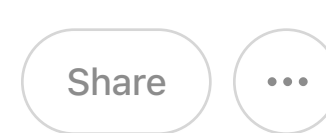


# Autumn in Korea

DEC 2, 2023



It's been a while since I posted an update here! In my September 1st update, I mentioned that I had recently taken a placement test for Sogang University's language school which started the following week. After hearing other students' experiences, I expected to be placed into level 4, but I was somehow placed into level 5 (of 6 total)... uh oh. After the first few days of class, I realized that I was definitely one of the weakest Korean speakers in the class, but I stuck with level 5 thinking that I'd catch up if I just work extra hard. That seemed to work in the end, as last week I graduated level 5 with good grades and was no longer the weakest in Korean!

It was pretty tough for me being in the bottom of a class, but as I got to know the other students (mostly Russian, Chinese, or Japanese), I learned that most of them had been studying Korean and living in Korea for several years. It took me a while to stop comparing myself to everyone else, as we were all in different places in our language learning journeys, but that was easier said than done! This has been a constant problem for me seeing other foreigners speaking Korean so so well, but I have to remember that a year and a half ago, I only knew how to say hello and thank you in Korean!

I was also thoroughly impressed by this school's quality of education. Sogang University is famous for churning out strong speakers, where the other major language centers are famous for teaching perfect grammar and lots of advanced vocabulary. DLI in Washington DC did not focus much on speaking or writing, so the writing class and several hours of speaking each day was excellent practice. My Korean spelling and writing speed is much faster now, and the class pushed me out of my comfort zone on a daily basis. We had to do formal debates in Korean, give presentations, and one project even had us polling random Koreans on the street to gather stats for a presentation! Even in America...in English...this would be challenging for me, but it was a worthwhile exercise that increased my Korean confidence.

The language school took the vast majority of my time since September. Daily class, homework, studying, and prep took up most of my energy, but I got a few bike trips in on weekends and continued running with my running club when I could. Some photos and videos from my non-class activities follow~~

Biking adventures - While the weather was still nice, I biked as much as I could around the northern part of South Korea. I biked all around Seoul, including westwards to the Ara Waterlock at Incheon and eastwards to Chuncheon. For the Chuncheon trip, I made a video where I narrated the journey in Korean too! Even though it was just a few months ago, looking back at the video makes me cringe, but it shows where I was at the time and I'm glad I made that snapshot video. I have future bike trips planned where I will do live narrations instead to sound more natural, plus that makes the edit a lot easier 😊

I also took my new folding bike out to Sokcho on the east coast which was an incredible experience! I went during the peak fall colors and got to experience a more rural side of Korea. I will definitely be returning when the weather warms!



Folding bike ready to go



This Brompton is so dang convenient for subways and buses!



