

October Recap

Monthly update of my Korean language progress (weeks 17-20)

NOV 1, 2022

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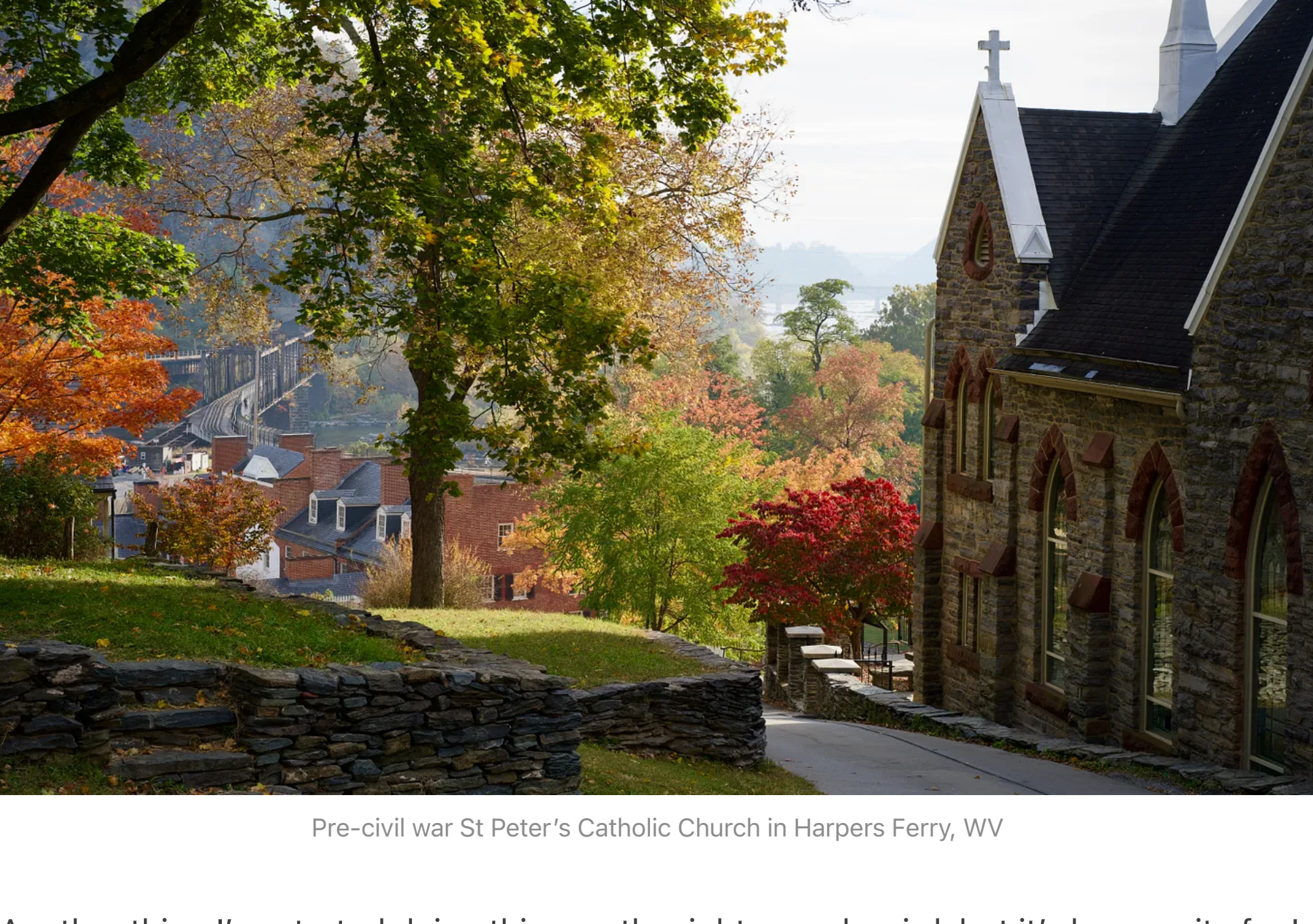
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안녕! October is sadly coming to an end, but it's been a great month here in DC! I've run nearly every day this month and change up my route every day to see some something new and to soak up the fall season. I was also able to make a trip out to Harpers Ferry one weekend to see the gorgeous colors there, and pictures can't do it justice. The peak has passed and the trees are starting to empty, but I definitely didn't waste this month. I'm still in love with this city and all it has to offer :)

