

It's a small world after all, Koreans say

By Tamara Bell
Staff Writer

It's a small world. A cliché, surely.

But the small world idea is one four students from Korea say aptly explains the similarities between their country and the United States.

Take Dukmin and Taeyeun Kim, for example. By looking at their apartment, you could almost imagine they grew up in San Antonio instead of Seoul. The apartment resembles any married students' first home, complete with television, stereo and a second-hand couch.

"The only real difference we find in lifestyles is there's many kinds of food in Skaggs," Taeyeun says. "We're westernized so it's not a huge gap. I thought there'd be a big difference but I don't find a difference. We have 'Dallas' and 'Dynasty,' too."

"Dallas" and "Dynasty" they might have, but some doctoral programs they don't, the Changs say. So three years ago

they came to College Station because Korean universities didn't offer the doctoral degree in petroleum engineering Dukmin wanted.

Another reason Korean students study in the United States is to have better job opportunities once they return home.

"It's difficult to get a Ph.D in Korea," Dukmin says. "It's very competitive in industry, and if someone can speak English and communicate with Americans, he has an advantage over Koreans who haven't seen America."

Although Koreans study English from the time they are 10- or 11-years-old, they aren't often fluent in the foreign language, says Koom Chang, a graduate student in soil and crop sciences.

"We learn English from middle school," she says, "and learn about grammar. We know the English grammar better than the Americans but we can't converse with American people. Especially in class when the professor says a joke. Every American laughs but I don't realize what it is. Doesn't bother

me because it's not about the course but sometimes it drives me crazy."

To study in the United States, Koreans must first receive an admission form from the university they'll be attending. From there, they apply to the Korean government for a visa. Once they have the visa they're on their way.

For most, studying in the United States will be the first time they've left home. Koom says she was dependent on her parents before she came to A&M.

"In Korea you're a member of family and you're dependent on them until you marry," she says. "But now I control everything about me. Mom cooked, now I cook myself. I clean myself, everything is by myself. It was hard at first but it's good experience and I like that."

Just as hard but more fun is adjusting to the friendliness of Americans, Koom says.

"When I came here the first time an old man said 'Hi' and smiled," she says. "In Korea we didn't do that. Say 'hi' to older people and they think you're

crazy. At the time I thought it was strange, but now I think it's great."

Duk-jin Chang (no relation to Koom Chang) is a graduate student in computer science. He says the material he's studying in textbooks at A&M is similar to the material found in Korean textbooks.

"It's just my problem that logical material is more difficult to deal with than mathematical," he says. "With logic I must express more, and express it in English. Math notations are universal so it's much easier to study math."

Because Koreans think before they speak, Americans believe they're either slow or dumb, Duk-jin says.

"We are more reserved," he says. "The language barrier also makes it difficult for us to respond quickly. Americans react quickly because life is more simple here than in Korea."

"There are established rules and common sense. Americans look ahead and go straightforward. It's a little bit more complicated in Korea. We look around, not just ahead."

Unlike Koom, Taeyeun says she finds Americans more conservative and less friendly than she'd anticipated.

"Before we came here we thought Americans were very, very kind to strangers," she says. "Koreans are never kind to strangers, very shy. But we didn't find the kindness here. We find Americans reluctant to speak to strangers. Maybe after the Korean War, students came here from Korea to study and became common. We are no longer strangers to be kind to."

Taeyeun thinks one reason for the barrier between Americans and Koreans is that Koreans don't participate in community activities.

"We read Korean newspapers and magazines that we get from Houston," she says. "Most Korean students have more information about Korea than America. So often we meet together and exchange information about Korea. It takes

The families of international students participate in international week festivities (left). A food fair (below) allows visitors to sample food and drink from foreign lands. The fair starts at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, March 5, on the second floor of the MSC.



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background and culture of foreign students at A&M.

"The show runs real well, but it's always hectic in the back," Hamade says.

A talent show will conclude the International Week events for ISA, says talent show coordinator Naynesh Desai.

While at A&M, Desai has been involved with the India Association and the ISA.

Desai says 22 countries will

participate in the talent segment, performing songs, dances and other talents from their country. Lane says that in the past students have learned to play an instrument from

to participate in the talent show and other events during International Week, an incentive is offered in the form of awards for each of the events, Desai said.

"In the lobbies of the MSC you will be able to see almost all the cultures of the world,"
Naynesh Desai, talent show coordinator

their homeland so that they could participate in the talent show.

