

Nathan Goodman
HI244
Inga Diederich
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Eunho Lee Interview Transcript

N: This is my interview of my friend, Eunho Lee. My Name is Nathan Goodman. It is October the 8th, 2025, and we are here at Colby College. Eunho may I have your consent to interview you?

E: Yes.

N: Excellent thank you. Alright, how has your week been, how are you doing, man?

E: It's been alright, you know, it's midterm week. Definitely a little tiring but it's about to end, so I'm very excited. We have a break coming up, so yeah, overall I can't complain.

N: Are you going home to see your family?

E: Yeah.

N: Nice. Could you please restate your name, age and hometown?

E: Yeah, Eunho Lee, I am 21 years old and I am from Weston, Massachusetts.

N: So, getting sort of into your family background, where were your parents born?

E: My parents were born in Seoul, I believe. I am actually not 100% sure, but most of my family is from Seoul, so I would assume they were born in Seoul.

N: Have you heard any stories about their childhood growing up?

E: Yes, I've talked to my dad a lot about that. I don't know how deep you want me to get into it right now, but he has talked to me a lot about the economic shift. He once told me that when he was in elementary school, three people in his church owned cars, and then by the time he was in high school, almost everyone had cars. So, he kind of lived through that big development process in Korea. And he talks about in '82—was it?—where there was a regime change, and living through that... living in that militaristic society. One time he caught his dad watching a Japanese TV show that he had illegally, and he was like, “Do I have to report him?”

And so the very fabric of Korean culture and society at that point was very militaristic, you know. Obviously very heavily influenced by the colonial period and then the Korean civil war and so, yeah, he definitely talks. We talk about, like... We both love history, so we talked about that quite a bit.

N: Did he talk about how he did feel when he saw his dad watching that?

E: Yeah, I mean, because for him and my mom too... At school they would obviously be taught a very specific version of history. He mentioned that they never really talked about the colonial period. Obviously, you know, that was quite an “embarrassing” time. And

so, nationalism was definitely a big tool for political parties at that time. And so, if his idea of what Korea was and what history was was very limited, obviously, and then he—when he went to college—he first got access to books and resources not from Korea. And he has told me that that was a very eye-opening moment for him when he became a lot more radical in his political beliefs. In the '90s there were a lot of protests and at his college at Yonsei there were protests, and they were fighting against the military police and his job was to drag out injured bodies. Because, you know, they were throwing, molotov cocktails. They were actually fighting and stuff like that. He was showing me videos. He was like, “Yeah, I was in this protest.” He definitely had a very big shift once he kind of escaped that very controlled education system.

N: And that was at Yonsei?

E: Yonsei, yeah.

N: Yonsei?

E: Yeah.

N: And he met your mother there?

E: Yes. Yes, he did.

N: What were they studying there? Do you know?

E: Both dental programs.

N: And they were both from the Seoul area, probably?

E: Yeah, I think my grandparents on my dad's side live in Pyeongchang, and then my mom's side lives in Seoul. But I'm not too familiar, honestly, where exactly and what the geography is like.

N: Did your dad ever mention the way that he... his views on the political system in the '90s was then, and now has changed in retrospect? Has there been sort of a maturation of [ideas] as you get farther away from it?

E: Like how it has developed over time?

N: Yeah.

E: I think just, over time, generally this recent era gets more and more progressive. In his opinion, he's definitely left-leaning in his politics, and he is definitely very critical of Korea and the Korean government and just Koreans' everything, like society, culture, and... Yeah, I think obviously, he is very... He is not pro what it was like in the '80s under any of the dictatorships. But he has not really been a fan of any of the Korean presidents recently. Actually,

slightly off topic, but my grandfather's—my dad's dad—one of his friends from school recently ran for president, and he was this progressive hero in Korea for like... for progressive things. And so - I'm gonna try and pull up the name - but yeah, he recently turned right-wing in the recent election, and so my dad was super pissed about that. His name is Moon-soo Kim. I think my dad one time said Korea is forty-fifty years behind in terms of progression compared to the US. I think he is still very critical. But obviously, things are better now than they were. Significantly better now than they were before.

N: Kim was friends with your granddad?

E: Yeah.

N: What was your granddad's life like? Do you know?

