

THE KOREA FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP FOR THE KOREAN
LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMME
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I arrived in Seoul in the early hours of the 15 June. I was met by my Korean friend, Solomon You, an ex-Murdoch student, who had very kindly taken the morning off work to help on my first day in Seoul. First, he took me to the Korean Language Institute in Yonsei University for registration, where I was given a few addresses of boarding houses in the vicinity of the University. I took the first boarding house we went to, which was two minutes from the front gate of the University. Solomon then helped me to open a bank account as instructed by the Korea Foundation. We then went to the Korea Foundation office to make my arrival known to the Foundation. I was told to come to the Foundation once a month for a meeting with the Director (International Cooperation Department) and other Fellows for us to report on our progress. The Foundation did not provide me with any programme or activities but I was told that they would be happy to help me with whatever relevant activities I wished to pursue. Other than this once a month meeting, and having the programme officer arrange my visits to the libraries, I was left to my own devices.

Living in Seoul

I rented a room in a boarding house for 400,000 Won (A\$800) per month with breakfast and dinner provided. The room was about 3m by 3m, with no furniture, and a small window facing a noisy street and a railway track at the back. On the day of my arrival, my landlady had to take me to buy bedding so that I would have something to sleep on.

There were about 13 students in the boarding house, including 6 Korean and 6 Japanese. The Japanese students proved to be most helpful as I could communicate with them better than I could with the Korean students. They were especially useful when I needed to communicate with my landlady who spoke no English.

In the vicinity of the boarding house there are three universities. Thus the whole area of Shinchon, as it is called, is an area catering to young people. There are numerous karaoke bars, beer houses, video shops, electronic game parlours, restaurants, music shops, and so on. It is often very noisy until the early hours of the morning. After the first few nights, I learned to sleep through, regardless of the noise.

Nearly all my weekends were spent visiting places of interest in and around Seoul. (This beat staring at the four walls in my room). I have visited nearly every attraction listed in the Lonely Planet guidebook.

email is the only Internet facility available on these terminals. No printing facility is available.

Conclusion

At times I felt that the Korea Foundation could have offered more 'pastoral guidance' to foreign students. However, on reflection, I am not entirely unhappy about the absence of a detailed programme and that I was left so much to my own devices. As a result of my visits to the libraries I now have professional contacts in these libraries. I was able to make some Korean friends and, although my living conditions were basic, I was living just like any Korean student and therefore gained a truer insight into student life in Korea. At the end of my stay I was asked to write a report to the Korea Foundation about my experiences and they responded very positively to my suggestions for improvements to the programme.

I now have a better understanding of Korean history, politics and culture and most of all its relationship with Japan: "the Koreans are driven by a fierce desire to beat Japan, which colonised the Korean peninsula until 1945 ... the urge to assert Korean's role as a first-tier power is shared by virtually the entire society. from government ministers and CEOs to auto workers and construction supervisors." (*Business week* July 31, 1995). Personally, it is very interesting for me to compare the Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures. Korea has, at various times in its history, been colonised by both countries, and Korean culture is heavily influenced by China and Japan. This is especially obvious in the structure of its palaces and temples, its cuisine and its language. Korean language belongs to the same linguistic family as the Japanese and the Mongolian languages — the Ural-Altai family. Its grammatical structure is similar to that of Japanese but 70 per cent of Korean words are of Chinese origin.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Korea Foundation for making this trip possible, and also Murdoch University Library for giving me time off and helping to finance my trip. Although three months is not long enough to achieve mastery of a language, my course at Yonsei, together with the one I have completed at Curtin University, has given me sufficient grounding to search for titles and add the small collection of Korean books we have to the national CJK database.