

The University Life

KYUNG HEE UNIVERSITY

The University Life | No. 457 | March 2025

KHU's Prof. Hong Choong-seon Awarded the Undang Grand Prize for ICT Excellence

This recognition goes beyond individual academic accomplishments and research publications; it formally affirms the critical impact of his work in shaping the future of ICT and enhancing South Korea's technological competitiveness.



Prof. Hong (Right) receiving the Undang Grand Prize at the 2024 Undang Academic Awards Ceremony
Photo: KIPS (kips.or.kr)

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On December 30, 2024, Professor Hong Choong-seon from Kyung Hee University (KHU)'s School of Computing received the Undang Grand Prize at the 2024 Undang Academic Awards Ceremony. The award was originally established to commemorate the achievements of Undang Lee Joo-yong, the founder of KCC Information & Communication, the first Information Technology (IT) service company in South Korea. Today, it is organized by the Korea Information Processing Society (KIPS) and the Mirae & Soft Foundation (MSF) to recognize individuals dedicated to advancing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) academic research and technological development in South Korea.

The Undang Grand Prize is considered one of the most prestigious honors in IT. Prior to the 2024 Undang Academic Awards Ceremony, KIPS announced that they would select a researcher who has made exceptional contributions to IT field in South Korea. Under this initiative, Prof. Hong was honored for his continuous research activities and significant impact on the academic community.

Prof. Hong's Outstanding Work in Global Research

Prof. Hong has held several prominent positions, including head of the Korea Telecom Network Technology Research Institute, director of Industry-Academic Cooperation Foundation at KHU, senior expert committee member at the National Research Foundation of Korea, and president of the Korean Institute of Information Scientists and Engineers. He currently serves as the Vice-president of Global Campus.

His extensive research contributions are evident in both quality and quantity. As of January 2025, he has published more than 837 research papers and filed 135 patents. In the past five years alone, he has published 115 journal papers indexed in the Science Citation Index, authored two academic books, filed 66 patents, and registered 39 patents, demonstrating his world-class research in artificial intelligence (AI) networking.

One of Prof. Hong's notable achievements is the development of Mobile Segment Anything Model, an ultra-lightweight vision-based deep learning model for mobile applications, created as a part of the KHU's School of Computing research team in 2023. In August 2024, he continued his active academic engagements by participating in the US-Korea Conference on Science and organizing a forum on expanding US-Korea cooperation in space exploration.

Later, on August 22, he attended the University of Leadership Forum as a panelist, and on August 23, he delivered a speech at the Research Vision Talk, where he discussed the future direction of university research in leading global advancements.

Prof. Hong's contributions have been widely recognized in the academic community. In 2023, he was selected as a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, one of the most prestigious organizations in the fields of electrical engineering and ICT.

An Honor Received from the Undang Grand Prize

The Undang Grand Prize is a distinguished award that formally recognizes outstanding research achievements and academic contributions in South Korea's IT field. It highlights the tangible impact of a recipient's research on both academia and industry. The MSF has

emphasized that this award is given to individuals who have demonstrated dedication to ICT scholarship and technological innovation.

Its significance is evident from the list of past recipients. From 2021 to 2023, the award was presented to Choi Yang-hee, an honorary professor at Seoul National University (SNU) and former Minister of Science, ICT, and Future Planning; Oh Hae-seok, a chair professor at Gachon University, former presidential IT special advisor, and chairperson of the Internet Policy Committee; and Lee Kyoung-mu, a chair professor at SNU and head of Interdisciplinary Program in Artificial Intelligence.

The Undang Grand Prize has consistently recognized outstanding researchers in ICT who have led groundbreaking advancements in their fields. This year, Prof. Hong was acknowledged among them, further highlighting his critical role in strengthening South Korea's ICT industry and progressing the field of IT. This recognition goes beyond individual academic accomplishments and research publications; it formally affirms the critical impact of his work in shaping the future of ICT and enhancing South Korea's technological competitiveness.

With this latest achievement, Prof. Hong has solidified his status as a leading figure in South Korea's academic community while also raising KHU's reputation in research excellence. He remains actively involved in both research and education, advancing the next generation of scholars in network architecture and AI systems. His ongoing research is expected to further expand his academic contributions, while his work is anticipated to drive future industrial and technological advancements with significant impact on society.

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KHU Showcases Innovation at CES 2025

KHU participates in CES, the world's largest exhibition, to showcase the competitiveness of its members to the world and to enhance its internationalization efforts.

