

# The University Life

KYUNG HEE UNIVERSITY

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International students at Kyung Hee University (KHU) struggle to access clear information about tuition fees. This challenge has become particularly evident this year, as the University takes an active approach to tuition matters for Korean students. The situation demonstrates KHU's need to better ensure international students' access to information.

## Tuition Hikes Without Notice

Tuition fees for international students increased by 5% for the 2025 academic year, marking the third consecutive rise. However, many students were unaware of this change until they viewed their tuition invoices.

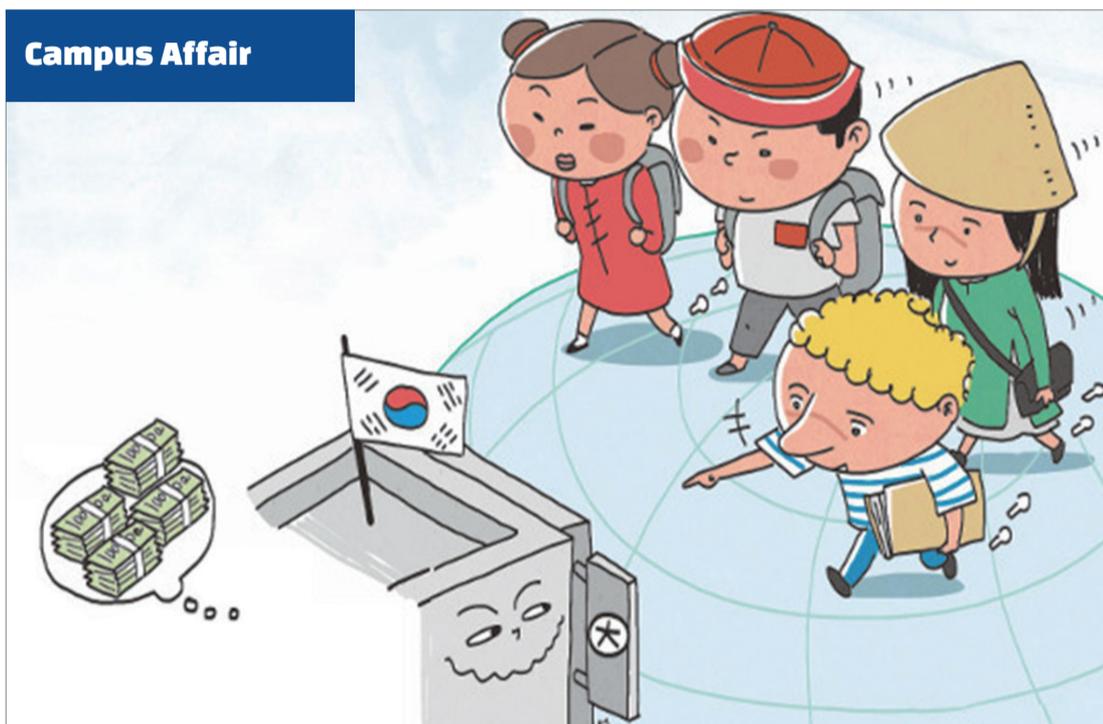
"I never received any official notification about the tuition fee increase and only learned about it later," said Li Anastasiia, a Russian student from the Dept. of Korean Language.

Similarly, Ei Mon Phyu, a Myanmar student from the Dept. of Tourism Sciences, added, "I only discovered the tuition fee increase when I printed my tuition invoice from Info 21."

The ignorance is due to the lack of efforts made to inform international students. The Office of Planning and Coordination (OPC) did not provide detailed explanations or conduct promotional efforts. Furthermore, neither the General Student Association (GSA) nor the General Affairs of International Students (GAIS) made any formal announcements.

This sharply contrasts with how the University handled the tuition fees for Korean students, which have increased for the first time in 16 years. Before making this decision, the OPC had enough communication—they held two times of face-to-face tuition explanation sessions, a press conference with KHU media outlets, and involved the GSAs from both campuses in the Tuition Deliberation Committee (TDC).

## Campus Affair



The universities want the international students to pay more

Photo: The Kukmin Daily (kmib.co.kr)

# Paying More, Knowing Less: International Students Question Tuition Hikes

Many international students only learned of the tuition hike through their invoices.

## Not a Conversation, But a Broadcast

The OPC stated that the tuition fee decisions were made with sufficient communication to students. They explained, "We discussed with the whole related stakeholders regarding the tuition fees rise, including the representatives from GSA, GAIS, the Office of International

Affairs, and the OPC. The final decision was made at the TDC meeting based on these discussions."

Despite these procedures, international students still face significant communication barriers. Tsui Man Ki, a Hong Kong student from the Dept. of Industrial Design, expressed her frustration: "I have no idea how the tuition fees for international students are determined." She added, "Most tuition fee information is available only in Korean—even on Instagram. I do not know how the fees are calculated or where the money goes." Her remarks highlight the lack of accessible information for international students.

Li Anastasiia also expressed her concern, "I did not know that our campus had a GAIS. Especially at the Global campus, there is no such organization. I think it would be good to establish a representative body so

that international students can gather and discuss the tuition fee matters."

## Lack of Student Governance Support

A source of the recurring problem stems from the student body's lack of perception of the issue. The 2024 Seoul Campus GSA, KHUBE, clarified their stance: "Matters related to international students are handled by GAIS, and we have a limited role in this issue. We will cooperate if they request our support."

The 2024 Global Campus GSA, Running, showed a similar response. Initially, Running made an election pledge to establish a GAIS at the Global Campus. However, they dropped it for two reasons: a student self-governance body creating another such body being controversial, and insufficient demand from

international students to establish such an organization.

Instead, they revised the Student Association Constitution to allow for the establishment of an International Student Committee with the role of "protecting the rights and improving the welfare of international students at the Global Campus." This change indicates that the Global Campus now has a framework for gathering international students to hear their voices and needs.

## We Paid, with No Idea Where It Goes

International students' demands also reflect a call for greater transparency. The OPC explained that the fees go toward student welfare. They stated, "Since 2023, all international students have been enrolled in health insurance. We have also hired advisors exclusively for international students and increased the number of dormitory slots available for them."

However, international students seemed unaware of these benefits. Ei Mon Phyu said, "I am not sure about those benefits since I have not used them."

Li Anastasiia remarked, "I am a junior, but I have not really experienced these benefits during my past three years. While medical support is a great policy in theory, I have not been satisfied with it."

Some students suggested more immediate needs. Tsui Man Ki said, "I do not think there are enough English classes. This semester, there was only one Global Citizenship class in English. There are many students in the English track, and most of them cannot register for the class. I want more English classes."

International students' tuition fees have been rising annually. As a result, they continue to demand greater transparency, wanting to understand both the reasons for these increases and how their fees are being utilized. To build trust and improve satisfaction, KHU must support its international student community and ensure their right to know and participate in policy implementation.

# KHU Performs the Highest-ever in 2025 QS World University Rankings

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On March 12, Kyung Hee University (KHU) recorded its best-ever performance in the 2025 QS World University Rankings by Subject. The QS Rankings is widely recognized as a prestigious measure of academic excellence among universities worldwide. A record 32 subjects ranked within the global top 450, marking the largest number to date. This accomplishment raises expectations for KHU's continued academic growth and sustained rise in global reputation.

## KHU Rises Globally Across Various Disciplines

KHU achieved the highest-

ever recognition in 32 subjects across fields such as arts, humanities, social sciences, engineering technology, life sciences, and medicine. This marks an increase from 27 last year, demonstrating KHU's growing academic competitiveness. Among these, Hospitality and Leisure Management ranked at 42 globally. Linguistics, Petroleum Engineering, and Dentistry newly entered in the global top 100.

10 new subjects entered the rankings, demonstrating the university's strategic focus on specific academic areas. Each of these fields rose by approximately 100 places compared to the previous year.

## From Research Hubs to Global Rankings: KHU's Strategic Leap Forward

KHU has been focusing on academic diversity and balanced

advancement to strengthen its research capabilities across a wide range of disciplines. The Evaluation and Consulting team of the Office of Planning and Coordination at KHU stated, "KHU has expanded research support across all academic fields. It has also actively encouraged interdisciplinary and international joint research to enhance the quality of research outcomes." The team added, "In 2022, KHU established the Institute of Convergence Technology to provide opportunities for researchers from various disciplines to collaborate."

Strategic support focused on six major academic fields that have shown notable growth: space science, bio-health, quantum science, advanced materials, artificial intelligence, and studies on human civilization. In these fields, KHU has demonstrated a strong commitment to enhancing global academic capacity through international collaboration, establishing global research centers and recruiting renowned scholars.

These efforts have laid the foundation for KHU's rise in global academic rankings. One major area of improvement is academic reputation, which accounts for over 40% of the QS Ranking score.

KHU has supported re-



KHU Administration Building

Photo: KHU (khu.ac.kr)

searchers to participate in international conferences and publish in high-impact journals. It has also actively promoted academic achievements through strong networks with academia and industry. Another area of strength is the University's international research network. Through partnerships with over 500 universities worldwide, KHU has established a broad global research infrastructure, enabling international collaboration and highly recognized research output.

To further boost its global research capabilities, KHU recently launched the Search and Recruit Committee under the direct supervision of President Kim Jin-sang. This committee

is focused on identifying leading scholars and discovering promising young researchers. To meet the demands of the fourth industrial revolution, KHU also seeks faculty members and experts in emerging technologies and convergence skills.

KHU's rise in the latest QS Rankings highlights its ongoing efforts to enhance global research across a wide range of disciplines. Looking ahead, KHU plans to recruit outstanding faculties, promote international collaboration, and support diverse academic fields. This rise in the QS Rankings is more than a milestone—it serves as a strategic stepping stone for KHU's emergence as a global academic leader.

# Food Poisoning Unlikely—But Hygiene Still an Issue

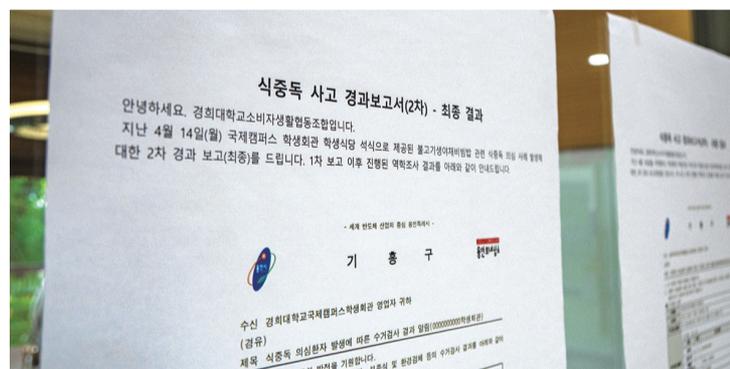
Oh, Eun-je

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The investigation into the recent suspected food poisoning incident at the Student Center cafeteria in Global Campus has revealed partial results. Findings from half of the reported cases suggest that Kyung Hee University (KHU) Cooperatives may be less directly responsible. However, given the current state of cafeteria operations, concerns about hygiene and safety remain.

