

## Overseas Korean, their two names

Jeongok Park  
(lydia8737@Gmail.com)

### **'Banana', 'Twinkie', 'Oreo'**

Do you know what these words mean? Banana which has white flesh and Yellow peel. Twinkie- yellow bread which has white cream inside. Oreo- black color cookie with white cream inside.

Did you get it? 'Banana' and 'Twinkie' represent Asian-American who is born in America so that their native language is English and get used to American culture more although their appearance is Asian. 'Oreo cookie' stands for African-American like meaning of 'banana' and 'twinkie'. A lot of Korean people live in the U.S being called as a 'banana' and 'twinkie'. There are many Korean living with other countries' nationality not only in America but also in other countries. What do they think about their motherland '**Korea**'? It is said that lots of 'Gyo-po(Korean who are born and raised in other countries)' do not like Korea and feel disappointed when they come to Korea. So it is, what made them feel like that?

First, let's think about following questions.

#### **Question 1**

There was a big issue about a singer Park Jaebum who is a member of 2PM several weeks ago. He is a Korean-American who was born in America and could not speak Korean at first. When he was a trainee for singer he wrote his complaining about his situation, Korea and Korean on his personal website. Several years later, he became a very famous singer in Korea but what he criticized Korea was known to lots of netizens. They were biting at him therefore he had to leave Korea. At that time when his writing was spread widely, a large number of netizens point the finger at him saying "You traitor!" "He is a YANKEE who earns a lot of money in Korea and takes it to America." I am not trying to distinguish if he was wrong. If any star who is Korean not a Korean-American criticized Korea, would it be really big problem like Park Jaebum?

#### **Question 2**

Korean immigration history goes back very long time from Korean-chinese(chosun-jok) to Korean-American. The number of overseas Korean is about 6.4million. First generation of overseas Korean might think they are absolutely Korean. What about second or third generation of overseas Korean who are born and raised in America or china, Japan etc.? In case of Korean- American, most of them can hardly speak Korean and their lives have no any differences to American lifestyle. Then, are they Korean or American? What about Korean- Chinese? Do they think they are Chinese or Korean?

I talked to a Korean-American, Rosa Kim who is a university student in U.S in order to find out answer for these questions.

Q. When you were in Korea, what kinds of things were hard to you? Please tell me in detail

A. When I was in Korea, there were many happenings that I found quite offensive. First of all, Foreigners got "special treatment" while Korean Americans (kyo-po) didn't. Korean Americans have it the worst. We get made fun of for having the "butter accent," but not being able to speak Korean properly, and for acting "American" when our blood is Korea. They do not understand that we are American-born and raised and that we are socialized to be Americans, not Koreans. And when I was at a club, the younger Korean men thought that I was very sexually open because I came from America. This Korean guy threw 3000 won at me thinking I was a stripper. I was

highly offended. Furthermore when I spoke English with my international friends, some people would look at us like we were showing off and said, “wen yung-uh jeel ee-yah?”

Q. Why did you come to Korea? And how was your life in Korea? Please tell me good things.

A. I came to Korea to learn more about my motherland. I have visited Korea many times before, but I had never lived there long enough to actually experience the culture thoroughly. I lived in Korea for 4 months, and because I am young, I loved the nightlife and food. I went out often with my international friends and enjoyed myself.

Q. Is Korean race stronger to you than your nationality (USA)? Which one is stronger to you? And why?

A. Both are quite strong, but in the end, I have to say that being American is stronger because I was born and raised here. As much as I absolutely love Korea, there are many aspects of Korean culture that disagree with my personality and lifestyle. For example, gender roles are stricter in Korea than in America. Of course gender roles still exist in America, but it is to a lesser degree.

Q. Do you know the issue about Korean singer Park Jaebum who is one of 2PM member? If you know about that, what do you think?

A. As most Korean Americans believe, I think this situation is absolutely ridiculous and the netizens are giving Korea a bad image. He was a talented artist who went to Korea to perform and entertain the Korean people. I'm sure it was very difficult for him during his training years, and I know he hated it. But who wouldn't have? Who would have liked grueling training sessions that lasts years and still have a positive image of the company and country? Those Anti fan netizens need to put themselves in another's viewpoint and try to understand the person's situation. They also need to realize that English is a LOT different than Korean. The term “gay” does not always mean homosexual- it also means a weaker version of “dumb.” Americans use “gay” ALL THE TIME. Netizens need to put things in context and try to understand the situation instead of jumping to conclusions like immature children.

