

Arrivederci KIAS

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They say that time flies. This appears to me particularly true in Korea. In fact, it seems yesterday to us when my wife and I set foot in the “Land of the Morning Calm” for the first time. However four years have already passed, during which we have seen this fast evolving country and in particular the city of Seoul, changing at a hectic pace before our eyes, openly contradicting the placid image of its traditional definition. Since our arrival, inaugurations have included a new terminal in the Incheon airport as well as a new Subway line connecting it to the city, the new park of the Cheonggyecheon stream crossing downtown, a renovated City Hall, a brand-new National Museum of Korea close to our home in Itaewon, and a totally restructured Seoul Tower (one of the major turistic attractions of the city on top of the Namsan mountain). This pattern of fast change is not limited to big projects, but extends to every aspect of Korean life: in the same time we have seen shops and houses changing at a similar pace around our home.

The fact that Seoul is an international metropolis where English is ubiquitous has made lives very easy to us, as well as to the many foreigners living here. However it has also probably demotivated my wife and I from studying harder the local language: as many other foreign guests we can barely speak a few words in Korean, something that, I confess, is sometimes cause of embarrassment to me when I tell people, especially strangers, that I have been living here for so long. A predicament which turns out to be not so unlikely, since I am often addressed with the outmost affability by locals in the subway or in the street who are happy to exchange small talk with a foreigner.

In the last four years we have learned how to love and respect this country, very proud of its strong identity, with a deep work ethic, an ever-growing curiosity for foreign people and cultures, a very deep sense of hospitality, a healthy passion for hiking and an almost insane one for spicy food (the latter resulting somewhat puzzling to the uninitiated guest. For the record by now I have acquired it too).

Anyway this is actually not a real farewell for us. Having crossed the Han River for a

job in Seoul National University (SNU), I will be working nearby, and I plan to keep collaborating with KIAS members and to attend seminars and workshops here. Actually, working in SNU allows me to have now a more clear perspective of what KIAS mission is.

While the goal of a University is that of educating the future generations, KIAS is primarily devoted to pure advanced research, and focused on allowing scientists of different backgrounds and nationalities to interact with each other. As I personally experienced during the last four years, this goal in KIAS is fully accomplished. An important ingredient for KIAS success is the very efficient internal organization provided by its supporting staff, which I would like to thank here for their help during my stay. Moreover, everything is readily at hand in the Campus (including housing, banking, two cafeterias, a steady supply of “deok” (rice cakes) and cookies, as well as an unlimited one of freshly brewed coffee) allowing its members to concentrate on thinking and ideas. But the major aspect of life in KIAS is personal interactions. As every scholar would confirm to you, progress in research work is made sharing a tea or a nice dinner with a colleague, as well as listening to a seminar or a talk in a workshop (which, by the way, are held continuously in KIAS on the more diverse subjects). In KIAS this is not left to chance. Everybody is strongly encouraged to join tea time every afternoon in order to meet other members and the many foreign scholars that visit KIAS in every period of the year.

Actually I must confess that I now miss tea time in SNU, being more difficult for me to be aware of new visitors or of other members’ displacements and projects. Moreover in KIAS seminars are held almost everyday, and usually afterwards further useful interaction is assured at dinner. Moreover the weekly journal club, open to visiting scholars as well as to KIAS members, is a constant opportunity to be informed about the latest developments in one’s field.

As I already said, I keep visiting KIAS regularly even now that I am no longer a member. And every time I come back, I really feel at home. So this is not a farewell at all. This is an *arrivederci!* (=“see you soon” in Italian). [KIAS](#)