E: Yeah, so he was not the eldest son. He was somewhere in the middle of seven or eight kids, and he—I think in college—he studied agriculture or something to do with agriculture. But he eventually started a business, and it was a very successful. My dad, when he was seven years old... up until then they had people in his house, like workers, doing their laundry for them and they were very affluent, especially relative to Korean standards. And in '82 with the regime change my grandfather got all of his assets taken by the government, so they went from being super rich, to being extremely poor. And so,

my grandfather... I guess this is a little sensitive. He was gonna kill himself. He went up to a building, and then the image of my dad's younger brother flashed in his head, and [he] was like, "I can't abandon my family." And so he obviously didn't do so, but yeah, I think I'm a little less like... Me and my grandfather talk [but] we don't... you don't really get into that type of thing. I only know through what my dad says, but just growing up they were born in the '60s. They definitely had very tough lives, but he's a very self-made man. Hes very traditional, very conservative, but... Yeah, I don't know too much more about his life or upbringing really.

N: I think it's so interesting that, like, one of his contemporaries and friends. Like, was this big political figure who has done this like, switch.

E: Yeah

N: That must be - they must have had crazy conversations, growing up,

E: Yeah, definitely. Like, the most recent Korean president that just got impeached, he's a clown. Like my dad calls him 'Korea's Trump' and my grandparents were like, "if he doesn't get elected, we're moving to the US!" like they're that type of conservative, so, yeah, they must have had very interesting conversations where one of his best friends was a progressive hero. Definitely, it would have been interesting to hear that.

N: Are your grandparents on both your dad's side and your mom's side pretty conservative and traditional?

E: Yeah. Well my mom's dad passed away when my mom was in college, so I never met him, and I'm not familiar with my grandmother on my mom's side's politics. She- I would definitely guess that she is more traditional. I feel like the Korean culture in general, I feel, is kind of resistant to change, because older people just hold power over younger people. Like, it's just kind of hard to resist against power in Korea, and so if I was a betting man, I would bet my money that she was definitely more - or she is more conservative, but I'm not sure actually about my grandmother on my mom's side.

N: Have you heard many stories about that experience in sort of that rebuilding phase, like the late fifties, early sixties area? Or is that sort of forgotten or predating?

E: Yeah. Also, I just realized my grandparents were born in the fifties.

N: Yeah, I was gonna say!

E: I said sixties, and then I was thinking about it - that's actually not right. I think they were born... My grandparents on my dad's side, were both born in fifty three and so right, as the Korean War ended. But no, they never talked about the fifties or sixties or their upbringing. I think it's definitely a sensitive topic. So yeah, I don't have any firsthand, or they have never shared their firsthand experience with me, no.

N: But generally, you think it was in and around Seoul for most of their lives and they were raised in and around Seoul or maybe from other areas?

E: Yeah... with my grandparents I really couldn't say.

N: Yeah, okay, I understand. How was Korean history, just in general, broadly, sort of moving on, presented to you by your family as you were growing up, versus maybe how it was presented in the school system or in media?

E: Korean history... as I said, my dad loves history. We would talk about, like my dad loves ancient history a lot, he would always tell us stories about, like funny stories from Korean history. Or just, you know, literally stuff from like, 1000s of years ago. In terms of modern history, he would talk about that as well and I think - my dad is very critical of Korea, and so, I think a lot of the stuff that I would hear would be from that perspective. From post World War Two, until our first elected president, he always talks about how shitty everything was, how militaristic society was. I think another thing that my parents always emphasized was the reunification dream. I remember - more when I was really young - we had a map in my room, and they outlined Korea as one country, and they would tell me we are one country. Like this is just an artificial - but we are one people - like that type of thing. And I remember, I have no idea this is true, but they told me - or it might have been my sister's - I was young I can't remember, but they told me that Korea was spelled with a C, and then the Japanese changed it to K, because K comes after J in the English alphabet. I don't know if that's true. That kind of sounds like

wishy-wash. I don't know if that's true, but stuff like that I would hear when I was younger. And like the Japanese efforts to rewrite history: my parents were conscious to make me aware of that. And like, our - the true history, I guess. Yeah, but... I am kind of rambling now, but even saying that, like my dad too, he would talk about, post World War Two, when the winners of World War Two were kind of like divvying up, or divvying out who's responsible, who's gonna pay for what, all these, like reparations and stuff like that - And like, Korea wasn't recognized as a country, but then in the negotiation of it, instead of accepting reparations, the Korean government officials - corrupt officials - accepted, like, a lump sum of cash or something like that, and so, like I was saying before, a lot of it is very like - my dad frames recent Korean history in a very critical lens, while not downplaying, obviously, the roles of Japanese Imperialism, or the impact of the United States government in supporting these dictatorial regimes. And so, yeah, I think they did talk about it a lot, but it wasn't just a historical account or just making sure we were educated, it was definitely charged with, especially my dad, with his emotional feelings about it, and his political beliefs were definitely like infused into how he talked about Korea.