## Background of the Food Poisoning Incident

Concerns regarding the food poisoning incident first emerged on April 15. On that day, several students posted on Everytime—an anonymous university community application—reporting symptoms after eating dinner at the Student Center cafeteria on April 14. In response, the KHU Cooperatives voluntarily reported these cases



The Giheung-gu Office's announcement of the food poisoning investigation results

to the Giheung-gu Office to assess whether they were responsible. Then, the Sanitary Guidance Team and the Gyeongin Branch of the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety took charge of epidemiological investigations, while the Giheung-gu Public Health Center is handling specimen collection and analysis.

Regarding potential causes, the KHU Cooperatives indicated that leftover food may have caused the symptoms. They stated, "We served leftover lunch items for free during dinner service. That day was rainy, and the temperature fluctuated more

than usual, which could be the source of the issues." As a result, they have since stopped serving leftover food.

## "No Food Poisoning Bacteria Detected"

The epidemiological investigation results were released on May 16. The investigation tested samples—including preserved food, cooking utensils, drinking water, and cooking water—regarding the presence of food poisoning bacteria. In the official document, the Sanitary Guidance Team of the Giheung-gu

Office stated that all results were negative, concluding that "No food poisoning bacteria were detected."

In contrast, the specimen analysis results remain inconclusive. The KHU Cooperatives explained, "According to the latest update, nine students volunteered for testing, and two of them were tested positive. However, the public health center hesitates to draw a conclusion due to the small sample size. Since approximately 300 people had dinner that day, two positive test results may not be sufficient to confirm food poisoning." The General Affair Team (GAT) of KHU also expressed their confusion, stating, "The specimen analysis so far has shown ambiguous results. At this point, we cannot make any definitive conclusions. All we can do now is to wait for the final results."

## Test Results Do Not Guarantee Safety

Although the results suggest that the KHU Cooperatives was less likely to be responsible for the suspected food poisoning, hygiene-related concerns remain due to the current cafeteria conditions. When the test results were released, the KHU Cooperatives explained that fa-

cility conditions might cause another hygiene issue. The Student Center building's rear section has several cracks, which may cause insect infestations. Chunwoo Environment Service Corporation, a company called CES-CO specializing in pest control, explained, "This may reduce the effectiveness of our pesticide treatments. Maintaining the building's structural integrity is the way to prevent insect issues."

The cooking area showed a similar issue. During an emergency inspection of the cafeteria, inspectors discovered several cracked floor tiles and raised concerns about potential safety and hygiene risks. Although the KHU Cooperatives requested support from the GAT for tile repairs, they were reluctant to provide assistance. This situation indicates that the KHU Cooperatives is solely managing hygiene concerns under these poor conditions.

Based on the announced results, the food poisoning incident appears less connected to cafeteria operations. However, the current cafeteria conditions suggest that test results alone do not guarantee student safety from hygiene concerns. Improved service consistency and hygiene depend on the KHU community's engagement with the cafeteria incidents.

# SLS Mentoring Program, Still Shaky as a New Initiative

The SLS faces serious issues in its mentoring program, as a mentor stated: “We are remaining in the program due to our mentees and colleagues, not because we believe in the program itself.”

**Oh, Eun-je**

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The divide between the School of Liberal Studies (SLS) mentoring program participants and the administration is widening. While the initiative was launched to help students explore majors and adjust to university life, mentors say they face challenges related to space limitations, financial burdens, and poor communication. So far, the administration’s response has left the unsupported feeling to the mentors.

## The SLS Mentoring Program

SLS is a new major established in 2025 at Global Campus. Students are admitted without a declared major and are expected to choose their major after a one-year exploration period. After completing the exploration period, the 240 students enrolled in this program are free to take courses across disciplines and declare any major at the Global Campus, with the exception of Post-modern Music.

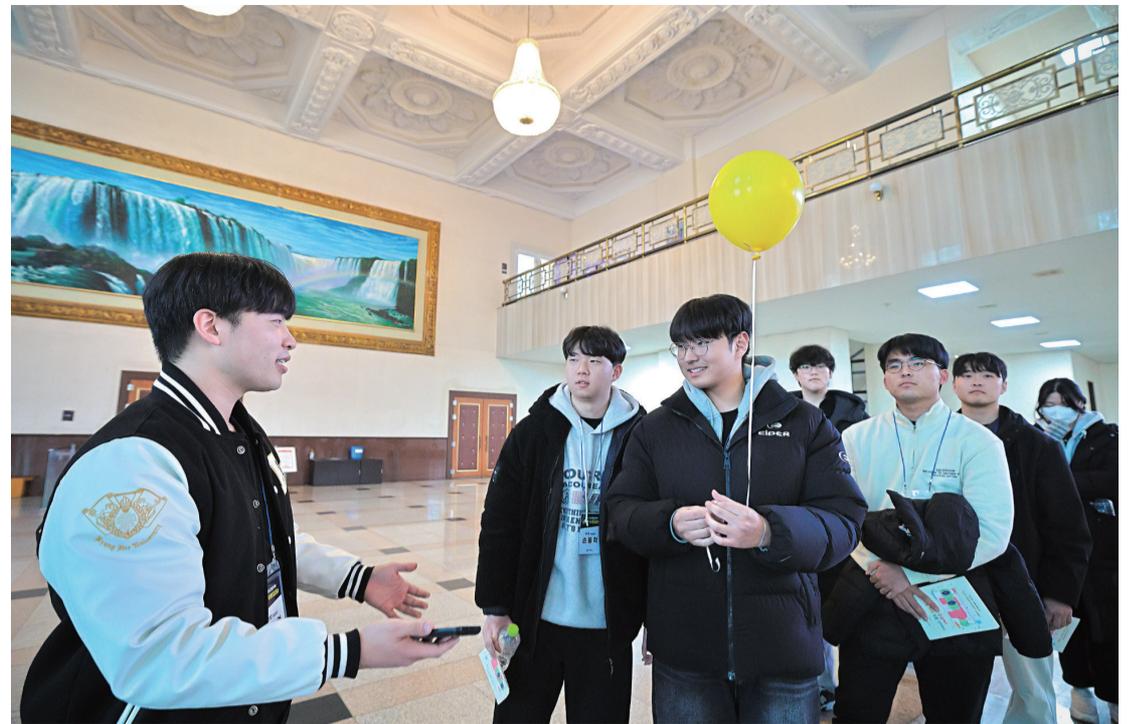
To provide better insight into

the majors, the SLS launched a mentoring program. Last December, they recruited sophomore-level or higher students from various majors as mentors. According to the program’s promotional materials, the mentors would help SLS students explore majors, navigate university life, and receive guidance on studies and careers. In return, the mentors were promised compensation, volunteer hours, and a certificate of participation.

## No Space, No Budget: Mentoring Under Pressure

The SLS department stipulates that mentors have to follow certain forms and complete a required number of mentoring sessions. According to mentoring guidelines, each mentor manages five mentees per semester and must provide them with mentoring sessions at least twice per month. The office requires mentors to conduct mentoring sessions twice a month—both group sessions (1:5) and individual meetings (1:1), respectively. If mentees prefer, mentors can conduct group meetings instead of individual ones.

However, space for these meetings is hard to find. The



The SLS students are participating in a major exploration program

Photo: KHU SLS (sls.khu.ac.kr)

administrative office prohibits mentoring activities in department student council rooms and student club rooms while offering no alternative venues. Regarding this issue, Lee Ye-seung, a current mentor from the Dept. of Mechanical Engineering, said, “As a result, mentors are forced to conduct sessions off campus, often in cafés.”

This situation has created a financial burden for the mentors. Park Seong-su, a current mentor from the Dept. of Industrial and Management Systems Engineering, explained, “Usually, seniors cover the expenses since it would be awkward to ask freshmen to pay. Additionally, when mentoring sessions overlap with mealtimes, we feel obligated to treat our mentees to a meal. These expenses add up with each session.”

By contrast, the Seoul Campus offers better financial support. The School of Global Eminence (SGE), Seoul Campus’s undeclared major, operates a comparable mentoring program. While the SLS provides only 500,000 won of scholarship for the mentor, the SGE offers both a 500,000 won scholarship and 300,000 won in activity expenses. Therefore, SGE mentors experience less financial burden when conducting their mentoring activities.

## Volunteer Hours in Jeopardy

In addition, the issue of volunteer hours has created confusion among mentors. The SLS office initially informed mentors that they would receive 32 hours of volunteering time, which meets the requirement to earn one credit in the Service-learning course. However, the office later revised this announcement, stating, “Volunteer hours will only be granted to those who participate in the

Major Exhibition in May. Those unable to fully participate in the exhibition will only be credited for the actual time spent at the event.”

Lee stated that this means mentors need to find other ways to fulfill the 32 hours of volunteer time. He said, “The exhibition runs for three days, eight hours each day. Therefore, mentors cannot fulfill the entire requirement for the Service-learning course.”

Kim Yu-jin, a current mentor from the Dept. of Astronomy & Space Science, expressed her frustration with the timing of the announcement. “The office told us that if we thought we might not be able to meet the volunteer hours, we should withdraw from the course. But the problem was that they informed us when the course withdrawal period had already ended.”

## Communication Breakdown Leading to Low Morale

In response to these issues, the office maintain that such problems are inevitable. When Park raised the space issue, the office suggested conducting sessions at the Multimedia Education Building Lounge. However, Park expressed his dissatisfaction with the response, stating: “The lounge is crowded most of the time and limited in size. It is not suitable for mentoring.”

Regarding the financial issues, the office confirmed that the issues were unavoidable. “The support provided by the Seoul Campus mentoring program differs in scale because it includes additional courses compared to the Global Campus program, and aligning the level of support between the two was difficult since they were planned at different times.” They added, “We will continue to explore better management

solutions.”

As for the revised volunteer hours, the office explained they are following their original plan. “We initially planned to provide volunteer hours for contributions to the Major Exhibition. This is why we advised mentors to withdraw from the course if they could not fulfill the requirement.”