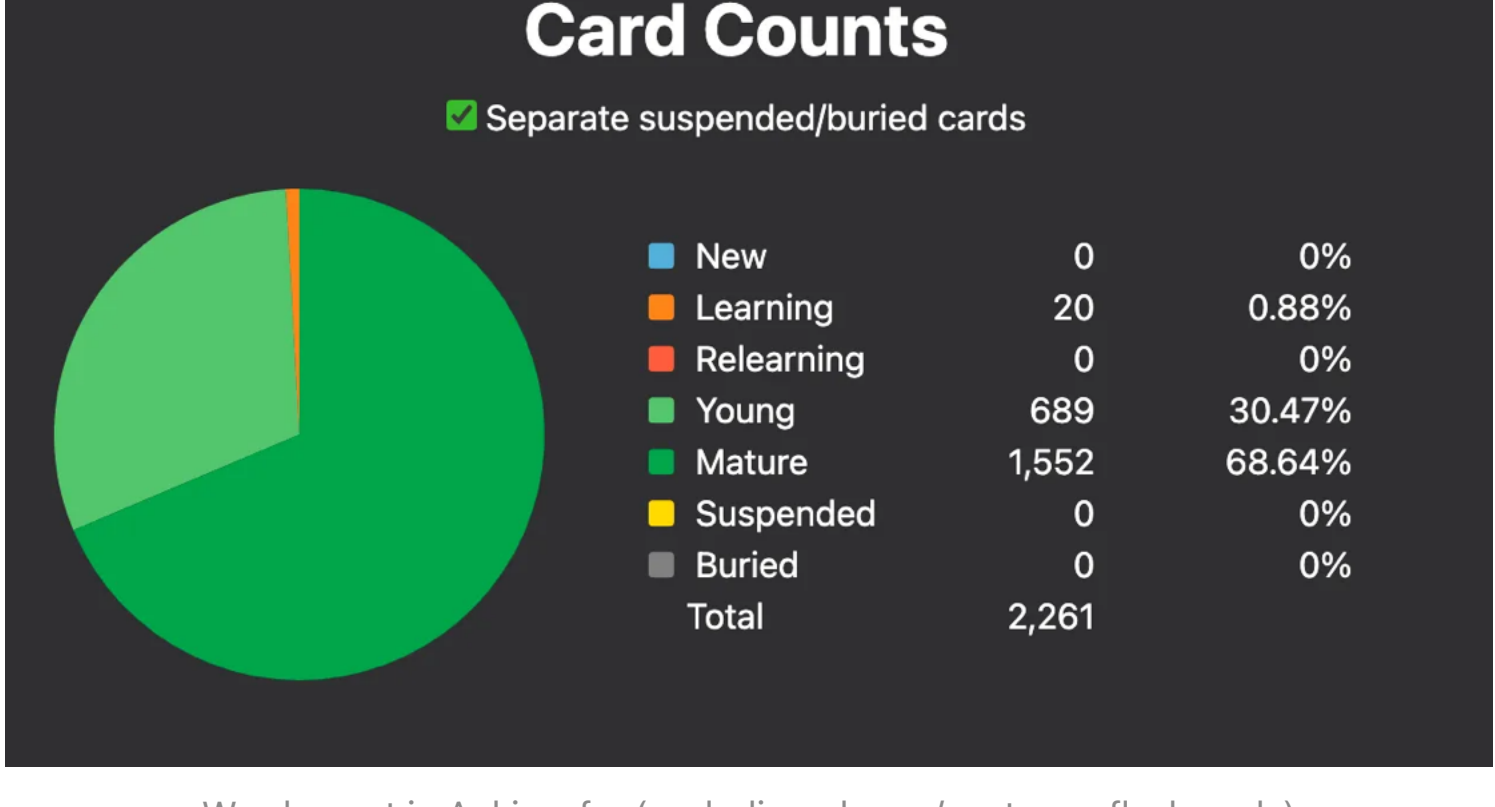


Pre-civil war St Peter's Catholic Church in Harpers Ferry, WV

Another thing I've started doing this month might sound weird, but it's been quite fun! One of the textbook chapters early this month was about various sports/hobbies, and I learned about the "National Gymnastics" (국민체조) that used to be shown each morning on TV throughout the country. Apparently this is still a thing in North Korea too! So to continue to embrace everything Korea-related that I can, I've been doing this short and effective stretching routine each morning. It just takes a few minutes and gets your body moving in good ways, so it's worth a try! The silly factor makes it even more fun because I can't help but smile when it feels like I'm in a '70s propaganda film.