N: So do you think that, that sort of perspective centered mostly on Korea, rather than being ore focused on the outside influence? Is that sort of what you are saying?

E: He focused on both. Like when he came to the US, because he had to apply to American dental schools, because if you want to be a dentist here, you gotta go to an American dental school, and he got interviewed by one of these colleges and they asked him "What do you think and how do you feel about the threat of North Korea?" and apparently he went crazy on the interviewer like "The only threat is the United States." Like, you know, if there's gonna be, like a

re-invigoration of a conflict, like, the US will, have a hand in it. He was saying, like, they're the ones who, like, hold it. Yeah, he's definitely very critical of the United States as well. Both my parents have told me about how when they were younger they used to look at the US with wonder, which I think my mom still does to a certain extent. Like she just said, how thankful we should be that the US intervened in the Korean civil war and stuff like that. But like my dad, in the 80s when there was protests and stuff like that against the dictator at the time, and then the US came and supported that dictator in that - he cites that as a time when his idealized vision of the US was crushed and that like "oh, they don't stand for freedom, actually" and stuff like that, and so he's definitely very critical the US as well. I think he's just anti authority, or authoritarianism, or like, anti hierarchy, because I feel like what he really sees in the world, and especially in Korean culture, is these very rigid hierarchies, and most of the time, the people at top, take advantage of the people at the bottom. And I think that is kind of like... he's just seeing that in his, you know, his family, his communities, his country, in, you know, the globalized history that we live in now, I think he's just very radically against that. That's why he's very left leaning, I feel like. But yeah,

N: And his perspective sort of changed in the 80s with this political change?

E: That was a moment where his image of what the US was changed. But I think he, I hope I'm representing him correctly, but I think college was truly when he really got access to outside sources, and when he really started to shift in what he believed, and he just learned stuff that he could never learn in the past. And so, yeah, I think college is definitely that.

N: And when he came to the States, he went to school, can you sort of go through, like, your early life and, like, the formation of the family and stuff like that?

E: Yeah. So my dad moved in 2006, my sisters and me and my mom moved in 2007, and like, that time was - I think looking back, I can tell, but at the moment, obviously, I was three years old - I didn't really understand what was happening, but like, it was definitely a super stressful time from parents like, I know my mom has told me recently, like, yeah, "I was this close to divorcing your dad and just taking you and your sisters back to Korea" because my dad really wanted to live in the US, because he did not want to raise kids in Korea, because of how the society - how like societal norms were, and so the first few years in the US were definitely pretty hectic. My parents are going through graduate school, like dental school. They have three kids. They're trying to, you know, become fluent at the language. You know, we're in school. Like, that's something that is kind of tough to navigate, in and of itself. Obviously, like, you know, money wise, we moved, we were adjusting. It was definitely a very stressful time, I know my grandparents, or my grandmother specifically, flew over a few times for like, a month or two spans to help out and stuff like that. But yeah, definitely looking back, it's very clear to see: very stressful - my parents had just a lot of responsibilities and they weren't always able to attend them. But I think in the moment, I mean, I was like a five year old, I was lowkey loving life to be honest. I was definitely super ignorant to that - like, I just wanted to play the Wii and go outside and play soccer. So yeah, I think in the moment I didn't really realize it. But looking back, yeah, it was definitely a very volatile time.

N: You were young enough that first move that it didn't really feel like a super big change to you?

E: You know, I remember being super confused because we moved to the US, and then the first, like, three summers after that, we we went back to Korea for like a month or two and then came back, and I remember thinking, like, I think I didn't really understand the concept of countries and like these are different places. And I remember thinking to myself, "why do we live here sometimes, and then we live here sometimes?" Like, I just didn't really understand that. But yeah, back then you know, my concerns were, eating food, playing outside and having fun. So I definitely was way too ignorant to really understand what was happening.

N: Do you keep a lot of contact with your family back in Korea still?

