussion based on a certain topic of their choice. All scholars are also assigned to a capstone group project, and this "class"

culminates with a presentation in front of fellow scholars. The day ends with a discussion about the lecture with your assigned group.

Although this schedule seems packed with exciting activities, there are also opportunities for students to explore New Haven and the Yale campus within YYGS boundaries. Many scholars will often opt to get food or simply look around the stores in New Haven.

All in all, the best part about this program is the inclusivity. I was able to listen to diverse perspectives and experiences through my family members, who were from countries including Colombia, Egypt, South Korea, and the United States. This opportunity is great for anyone who wants to network or hear about the different experiences their peers have.

Spending two weeks with a group of talented peers passionate about subjects similar to mine was one of the most enriching experiences of my life. I made friends from all over the world, shared a variety of stories, and discussed societal issues and their solutions. As I get ready to leave today, I know for sure that the things I won't be leaving behind are my memories and the relationships I've made from YYGS.

Student Reporter

Gyeongbokgung: Korea's Top Tourist Spot



Katie Lee
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STEM Magnet

The palace that once belonged to the Joseon Dynasty has now become South Korea's most visited tourist attraction. The Gyeongbokgung Palace was first built in 1395 and served as the main royal palace during the Joseon era. In addition to Gyeongbokgung, four other palaces were constructed during the dynasty: Changgyeonggung, Changdeokgung, Gyeonghui-gung, and Deoksugung. Of these four, Gyeongbokgung Palace stood as the largest and most significant among them.

During my trip to Korea, I had the chance to visit Gyeongbokgung Palace. The streets around it were filled with both foreigners and locals walking in and out of the hanbok rental stores dressed in traditional hanbok, their faces lit up with joy. Many smiled even wider at the realization that wearing a hanbok allowed free entry into the palace. The moment I walked into Gyeongbokgung Palace, I was overwhelmed by its scenery. Standing there, I felt a really deep connection. More than 600 years ago, the king and queen, royal guards, and citizens stood in the exact same spot I was in, carrying on with their daily lives and holding ceremonies. The palace that was



A view of the pond and one of the many halls from Gyeongbokgung Palace.
[Source: Author, Katie Lee]

once a home is now a tourist attraction with over 3 million visits a year.

One of the factors that is known about the Gyeongbukgung Palace is its architecture and design. Back in the 1300s, the Joseons used traditional construction methods. The moment

you take a step into the palace, you are met with countless halls and designs. If you take a closer look at the wooden roof of each hall, you will see detailed carvings with flowers drawn on them. These flowers are kkot saegim, also known as flower carvings. They are bright and colorful, rep-

resenting good fortune and protection. These traditional decorative styles of paintings are called dancheong. You can see these flowers on the roof of every single hall within the palace.

If you ever visit the Gyeongbukgung Palace, you'll notice that there is a lot of nature. The palace is also known for its ability to blend in with its natural surroundings. The pond reflecting the palace buildings creates a calming and aesthetic vibe. The mountain known as Mount Bugaksan, towering over as the background of the palace, is like a protective barrier. The gardens at the palace have been carefully cared for, and their vibrant colors bring the palace to life. Together, the pond, the mountain, and the garden provide an example of the traditional Korean belief that we must live in unity with our environment.

The opportunity to visit the Gyeongbukgung Palace allowed me to gain insight into Korea's history. Walking through the palace that was once ruled by a king and looking at the countless halls with their incredible designs made me appreciate my country more. It filled me with pride in who I am and the rich history behind my heritage.

Student Reporter

Taekwondo Hanmadang Returns to U.S. After 17 Years



Ian Lee
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Upon entering the Anaheim Convention Center, you hear the squeaking of mops being pushed across the floor, and smell the rubbery scent of the foam mats that will soon have thousands of feet moving across them. Finally, the 30th annual Taekwondo HanMaDang tournament has come, and for the first time in 17 years, it's happening in the USA. The HanMaDang is a worldwide taekwondo tournament that attracts competitors from all over the world. While it is mainly held in South Korea, for the second time in HanMaDang's history, it was held at the Anaheim Convention Center, located in Southern California, and I had the opportunity to attend.

I attended the event on the first and second days, and the roar of the crowds was deafening. As thousands of spectators watched, competitors from all across the world fought on the mats, participating in the tournament in numerous activities, such as forms, breaking boards, and demonstration performances. People were competing for medals and recognition, each representing their own school and nation. I competed in the first

tournament, in the Individual Traditional Forms event, where opponents demonstrated a series of taekwondo motions that consisted of kicks, blocks, and punches. The discipline and strength that competitors from all around the world showed, each in their own way, inspired me as well. However, while the competition itself was impressive, what truly caught my eye was the performance of the athletes from the official taekwondo headquarters in South Korea, Kukkiwon.

On the second day, after the competitions for that day were over, HanMaDang held the official ceremony for taekwondo. At the beginning of this event, members from each school came out with their flag and held them up for the spectators to see. Then, after all the announcements, recognitions, and honorary mentions, Kukkiwon performed a taekwondo demonstration. As everyone watched, a group of 25 athletes began with synchronized motions and moved on to demonstrate high-flying kicks with the use of nothing but their bodies and momentum. The audience watched in awe as athletes broke boards



As the audience watches in awe, the Kukkiwon demonstration team sends boards flying with their high-flying kicks.
[Source: Author, Ian Lee]

blindfolded, kicked boards that were placed more than 20 feet in the air, and even kicked an apple off of one person's head! Their demonstration was definitely the highlight of the competition and left everyone waiting for more.

The HanMaDang, an event where all kinds of people can come and show their passion for

taekwondo, is truly a memorable experience. From the competition and the awards ceremony to the Kukkiwon demonstration, it is truly a sight to see, and a moment I'll never forget. So, if you are ever in South Korea during the tournament, or happen to be in the US the next time it is here, don't miss HanMaDang!