

*Thomas Chung, a Youth Ambassador from the 2017-2018 program, reflects upon some lessons learned from his experiences in Project Bridge.*

Before being chosen for Project Bridge, I didn't know much about Korea and all information that I heard about Korea stemmed from hyper-sensationalized news media (regarding the aggressiveness and tensions between North Korea/Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un and the United States/President Trump). I was ignorant of the deep cultural history behind Korea and its people as well as contemporary events that were happening in Korea. Over the course of the past 8 months, my involvement in Project Bridge furthered my knowledge extensively about Korea. From Sa-i-gu (the 1992 Los Angeles Riots) to the Three Kingdoms period to Japanese colonization to the Korean War to the 1997 crisis, I have become an expert in Korea because of Project Bridge. I never anticipated the sheer scale of knowledge that I would consume and I'm immensely appreciative that I was specially chosen to participate in Project Bridge because of this.

Another aspect of Project Bridge which I am so thankful for is my opportunity to embark on a study tour to Korea. Seeing everything that I studied manifesting itself in front of my eyes will be something I never forget. As a youth ambassador to Korea, I was able to see how Korean economics, history, politics, and religion shaped modern-day Korea and its people, the interconnections were overwhelming and it's simply impossible to convey all of them. The most memorable aspect of that study tour were the beautiful *people* involved in it, I'll never forget the high schoolers that we met. My partner Jun-ho, from Banpo High School, gave me a 5 hour tour of Seoul and was responsible for formulating my love of the city; it seemed as we experienced all of Seoul in that 5 hour span, we went out to bowling, we then ate *tteok-bokki*, we rode the bus and the subway, we went shopping, and we visited the Han River. I ziplined with Hansul, my partner from Jeonbuk Foreign Language High School, and we told each other about our lives and bonded over fried chicken. My partner from Daedong Taxation High School, So-Yeon, talked to me about her aspirations to become an accountant and her daily school life. My partner from Poongsan High School, Minsuh, introduced me to her school environment and helped educate me about Korean culture in dance, clothing, courtship, and food. She detailed how she wished to serve as a human rights lawyer in the United Nations, her concern for the tensions with North Korea, and her aspiration to go to the SKY universities; I connected with her as an ambitious high schooler with big dreams, wanting to attend the prestigious universities and be in the public eye. Each of these high schoolers personified how Korean Neo-Confucian history, Korean economic pressures, and the rigorous Korean education system were responsible transforming the Korean youth today. As a youth ambassador, I was able to exchange my experiences with them and also learn about their everyday experiences. Project Bridge's goal was the bridge the gap between cultures, the entire program allowed me to do so in its 10-day study tour by allowing me to connect with fellow young people.

Ever since I was young, I have loved learning new things and challenging myself. Project Bridge exemplified these loves and helped me accomplish them. I challenged myself in learning Korean phrases, expressing myself fully, and understanding foreign mysteries. I learned that we all have different cultures, different languages, and different ethnic backgrounds, but that we can all still understand each other and form bonds with each other. The lessons and the duties I undertook as a youth ambassador will carry on in the future, when I become involved in my community to build relationships and when I forge relationships with people who are very different from me.

As I try to keep my emotions together and hold my tears in while writing this final reflection, I'd like to thank all my fellow youth ambassadors, the wonderful group leaders, the coordinators, and to all the

sponsors who made the experience a memorable, emotional, educational, and enlightening one. It so hard to compartmentalize how you all were integral in changing me as a person and helping me take a step forward. My mom has always told me that “it’s about the journey, not the destination.” This journey we all undertook together was wonderful and unforgettable, and we are finally reaching the destination. When I tear-jerkingly make my final presentation at graduation, I will be thinking about everyone I met and all the experiences I had. We all arrived at this destination together and I hope that we will continue on our separate journeys remembering each other and carrying out the lessons we learned, preaching ambassadorship within our communities and changing the world.

*This reflection was written by Tracy Luong, one of the PB Group Leaders from the Los Angeles group.*

Having participated in Project Bridge as a high school student has left a deep impression in my life. When the opportunity to return as a group leader arose, I was excited to contribute back to a program that has helped me develop a better understanding of diversity, appreciation for culture and importance of taking initiative as a leader in the community. I took the idea the program instilled of "bridging the gaps" in our society to heart and it has permeated many of my career aspirations. Working in the healthcare industry, I encounter cultural barriers everyday whether it is with patients, families, or co-workers. The lessons I learned from Project Bridge enabled me to enhance communication and initiate conversations about cultural misconceptions so we can begin to recognize similarities among the cultural differences and embrace the unique society that it creates.