E: I would say no. We do family Skype calls, or video chats with my grandparents, or, like, my aunt, my mom's sister and her family, on occasion. But no, not really. Even though I love my extended family, we're not that close. We grew up in different countries. Even though I speak Korean and they speak some English, there is still a language barrier, cultural barrier, and there isn't really that strong of a link between us, or at least me and my extended family. Obviously, my mom will talk to her - but even then, I actually asked her recently, they're not that close. My dad isn't that tight with his younger... actually, they're not on great terms. My dad and his parents, they talk on occasion, but I don't know, maybe it is a Korean thing. Even me: I go back home and me and my mom, we talk for a long time, but like, I don't really call her and we don't

really text that much. I don't know if that's a my family thing. I don't know if I can impose that as a Korean characteristic. But, yeah.

N: You mentioned to me one time that you basically have a time limit before you can go back to Korea because of -

E: Not anymore! So freshman year, sometime during freshman year, I was able to, or my parents, like, forfeited my Korean citizenship for me. If I hadn't done that, I would have had to enlist, like I got my conscription letter, and so, yeah, I mean: I'm not doing that. Like, I love Korea, but, like, I'm not spending two years in the military. That's not happening.

N: But now you're all chill?

E: Yeah, I'm going this winter.

N: Sweet. Can you tell me about your experience just growing up in middle school, highschool, having sort of like this first generation Korean American perspective?

E: Yeah, I feel like definitely, and this is super common with immigrants, but like code switching. Like I go to Korean school on Saturdays and a Korean church on Sundays, and then on Monday through Friday, I'm at an American, dominantly white school. And so then, I would actively - my personality would not fundamentally shift, but there's a clear change, like, almost two different people, I would say, the way that you talk to adults changes the way... in Korean

areas still, I'm a little tense. I'm a little anxious. I'm always trying to think about my mannerisms, the way I talk, the way I show respect to the people that I need to. I think when I was younger, it just felt normal - that was just my norm. I didn't really think about the fact that for other people that's probably not a reality that they live through. I know for a lot of people, like immigrants, that is kind of a cause for identity crisis. I don't know if I really... I don't know. I don't really associate any negative views, even though there are obviously hardships that come with that, but I don't know. It was kind of dope to me, honestly. I had my Korean friends, you know, that's a lot of fun. I had my American friends, that was fun. It was definitely... yeah. I don't know. Looking back at it from this perspective, even next year or a year ago, if you asked me this question, things might have changed, because, obviously I'm trying to think back to these experiences and memories from the past, but like, you know, it's been 10+ years now, and my current context of like, what I'm going through right now, what my beliefs are right now, my experience, how my frames of viewing the world have changed... It's kind of hard to look back, because I do feel like I am imposing some of my current views. I'm not sure if I'm being fully objective. There's definitely lines being blurred. I also mentioned this because I've done these interviews in the past for this class, and I know that, low key there might be some contradictions! If that's the case, this is why.

N: Why do you think that you felt that sort of tense, anxious feeling?

E: Because for Koreans you cannot - You have to fit in line. You have to understand your place in the hierarchy. Obviously, in any social setting, there's always dynamics of power, but in Korea, it's more visible and felt, and it's more interwoven into the culture itself. And so I remember when I was younger, my grandmother, she would harp on me about, like: I fidget a

ton. She would hit me if I was bouncing my leg. My posture always had to be perfect. The way that you speak, the words that you say literally change that you add extra endings to words when you talk to someone who's older than you versus younger than you. The word friend, "*chingu*" in Korean, is reserved for people born in the same year as you. Obviously, as an American, that's wild. I have a lot of friends that are older and younger than me and I don't think of myself as better or worse, but in Korea, you're fundamentally superior or inferior. And that's so very baked into the culture. There's also, like- I observe this and there, you know, I don't know, like - there's probably some sociologists that have laid this out more concretely - but I think in Korean culture too there is kind of a passing of trauma. I think a lot of people - like a clear example - would be "Tiger parents." That archetype definitely is real. A lot of Korean parents are very strict, or use harsh punishments. And you see their kids, and when they're parents they do the same thing. And so there's kind of, like people from above are kind of beating you down. And instead of breaking the cycle, a lot of people will just beat the people below them, which is quite sad, but that's just kind of how it is, I guess. And you definitely, being Korean in Korean spaces, you definitely feel that. It's an ever present thing. At least for me, I'm also an overthinker. So, you know, maybe again, this doesn't, it's not a universal law of Korean experience, but this is how I feel, at least.

