

Hatfield's trip to South Korea reveals similarities to American Indian cultures

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You went to South Korea for research work, so tell us how that opportunity came up for you.

The opportunity is offered globally by The Korea Foundation, which works to unite and serve as an ambassador for global work; for increased understanding of Korea, including its culture; and to promote relations globally. Different areas can be applied for, such as arts and culture, or language; and it has student, graduate student and professional levels.

I'm an assistant professor senior researcher at Oregon State University, so I chose field research in order to continue the research I began years ago if I was chosen.

Luckily enough, I was selected for a field research opportunity. I had the unique opportunity to travel to South Korea during March, April and May 2022. I was one of 30 global scholars selected for the prestigious work fellowship opportunity and was chosen over three other global scholars for the honor of working with esteemed Dr. Sun-Kee Hong, a professor at the Institution for Marine & Island Cultures at Mokpo National University, international author and speaker.

Out of all the global places, why did you choose South Korea?

This was my second time (the first was in 2017) and I was very, very lucky to be chosen twice. The first time, Tadee was unable to go with me so I wanted to make sure for a return visit we went at a time when he could go along.

The program is a very difficult one to be selected for, there's so much worldwide competition by scholars who are excellent in their area.

The first time Korea and Korean culture "landed on my radar" was back in 2015. A student in one of my classes asked to write a final paper on a Kdrama (Korean drama) show. I had no idea what he was talking about, so I watched one to see if it was appropriate. I was floored at what I was watching – the same value systems and many of the same morals we Natives embody in our culture were being shown.

I watched one after another and did some intensive research into the culture. It reinforced how similar the culture is. Aspects like honoring elders, community, respect, cohesiveness and food like seafood were so similar it was surprising.

I chose South Korea for a couple of reasons. First, because of its rich history and the similarities in cultural styles with Native culture. South Korea, like Tribal communities, has had a difficult and often agonizing history with colonization and removal of culture.

Many people don't understand the depth of history and how hard Korea has battled to regain itself. Korea has fought on and off with Japan since at least the seventh century, with Japan repeatedly trying to invade the peninsula since then.

In 1910, Japan annexed Korea, turning the territory into a colony. In order to gain control, Japan began exterminating



Left: Samantha Chisholm Hatfield, Tadee Hatfield and cherry blossoms at the Bongeunsa (bong goon sa) Temple in Seoul. Right: Samantha and Tadee at Manjanggul Cave (mahn jahn gool) on the island of Jeju. The cave is a lava tube with a unique ecosystem that includes a cave spider only found inside the cave, plus the largest bat colony and largest bat cave in Korea.



Courtesy photos from Samantha Hatfield

Korean culture through removals and forbidding the speaking of the language. It also became a crime to teach history from non-approved texts and authorities burned more than 200,000 Korean historical documents, essentially wiping out the historical memory of Korea.

Schools and universities forbade speaking Korean and emphasized manual labor and loyalty to the emperor. Millions of trees were chopped down, with non-native and invasive species planted in their place. For a culture that relied on traditional medicines and food systems in a similar way that we Natives have, this was devastating.

By the late 1930s, Japan was starting to assemble for World War II and began to force Koreans to work in the factories and mines, or enlist as soldiers. It also sent tens of thousands of women from across Asia – many of them Korean – into military brothels to service Japanese soldiers. The victims became known as "comfort women."

Japan's rule of Korea ended in 1945 when it was defeated in the war.

And then secondarily, I learned about the Haenyo (hay-n-yo), women divers who were forced to dive for abalone for the emperor during the occupation and then contributed significantly to the Korean economy when the men were unable to.

I was fascinated with the relationship to abalone that's much the same we Natives have. It's a delicacy and there is so much ornate beautiful inlay everywhere. I was, and remain, fascinated by these women and their resilience, along with hoping to discover how we can learn tips for and help save our abalone populations.

In 2017 I had the opportunity to go out on the boat with a group of divers, but because of COVID we didn't have that opportunity this last time.