The office’s stance appears to be the main reason for the mentors’ disappointment. Park said, “The office only provides solutions that do not risk them. Their answers basically amount to: if you are uncomfortable, leave. That makes us feel like our suggestions do not matter.” Lee also added, “I feel like the office exploits us under the name of passion.”

This situation needs to be resolved promptly to ensure that SLS students have meaningful opportunities to explore potential majors. Park explained the overall atmosphere among mentors regarding the office’s stance: “Some mentors are quitting the program due to the office’s response. I am not satisfied with the program, but I stayed with the program for the sake of the mentees, as this affects their future major decisions.”

Lee further shared how mentors feel about the program: “We are remaining in the program because of our mentees and each other—not because we believe in the program itself.”

As a newly established department, the SLS faces serious issues in its mentoring program. If the mentoring program is to fulfill its mission of helping students explore majors and succeed in university, the administrative office needs to provide more than apologies and vague solutions regarding the issues. Without real support, the program risks losing not just mentors—but trust.



The Multimedia Education Building Lounge

Founded in 1958, The University Life is a nonprofit English newspaper of Kyung Hee University. Dedicated to the globalization of the university, the newspaper aims to impartially review the achievements and the problems of the administration, the faculty and the student body of Kyung Hee University. As an English medium, the newspaper also aims to provide international students with information and insights into the culture of Korea.

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## Communication Meeting: Form Over Substance

### The Editorial Board

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In April 2025, Kyung Hee University (KHU) Global Campus held its Communication Meeting at the Central Library. This biannual gathering, established in 2019, aims to facilitate dialogue between student representatives and university staff. However, the meeting still seems far from achieving its primary purpose—resolving campus problems through direct communication.

### Identifying Concerns Without Resolution

The Communication Meeting is merely a forum for sharing concerns rather than developing practical solutions. For example, regarding the deteriorating tiles in the College of Life Sciences' building, KHU staff provided only a contextual explanation. When students inquired about repair feasibility,

the staff responded: "We cannot make an immediate response as these tiles are no longer available for purchase. We will address it further once certain processes are completed."

Notably, this pattern continues to persist. The College of Life Science building's exterior wall is an example, where KHU staff offered the same apology with a familiar promise: "We will do our best to resolve it." As this pattern appears similarly in other agendas for a while, such as campus dualization and participation of dormitory management committee, indicating the meeting works only in identifying concerns while failing to generate practical solutions.

### Too Many Topics in a Limited Time



*Broader student engagement is essential. Greater student attention to conversations with representatives will push both the University and student representatives to address campus issues more effectively.*

The root cause of this issue lies in the meeting's fundamental structure.

In this year's meeting, only three hours were given to discuss 33 agenda items—college representatives had five minutes of presenting time respectively, and the General Student Association (GSA) had to address 20 agenda items within just 90 minutes. For the staff, this structure provided insufficient time to address all details thoroughly.

This limitation was first identified when the meeting began in 2019. The 2020 GSA posted a statement to the KHU staff, stating, "The Communication

Meeting did not produce practical results. We hope to receive feasible solutions, including detailed plans and budget information." This demonstrates that it is difficult to solely rely on meetings to solve the real issue.

### Breaking the Stalemate

To overcome limitations, addressing agendas consistently is essential. Student representatives must follow up on the progress of discussed issues after the meeting. Furthermore, for long-standing issues, the Communication Meeting needs to serve as a forum to discuss the progress and future action plans. Otherwise, the campus issue will continue indefinitely.

Broader student engagement is also essential. Greater student attention will push the University and student representatives to address campus issues. Students are, therefore, key to overcoming the restrictive structure.

The Communication Meeting struggles to function as a practical problem-solving forum because of its superficial nature. Addressing this limitation requires ongoing efforts to examine issues in depth. Specifically, student engagement at each step is crucial for achieving meaningful progress.

## Unlocking the Potential of KHU Cooperatives

### The Editorial Board

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A cooperative is a nonprofit organization that aims to enhance community welfare. Most of its surplus goes back into facility operations and improvements, enabling students to enjoy better services at lower prices. While Kyung Hee University (KHU) Cooperatives began operating on the Global Campus in March this year, their scope of facility operation is still limited, which is obscuring the potential benefits that KHU Cooperatives could offer to KHU Global Campus stakeholders.

Currently, the KHU Cooperatives at Global Campus is only in charge of one facility, the Student Center cafeteria. Then their operational committee could merely deal with cafeteria matters, confined to meal quality and hygiene. This contrasts sharply with Seoul Campus, where KHU Cooperatives manages 15 convenience stores,

three cafés, two cafeterias, and other facilities like the bookstore and stationary store. A similar model exists at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS), where the Cooperatives operates cafeterias, cafés, and convenience stores. This broader oversight enables both Seoul Campus and HUFS to discuss diverse initiatives, from facility-specific events to strategic profit reinvestment.

The limited operations could affect the ability to generate profit. The KHU Cooperatives initially faced an 80 million won deficit at Global Campus and now must rely solely on the Student Center cafeteria to recover these losses. Although they achieved a 12 million won profit in March, the limited scope of operations and current surplus pace suggest this year's earnings will merely cover the deficit.

In contrast, operating multiple facilities has an advantage in budget management. For example, Seoul Campus Cooperatives uses surpluses from profitable facilities to offset deficits in unprofitable ones, maintaining stable profits. Beyond stabilizing the budget, the HUFS Cooperatives generated additional financial value by returning 160 million



*To reach its maximum potential during this significant period, the Cooperatives must expand its role in campus welfare facilities.*

won to the university through annual donations. This demonstrates how a broader range of operations can create greater financial stability, ultimately enabling stakeholder returns.

If the KHU Cooperatives expands its scope of operations and financial capacity at Global Campus, students will benefit significantly. Recently, the HUFS Cooperatives has been providing snacks when the cafeteria is closed.

Through a partnership with Mom's Touch, they also offered chicken meals for under 10,000 won. Similarly, the KHU Cooperatives at Seoul Campus offers to-go meals and snacks during cafeteria breaks, along with more meal options than Global Campus. Since these services require additional budgets for staffing and resources, the broader revenue generated from operating multiple facilities sets the service of Global Campus apart from those at the Seoul Campus and HUFS.

The KHU Cooperatives has secured a five-year contract to operate the Global Campus Student Center cafeteria. To reach its maximum potential during this significant period, the Cooperatives must expand its role in campus welfare facilities. Otherwise, the Global Campus community will receive only normal service—not special treatment—similar to that of other university-operated companies.

To maximize impact of the Cooperatives, support from the Global Campus community—including students, faculty, and administrators—is vital. Their engagement will shape campus welfare in one of two ways: either empowering the KHU Cooperatives to improve welfare services, or relegating them to just another campus organization.

# How Will the New GTX-A Line Affect Daily Life?

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On December 28, 2024, the section of the Great Train Express (GTX) between Unjeongjungang Station and Seoul Station officially opened, following the earlier opening of the Suseo–Dongtan section in March. This new route dramatically shortens the travel time between the northwestern outskirts of the capital and its city center to about 20 minutes.

According to a 2014 feasibility report by the Korea Development Institute, the outdated and inefficient transit systems prompted the construction of the GTX line. To ensure on-time performance, the system was built with exclusive tracks and platforms.

## What Is the GTX?

The GTX is a high-speed commuter rail system aimed at connecting major areas across the Seoul capital area. The system was introduced to meet the increasing demand for efficient long-distance transportation amid rapid suburban development.



The GTX-A display

A key merit of the GTX is its high speed and compact route. The train runs approximately at 180 kilometers per hour at maximum, with only five stops between Unjeongjungang Station and Seoul Station.

In addition, the line provides convenience through frequent operation. Trains run every 6-7 minutes between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m., and 8-10 minutes even during non-peak hours. The first train departs Unjeongjungang at 5:30 a.m. and the last train from Seoul heading back at 12:38 a.m. the following day.

## The GTX vs. Conventional Public Transportation

These advantages reduce travel burdens for daily commuters and Kyung Hee Univer-

sity (KHU) students, who commute between Paju or Goyang and Seoul Campus.

To assess the impact on students commuting to the Seoul Campus, a comparison was conducted between traditional public transport and the GTX-A route. On March 28, Friday, a test trip from Hoegi Station—near KHU’s Seoul Campus—to Yadang Station via the Gyeongui-Jungang Line took 70 minutes. From there, a bus ride to Unjeongjungang Station required about 15 minutes.

The return journey using the GTX-A was markedly faster: departing Unjeongjungang Station at 5:24 p.m., arriving at Seoul Station at 5:45 p.m., transferring to Line 1 at 5:52 p.m., and arriving back at Hoegi Station by 6:10 p.m. In total, the

return trip took only 46 minutes—a reduction of at least 20 to 30 minutes compared to traditional options.

## Downsides of the GTX System

While the system brings clear benefits, it also faces challenges. The high fare stands out as a major concern—a single ride from Unjeongjungang to Seoul Station costs 4,450 won, which is more than double a typical subway fare.

Although youth passengers receive a 30% rebate through the K-Pass program, the discounted cost for daily commuting remains burdensome, particularly for university students. Moreover, while weekend travel offers a 10% fare discount to destinations like KINTEX Station, the overall cost still remains high compared to

existing public transit.

Unlike other subway lines, fare privileges for vulnerable groups are also limited. The GTX-A line only offers 50% discounts for seniors, people with disabilities, or national merit recipients.

Another notable drawback is that the GTX-A line has yet to directly connect the northern and southern parts of Seoul. Until this section is completed in 2028, passengers must transfer to other subway lines.

The newly opened GTX-A line provides KHU students from Paju and Goyang regions with a faster, more reliable commuting option. However, the system faces challenges due to high fares and poorly integrated transfer networks. Once these issues are resolved, the GTX system has the potential to revolutionize public transit across the capital region.

Schedule	Time
Take Gyeongui-Jungang Line at Hoegi Station	3:37 p.m.
Arrive at Yadang Station	4:47 p.m.
Move to Unjeongjungang Station for the GTX-A	Takes about 15 minutes by public bus
Take the GTX-A at Unjeongjungang Station	5:24 p.m.
Arrive at Seoul Station	5:45 p.m.
Transfer to Line 1	5:52 p.m.
Arrive at Hoegi Station	6:10 p.m.

Schedule and time of the journey

# Kyungheedam-gil to Be Reborn as a Local Brand

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On April 6, “Kyungheedam-gil”, a commercial district near Kyung Hee University (KHU), was selected as a target for the 2025 Local Brand Fostering Project, organized by the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) and Seoul Credit Guarantee Foundation (SCGF). The area was chosen for its vibrant and global atmosphere, shaped by students and international residents. Given its proximity to the University, the project is expected to impact KHU students.