N: Were there degrees to that? Like you mentioned being in school or in church and then being in your family setting with your grandmother, and then I would assume that now, when you're with like your friends here that are like your contemporaries, there is not so much strain on that. How do those degrees change or is this pretty persistent?

E: I think the past few years I have been actively trying to introspect, break down my frames of reference, my frames that I view the world through, and obviously you can't do this fully but, something I have been trying to do recently is outline how my values and worldview and how anything that happens in my life - when I experience it, how do I analyze it? What is the frame and how is that constructed? It is obviously heavily constructed by the fact that I am a Korean American and the fact that I am Korean. Looking back, as I got older and as I kind of became more American, which just means that my grandmothers were less active in my life, as I was like four, five, six, seven years old, moving from Korea was still a recent thing. As I got older I became proportionally more American than Korean and so there is definitely that shift. I remember, I was reading my first grade report card, or my teachers notes, and my second grade notes as well, and they were like "Eunho is such a rule follower." My first teacher actually wrote that "he goes around and encourages his friends to follow the rule when they are not." I don't remember doing that, but clearly I was a little bit of a teacher's pet! Because I was very accustomed and wired to understand the hierarchy at play and fall into it. In middle school if you look at my report cards, it was all "He's disrupting the class environment, he's socialising too much in class" so yeah definitely as I grow up and as the bank of experience that I have fills up, you can see that shift. But if you put me back into my Korean Church, I snap back, and I'm suddenly - you know, the old codes within me are right back at the forefront. I am going to go to Korea this winter - I am so scared of seeing my grandma. I am so scared of her. She is the scariest person I have ever met. And I know, I am an adult. I am 21 and there really is no reason for me to... There is a reason for me to respect her authority, but not to the extent that I used to. You know, she shouldn't have this complete and utter control over my actions and my emotions the way she did when I was six, but those dynamics still exist and it is still hard to break.

N: You mentioned there being Korean spaces and sort of like more American spaces. When you were in middle school and high school, did you have any meeting of those groups? At Weston for example did you have Korean American friends that you would hangout with or did those groups ever meet? What was that like, was it a very hard code switch from Saturday Sunday to Monday through Friday?

E: Definitely as I got older too, the Korean spaces I occupied, like Korean school, there were a lot more 'Korean' Koreans there. Whenever my church would have, there's like small groups in the church, and different groups of families, when we would meet it would be very 'Korean' Korean. When my grandparents were here, when I went to Korea... the last time I went to Korea was fifth grade. Definitely there were spaces that were very 'Korean' Korean. As I got older, those became way less prevalent in my life. Church, once I entered the youth group which was grades sixth through twelfth, a lot of the kids were Korean American just like me. There was definitely still a range of "how Korean" or "how American" we all were, but we all were on the same page. Our experiences definitely aligned more. So in those areas, it was an interesting mix of American and Korean culture and norms. I can't think of specific examples but like just the feeling was a very mixed space. I didn't have any Korean American friends, or Korean friends from my high school, or from Weston rather. Honestly middle school and high school, those were like the main, in terms of kids my age, groups I occupied. My church friends and family friends that went to church, who were Korean Americans, and my dominantly white friends from Weston. There weren't that - I can't really think of many times where they mixed. But, I know recently this past summer I really wanted to get some of my Weston friends to meet up with my

Korean American friends, but my Korean American friends are very American. It's not like this crazy clash of like- you know there wouldn't really be conflict. I would say generally those spaces wouldn't mix too much. But that Korean American circle at my church definitely was a site where there was that - clash is not the right word - but like that mix.

N: Cool. You mentioned your church community a lot, can you sort of describe your church community? What branch of christianity was that? What were the customs? How engaged was your family with that? Your education?

E: Protestant Korean American Church in Brookline. I experienced being a part of that church community as we call it sunflower, that's kindergarten to fifth grade I think, and then as a youth group sixth grade to twelfth grade. I was mostly just hanging out with my buddies, I wasn't really integrated into the church structure in the same way my dad was. My dad was a deacon for a while. He actually recently became an elder, begrudgingly. It's a Korean church right, a Korean American church, but the old heads, the elders, the ones who really control things, the operations and the administration of the church, they are more 'Korean' Korean. Even though they had been living in the US for a while, they are old. They moved here when they were adults. They are more coded as Koreans I would say. When I say "coded Korean" "coded American" these aren't rigid groups, this is just generalizing for the sake of explanation. The same issues of hierarchy really permeated in my church. One example was our main service we offered in Korean, and we have the money and the resources to offer these headphones that translate, and there is one day a year where the youth group and the sunflower kids come up and we have a whole church, we have one service. For that you get these headphones and then if you don't understand Korean you

