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Oral History Interview: Sanghong Yoo

Sanghong Yoo

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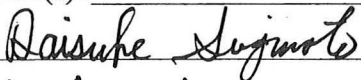
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Interview Date 11. 26. 05

HST 635, Dec. 6, 2005

Daisuke Sugimoto

Transcript of Interview

Abstract: The following interview was taken place by the interviewer, Daisuke Sugimoto, at interviewer's residence on November 26 between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. The narrator was Sanghong Yoo, an ex-international student from South Korea, enrolled in ESL and Graduate College at Marshall University in 1996 and now a research faculty of MU. A few parts of the transcript of the interview are modified in order to have consistency. The interview reveals one example of everyday life for international students at MU.

The following interview will be conducted with Mr. Sanghong Yoo on behalf of the history of international student at Marshall University for the HST 635 Oral History Seminar.

Q.1 DS: Tell me about your experience before you came to Marshall University?

SY: I came here in 1996 to learn English. Before I came here I was a senior student in Kyonsan National University in South Korea. I majored in organic material engineering. Uh... What else... I served three years in military, which is mandatory service for every male in our country. My family size, I have five brothers and one sister, and I am the youngest. Back then, it was a not-too big family. It was a maybe not normal size, but not considered a not-too big family. Now, probably, it is a really big family because, these days, a family has only one or two kids. That's like a regular, normal family size.

DS: You were the only children [sic] who studied abroad?

SY: That's right. I was the only lucky one, I guess. My first through the fourth brothers, they had a high-school degree only. They tried to get into a college, but, you know, didn't get into the school. My sister, she is the second. She has a college degree, four-year university degree. She is a special education major and teaching in a special education school. She teaches, I think, kind of

elementary school for disable students, handicapped people. My fifth brother has a master degree. He tried to study art in Japan but didn't make it.

Q.2 DS: Please tell me about how you found Marshall University and why you decided to study at Marshall University.

It's a kind of unique story in a way. My junior year and senior, '95 and '96, there was a boom among college students going abroad, especially English speaking countries and learning English. Everybody thought it would help to get a job after they finish their education, so I was thinking about going to Canada or the United States to learn English about one years. On holiday season like Thanksgivings, we call it Chuzon in our country, Chinese, I guess, moon festival, my uncle came, and I kind of asked his opinion because he traveled outside the country for business, so I asked him about what would be the best or he has some knowledge, or maybe among his friends, maybe their daughters or sons went to Canada or the United States. So, I asked his advice. He told me that, "That's good idea. I will talk to my friend and maybe I can find a school." Then, in two months, we met and talked again. I gave me some file with a bunch of bluchers, pamphlets of universities, which was Marshall. I asked him, "I've never heard of it, Marshall University." Right? It's not like a, what we call, Ivy League school. So I asked him, "How did you find this school?" And he told me he met a guy at a kind of industrial exhibition's conference. He got to know him. Well, I don't think he did any business with him, though. And he kind of invited him in Huntington, and showed my uncle his business, and showed him around Huntington. He also arranged some meeting with Clark, you know, a director of the ESL. And he also met a president of the school, I think. So, he kind of liked it, because it's kind of not too big, not too small, also the town was a middle size. One thing that he was very interested in Marshall was that there wasn't any Korean student as far as he knew. So, he thought to learn English that is a big factor. So, he kind of made a decision for me, and told me, "You'd better go this school if you wanna learn English." That's how I decided to come to Marshall.

DS: So, did you plan to learn only one year?

SY: That's right. Two semesters.

Q.3 DS: How many students, international students were in Marshall when you came?

SY: It was 1996. There was three different levels; 107, 108, and 109. I think there were ten through fifteen students in each level, so less than possibly forty, forty-five students in ESL. I don't know about regular students, enrolled in undergraduate and graduate school. But as far as I know in ESL, there were possibly forty students.

DS: Was there any Korean student among the forty?

