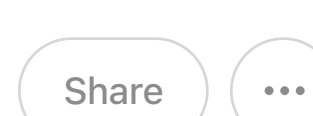
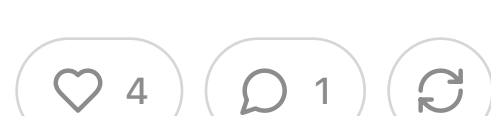


Off to Korea!

Finishing language school and preparing to leave

JUN 15, 2023



Wow, the last month and a half has been a whirlwind. The final month of language school before my tests was...interesting. I mentioned before that I had multiple Korean teachers, each with different plans and expectations for me, so I didn't have the most ideal review time. The teacher I had for most of the month insisted that each night, I write a 2-3 page briefing in Korean about the topic of the day (AI, economics, politics, job experience, etc.) and memorize it the following night. It was useful in the sense that some sentences are seared into my brain, but it was quite stressful having to walk for about 2 hours a night repeating lines over and over just to not totally flop the next morning. We did cover quite a bit of ground in that time though, "learning" 50+ new words a day in that niche topic and then *actually* learning the words I chose to use in the briefing I wrote and rehearsed. It didn't help me one bit though for my final language tests, where none of these topics came up in any meaningful way.

Speaking of teachers, one of the many Korean holidays in May is Teacher's Day. For this day, I brought in carnations to pin to the teacher's shirts (a traditional practice), and we took our teachers out for lunch at a Korean BBQ place. It's always fun speaking in Korean outside of class to Korean employees and being together as a proper group for once.



It was also the last week for one of the Korean students, so we wished him a farewell at the lunch and took a few silly photos.



Galaxy S23 Ultra

"finger hearts" are the new "finger V"



Finally, my visa and official passport are in hand!

Besides finishing up my language school program, I also had to move this month. I had one shipment of my things going to Korea and one shipment of things that will go into long-term storage here in the US. That first move went off without a hitch, but for the second move, the movers just...didn't show up. It was my last weekday in that apartment, and I was assured by the government side that everything was confirmed and good to go, even if I hadn't been able to get a hold of the movers to talk to them myself. Well, when I finally got a human on the line, I found out that the moving company had no idea about my move, so they offered to give me a date the following week. This was not acceptable, so I pulled the levers I could to get the movers out that day while moving myself out to the loading dock in preparation to move everything myself into a U-Haul truck as a last-ditch measure. It was not a good day, but I guess I learned yet again that you need to be **annoyingly** persistent on the front end with any government work.

In better news, the following day, I got to attend the annual Olmsted gala at the beautiful Anderson House here in DC! This was a treat to attend, just like last year. I got to catch up with my class of scholars, previous scholars that I've met and gotten to know over the last year, and some new scholars for the latest class. The picture below is the Space Force representation at this year's gala, including the first and second chosen scholar from the force, the Space Force's VCISO (4-star General DT Thompson), and another O-6 who helped me when I reached out in the application period. It was a great way to end my time in DC, and I can't wait to attend future Olmsted galas once I'm back from Korea.



After the party, I just had a few more days of language testing left. I was nervous for the speaking interview test given my lack of structured practice in school, but thankfully it all went smoothly. The reading and listening tests were very easy, and the speaking test was actually quite fun. I was able to understand everything he asked of me and respond quickly and properly, and only got stuck when trying to describe some recent military operations...that was a bit out of my depth beyond describing the basics of what was in the news. After the speaking test was done, I breathed a large sigh of relief, celebrated with some friends, and departed for one final stop in the US!

That brings us to the present time, where I'm attending a week-long course at the Department of State. The course is primarily designed for diplomats going to posts around the world, but as I'll fall under the US Embassy umbrella for my time in Korea, I get to take the course too. It's been a rewarding experience so far, and it's been nice to see how the Department of State runs training courses as compared to the similar military courses I've taken in the past. The course also refreshed some stale skills and allowed me to meet many interesting diplomats with experience all around the globe. I didn't realize the DoS had such cool jobs!



Department of State training

That's it for now. Next post, I'll be in Korea for good, hopefully with an apartment lease signed and a bunch of new experiences to share, so until next time, 안녕!

-Sean