The similarities to Tribal atrocities that we (Siletz) and other Natives have faced, endured and overcome were incredible. It was amazing to be in a society that has such a similar history to ours and has overthrown invasions and colonization attempts, restoring culture back to a degree where if one was not aware of the turbulent history you might assume they had never been negatively affected by outsiders.

The first time I went to Seoul and saw people walking around in Hanboks (traditional clothing) I was shocked and actually teared up. I couldn't help but think of how it would be for us (Natives) if we had the same ability and opportunities to retain our

culture and freely – and proudly on our own homelands and not have to worry about it – walk around publicly in traditional attire any time we wanted. The ways in which they have rebuilt and restored their culture are inspiring and motivational.

What was alarming or even maybe shocking to you?

How there's such strong collective community support, thinking and being concerned about the well-being of the group so everyone is taken care of – it reminds me of how the elders used to talk about how we operated as a Tribe and the real sense of community – in action.

Everyone is so kind; there was always someone willing to help if we needed it. And I had zero culture shock – I anticipated having some major culture shock being half-way around the world, but there was none.

I've worked and been in communities here in the U.S. doing research where I've experienced high levels of culture shock. The cultures were so different that it was difficult to adjust and adapt. Both times in Korea, however, I felt virtually zero culture shock.

During my first trip I was "adopted" by a highly respected Korean scholar who is an expert in Korean calligraphy and one of a handful who translates old Chinese texts into Korean. This is a dying art that not many younger generations are interested in.

To have the opportunity to go to a calligraphy studio and just hang out with calligraphy masters was such an honor. He gifted me a Korean name that translated means "She Is The Place Where Ten Thousand Flowers Grow."

Korean naming, just as in Native societies, is an enormous honor and expression of respect. Tadee was honored this trip and since his name in Omaha means "wind" and translates into Korean easily, he was honored with recognition of his strength and power, and his name was likened to the strong mountain winds. Tadee had the opportunity to also study and do calligraphy with a high-level master calligrapher and artist who was once the national calligrapher for one of the Korean presidents.

I think one of the things that surprised me both times was the level of respect and understanding Koreans have for Natives. They very clearly differentiate us from mainstream non-Native Americans.

We took a taxi one time and the driver asked where we were from. He was

incredibly excited when I explained we were Native (everyone always was very enthusiastic to meet us once they knew we were Native). He started talking about how Koreans love Natives and how Koreans and Natives think the same way. I didn't fully understand the concept, so he used his translation app to explain and I took a picture. It was so heartwarming.

Tadee (Bill), what did you like about Korea?

I found it interesting that their culture is very different from ours and yet very similar at the same time.

Korea was fascinating for how small and compact everything is and yet there's so much to see and do, it feels much larger. I really liked the Buddhist temple we went to in Seoul, the Coex Mall and the islands we visited, but I think my favorite place was Manjanggul Lava Tube caves.

The people are really nice – the people we stayed with were really nice, we had breakfast every morning with them. They showed us neat stuff we might not have seen on our own. It made us feel like we lived there. They took really good care of us, just like we were family.

My favorite food there was the Korean chicken, sannakji (live octopus), squid and the snack foods they have. The food is really good there!

One of my favorite times was spending time with Oppa (the master calligrapher who has "adopted" us). I really had fun tutoring English and meeting other students, though, too.

Do you think you'll go back to do more research or visit?

Definitely. I'd like to do more research there. I'd also like to bring students and potentially Haenyo and scholars here to help us figure out how to address the issues we face that they are working on in maintaining sustainable populations in abalone, seaweeds, shellfish – all the things we are watching being impacted by increasing ecosystem failures.

It would be fantastic to build Korean partnerships to learn new techniques and engage in collaboration for healthy diverse ecosystems and potential future opportunities for the Tribe. Being a coastal Tribe reliant on many ocean resources, it's important that we find ways to maintain and sustain our cultural ways in the midst of these ecosystem impacts and failures.

Bill: Probably someday. It was a lot of fun.