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Kyung Hee University (KHU) members participated in Consumer Electronics Show (CES) 2025, held in Las Vegas, US, from January 7 to 10. CES is the world's largest technology exhibition, bringing together over 4,000 global companies each year to show the latest technology trends and innovations, while industry experts engage in networking and collaboration. KHU's participation was led by the Leaders in Industry-university Cooperation 3.0 (LINC 3.0) Project Group and the Industry-Academic Cooperation Foundation. The delegation included four faculty- and student-founded startups, student supporters, and participants from the Kyung Hee Passion-Based Learning (K-PBL) program.

KHU Startups Debut at CES 2025

KHU startups exhibited their innovations at the Seoul Pavilion and Gyeonggi Pavilion under the University's booth. The University supported the participation of three faculty-founded startups—KBioHC, ReadyCure, and Itphy as well as the founded startup, Caique Tech. These companies have successfully commercialized technologies based on innovative ideas emerging from the healthcare, biotechnology, and sports industries.

KBioHC, founded by Professor Lee Sang-ho from the Dept. of Medicine, introduced a personalized health management service based on individual health records. The company gained attention for LiteracyM, which collects and analyzes individual health data to en-



KHU members who participated in CES 2025

Courtesy of the Office of the President (Global Campus)



Kyung Hee Community Night: sharing recent achievements and connections

Courtesy of the Office of the President (Global Campus)

hance preventive healthcare. ReadyCure, founded by Chung Weon-kuu, a professor of Radiation Oncology at KHU Medical Hospital at Gangdong, introduced HeLaXON X1, a digital X-ray therapy system for the treatment of early-stage Alzheimer's disease. Itphy, a startup founded by Prof. Rhee Sung-min from the Dept. of Medicine, showcased a healthcare solution called Ringdoc, integrating wearable devices and internet of things technology. The company supports the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders, by utilizing digital technology to monitor patients' conditions and offer personalized treatment. CaiqueTech, founded by Lee Tae-uk, a student from the Dept. of Smart Farm Science, unveiled the PI Speed Gun, a smartphone-compatible speed gun paired with a sports coaching application. Designed to measure ball speed and enhance athletic performance, it attracted significant interest from global buyers.

Hong Choong-seon, Vice-president of Global Campus, emphasized the significance of this milestone. He said, "Last year, KHU participated only as a supporter introducing Seoul's products. However, this year holds greater significance as it marks the first time our own startups have taken part." He

emphasized that this participation showcases the University's efforts to foster a vibrant startup ecosystem and expand its global reach.

Kyung Hee Global AFRO! Student Supporters Take the Lead

KHU's LINC 3.0 Project Group selected the 8th Kyung Hee Global AFRO!, the CES student supporters, from June 24 to July 7 last year. Among them, 16 student supporters worked on-site at CES, collaborating with startups by providing interpretation services, arranging buyer meetings, and assisting in business expansion overseas. Unlike traditional event staff, these supporters were strategically paired with startups in advance.

Park Gi-beom, a student from the Dept. of Media and the team's representative at CES, conducted pre-meetings with companies to establish goals for the exhibition. He thoroughly studied the products and solutions, prepared questions and answers, and drafted English scripts to ensure effective communication. Park shared, "The most rewarding moment was when buyers showed deep interest as I explained the products and solutions of the company I was assigned to. It was even more fulfilling when they expressed their intention

to receive samples after returning to South Korea. I realized that I was not just providing translation services but playing a crucial role in creating real business opportunities."

The supporters not only assisted KHU's startups in expanding into global markets but also had the opportunity to visit Las Vegas Convention Center, the core exhibition hall of CES, where they explored the latest technologies from global corporations and gained valuable insights. They directly experienced the innovative technologies of Korean companies such as LG, Samsung, and SK. Observing how these companies are recognized in the global market, they took the time to reflect on the strategies needed for domestic startups to enhance their competitiveness in international markets. Reflecting on the experience, Park stated, "It is rare for university students to have the opportunity to participate in an international exhibition and collaborate with companies. Experiencing this firsthand on a global stage like CES was truly meaningful."

Vice-president Hong stated that by introducing products at CES, the supporters were able to identify people's interests and gain motivation as future entrepreneurs. He also emphasized plans to establish an independent KHU Pavilion, "Through

this, we aim to provide more opportunities for KHU faculty and students to participate together and create space to showcase at least 10 or more startup products. By doing so, we hope to promote KHU's creative and innovative technologies to the world." The CES supporter program was recognized as a successful example of collaboration between the government, industry, and academia, demonstrating the effectiveness of joint efforts between companies, local governments, and universities.