## What Is the 2025 Local Brand Fostering Project?

This joint project by the SCGF and the SMG aims to revitalize local economies by discovering unique content and nurturing creative small business owners. As offline shopping districts struggle with the rise of online consumption, this project was launched to help local business owners.

Areas are selected on criteria such as originality, growth potential, and the strength of their local storytelling. For example, Sharosu-gil, a street near Seoul National University, was chosen for its youthful and creative atmosphere, while Chemi Street near Gangnam Station was recognized as a hub for the K-lifestyle. These areas had been losing their unique charm due to the spread of commercial chains, but were rebranded by the development of local brand identities. Ultimately, these areas have transformed into destinations offering distinctive experiences.

## What Is Kyungheedam-gil?

Kyungheedam-gil is a compound of Kyung Hee and *dam-gil*, meaning a street where stories flow. It is a five-minute

walk from Hoegi Station and is also close to nature-friendly attractions such as Cheonjang Mountain and Hongneung Arboretum. The area is known for traditional eateries, unique local shops, and diverse global restaurants, like Kong Kebab, Bonghwa Lamb Skewers, and Kota.

With nearby universities such as KHU, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS), and the University of Seoul (UOS), the area maintains a youthful and distinctive vibe. It is seen as a place where the spirit of youth, diversity, and locality coexist—qualities that contributed to its selection for the project.

## Future of Kyungheedam-gil: Plans and Expectations

Through this project, SCGF, SMG, and the local government are willing to build a local network together, develop brand identity, produce content, and implement both online and offline marketing strategies. A unique slogan tailored to Kyungheedam-gil’s identity is also expected to be developed, like Sharosu-gil’s “One Day Pause, Sharosu-gil.”

The Foundation’s planning team expects the project to serve as a launchpad for small

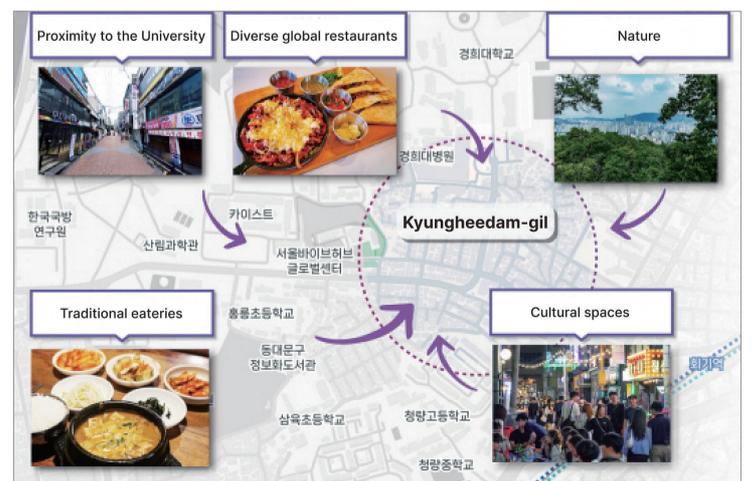
business owners to grow their brands, while visitors experience the area as a vibrant space filled with food, performances, and various markets. Eventually, they aim to establish Kyungheedam-gil as one of Seoul’s sustainable local brands.

Local business owners and students also shared their expectations for the project. The owner of the bakery Portuá said, “Most of our customers are from KHU, HUFS, and UOS, and we also get foreigners from time to time. I’m looking forward to getting more diverse customers throughout the project.”

Nam Ha-kyung, a sophomore in the Dept. of Political Science and International Relations at

KHU said, “I am excited to see the area become more vibrant. Since it is called Kyungheedam-gil, I hope there will be lots of activities that KHU students can enjoy.”

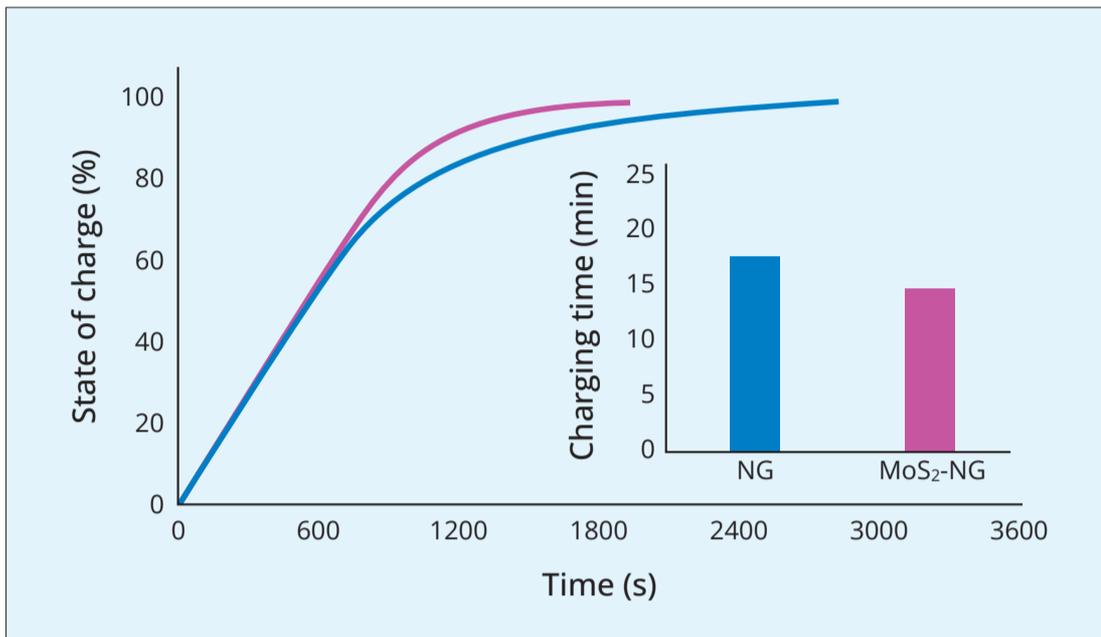
The selection of Kyungheedam-gil for the Local Brand Fostering Project marks a promising turning point for the commercial district near KHU. In particular, the development of a local brand centered on young people and foreigners is likely to impact KHU students directly. Through this project, the area around the University is poised to transform into a sustainable space that energizes both student life and the local community.



Kyungheedam-gil area map

Photo: Dongdaemun District (ddm.go.kr)

# Prof. Park Min-sik Opens a New Era in Electric Vehicles



Comparison of charging performance between NG and MoS<sub>2</sub>-NG anodes

Photo: Advanced Materials (advanced.onlinelibrary.wiley.com)

Prof. Park's research team demonstrated the excellence of fast-charging technology and the performance of the battery by using the MoS<sub>2</sub> coating method.

**Jeon, Hyeon-jun**

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The research team led by Prof. Park Min-sik, from the Dept. of Advanced Materials Engineering at Kyung Hee University (KHU), and Prof. Lee Jong-won, a professor in the Division of Materials Science and Engineering at Hanyang University, has developed a fast-charging battery technology, which was announced on March 7, 2025. This research was recognized for its achievement and published in *Advanced Materials* in February, with the title *Toward Fast-Charging and Dendritic-Free Li Growth on Natural Graphite Through Intercalation/Conversion on MoS<sub>2</sub> Nanosheets*. Prof. Park's research team has opened new possibilities for

reducing consumers' hesitation toward Electric Vehicles (EV) by innovatively reducing charging time.

## The Limitations of the Current Battery

Prof. Park said, "Uneven lithium plating on natural graphite (NG), a conventional material for batteries, is the obstacle to the fast-charging and stability of the batteries." NG has issues with lithium plating under fast-charging conditions. Lithium plating refers to the uneven deposition of lithium in solid form on the surface of the NG, which causes a decrease in the battery's stability. In severe cases of lithium plating, it physically connects the cathode and anode, which are the two opposite electrodes in a battery. This can cause the battery's lifespan to shorten or trigger a short circuit. The short circuit causes the rapid movement of lithium ions

and an increase in thermal energy. As a result, it increases the likelihood of a battery explosion. To prevent this, metallic coating technologies have been used.

However, previous research using titanium dioxide, aluminum oxide, and molybdenum oxide has caused unpredictable solid electrolyte interphase (SEI) formation. The SEI is a thin layer that forms between the anode and the electrolyte, which fills batteries. The formation of SEI can have a critical impact on batteries. If it is formed controllably and uniformly, SEI doesn't disturb the electrochemical properties and stability of the anode material. Though, if it is formed unevenly or unstably, it can lower the performance and stability of the battery. In previous research, many materials formed an unstable SEI that could not satisfy complex functional requirements. Prof. Park's research team demonstrated that by using molybdenum disulfide (MoS<sub>2</sub>) as the coating material, maintaining battery performance without any energy density loss.

## Fast-charging Without Energy Density Loss

Prof. Park mentioned, "The key is shortening charging time without compromising energy density." Previous methods of reducing the charging time relied on a trade-off approach that decrease the battery capacity. Yet, this causes discomfort for the EV users, and high energy capacity is often associated with long charging time. This research demonstrates the possibility of shortening charging time and maintaining energy capacity.

Furthermore, this research solved the battery performance and stability issues. Molybdenum disulfide, with the chemical formula MoS<sub>2</sub>, is commonly used as a lubricant for mechanical components to move smoothly. However, this material has limitations in its bulk form, as it disturbs the movement of lithium ions and increases battery weight. Prof. Park's research team applied MoS<sub>2</sub> in a thin-coating method, which can maintain lithium ions' movement and battery stability.

Prof. Park mentioned that the coating process of MoS<sub>2</sub> was the most challenging part of the research. They tried many times to coat MoS<sub>2</sub> on NG evenly, but initial attempts failed. At this point, Lee Jun-won, one of the members of his team, solved this problem by adding a thermal process.

Prof. Park's NG coated with MoS<sub>2</sub> forms a more even SEI,

making the battery more stable. Due to its low absorption of energy, MoS<sub>2</sub> can attract lithium ions easily with lower energy requirements. Attracted lithium ions are easily stored between the layers of coating material and have higher stability. Lithium ions stored between coating layers become another phase of chemical materials, and they store the electrons in this process, which is called 'charging process'. Afterward, the material emits the stored electrons by discharging. MoS<sub>2</sub> plays a key role in attraction, storage, and transfer of lithium ions.