get these headphones. My dad was trying to argue that for newcomers, for Korean Americans, and as generations go on, they are gonna be increasingly more American and maybe they are not gonna speak [Korean]. This is kind of an act of exclusion, if the only way you can access adult service is by being fluent in Korean. And then the old heads were like “No.” There is a group of deacons and a group of elders, but the way my dad explains it is that the head pastor and a few of the elders, whatever they say goes. Everyone else can disagree, but they are the oldest and they hold the position of highest authority. And so my dad has beef with a lot of people in our church's leadership. I think a lot of it stems from the fact that he refuses to kinda fall into line. Another thing was that we spent like ninety [thousand] on this Korean cultural event while we were not - we have service trips, mission trips - we were struggling to raise funds for that, but they wanted to have this very lavish, in my dad's opinion very performative event, but no one has a voice to resist, to provide an opinion that counters that, that is actually gonna be heard and influence the decisions of the church. Within this Korean American church you can really see how the norms and the values of Korean society impact the leadership and impact decision making. It impacts whose voices are heard and whose voices are not. Another example is, you know, Korean culture, as a lot of cultures are, traditionally is very sexist. And literally, in the kitchen, we have after service church wide lunches, all the women - only women cook food. Or they did for a while. My dad and some of the other leaders changed that, but there was so much resistance to that. And so those are just some examples where you can see how this space is constructed very significantly by these dynamics.

N: With your practice here on campus, you have mentioned a ton of systemic sort of, how do you say... In the infrastructure of the church and in the organization of it, there are these ideological differences. How do those opinions contrast with your practice here on campus?

E: I think here - well I am way less involved here. I go to church way less, because there are so many Sundays where I tell myself "I am so busy" and there are events on campus. We have weekly events and I try to go to as many as I can, but that is not a church. It is a club at a college. Its student run, there is one staff member. I think it is very fundamentally different to the church, but you know it is a lot more... Free is not the right word because... It's less rigid. This is not your question but I think something that is relevant is that my dad said that the year before my mom and me and my sisters moved, 2006 and 2007, he went to an American Church. He said that was the best year of his religious life. He said that was the most free he has ever felt as a Christian. But then we came and my mom made us move to a Korean church because she missed Korean culture, and just having a Korean community. I think once you step outside that, it is way easier to see. Back to your direct question, the way I practice being a Christian here is more... I don't know. I was gonna say individualised but I think the youth group also differs from the adult service so like there is a lot more similarity I think than you would be led to believe by my description of my church, but you can definitely tell that here, even though there are a lot of Koreans, it is definitely not constrained by those dynamics.

N: Have you spent time in an "American" church?

E: I went to a service once and I fell asleep

N: Hehehe

E: I can't say. I will say I went to - so one of our friends, Erwann, he was in London and when I visited him in the spring, he was going to an all Black church in London, and that was a crazy experience for me. In the adult service in my church, you know it's a lot of singing hymns I guess, it's very low energy, very ritualistic I would say. But they played very loud music, it was a dark room, like it was kind of like a club [laughs] there's lights and stuff. It is a lot more passionate, a lot more - like people are dancing, people are joyful. You can literally see people are in Korean churches standing up straight, they are acting in a very cordial way, whereas in that church, in the all Black church I went to, it's very expression heavy. During the sermon in a Korean Church everyone is quiet the entire time. But there, people would yell out if they were vibing with what the pastor was saying. It was very dynamic, and yeah that's literally just to show that the constraints and the culture really shaped behavior, shaped feelings, emotions and all that stuff. I kind of forget what the original question was.

N: No, that was sick, that was cool. Do you think that growing up, when you start to have a family and build a routine, are you going to keep church important in your family life?

E: Yeah.

N: Is it going to be a Korean Church, is it gonna be back in Weston...

E: I am not sure. I think -

N: Or you said Brookline sorry that's my bad .