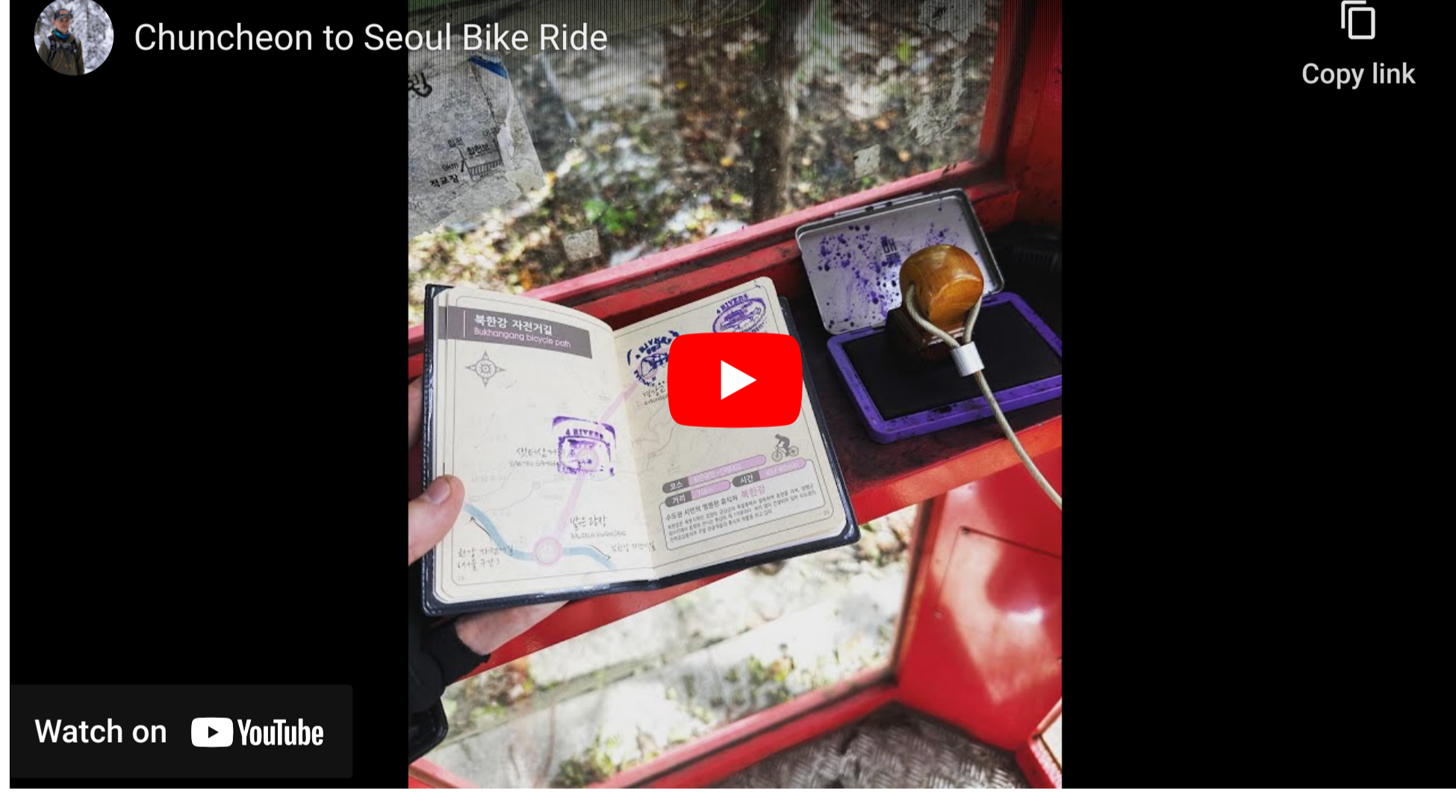
Soaking in the fall leaves



Sokcho (east coast of Korea)



My daily view on evening rides home



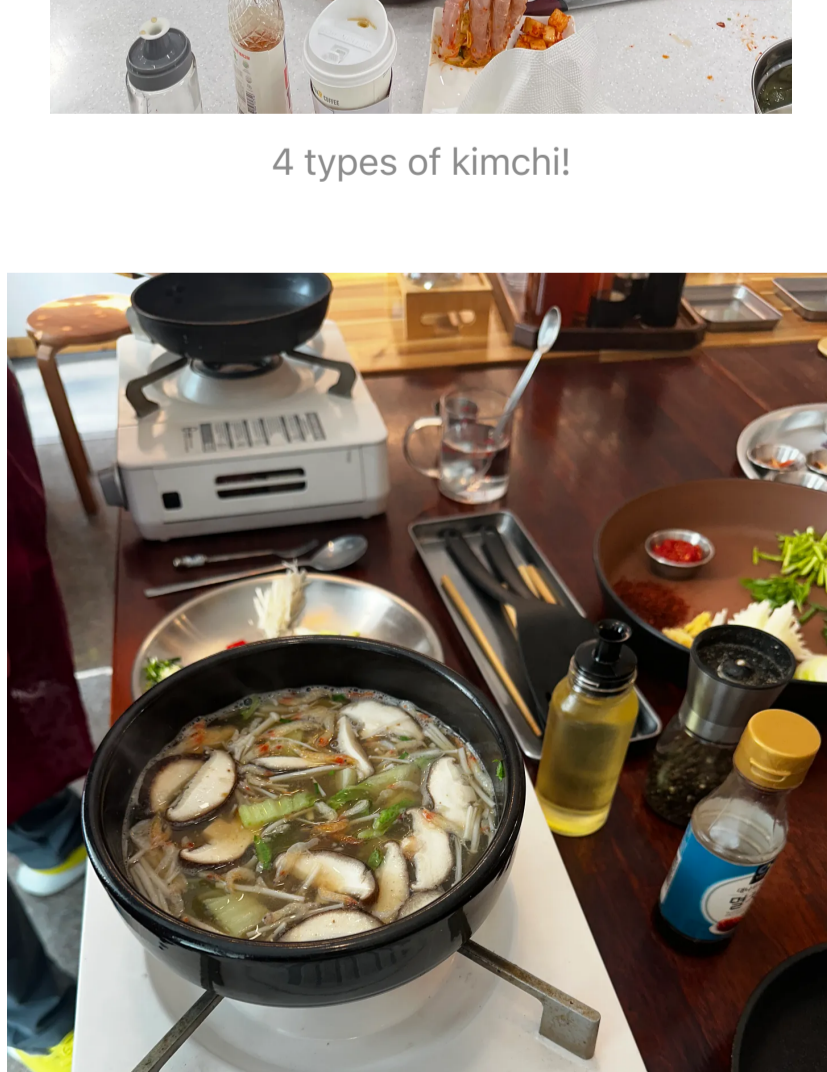
Cooking class - I learned 4 different kimchi methods from a kimchi chef, just in time for kimchi making season! I also took a cooking class at a different cooking studio for Korean style onion pancakes, soybean stew, and other side dishes.



Learning from a kimchi chef



4 types of kimchi!



soybean stew lesson

Graduated Sogang Level 5 -



My level 5 class! (minus a few missing students)

1SAD (1 Second a Day) October: [https://youtube.com/shorts/FFFI8\\_OjVjc?si=pqi25pvqN63\\_B9dY](https://youtube.com/shorts/FFFI8_OjVjc?si=pqi25pvqN63_B9dY)

1SAD (1 Second a Day) November: <https://youtube.com/shorts/X44ImJT-UwE>

Overall, I'm loving Korea more and more every day. Sometimes I feel like my Korean is just nowhere good enough, but then I get a big confidence boost after speaking in Korean to random shopkeepers and being understood and complimented, even over the simplest of conversation topics. I'm definitely improving in all aspects of Korean each week though, and the more I learn, the easier it is to naturally pick out new vocab and grammar that I come across in the real world.

Now that I'm first with that particular language program, I'm going to take full advantage of my days real time off since arriving in Seoul while I wait for graduate school admissions results. I've got some fun Asian travel plans throughout this month, so I'll be sure to post an update after the holidays!

Until next time, 안녕! 🙌

-Sean