KHU's Office of Educational Innovation & Planning operated the K-PBL program at CES, providing students with creative learning opportunities. Participating students were tasked with analyzing real-world technology trends using a problem-based learning approach and introducing KHU's outstanding research achievements to a global audience. This year's program was centered around the theme: "Finding KHU's unique global value and direction to save the world." Through pre-event learning, students explored innovative ideas and technologies from the University's research labs and startups, identifying ways to integrate them into CES exhibitions.

In particular, students engaged in networking opportunities with global corporations and buyers, exploring innovative ideas that integrate technology while honing their creative problem-solving skills. Vice-president Hong said, "The K-PBL program is a unique learning model of KHU, playing a crucial role in fostering students' creative thinking and problem-solving skills on international stages like CES." He further highlighted the program's significance, adding, "Through this experience, students gained insight into global technology market trends and discovered their potential as future entrepreneurs."

KHU's presence at CES 2025 showcased the University's research excellence and growing startup ecosystem. This participation went beyond a technology exhibition, providing students with opportunities to understand global technology trends and explore their potential as future entrepreneurs. Moving forward, KHU aims to strengthen its industry-academic cooperation model, foster creative talents with a global perspective, and advance as a world-class institution in education and research.

Cultural Diversity and the Right to Choose: KHU Faces Challenges in Campus Dining

As a globalized university with a large international student population, KHU's inability to provide equal access to cafeteria meals for all students raises important challenges.

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In today's globalized era, having a respectful view of students' various food cultures is an important responsibility for universities. In particular, Kyung Hee University (KHU) faces growing demands for more inclusive dining options since it has the second-largest number of international students in South Korea. With KHU Cooperatives taking over meal services at the Global Campus Student Center, there is growing interest in how the new cafeteria system will meet the diverse expectations of students.

A Growing International Community with Diverse Diets

The number of international students in South Korea is increasing annually. According to the Ministry of Education, the number of international students in South Korea's institutions of higher education has increased from 16,823 in 2004 to 181,842 in 2023.

KHU has the second largest number of international students in South Korea, with 6,395 foreign students enrolled as of 2024. Additionally, the university maintains sisterhood relationships with 595 universities across 84 countries and hosts over 2,000 students annually in various international programs. This diverse student population brings a variety of dietary requirements, including religious, ethical, and health-related restrictions.

Muslim students, for example, can only consume halal food, which refers to food permitted under Islamic law, *Sharia*. In the case of meat, pork

is strictly prohibited, and other types of meat are allowed only if they are slaughtered according to *Sharia*.

Beyond religious reasons, people are increasingly adopting a vegetarian diet for various reasons, including health concerns, personal beliefs about climate change, and animal welfare. For instance, livestock farming, especially cattle production, is a significant contributor to environmental pollution, including deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions.

Additionally, concerns over the ethical treatment of animals in industrial farming practices are prompting individuals to seek plant-based alternatives. According to the Good Food Institute, a non-governmental organization focused on food sustainability, sales of plant-based foods in 13 European countries, including Germany and France, reached 5.8 billion euros in 2023. This represents a 21% increase since 2020.

Limited Options at KHU's Campus Cafeterias

Despite its diverse student body, KHU's campus meal options remain largely meat-based. For example, the menu at the Cheongwoon Building student cafeteria in September 2024 included beef, pork, chicken, or seafood in every dish, leaving vegans with only a salad pasta option.

Although the menu at the Pu-



Pureunsol Building student cafeteria

Photo: KHU (khu.ac.kr)

reunsol Building student cafeteria is somewhat better than that of the Cheongwoon Building, it still leaves much to be desired. There are vegetarian options such as cold noodles and rice balls, but these are mainly offered as side dishes rather than full vegetarian meals.

KHU previously offered halal meals at the Cheongwoon Building student cafeteria in 2016. In response to a request from the Global Center, the university collaborated with Muslim international students to introduce halal dishes within the cafeteria's operational limits. However, due to difficulties in sourcing ingredients and maintaining halal-certified cooking methods, the service was eventually discontinued.

The primary challenges included the procurement of halal ingredients and adhering to the strict preparation process. Halal food is not simply about excluding pork. Muslims can only consume meat that has been slaughtered according to *Sharia*, requiring the use of strictly permitted meats. Additionally, cooking utensils must be kept separate from those used for non-halal ingredients. Another challenge was the restriction on common seasonings such as soy sauce and mirin, which are classified as alcohol and therefore not permitted in halal cooking.