E: Yeah. Being a christian is definitely always going to be an important aspect of my life. When my kids are little, they are gonna go to church with me. I won't force them to go, you know. At a certain point, I don't know when, I haven't thought too exactly about it - they will go to church with me if they want to. It is nice going to Korean church, because even though I said all that stuff and it sounds really terrible, the way I portrayed it, it is awesome getting to... you know you are a minority and then you enter a place where everyone is the same. There is a very communal feeling about that for sure. I am not sure what type of church, but I think more specifically, the way I raise my kids, I just want them to be aware of the ways that these spaces are constructed and how they are influenced and how they are shaped. The more aware of that you are, the greater the capacity you have to be an individual, to be able to self express, to critically think to be able to exercise your autonomy. Like I said before, the "Koreaness" in me literally shapes my physical posture, the way I think, my emotions, I think that understanding that has been, dare I say liberation you know? I think that... I don't know where specifically I am gonna go. What role religion is gonna have in my kids lives, but I just want them - I dont want to enforce my beliefs or the structures that I believe are good. I really want to just give them the tools to do that themselves, in the way that my dad really tried to do for me. I think that is more significant.

N: Is that sort of similar with your... Obviously that connection to community, you described as being really comforting, is that something that you want to continue to foster for your family separately from the church? What would that look like?

E: I assume I am gonna stay in the states. I think about finding Korean communities, I guess not in some parts of the country, but if I am in Mass, New Jersey, New York, or California, it will be very easy to find Korean Communities I think. I don't know who my future partner is going to be. Maybe they are Hispanic or Eastern European I don't know. We will have other communities that will be important to consider, involving into my family's dynamic. I do think that... I don't know. I am actually not too sure what I believe, because on the one hand, like I said there are those benefits. There is that sense of connection. Being a Korean American - [gestures to interviewer] you're an 'American' American. Even though we can get along very easily, we are fundamentally distant. Even though that doesn't mean that we can't be friends, that difference exists, even if it's small. And then being in a space where that distance is shortened, can definitely be a very healthy thing to have in your life. On the other hand - again I don't want to... I don't know if I am going to be like forcing them to be a part of these communities or constructing their lives for them, it is a hard question, I am not too sure. It is definitely important I think, but I don't know how that will manifest in how I manage my family with my family members.

N: For you personally, you do have that desire to maintain that close relationship with the Korean community?

E: Yeah. I have a lot of Korean friends, which is fire. I love Korean food. I love Korean music. I love being able to connect with other Koreans about being Korean. For me definitely it is important to me.

N: What do you think is the most common misconception or misunderstanding that someone who is not from the Korean community have about contemporary Korea today and about Korean Americans or that experience - something that I wouldn't get.

E: Specifically an American, or even beyond like other immigrants wouldn't be able to relate, like specifically Koreans?

N: Either way. We have gone over a ton of really deep stuff so its like you dont need to point to anything you know

E: Yeah. Honestly, you probably could understand this, but like how significant food is. If I was given a choice: eat only Korean food for the rest of your life, or have access to every other cuisine and food, I would choose Korean food and it is not close. It is a very easy choice. When I am here, the hardest thing about being at Colby is not having Korean food and that is very easy to say for me. I eat Korean food every day when I am home. I think it is so engrained in Korean culture, and in my opinion it is the best thing to come out of Korea. I love food so there is a little bit of a confounding variable there. But yeah I think how serious we are about food. That's not - I don't know how unique that is I think every culture loves food [laughs]

N: That's dope. How do you feel about the characterization of North and South Korea in the media today?

E: Yeah I mean North Korea is definitely a political tool in the US for sure. It is a way to justify military presence, political presence in Asia. It is portrayed as a global threat even though technologically they are so far behind. Their military is perceived to be very strong whereas you look at the North Korean soldiers that fought in the Russia-Ukraine war and they were so beyond incompetent and those are supposed to be their best soldiers. I think it is very intelligently leveraged by a lot of political figures. It has always been official to have an Other, capital O. An opposition. You unite 'us' against this other and you can justify radical action. I think North Korea fills that role a lot from the US perspective. If you ask almost anyone here in this country "what do you know about North Korea?" Oh Kim Jong Un, they are a dictatorship, they have nukes... all this stuff. But from a Korean perspective I truly just see it as the very, very sad outcome of globalised conflicts. Korea was split, and these group of people were subjected to certain ideologies, harms oppression, these people were subjected to their own set of harms and oppressions, but in the long run if you look at the history over the last seventy years, just because of the political situation between the USSR and the US, the ideologies of communism and western freedoms, the decisions of Truman and Eisenhower, of Stalin, people across the world have this impact. That's really how I view North and South Korea. We are fragmented into these artificial lines - North Korean, South Korean, Asian - we are all just people. But then the labels that we give ourselves profoundly and literally dictate life and death. It dictates suffering, and the proliferation of welfare. It's so constructed, it's so artificial. North Korea, South Korea, we are connected fundamentally by our history and the fact that we were a group of people that were

colonized and separated, and we had a war. We are connected in that way, but these are all not inherent. A North Korean is not fundamentally different to a South Korean who isn't fundamentally different to an American, at our very core. But our experiences align with all these categories and labels that we are given. Sorry what was the question?