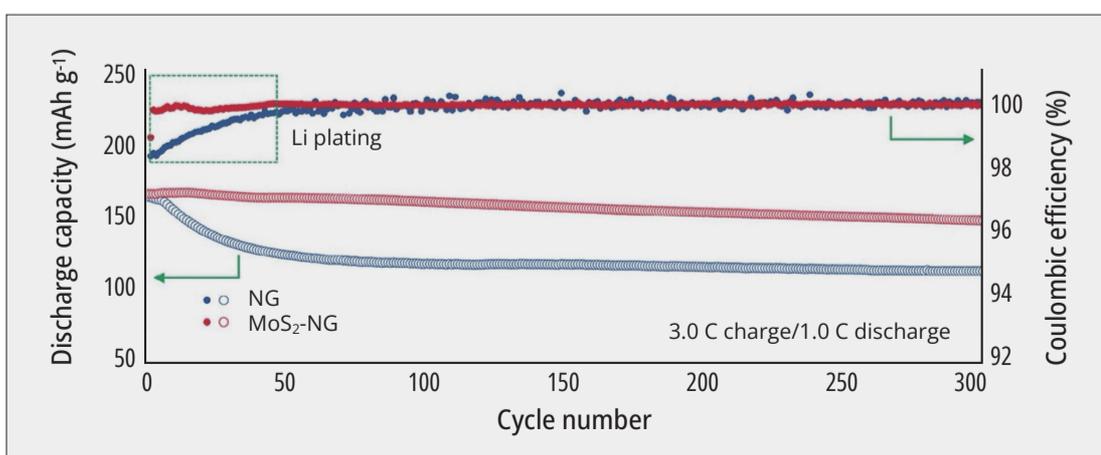
Anode materials coated with MoS<sub>2</sub> showed excellent performance under fast-charging conditions and demonstrated strong battery durability. According to the paper, a battery coated with MoS<sub>2</sub> takes 14.7 minutes for 80% charging. It demonstrated a 16% reduction in charging time compared to conventional NG material. Moreover, during the 300 cycles of charge-discharge of the battery, it maintained its original battery performance.

## Safety Issues That Simultaneously Overcome

Prof. Park said, "It seems that the battery coated with MoS<sub>2</sub> will demonstrate excellent safety performance for EV users." He added, "Lithium plating and thermal issues are mostly caused by environmental conditions, but the fact that we solved the lithium plating issues means we can expect improved battery safety."

This research improved the performance of lithium-ion batteries and got rid of the obstacle for users who feel discomfort with EVs. Prof. Park said, "As a lot of battery companies contacted me, the EV industry has shown strong interest in fast-charging technology." Furthermore, he mentioned, "But the technology used in this research is not yet industrialized. Therefore, we are planning to conduct further research using alternative methods such as atomic layer deposition, in collaboration with Prof. Jeon Woo-jin, from the Dept. of Advanced Materials Engineering at KHU."

Prof. Park's research team demonstrated the excellence of fast-charging technology and the performance of the battery by using the MoS<sub>2</sub> coating method. Prof. Park said, "We will conduct further research comparing other materials that satisfy similar conditions." As this research solved not only the discomfort of consumers but also the safety problems, it is expected to open new possibilities for innovative growth in the EV industry.



Comparison of cycling performance between NG and MoS<sub>2</sub>-NG anodes

Photo: Advanced Materials (advanced.onlinelibrary.wiley.com)



Prof. Choi Jeong-uk's laboratory

Photo: KHU (khu.ac.kr)

# Breaking Fibrin Barriers: A New Approach to Boost Immune Response in Pancreatic Cancer

**Shin, Jung-hyeok**

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A collaborative research team led by Choi Jeong-uk, a professor in the College of Pharmacy at Kyung Hee University, and Taslim A. Al-Hilal, a professor in the Department of Molecular Pharmaceutics and Biomedical Engineering at the University of Utah, uncovered how fibrin in pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma (PDAC) affects immune cell behavior. Their study found that fibrin forms a barrier that hinders immune cell infiltration, enabling the cancer to evade immune attacks. The research was published in *Bio-materials* on March 20, 2025, under the title, *Stromal fibrin shapes immune infiltration landscape of pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma*.

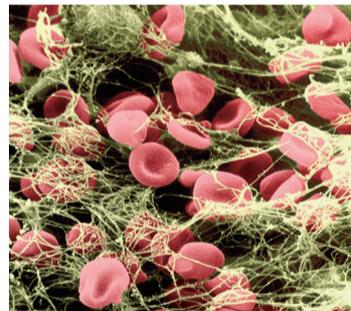
## Key Points of Research: FibTS

Pancreatic cancer has one of the lowest five-year survival rates, hovering around 15%, largely due to its lack of early symptoms and the difficulty in early detection. The most prevalent form, PDAC, accounts for 85–90% of all cases. The research identified that within

PDAC, blood clotting leads to the accumulation of fibrin—a fibrous protein—which forms a dense structure known as crosslinked fibrin-rich tumor stroma (FibTS). This structure influences the movement of immune cells within the tumor.

The research team investigated how FibTS shapes the behavior of immune cells within pancreatic tumors. They discovered that FibTS acts as a physical and immunological barrier, blocking the entry of key immune cells—particularly CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells and tumor-associated macrophages. This restricted access fosters an immunosuppressive environment, allowing cancer cells to evade immune surveillance and continue growing. Importantly, the researchers demonstrated that pharmacologically disrupting FibTS formation reshaped immune cell infiltration patterns and slowed PDAC progression, highlighting a potential new therapeutic strategy.

Prof. Choi has long studied blood clotting and initially focused on its mechanisms during his doctoral research. His interest turned to cancer upon observing that blood clots frequently form around solid tumors, as cancer cells damage blood vessels and promote metastasis. This led him to explore



Fibrin in blood clotting

Photo: Britannica (britannica.com)

clot removal as a cancer treatment, which both suppressed tumor growth and improved the immune environment—laying the foundation for the FibTS concept.

In collaboration with Prof. Al-Hilal's research team, which specializes in microfluidics, the researchers developed a tumor-mimicking microfluidic device that simulated the flow of blood-like fluid. Using this system, they found that cancer-fighting immune cells—such as CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells and M1 macrophages—were impeded in their movement, while M2 macrophages, known to promote tumor growth, were able to infiltrate and take shelter within the clot-like matrix. “We do not yet know why,” Prof. Choi said, “but it is fascinating that clot formation appears to have a selective mechanism—favoring immune cells that support tumor growth, while excluding those that suppress it.”

## Background of Research

Pancreatic cancer is notorious for its low survival rate and resistance to conventional treatments, including surgery. One major obstacle is its uniquely dense and pressurized tumor microenvironment, primarily composed of collagen-rich stroma. This fibrotic barrier limits immune cell penetration and severely undermines the efficacy of immunotherapy and other anticancer drugs.

Prof. Choi, whose background is in engineering, began this research with the aim of applying engineering principles to cancer treatment. Since previous studies have shown that blood clots occur more frequently in the microenvironment of pancreatic cancer than in other cancer types, the team focused on pancreatic cancer as the ideal model. Their goal was to know how targeting clot formation could enhance the effectiveness of cancer therapies.

## Significance and Prospect of Research: Turning Clots into a Cure

The research revealed that FibTS in pancreatic cancer acts as a barrier, blocking immune cells from entering the tumor. Crucially, selectively inhibiting this fibrin structure slowed tumor growth. By identifying the dense, crosslinked structure of fibrin proteins formed during blood clotting as a key component of the tumor microenvironment, the researchers proposed a new combination therapy strategy: pairing anticancer drugs with antithrombotic agents. This approach could enhance the infiltration of both immune cells and therapeutic drugs, offering a more effective path for treatment.

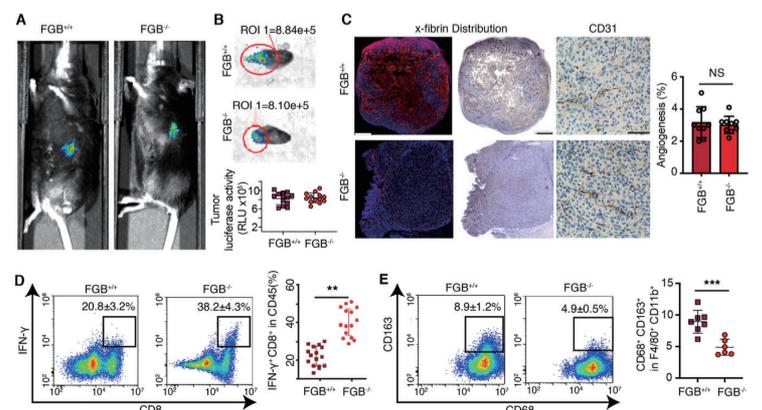
Prof. Choi emphasized that the significance of this study lies in its innovative yet practical approach—rather than departing drastically from existing cancer treatments, it introduces antithrombotic drugs as a new therapeutic angle. The

concept of using antithrombotic agents, commonly referred to as blood thinners, to treat cancer is relatively novel, offering a promising alternative that enhances clinical feasibility by allowing combination with various anticancer therapies. This strategy broadens therapeutic options while also creating potential for synergistic effects. Importantly, its application may extend beyond pancreatic cancer to other major solid tumors such as gastric, lung, and liver cancers. Antithrombotic therapy could also serve as a valuable second- or third-line treatment option when standard therapies fail.

However, Prof. Choi emphasized that further research is needed before FibTS-targeted therapies can be applied in clinical settings. Research on dosing and treatment intervals is essential, as preventive use of antithrombotic drugs could pose long-term risks such as bleeding. He also pointed out tumor heterogeneity—the fact that cancer can vary not only between patients but also within a single tumor. This makes FibTS-targeted therapy unsuitable in some cases, and this approach may be difficult to apply where clots are sparse or in non-solid cancers like blood cancers. Nevertheless, he remains optimistic about its potential as an effective treatment for solid tumors where FibTS is clearly present.

## FibTS: A New Way to Unlocking Immunotherapy

The research reveals that FibTS in PDAC acts as a barrier to immune cell infiltration and it enables the tumor to evade immune surveillance. It also demonstrates that selectively inhibiting FibTS can restore immune activity and slow tumor growth. This discovery is especially significant as it introduces FibTS as a novel immunotherapeutic target—not only for pancreatic cancer but potentially for a wide range of solid tumors. It offers a new avenue to enhance the effectiveness of cancer immunotherapy.