Kim Min-hwa, Secretary General of KHU Cooperatives, explained, "When we provided halal food in the past, the limited demand, combined with the challenges of ingredient sourcing, strict cooking procedures, and pricing, made it unsustainable. Unfortunately, we had no choice but to discontinue it."

Flaws in the Cafeteria's Labeling System

Since 2016, a labeling system has been in place, allowing students to check whether the food contains ingredients they cannot consume. However, inconsistent labeling has led to confusion. Both cafeterias of Cheongwoon Building and Pureunsol Building use green text and symbols to indicate pork-free dishes. But, this system was not consistently applied. In the second week of January 2025, the Cheongwoon Building menu included only the symbol without the green text. Another issue is that the symbol is very small, making it difficult to recognize at a glance.

Additionally, at Pureunsol Building, some dishes were marked with green text but lacked the symbol. Some dishes were labeled incorrectly, such as a bacon potato pancake being marked as pork-free.

Kim acknowledged these issues, saying, "This was an error, and we will correct it. I will also ask the nutritionists to ensure that such mistakes do not occur in the future."

Challenges in Expanding Meal Options

The main obstacle to expanding vegetarian and halal meal options is low demand. Kim explained, "There are always many requests for specific meals in the cafeteria. However, when these meals are actually provided, the number of students who order them is often much lower than expected, resulting in financial losses. Although the cooperative is not a profit-driven organization, it must maintain a certain level of financial stability to sustain itself. We hope students understand that we cannot continuously operate at a loss."

However, the KHU Cooperatives also expressed openness to reintroducing past meal options if demand is sustained. Kim stated, "If an organized student group, such as a student

association or a club, can ensure stable demand, we would be open to discussions. We are willing to consider bringing back initiatives like the pre-pandemic weekly vegetarian menu on Wednesdays or the salad bar. However, this is not something the cooperative can handle alone. Student participation is essential."

The Future of Dining at KHU

With the KHU Cooperatives taking charge of operating the cafeteria at the Global Campus Student Center, attention is focused on whether the new meal system will meet student demands. Yet, as the menu structure mirrors that of the Cheongwoon Building cafeteria, major changes such as the introduction of new vegetarian or halal options seems unlikely.

However, Kim assured that efforts are being made to provide stable meal services that meet student expectations. He added, "Students tend to view the cooperative as just another vendor, but in reality, it is an organization created by and for the KHU community. For the new meal system to be successfully established, support from university members, especially student participation through cooperative membership, is crucial. We hope that, like the Seoul Campus, the Global Campus will also develop into a community where faculty, students, and staff actively participate."

Food is more than just consumption; it is a crucial element in shaping culture and identity. As a globalized university with a large international student population, KHU's inability to provide equal access to cafeteria meals for all students raises important challenges. If student demand is strong and well-organized, initiatives such as vegetarian and halal meal options could become a reality, fostering a dining environment that better reflects KHU's diverse campus community.



Symbols used in KHU's cafeterias to indicate halal meals and pork-free meals
Photo: KHU Cooperatives (coop.khu.ac.kr)

After 16 Years, Tuition Fees Are Rising Again



Entrance of Kookmin University

Photo: The Korea Times (koreatimes.co.kr)

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The long-lasting freeze on tuition fees appeared to be coming to an end. In January 2025, most South Korean universities raised tuition due to financial difficulties. However, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has requested that tuition fees remain frozen, as they have been for the past two decades.

Tuition Fee Increases for the 2025 Academic Year

Most private universities decided to increase tuition fees at the beginning of the year. Leading the wave, Sogang University raised its tuition by 4.85% on December 26. On January 2, Kookmin University followed, raising tuition by 4.97%. This marks the first tuition increase among private universities.

Following this decision, several universities announced tuition hikes for the 2025 academic year. On January 31, Kyung Hee University (KHU), Korea University, Dongguk University, University of Seoul, Sungkyunkwan University, Yonsei University, Ewha Womans University, Sungshin Womans University, Chung-Ang University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, and Hanyang University confirmed their tuition increases. KHU decided on a 5.10% increase.

The move by these universities was anticipated last year. According to a survey conducted by the Korean Association of Private University Presidents (KAPUP) in November, 48 out of 90 respondents stated they planned to raise tuition fees for the 2025 academic year. Meanwhile, only four universities responded that they would not increase tuition, while 38 universities said they were still deliberating. Notably, no universities planned to decrease tuition fees.