### **What made overseas Korean feel disappointed at Korea?**

#### **A strong Racial Consciousness**

‘A homogeneous country, Korea!’ This might be not true anymore because the number of foreigner in Korea is over 1.2million currently. The number of people who get married with foreigner is increasing and there are lots of children of mixed racial origins. I believe Korean has stronger bond among the same race comparing the other countries because Korea has been a homogeneous country for a very long time. A strong racial consciousness which most of Korean have is good for inspiring people with patriotism. On the other hand, this strong racial consciousness might hurt foreigners in Korea including ‘Gyo-po’. When you think ‘You and I are the same! You and I are same Korean, same race!’, you might categorize ‘You and I’ into ‘WE’ and other else could not be involved in ‘OUR line.’ I do not mean racial consciousness is bad thing. I just want to mention that a strong racial consciousness has possibility to hardly accept others and drive out non-Korean from ‘OUR line’. In regard to overseas Korean, how is Korean attitude toward them? One Korean-American guy who lives in New York City said “When Korean-American or half-Korean become famous with good thing, Korean emphasize the people are Korean origin. However when Korean-American has any problem, we ‘Gyo-po’ have to be kicked out of Korea hearing ‘YANGKEE go home!’ I do not want to admit his saying, but it is true, actually. Of course not all of Korean does like that, but public opinion is shaped like that way. What he say is, in other words, once at the moment that Korean people feel that person is not like Korean and not in ‘OUR line’, Korean people can completely turn against that person. And a Korean-Chinese woman, Kim who

is studying at one of university in Seoul said “Josun-jok(Korean-chinese) have been keeping culture and identity of motherland. However, sometimes we have been reproached for adopting Chinese culture and having love for china.”

### **Accepting the “difference”**

Why do people want to travel other countries? Why the world is really beautiful? Diversity! Because there exist diversity everywhere in the world, the world can be more amazing and worth getting to know. It is said that the hard hardest things that ‘Gyo-po’(overseas korean) suffers from when they come to Korea is attitude of Korean toward them caused by different culture. A Korean-Chinese Kim said “Korean thinking tends to not admit others. I think open-minded and global way of thinking is needed to them. Sometimes some people demand that we should do like Korean saying our Korean do not like that”. And he added that he can understand this because he came to Korea to learn Korean culture. He said, however, he feel tired and discontent when people force him to do only their way. When I asked a Korean-American, Hyunsuk Kim(an America soldier) which culture is more influential with him, he said that ‘Most Koreans living in the U.S keep the Korean culture like taking off your shoe when you enter a home. But as we grow older most of us as we go to High School and College we start to forget the culture we grew up in. We are used to the American lifestyle more.’ Like his saying, overseas Koreans lifestyle and culture is definitely different to Korea. They have bloomed new flower of culture as engrafting motherland culture into residential country’s one. We cannot and should not compel them to follow Korean culture. We should comprehend their culture as one of various cultures in viewpoint of culture relativism and respect it.

### **UNDERSTANDING: The easiest thing, but in other hand the most difficult thing.**

In fact, ‘Banana’ and ‘Twinkie’ has contemptuous meaning. As you know from these words, Korean-Americans are treated as a stranger because of their looks in America, besides they are treated as a foreigner because of nationality and different culture in Korea. Not only Korean-American but also Korean-Chinese, Korean-Japanese, etc. all overseas Korean must undergo the identity problem and loneliness that they cannot belong to any one side completely. When I asked Hyunsuk Kim his thinking about what happened to Park Jaebum, he answered “It was just stupid and also I think being the fact that he is a Korean American made it even easier for the netizens to use on him.” If his saying is really true, it would make lots of overseas Korean who want to know more about their motherland feel lonely and the loss. We should be able to understand their situation of confused identity and different culture. Everyone knows understanding is the best way to solve any problem. However it is not easy to carry out. If it was easy to understand each other, there would no any trouble in the world. That is why we should keep trying to understand each other.