SY: In ESL, No. But I think after I came here about six weeks, there was some kind of international-get-together, I think a term we call an 'international table,' some international students get together and get to know each other. There was a student from Thailand who majored journalism. She was conducting interviews, like you right now, with international students for class assignment. She asked me the same kind of your questions. I introduced myself and told her I came from South Korea. She told me that, "Well, I know a student from South Korea and he is a good friend of mine." And, I told her, "That's not true because as far as I know there isn't any Korean student." Then, I talked to the center for international students, and they said there was no Korean student. I think about one week or ten days later, I got a call from a Korean student. I guess that the Thailand student told the Korean student that she met a new Korean student. He went the international student office and got my phone number of dorm. That's how I met Brian. And...about two, three weeks later, I met Choi, another Korean student. Well, I saw him many times in the dorm, but I thought he was from Singapore or Vietnam, not from South Korea. One day we sat together in the cafeteria and we introduced each other, found out we both from South Korea. That's how I met Choi. So, in '96 fall there was only three Korean students. I was in ESL and they were in undergraduate.

In Spring 1997, there were two new Korean students, so three including me. After that, the number was up and down, Then, I think in 1999 or 2000, the number became quite a big, I think after the Center established an exchange programs with two of university in South Korea.

Q.4 DS: Can you describe life of international students?

SY: Back in '96? I don't know. My life. When I was in ESL, because ESL, English Second Langue, you have to take twenty-two hours of class every week, so quite a lot of school work. So, from 8:30 or 9:00 to 3:00 or 4:00 you have class. After that, you have assignment, homework. So, I was quite busy because of school works. But, I guess in the beginning of the semester I was busy, but after two, three months, after one I found out there was other Korean student, I tried to hang out. I don't know school life, meeting with other international students and drinking, talking. Maybe another side of my life was a dormitory life. My roommate, when I was in dormitory, was 18 years old. I think I was 25 years old in '96. He was young, and I was not young. I was old in a way. I think I was a first foreigner who he spent time, a lot of time with foreigners, so it was quite new experience for him and it was new experience for me too because it was first time in my life I spent time abroad. I'd never been to any other country, so the United States was the first foreign country I'd been to. So, I was, the beginning was a very struggle to change, I guess my roommate a little bit for him; you know some adjustment he had to make. I don't know life in ESL, international student's life. Study and Making friends. Make a best out of it.

Q.5 DS: Did you participate in school activities like international festival or international picnic?

SY: Picnic? Yes. I went to most of the picnic, but international festival. Maybe once. Maybe non.

Q.6 DS: What did you usually eat?

SY: Well, cafeteria foods, because I was in the dorm. It was a kind of big change. Foods were totally different. I wasn't used to eating cheese or dairy pie. So, I think in two, three weeks, I had a stomachache like everyday. I guess my body was trying to change. So it took about two, three weeks to get used to the dorm foods, not because the food was bad but because the food was different. After that, it was O.K.

Q.7 DS: How did you spend in weekends?

SY: Stayed in the dorm, or I don't know hanged out with Korean students or international students. Sometimes I traveled. That's all.

Q.8 DS: Did you participate in Huntington community activity, like some Churches invite international students?

SY: No.

Q.9 DS: How did you spend on Thanksgivings Holiday?

SY: Thanksgiving? I think I visited a friend of my brothers. He was in Virginia. He was a university student. I happened to know him quite well, so I made a trip to Virginia during Thanksgivings.

Q.10 DS: What about Christmas?

SY: Christmas? I think I went a winter place with a couple of international students on Christmas Day.

Q.11 DS: In 2000, exchange student programs to universities in Japan and Korea was established. Many exchange students came to Marshall. Did you see any change of your life because of the increase in the number of Korean students?

SY: I think so, because before 2000 there were only two, three students, but after 2000 maybe ten or more. I think I hanged out with Korean students more than ever. Maybe everyday or every weekend, we got together. Even, we traveled together to see big cities or national parks. It was, yes, a big difference.

Q.12 DS: What did you do on September 11, 2001?