N: It was about the relationship between the North and South now. That was really cool.

E: I am an anthropology major, and recently I have been reading a lot of political theory, philosophy, and like it really - you look at the world and there are so many dominant ideologies, there is an Author, a scholar named Donna Harroway who calls them origin stories. We are so pigeonholed. These things at a very basic level, like oh everyone is a person and we should care. Everyone should have the right to live and be happy. Even those ideas are constructed in a way, but you see how strong these constructions are, these political constructions, these cultural constructions. What I was saying earlier about how I am constructed by my Koreanness and how that impacts my very behavior, I think this North Korea / South Korea divide and all these things... It's really sad. It really is just sad. As Americans it is really easy to view suffering that is distant and look at it through the lens of international relations for one example and be like, you know... The Ukraine Russia war, we frame it through the lens of "our" economy, can we afford that spending? You are evaluating those people's lives in terms of dollars. The economic framework is a very dominant one because globally we are very capitalist. What I would want to say to that question, I know I am rambling, but what I would want to say is that we should make more of an effort to not view ourselves as North Koreans, or South Koreans, or the people that... right now the people in Gaza, the people who perpetuate the rhetoric that those lives can or

morally should die to eradicate Hamas. That is obviously what Netanyahu says and that's what a lot of Pro-Israel people say. Lets try to not evaluate lives and assign value and definitions to people according to political and economic labels- these things aren't real. They are real because real consequences happen, but they are only real because we perpetuate them as individuals. We all as individuals perpetuate and produce these frameworks and concepts as real. Market forces in economics: people decide - they exist, but like... the US, if they leverage their influence on a global stage to pressure a country into agreeing to certain trade terms, you can't... now I am just really rambling - but you get what I am saying. We have to break out of these frameworks. The way that we view North Korea and South Korea, I think is just a good example of everything that I just said, and how people's lives and the course of history, the course of many people's lives are dictated by these constructions that quite frankly are bullshit!

N: Just arbitrary labels that enable other people to take advantage of them.

E: I wont go anymore [Laughs]

N: All right dude, thank you very much! I appreciate your time, I know you are studying for a midterm until like four in the morning tonight.

E: Yes I am, but I will always make time!

Biography

Eunho Lee was born in Seoul in March of 2004. Eunho's parents met in dental school at Yonsei University in Seoul, and Eunho's father immigrated to Massachusetts in 2006. Eunho, his mother, and his two sisters followed in 2007. Growing up, Eunho attended a Korean American church in Brookline, Massachusetts, and Weston Highschool. Eunho is currently a senior at Colby College where he is double majoring in Economics and Anthropology, is a captain of the Men's Club Soccer team, and is a member of the Colby Korean Club and the Colby Intervarsity Christian Fellowship.

Thank You Note

Dear Eunho,

Thank you so much for participating in the Voices from the Peninsula Oral History Project. I appreciate you taking time to meet with me on October 8th. It was a pleasure spending time together, and I am grateful that I have the opportunity to share your stories. I thought your description of the Korean church structure and contemporary views on Korean labels were especially powerful. I have transcribed the interview and composed an interview synopsis and accompanying biography of you. Before submitting, I would like to get your approval. Please check for the spelling of names, or for any other content that you would prefer to have removed. I will need to submit the interview by October 25th and it will be posted to the Voices from the Peninsula: Oral Histories of Korea project website at <https://web.colby.edu/voices/> in the near future. Please let me know if you have any questions or suggestions, and confirm if I have your final approval. Thanks again.

Sincerely, Nate



Eunho Lee

to me ▾

1:50 PM (6 hours ago)



Hi Nate,

I looked over the transcript and it looks good! Thank you for choosing me to interview, I really enjoyed the conversation and had a great time overall. You have my approval to submit the transcript and for the project to be posted.

Have a great weekend!

Best,
Eunho