I was able to share my passion and many lessons learned from Project Bridge to influence the young minds of students from Los Angeles and New York through rigorous workshops and a study tour in Korea. The biweekly workshops on culture, Korean economics and history helped develop the students as leaders by learning material in preparation for the study tour and participating in discussions and presentations. The trip immersed the students of what life is like in Korea, from meeting fellow students their age in Korean schools to visiting large business conglomerates and even witnessing political tensions at the DMZ. They were able to see all the differences in culture but at the same time find many universal similarities they shared. The students enjoyed meeting fellow Korean high school students the most and built relationships beyond the trip that I know will lead to lasting international connections.

*This report was written by Kaytan Shah, one of the PB leaders from the Los Angeles group.*

This was my first year as a group leader with the Project Bridge program and one of the best experiences of my life. The whole notion of bringing together a group of high school students from New York and Los Angeles to bridge, bond and grow as a group is a program that should be extensively promoted around the world.

Being a high school counselor myself, I cherished watching our wide-eyed students question, comment and discuss cultural differences not only amongst themselves, but about the human condition as well. The Los Angeles group started off strong and bonded quickly. We met twice a month for about eight months, prior to the Study Tour in Korea. We initially met at the Korean American Museum where we watched an excellent documentary called Sai-gu. Here our students watched first hand videos and interviews during the Los Angeles riots that occurred in 1992. Most of our students were being born at the time, but were intensely engaged in the mayhem that they watched in their “backyard.” This set the backdrop for what our students signed up for with long, detailed discussions as to why human conflict occurs and possible ways to avoid major clashes between different sets of people.

All the while, my excellent co-group leader Robin Kim and I were pushing and preparing them to be well-rounded ambassadors to promote goodwill and understanding. All those meetings and workshops paid off immensely as we got ready for the Study Tour in Korea. We hit the ground running with our students spending their first night in Korea with the students from Banpo High School. The 10 day tour was packed with us meeting financial leaders, top dignitaries, leading corporations, cultural and religious events, the DMZ, just to name a few. Our students were assigned different topics related to what we were going to experience prior to the Study Tour. This was done to familiarize themselves with the subject as well as to ask pertinent questions to our gracious hosts. In my opinion, the best part of the whole trip was when our students sang “Arirang,” a traditional Korean song, at the conclusion of each meeting with our wonderful hosts. The look in the hosts’ eyes said it all!

Every night we would reflect about the day and journal about all that we were experiencing. The group bonded real closely and many emotions poured out with everyone supporting each other. When it was time to go home, the New York and Los Angeles group had a tough time parting with each other, but the memories that were created on this trip would last a lifetime. The Project Bridge program was everything I have read about and more. Behind most human conflict seems to be a misunderstanding of sorts through assumed stereotypes and lack of patience and tolerance to try to sort out their differences. That is why this program works as effectively as it does. It has the resources to actually bring what we read about into existence. But it would be foolish of me not to give credit to the group of students and group leaders we had on this trip. These students were highly motivated, intelligent and quite funny in their own regard which created an excellent dynamic the minute we met in Seoul. I have no doubt that they will be great role models, professionals, community leaders in the very near future. Thanks for the experience Project Bridge!

*Jane Vu, a Youth Ambassador from the 2008-2009 program, reflects upon some lessons learned from her experiences in Project Bridge.*

During one of my trips to Vietnam, I witnessed discrimination. A Nigerian man had visited Vietnam for a vacation trip and he was walking to the nearest town market. I learned of his story by striking up a conversation with him. It was not every day that you saw a Nigerian man in Vietnam. This statement was held true when some ladies who saw me talking to him started asking questions and making racist comments. They were wondering if I was scared to talk to him. They assumed he was dirty and a criminal due to his appearance. I explained to the ladies his story and they gave me a blank and skeptical stare.

Ever since then, I have vowed to break barriers and to educate everyone of tolerance. Project Bridge, to me, is a continuous fight and struggle to help end discrimination and to promote interactions between cultures.

But I have learned so much more about myself and what is expected of me. One needs to accept oneself first before one can accept others. Humanity is worldwide. And once you have a better understanding of yourself, you are able to understand others better. Project Bridge has allowed me to meet different people from Korea and from all over the world. And through these people that I have made connections with, I am a better person.

Project Bridge brings about the responsibility I have to others and myself to stand up for what is right. If no one will stand up for what is true and just, then what will become of this world? All of us have struggles with ourselves and with others, but we should never give up hope and faith. Nothing is impossible. If we lived with a negative mindset, then we wouldn't have progress.

Going back to the word 'strive', we must never give up on our hopes and dreams because it is the vision of a better world and life. Project Bridge has also reinforced my way of looking at life. I live life to the fullest and will try anything once. The question of "Who am I?" has popped up during the trip. I believe that each moment of life defines me. During the trip, each minute I was constantly learning and self-improving. I chose not to stick to a stereotype by answering the question "Who am I?" but to self-improve through each experience. We go through many challenges in life. And the best thing I've learned to do is to embrace life and breathe in every moment. Project Bridge seeks to break barriers and redefine connections between cultures. It is an experience that will contribute to the progress and improvement of the world and to society.

*"Be the change you want to see in the world" – Ghandi*