Knockdown fibrinogen genes reverses the immunosuppressive microenvironment of tumors  
Photo: ScienceDirect (sciencedirect.com)

# Living by Verbs: Life Lessons from the Classics

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**O**n January 30, professor Lee Byung-soo, a faculty member of the Humanitas College at Kyung Hee University (KHU), published a new book titled *Verb Lesson*. The book offers an overview of prominent classics from Anglo-American and European traditions, explaining the main messages of each work. Furthermore, prof. Lee focuses on verbs to describe behavior, which he considers to be the primary driver in life, rather than focusing on nouns. The book was published by KHU Communication & Press.

## Background of the Publication

Prof. Lee gives humanities lectures both within and outside KHU. As a professor at KHU's Humanitas College, he teaches courses on *Human Quest for Values and European Culture and the Civilization of Cities*. Additionally, he has conducted lectures at the Sunk-yung Library, where he engages students in reading classics and sharing their insights.

Prof. Lee noted that the student's requests were a key motivation for writing this book. He explained, "I wrote this book not only to explore the meaning and significance of classics but also to share the impressions they convey with readers." He added, "Having studied classic literature with my students for many years, I wanted to share more context and insights that time constraints prevented us from fully addressing in class." In particular, he was deeply motivated by a student's story after passing a job interview, which reinforced his belief that classics can enrich people's lives. He wrote the book with the hope that readers would independently explore the themes, contexts, and characters in these classics and reflect on their own lives.

## The Themes of Classics Explored Through Keywords

The book introduces 21 classics classified under five



Professor Lee Byung-soo, a faculty member of the Humanitas College at Kyung Hee University

Photo: mblogthumb-phinf.pstatic.net



*Verb Lesson*

Photo: Kyobo Book (kyobobook.co.kr)

**Classics are a treasure trove of wisdom accumulated by humanity. They address the joys and sorrows of human life, guiding us toward the right path in the present.**

keywords: "Empathy", "Imagination", "Action", "Expression", and "Passion". Each keyword is further explored through four to five specific verbs. For example, the theme of "Empathy", represented by the verb "Love", explores Plato's *Symposium*, the theme of "Imagination", tied to "Dream", delves into Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*; and the theme of "Action", linked to "Explore", examines Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Night Flight*. Prof. Lee explained his intention for this structure, stating, "As classic masterpieces encompass diverse messages, I chose the theme for each chapter with the hope that readers would focus on a single theme while reading." He also observed that conventional books often center on nouns, dwelling on questions of existence, spirit, and soul. However, he emphasized that life gains continuity not merely through thought but through physical action, highlighting the importance of practical, verb-based language as the foundation for this structure.

As such, the book has a unique structure that tries to convey the messages of the classics through the action of the main figures. For example, it effectively conveys the story

of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* by describing the action of Gregor. One day, Gregor discovers that his appearance has changed into an insect. However, even though his appearance has changed, he still has his consciousness, ability to think, and capacity for empathy. In the story, he communicates with his younger sister while hiding his appearance. They share feelings of sympathy and sadness with each other. Though transformed into an insect, he still considers himself to be a human, capable of understanding language and feeling empathy. Trusting his younger sister, who understands his heart, will



Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*  
Photo: Biblioklept (biblioklept.org)

accept him as a human despite his altered appearance. He eventually reveals himself to her. The book gives a message to the readers through the verb "Hear". Even in his insect form, he is still able to understand the language and feel the emotion. As such, the book poses a question and motivates readers to think independently: What makes us a human?

## Investigating Life Through Classic Literature

Prof. Lee argued that understanding behavior is the key element to investigating life. He mentioned, "As depicted by authors, what matters to us is not failure or success but the act itself. Only action awakens the truth of life and propels us forward." He further explained that he composed the book to explore the meaning of verbs, which express action as the driving force of life, enabling readers to interpret their own lives. He added, "All human endeavors begin with action. Do not confine yourself to a narrow space. Put yourself into the broader sea of life. What moves the ship is ultimately the verb. To grasp the essence of life, action is more important than thought."

Prof. Lee also underscored the importance of classics in people's lives. He stated, "Classics are a treasure trove of wisdom accumulated by humanity. These masterpieces depict ideas, nature, human experiences, social contexts, and diverse characters. They address the joys and sorrows of human life, guiding us toward the right path in the present." He encouraged readers, "Always cherish books, keep them close, and read them. I am confident that those who discover the joy of reading classics will be led to enriched and fulfilling lives."

The book effectively conveys the messages of classics by introducing them with relevant verbs. Moreover, it offers readers an opportunity to deeply understand the meaning of behavior. Prof. Lee's *Verb Lesson* is expected to provide an accessible approach to classic literature, by encouraging readers to reflect on their own lives. Through vivid explanations and relatable examples, the book bridges the gap between timeless literature and modern experiences, making classical wisdom more personal and relevant. It not only promotes literary appreciation but also inspires thoughtful introspection, which helps readers recognize how language, action, and intention are closely intertwined in shaping one's character and behavior.

# Unemployed Despite a PhD? Highly Educated Jobless at 10-year High



A PhD holding a resume

Photo: Segye Ilbo (segye.com)

## Hong, Jeong-min

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Last year, the unemployment rate among individuals with doctoral degrees reached its highest level in a decade. Once considered a temporary difficulty in the job market, the situation is now revealing itself as a structural crisis. This trend has sparked concerns that it could not only impact current university students but also pose a threat to the future of higher education and the broader economy.

### PhD Joblessness: Differences by Age, Gender, and Discipline

Young people who have completed their PhDs are struggling with unemployment, and the job crisis for highly educated individuals is becoming increasingly evident. According to a survey conducted by Statistics Korea in March of this year, 70.4% of the 10,442 respondents were either employed or had secured a job. The remaining 29.6% were classified as unemployed or part of the inactive la-

bor force. The proportion of unemployed new PhD graduates remained in the mid-20% range from 2014 to 2018. However, it jumped to 29.3% in 2019 and reached a record high last year. With the jobless rate at 23.4% in 2014, the data indicates a clear deterioration in the employment landscape for highly educated individuals over the past decade.

The unemployment problem among PhD holders has become particularly acute among certain age groups, genders, and academic fields. While 29.6% of all PhD recipients were unemployed, the jobless rate among those under the age of 30 stood at 47.7%, the highest figure recorded since the survey began. Among male PhD recipients, 27.4% were unemployed, compared to 33.1% of female recipients. Unemployment rates were highest in the fields of Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Statistics, Social Sciences, and Journalism.

Even after securing employment, many still receive low salaries. According to the 2024 *Employment Status of PhD Graduates Report*, among the 7,346 employed PhD holders, 27.6% earn between 20 million and 40 million won, while 19.8% earn between 40 million and 60

million won. Only 14.4% of PhD holders earn annual salaries exceeding 100 million won. Despite securing employment, it highlights the reality that highly educated individuals continue to face relatively low salary levels.

### Why Are Highly Educated Individuals Facing a Deepening Job Crisis?

The growing unemployment crisis among highly educated individuals is driven by various factors, making it difficult to attribute to a temporary phenomenon. First, there is a clear disparity in employment opportunities in the fields of study. In fields such as the Humanities and the Social Sciences, job opportunities that require both the specialized knowledge of a PhD and market demand are limited. Professor Kim Joong-baek from the Department of Sociology at Kyung Hee University explained, "Fields that require both specialized knowledge and market demand are primarily found in the natural sciences and engineering. In contrast, the labor market for such expertise in the humanities and social sciences remains relatively underdeveloped."

Unemployment among highly educated individuals has emerged as an urgent challenge that our society cannot overlook. Only through innovation across industry, education, and society can we fully unlock the potential of future talent. This is the moment for both the government and society to take proactive steps.

The overall rise in educational attainment across society is also exacerbating the problem. A report by the National Assembly Research Service indicates that the number of workers with a bachelor's degree or higher has been steadily increasing, yet the growth of professional and semi-professional jobs capable of absorbing them remains limited. As a result, credential inflation and a distorted labor supply-demand balance are emerging, with many highly educated individuals remaining unemployed.

Prof. Kim also pointed out the gap between highly educated young people's job expectations and the realities of the labor market as a key factor of unemployment. He emphasized that innovation within companies is essential for the development of a labor market that demands high levels of education. He further noted that political instability, a decline in international competitiveness, and the irrationality of corporate governance are hindering sufficient job opportunities. These factors negatively affect the ability to meet the expectations of highly educated young people.

### Clouds on the Horizon: The Outlook for Highly Educated Job Seekers

The hiring outlook for the first half of this year is also expected to be bleak. The Korea Economic Association's survey of the 500 largest companies by revenue found that 61.1% of respondents either had not made hiring plans for the first half of the year or had no intention of hiring at all. Additionally, 41.3% of companies had not established hiring plans, and 19.8% had no inten-

tion of hiring at all. Among the 38.9% of companies that had established hiring plans for the first half of the year, 28.6% reported that they would reduce the scale of their recruitment.

In addition, the Bank of Korea and academic fields have predicted that the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology may replace more jobs held by high-income and highly educated individuals. They analyzed that this trend could intensify further in the future.

As the issue of unemployment among highly educated individuals shows signs of becoming structurally prolonged, fundamental solutions seem urgent. Prof. Kim stated, "To resolve the issue of high-education unemployment, two approaches are necessary: securing a sufficient labor market that demands highly educated individuals and reducing the production of highly educated individuals who are not needed." He emphasized, "It is crucial to enhance corporate competitiveness and increase investment in higher education to provide more opportunities for highly educated individuals."

To address this issue, the roles of academia and society are crucial. Prof. Kim stated, "A system that allows highly educated individuals to fully utilize their abilities is necessary, along with a cultural shift where only those who truly need advanced degrees pursue them." It seems that efforts must go beyond simply increasing the number of jobs. Strengthening the connection between industry and education, developing tailored career paths, and shifting societal perceptions will all require multifaceted efforts.

# Who Supports the Migrant Workers We Rely On?



Migrant workers in rural areas

Photo: Muan Times (muantimes.com)

## Shin, Jung-hyeok

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**M**igrant workers are no longer optional in South Korea—they are essential. As of 2024, over 2.65 million foreigners live in the country, comprising more than 5% of the population. Many fill labor shortages, especially in depopulated rural areas. In response, the government expanded the E-9 visa for low-skilled foreign workers to a record quota of 165,000 in 2024.

Yet this growth contrasts with declining support. The clearest example is major budget cuts to foreign worker support centers. While migrant numbers rise, key support systems are being dismantled.

## Migrant Labor Rises, Government Support Falls

As Korea faces a declining birthrate, an aging population, and growing reluctance among youth to take certain jobs, reliance on migrant labor keeps rising. In many industries, migrant workers have become indispensable—especially in rural communities struggling to maintain their workforce.