SY: I think I was eating launch at John Marshall room, you know the second floor in the Student Center. I think they were having international foods. Each year they cook different international foods. That day, it was either Japanese foods or Korean foods, I don't remember. Anyway, I was in the dinning room. There was TV on the dinning room. I saw that what's happening in New York City. Everybody was kind of shocked. I was in the Student Center and eating launch.

Q.13 DS: Describe before and after the September 11th, life of yours or international students.

SY: Difference? I don't know. Maybe we are in a small town, so didn't change my life much, though, but from time to time when I have to do like renewing my visa or applying for permission or partitions to the Immigration, I see some restrictions or more paper I have to prepare. People are more kind of afraid of coming to the United States because of terrorist attacks. I heard that after the 911 lot of students who were planning to come to the United States changed a plan to go to Canada or Australia, instead of the United States. And, I have not seen many Middle Eastern students in Marshall since the 911. When I was in the ESL in '96 and '97, there were at least ten students from the Middle East countries, I think they were from USE and two from Saudi Arabia. I don't know. There seems like there are not many Middle East students.

Q.14 DS: Did you have any assistance from the Center for International Program? Do you think it is helpful for international students?

SY: Well, I don't know. It depends on students. Some students, some of my friends, say helpful, and some say no. From my own experience, they helped me to get my work permit and when I went the international office to get stamp on I-20. Some people told me that sometimes it's very difficult to get help. It depends on students.

Q.15 DS: Why did you choose to stay at Marshall after the graduation?

SY: When I finished the English program? I was a senior before I came here to learn English. I had one more semester to finish. I came here for English program, took two semesters. I don't know. I saw some of opportunities, something I can...I don't know. Well, I don't think the

quality of education is not better than the university in South Korea I was enrolled. But I guess the reason I decided to transfer was maybe in the same quality of education, but if I stay here, I can learn English, which can be my strong, one of the strong skill that I can represent to company after I finish my university, the degree. I think that was a main factor that I decided to stay. And then, I transferred in '97 to Marshall. I was in environmental science for two semesters. Unfortunately, after the first semester, there was the Asian economy clash. In '97 December or the end of year, the economy of Asian countries, especially South Korea, was really bad. At that time, my parent was my financial support. My father was paying my tuition. Because the economy was very bad, the exchange rate was really bad too. I was paying at that time the tuition was like twenty-eight hundreds or close to three thousands. But the exchange rate became doubled, so I was like paying six thousands dollars from three thousands. I had to stop my school, and headed back to South Korea. So, I kind of trans-back to the previous university and finished my school. I finished my school in '99 in South Korea. Then, I came back to Marshall for graduate school, because I knew I can get a Graduate Assistantship. I don't have to ask my parents pay my tuition. I can get a G.A., get a tuition waver, and maybe possibly support myself. You know the same quality of education and I can practice my English more. That was my main factor.

Q.16 DS: Tell me why you decided to stay here after your graduation from the graduate school.

SY: You mean after finish everything? Well, I was looking for job. If I can find a job, I will stay here another triple year to just get experience. If I didn't get a job, my plan was just pull back right away. Fortunately, I got a job. That's why I am here.

Q.17 DS: What do you think about young new international students?

SY: I don't know. It's different now. When I was a student, I was a still twenty. Even young students, I mean younger new students, even they were young, maybe they were twenty-one or twenty-two, and I was twenty-seven or twenty-eight, so we still had common things we could share. Now, I am not twenties anymore, and some younger students are like nineteen or twenty. There are more than ten-years age gaps. And because I am now working, I don't see them often.

I don't have chance to spend time. I don't know. I don't think I can answer the question because I don't have enough experience.

Q.18 DS: Tell me your analysis about the increase in the number of international students, especially from Asian countries. Is there any effect on life of international students?

SY: I think so. We are minorities among students, also even in the community, minority. As the number of the students increases, I think people will pay attention more because the number of us is greater than before. Some kind of attention. People pay attention more now because of the number. So, it's good things. However, because we have more numbers, there are more students. Maybe things can go wrong, you know. May be do stupid things, like getting involved in trouble. But that can happen to anybody. More students, I think, it's better for school and local community - Diversity.

DS: Thank you for your time.