Although students are eager

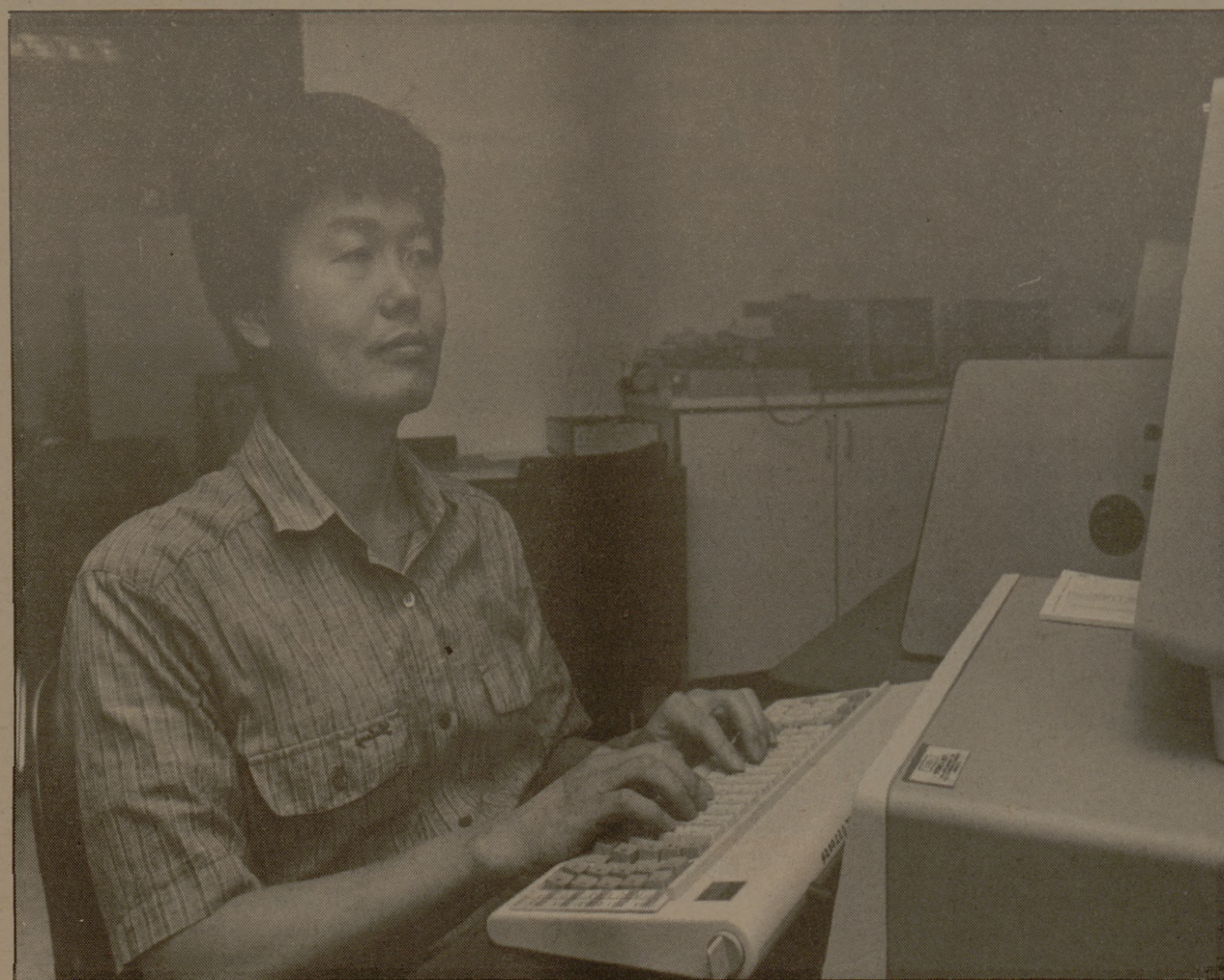
Judges rank the top five countries in each event, but only the top three receive awards. Countries placing fourth or fifth in

an event are kept in consideration at the end of the week, when one country is crowned as the winner of International Week.

International Week has been an event on the A&M campus for almost ten years, Lane says.

The object of the program is not profit, but education. As long as the program breaks even every year, the ISA and the University are happy, Lane says, and so are the people.

"In the lobbies of the MSC you will be able to see almost all the cultures of the world," Desai says.



Duk-Jin Chang works on data analysis programs for the Texas Transportation Institute. Chang is a graduate student majoring in computer science.