Jeon Eon-jun, owner of an inland fish farm in Gwangju, employs eight Sri Lankan workers—90% of his foreign staff—following the 2023 employment quota expansion. “They support an industry most Koreans avoid and ensure stable, quality food

production,” he said. Having worked closely with migrant laborers, he stressed the need for better protections: “They are vital to our economy. Their legal status and working conditions must be clearer so they can access rights and benefits.”

Despite the workforce expansion, the Ministry of Employment and Labor announced in September 2023 that it would cut the entire 7.18 billion won budget for foreign worker support centers, which had offered counseling, education, and welfare aid. This led to the closure of 9 national centers and 35 local offices.



Education program opening ceremony Photo: Yonhap News (yna.co.kr)

Since 2004, these centers had operated under a public-private model based on accumulated expertise. But the Ministry replaced them with a centralized, government-run system via local offices and Human Resources Development Service of Korea (HRDK). Critics warned of lost know-how and reduced effectiveness. Although 1.8 billion won was partially restored, only nine municipalities were chosen for a pilot program—each capped at 200 million won, a steep downgrade from past funding.

## Disrupted Services, Unready Replacements

Although funding was slashed, the workload at foreign worker support centers has remained the same—or grown. With fewer staffs and greater responsibilities, many centers are struggling to find alternative funding. The Ministry of Employment and Labor claimed it would shift multilingual counseling to local offices and transfer training to HRDK, but this restructuring has created service gaps, especially in interpretation and counseling.

Centers previously offered specialized services such as labor counseling, Korean language education, and employment permit guidance. But with staff reduced by four to ten people per center, employees are overworked. Resident interpreters are rare, and daily interpreters are only available for limited hours—leaving many workers without native-language support. Duties are no longer divided, placing all operations on a few remaining staff. In some cases, directors have taken on part-time jobs to cover deficits.

The Ministry of Employment and Labor announced that it plans to operate nine support centers with local governments to provide various residency support services tailored to local characteristics and will also provide direct counseling and Korean language training services starting in 2024. However, recruitment of multilingual counselors was halted due to a lack of applicants, and HRDK was only able to hire seven

new staffs. While 41 vocational training centers now teach Korean to foreign workers, most lack relevant experience.

In a national audit of labor ministry agencies on October 22, 2024, Park Jung, a member of The National Assembly and the Environment and Labor Committee pointed out that the situation was worse than when privately outsourced. Poor preparation and lack of research were cited as core problems. In response, local governments and private groups have stepped in to fill the gaps.

Joo Jin-woo, director of Poolbbang Workers Mutual, called for a national debate on how migrant labor should be introduced. Based on Seoul’s domestic worker pilot program, he emphasized the need to rethink which sectors should employ migrant labor. Communication barriers, cultural differences, and everyday hardships—once addressed by support centers—remain pressing concerns.

## What Do Migrant Workers Mean to Us?

When asked about migrant workers’ role in Korean society,

Joo emphasized they have supported the economy for over 30 years, since the launch of the Foreign Industrial Trainee Program in 1993. This system allowed foreigners to become full-time workers after training and verification period. To address labor shortages, the government has introduced foreign workers for limited periods in targeted sectors. Migrant workers are now vital in small and medium-sized manufacturing, agriculture, and fishery.

Joo noted that public attitudes have grown more inclusive, aided by migrants’ visibility and growing awareness of global citizenship. However, with the foreign worker population exceeding one million, social backlash and xenophobia have also increased.

“Support measures are urgently needed to help migrant workers feel secure and integrated, so they can contribute fully to the economy,” he said. “We must address discrimination and discomfort to prevent future conflict and foster a welcoming attitude.”

He added that young Koreans will increasingly live and work alongside migrants. “Caring about their working conditions and rights as fellow members of society—not just as outsiders—enhances our collective quality of life. Solidarity with those in vulnerable conditions is key to building an inclusive society.”

South Korea is now home to over three million migrants. Though not always reflected in demographic statistics, migrant workers are vital to industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction, fishery, and service sector. They support small and medium-sized businesses facing labor shortages and contribute to the local economy through diverse patterns of consumption.

As their numbers grow, so do the challenges. Experts call for greater attention to the regressive trends surrounding migrant rights and support. For younger generations, including university students, recognizing that migrants are no longer outsiders—but part of our shared social fabric—is a necessary step toward a more inclusive society.



Foreign worker support centers

Photo: Wolgan Naeil (labor21.kr)

# Chill Guy and Lucky Vicky: How Positive Memes Became Part of Our Everyday Life

Unlike traditional memes which were often used for criticism and satire, positive memes are taking on a new role. They offer comfort to viewers and encourage them to adopt more hopeful perspectives in everyday life.

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Recently, positive memes have gained popularity on social media. Positive memes highlight the bright side of difficult situations and reinterpret them in a more optimistic way. Unlike traditional memes which were often used for criticism and satire, positive memes are taking on a new role. They offer comfort to viewers and encourage them to adopt more hopeful perspectives in everyday life.



Jang Won-young and Lucky Vicky Photo: iConsumer (iconsumer.or.kr)

## Lucky Vicky and Chill Guy: Examples of Positive Memes

Notable examples of positive memes include “Lucky Vicky” and “Chill Guy”. Lucky Vicky, created by Jang Won-young, a member of the popular idol group IVE, combining the word lucky with her English name, Vicky. As of April 27, #LuckyVicky had been used in 23,000 Instagram posts. Inspired by Jang’s positive mindset, the meme encourages peo-

ple to shift their perspective and find something good even in negative situations.

Another example is the Chill Guy meme, which was selected by the U.S. newspaper *USA Today* as the top meme of the year. The meme features a cartoon dog in a relaxed pose and expression, accompanied by the message, “Stay calm and relax.” Users often describe themselves as Chill Guys to reframe their circumstances in a more light-hearted and resilient way.

## From Instagram to Advertising: The Versatility of Positive Memes

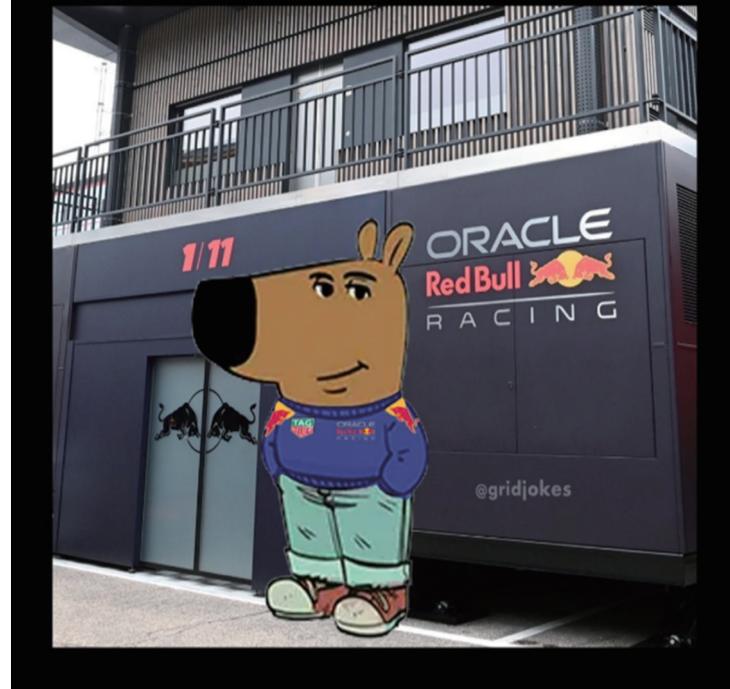
Individuals creatively adapt these memes into their daily lives. For instance, an Instagram account called Chillguykorea parodied the Chill Guy meme when he had no plans for Christmas. Instead

of feeling lonely, he identified himself as a Chill Guy enjoying the holiday at home.

Rather than simply consuming memes in their original forms, users actively reinterpret and personalize them. In the case of the Lucky Vicky meme, some replace Vicky with their own names to put a positive spin on their experiences. Positive memes, therefore, are continuously reimagined, reshaped, and spread in diverse ways.

Positive memes have also increasingly focused in marketing. In November 2024, Baskin Robbins launched a product called Lucky Bera ahead of Korea’s national college entrance exam. It incorporated the Lucky Vicky meme to send a message wishing good results to students by combining lucky and Bera, a common Korean abbreviation for Baskin Robbins.

When you somehow bring the wrong rear wing to the GP but you’re a chill guy:



Red Bull using Chill Guy meme for advertisement

Photo: Instagram (instagram.com)

Similarly, Red Bull ran an advertisement using the phrase: “Just a Chill Guy That Likes Red Bull.” Doctor Noh Joo-seon, who is a psychologist specialized in counseling explained that these marketing strategies offer consumers brief emotional comfort while reinforcing a favorable image of the brand and its products.

## The Social Background for Its Spread

The popularity of positive memes is driven by social and psychological responses to modern anxieties. Dr. Noh explained that the main users are young adults who experience stress due to unemployment and economic instability. As a reaction to this anxiety, they naturally turn to messages that provide comfort and help them

reframe their current circumstances. This trend is not just individual—it reflects a collective reaction to widespread social uncertainty.

Positive memes are simple and easy to share and apply to everyday life. Dr. Noh pointed out this simplicity allows people to practice positive thinking in a rational, not delusional, way. Different from simply ignoring negative realities, positive memes help individuals reframe situations logically to enable more optimistic interpretations. They are short and intuitive, providing immediate emotional comfort.

Dr. Noh also explained that Korea’s highly developed social media and online platforms amplify this effect. In this environment, the emotional changes of young adults are quickly reflected in and influenced their daily lives. As a result, these positive memes permeate everyday life more deeply and rapidly.

## More Than Humor: A Tool for Mental Health

The key characteristic of positive memes is that rather than merely encouraging optimistic thinking, they involve a process of approaching situations logically and reframing them in a rational way. Dr. Noh explained that this mechanism is similar to the cognitive restructuring techniques used in psychological therapy. Cognitive restructuring is a method of helping individuals replace unrealistic thoughts with logical ones, enabling them to analyze situations objectively and shift from anxiety to composure.

As a result, Dr. Noh argues that acknowledging reality and logically reframing it through positive memes enhances resilience and helps overcome negative emotions. He added, “Positive memes will continue spreading optimism and influencing various fields, becoming a key element of social media culture.”