Completed in October:

I feel like I've really gotten into a good rhythm this month. My life has been pretty uninteresting and routine, but it's been generally positive and I have no complaints. I've gotten into a groove with my 'substitute' Korean teacher and I think I'll continue to have her as my primary teacher going forward. I'm taking advantage of the higher intensity and higher expectations and I think I've improved a lot even just this past month. She has this special ability to speak quickly and in full Korean while only using grammar and words that I've seen so far so that I can understand everything, and she helps me work out how to say what I want to say in Korean even if I don't have the proper tools yet for more complex sentences. Overall, I'm loving class even if I'm mentally tired when I get home and have to figure out how to rally for homework and additional study.



Word count in Anki so far (excluding phrase/sentence flashcards)

With the addition of my evening North Korea lectures (more on that later), I didn't have as much time for homework/self-study this month. But those evenings have been well worth the time and effort, and I've even been able to practice some Korean before class with Korean attendees! I have been able to keep up with my Anki flashcards and finished a few textbooks outside of class this month too. I finished Talk to Me In Korean Level 5, breezed through the Korean Grammar In Use (Beginner grammar), and did some old TOPIK tests. By all measures, I'm in the lower "intermediate" stage, currently easily reading B1 material and able to have impromptu Korean conversations with various store owners in my neighborhood. I'm lucky that my local liquor store (that also sells Soju!) and some local delis and convenience stores are owned by Koreans and I've been able to practice with them without it being weird! There is a convenience store by my language school that sells homemade bulgogi and bibimbap, and I surprised myself at how comfortable I was talking to the 아주머니 (Ajumeoni) after not going there for a few weeks. When I see an opportunity to practice Korean in real life, I'm only nervous about how to transition to Korean smoothly and not the actual Korean language, which is a good sign! I've also caught myself saying "네" instead of "yes" several times in the real world by accident...whoops. I mentioned this to my Korean teacher and she seemed to think it is a good sign, so I'll take it without much embarrassment.

Korean language tracker

The biggest language win for me this month is related to those accidental 네's, and that is that I'm not really translating in my head as much anymore, at least for the easier material. I have to translate in my head when I come up against new grammar structures, but Korean in general has become a lot less confusing. Before, when listening to news or watching a drama, it was a big mess of unfamiliar sounds with some words I knew or heard before sprinkled throughout, but now, I can break it out into discreet pieces. I can visualize what I don't know and identify individual words I don't know or grammar forms I don't know yet and can generally "see" the sentence written out in my head. It's hard to explain in writing, but it feels like I'm sorting out the puzzle pieces and the massive puzzle is starting to take shape. Perhaps the border of the puzzle is done and now I have the long task of continuing to flesh out the details?

North Korea

The North Korea program at the George Washington University has been incredible! I'll write more about this after the program is complete, but I'm so glad I applied and got accepted into this cohort. It's not every day that I'm to the DPRK dozens of times or a previous IAEA nuclear weapon inspector who's been to the DPRK for decades to diplomats who negotiated with North Koreans at Panmunjom, but in this small group, I get to have those kinds of discussions twice a week. My cohort is an interesting group of people, from journalists who've been reporting on the DPRK for decades to diplomats who've lived and worked in Pyongyang, there's something to learn from each member of the group and the post-lecture discussions are always interesting. DC is truly the perfect place to be in the USA if you're interested in the Korean Peninsula.

4-Character Idiom (사자성어) of the month

Instead of a 4-character idiom this month, I chose a different kind of idiom because it's been relevant to a current interesting topic in Korea. I'm not particularly into K-pop, but it's impossible to avoid big news about BTS when browsing Korea news. As many of you know, Korea has compulsory military service for men, and that includes worldwide megastars like the men in BTS. This has been a hot-button issue these days between different generations' viewpoints, but as it stands, one member (Jin) had to enlist in the military this year, causing the BTS "ARMY" to react in various ways. One interesting little reaction was that many BTS fans started buying purple rubber shoes (usually in the form of a little charm accessory) due to this month's idiom:

고무신을 거꾸로 신다 (gomusineul gokkuro sintta)

It literally translates to "to wear rubber shoes backwards," from a phrase Koreans use to describe when women cheat on their boyfriends while in the military. 고무신을 신다 (to wear rubber shoes) means to stay loyal to that boyfriend, so many Korean ARMYs (the BTS fan group) are showing these purple rubber shoes to show how loyal they are to Jin while he's away. BTS fans are a whole different category of fans...

Thanks for reading! Feel free to leave a comment or question below :)

그럼 이만 안녕히 계세요!

-Sean