According to him, the spread of positive memes could foster personal growth and, beyond that, improve the overall psychological well-being of society. However, he emphasizes that individuals should go beyond simply consuming memes and instead objectively assess their situations and actively work toward improvement.

Far from being shallow internet jokes, positive memes are emotional coping tools for young individuals seeking relaxation in amid an anxious reality. By encouraging logical thinking and self-reflection, they are a cultural force that promotes positive mindsets through social media.

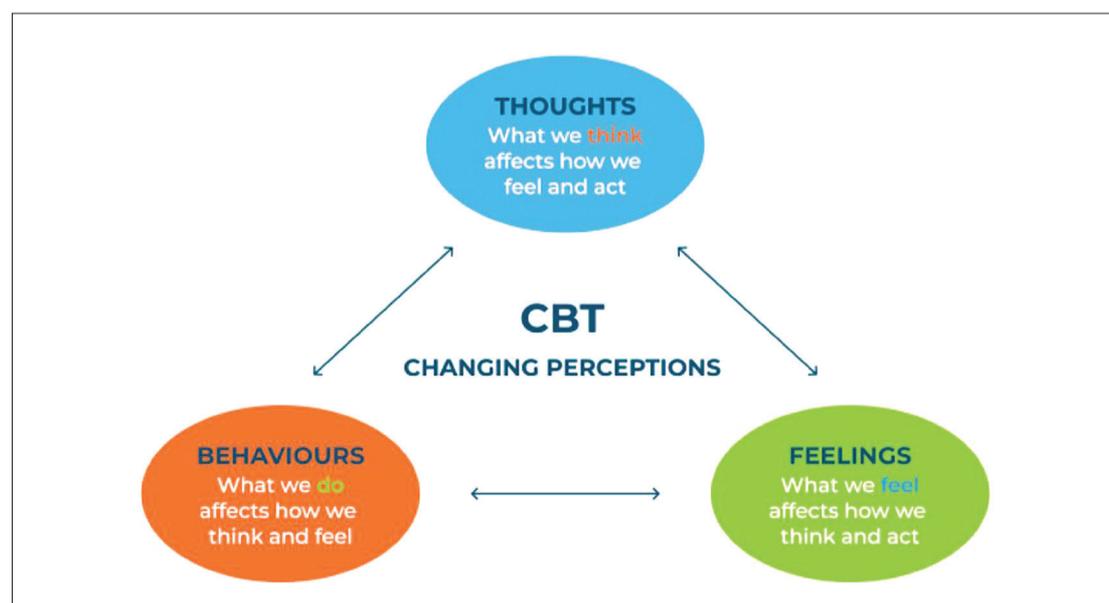


Illustration depicting the cognitive restructuring

Photo: Burns Virtual Psychological Solutions (bvpsychsolutions.com)

# My Way: The Musical and Educational Journey of Lee Ah-kyung



Lee Ah-kyung's 30th Anniversary Concert  
Courtesy of Lee Ah-kyung

To Lee, music is more than a stage—it is a way to connect with others, across generations, and into the future.

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On March 25, Lee Ah-kyung celebrated the 30th anniversary of her career with a concert titled “My Way” at the Seoul Arts Center’s Concert Hall. Lee is a globally recognized vocalist who achieved the unprecedented feat of winning first place in six international vocal competitions. She currently balances roles as an educator at Kyung Hee University (KHU) and an active vocalist.

## 30th Anniversary Concert “My Way”

The performance was structured based on the theme of expressing life through the four seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter—each paired with arias and songs. Spring featured songs she had never before performed on stage, representing the early days of hope as a young vocalist. Summer reflected a passionate and glamorous period, fall expressed her current maturity, and winter symbolized the twilight of life and a turning point toward a new chapter.

The recent concert took on a

distinct tone compared to her 20th anniversary concert. Lee said, “The 20th anniversary concert was like a family celebration with colleagues and students, while the 30th was a conversation with myself, a stage that encapsulated my musical philosophy, life values, and beliefs as an educator.” She added that the experience allowed her to reflect deeply on the road she had walked and how she wants her music to be remembered.

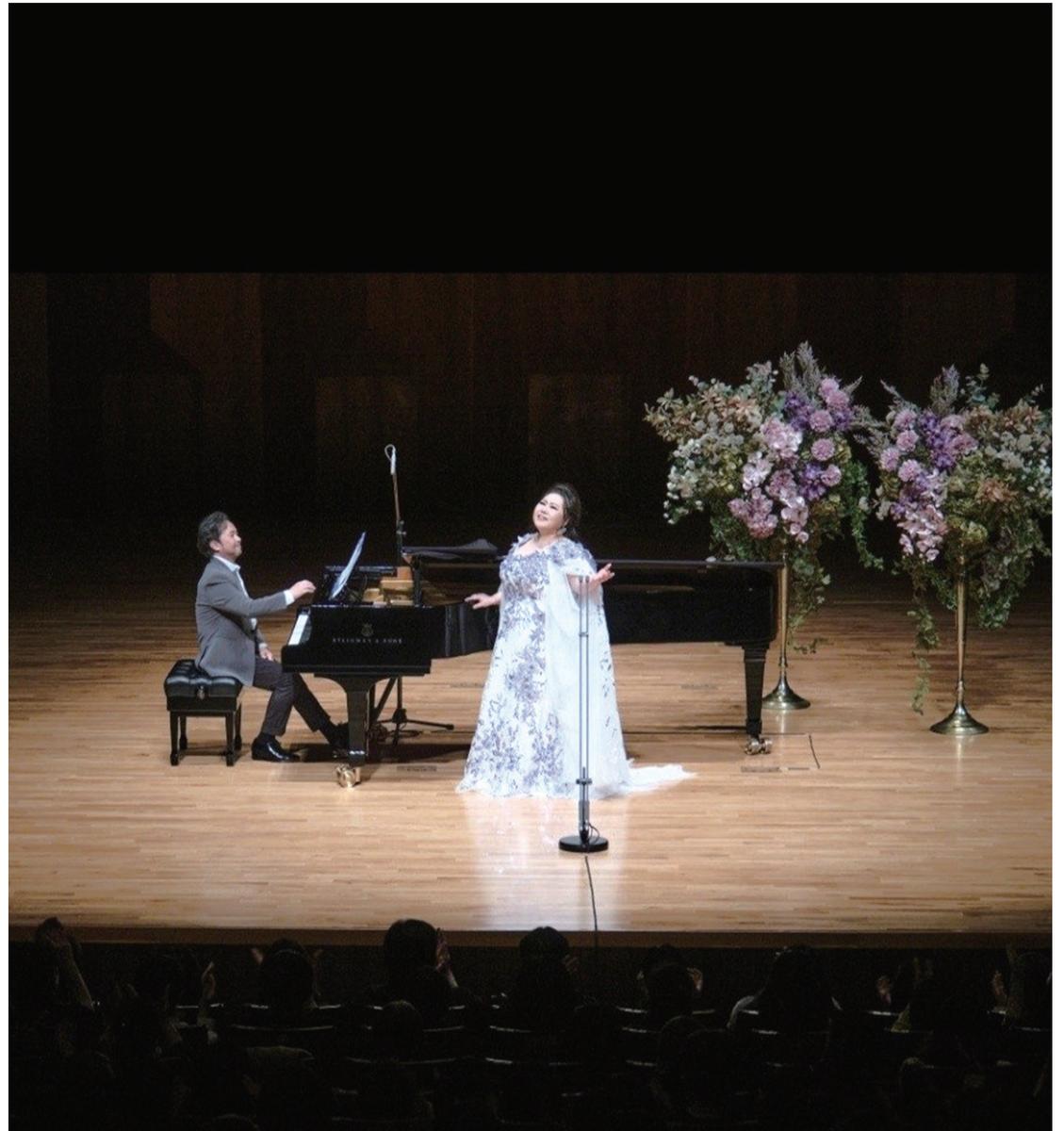
## Lee Ah-kyung’s Journey: Life as a Mezzo-soprano

Lee did not choose the path of a vocalist from the beginning. Rather, she grew into one through various experiences and opportunities.

Although she loved singing as a child, she first enrolled in a ballet academy and even received the Prime Minister’s Award in the solo ballet category at the Busan International Dance Festival. After quitting ballet, she began learning piano but felt more drawn to singing. Instead of entering a piano competition, she participated in the Jinhae *Gunhangje* Festival as a vocalist and won an award, which led her to study vocal music.

After entering university, she joined a choir and was discovered by Park Soo-gil, former head of the Korea National Opera, who happened to hear her singing. He cast her in the lead role of Menotti’s *The Medium*, making her official debut with the Korea National Opera at the age of 25.

In 2001, she studied in Italy and won first place in several international vocal competitions. Her win at the 2003 Bellini International Competition was especially meaningful to her. She said it made her reflect on “why I must do music” and



Lee Ah-kyung performing on stage

Courtesy of Lee Ah-kyung

“what can be achieved through it.” During her time abroad, she watched a documentary about her senior’s child battling cancer. After watching the documentary, she decided to use the prize money to help him. With that goal in mind, she entered the competition and eventually won first place, enabling her to offer support to her senior’s child. “I realized that the music I create can have an impact on others,” she said. “It made me

think about the kind of music I want to do.”

## Lee Ah-kyung’s Journey: Life as an Educator

Lee is now in her fourth year as the dean of the College of Music at KHU. As her educator role expanded beyond the stage, she began paying attention to the nuances of language, the depth of breath, body movement, and resonance.

Hoping to naturally integrate people’s lives through music, she found herself walking the path of an educator. She enjoyed seeing others grow through her knowledge, and this joy gradually led her to embrace education. She believes that music is not just an art but a means of understanding and connection.

While sending students abroad and fostering world-class musicians is meaningful, she places greater value on the immersive and comfortable relationships she builds with them. Rather than just teaching singing, she leads courses that

include performance planning, marketing, and analysis of social impact through music. She stated, “I can not guide students by the hand and lead them down a specific path after graduation, but I do try to listen to their struggles and offer advice.”

She offers this advice to her juniors: “Even if you are late, even if it is slow, walk your path steadily.” She added, “Do not get distracted by others. Those who walk silently and steadily until the results come are the ones who succeed. I hope they continue without regret once they have chosen a path.”

Currently, she is planning concerts with fellow professors and vocalists, aiming to create performances in which she can breathe and harmonize with the future leaders of the music world. Her goal is to create musical spaces that embrace multiple generations and grow together with broader audiences. To Lee, music is more than just a stage—it is a way to connect with others, across generations, and into the future.



Lee Ah-kyung

Photo: KHU (khu.ac.kr)