The 32nd meeting of the Korea Association of Private University Presidents on last November

Photo: UNN (news.unn.net)

Reasons Behind Raised Tuition Fees

Financial difficulties appear to be the primary reason behind the tuition increases. According to a KAPUP survey conducted on January 7, university presidents from 151 institutions cited tuition hikes as their top priority.

Respondents argued that financial constraints hinder efforts to enhance the quality of higher education. Due to the prolonged tuition freeze, 97.8% of respondents said that expanding and upgrading high-tech laboratory equipment was challenging. Additionally, 96.6% noted that recruiting talented faculty members had become difficult. Between 80% to 90% of respondents cited difficulties in academic management, curriculum revision, and university assessments.

The primary areas for using the increased tuition revenue align with these difficulties. Universities prioritize attracting excellent professors, hiring staff, and improving student welfare and facilities.

The root of the issue lies in the structural dependence of private universities on tuition. According to KHU's 2023 financial report, the university's total income was 497.1 billion won, with tuition fees contributing 304 billion won, making up 61.2% of total income. Other universities show similar patterns. According to the Korea Advancing Schools Foundation's 2020 financial report, private universities' tuition

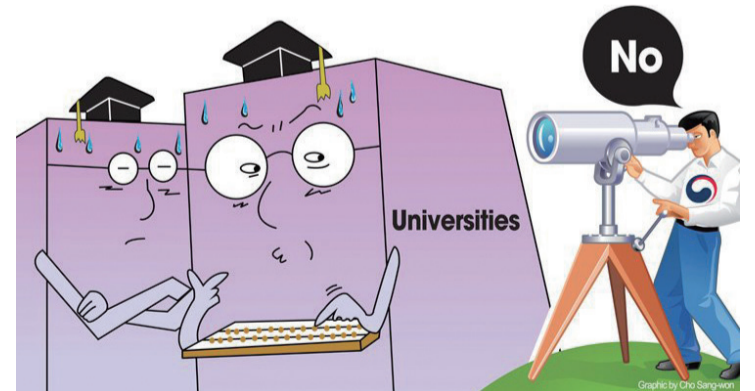
“The long-lasting freeze on tuition fees appears to be coming to an end. In January 2025, most South Korean universities raised tuition. Without additional alternatives, the tuition freeze is seen as unsustainable.”

dependency rates remained above 50% each year—54.8% in 2015, 54.2% in 2016, 53.3% in 2017, 54.1% in 2018, and 53.7% in 2019.

Recognizing these financial challenges, universities have been working to reduce their dependence on tuition by implementing alternative revenue-generating measures. According to the KHU Center for Strategic Planning (CSP), the university has introduced initiatives such as renting campus facilities, establishing non-degree programs, and expanding donation campaigns to ease students' financial burden.

The MOE's Continued Request for a Tuition Freeze

Despite the financial difficulties of private universities, the MOE requested to maintain the tuition freeze. Minister of Education Lee Ju-ho sent a letter to all universities urging them to continue the freeze.



The conflict between universities and MOE Photo: The Korea Times (koreatimes.co.kr)

In the letter, the MOE argued that the tuition freeze is necessary to reduce the financial burden on students and their families, allowing them to focus on their studies without economic concerns. The MOE stated, “We must consider the current severe national and international economic situation and the burden on students and their parents.”

Is the Tuition Freeze Still Sustainable?

Without additional alternatives, the tuition freeze is increasingly seen as unsustainable. To compensate for financial losses caused by the freeze, the MOE introduced National Scholarship Type II in 2012, which provides financial support to universities that freeze or lower tuition. According to the MOE, this initiative has allowed universities to maintain the freeze while securing billions of won in government support. However, the CSP stated, KHU received 34.5 billion won in total scholarship support, but only three billion won came from Type II. This suggests that the financial aid provided through this scholarship is too minimal.

Despite the government scholarship, maintaining the freeze may no longer be a viable option, especially as tuition policies are revised in response to inflation. The Higher Education Act, revised in 2010, stipulates that tuition increases cannot exceed the average consumer price index over the past three years. For 2025, the legal tuition increase limit is set at 5.49%. Raising tuition fees to this limit would generate more revenue than the funding provided by National Scholarship Type II.

According to the CSP, KHU expects to secure an additional 11 billion won if it raises tuition to the maximum allowable rate. This would amount to seven to eight billion won more than the current National Scholarship Type II funding.

With rising financial challenges, South Korean universities have started increasing tuition fees after years of a

prolonged freeze. However, the MOE remains firm in its stance, continuing to advocate for the tuition freeze through National Scholarship Type II. Moving forward, the key challenge will be finding a common ground between universities and government officials to determine the best path for the future of higher education.

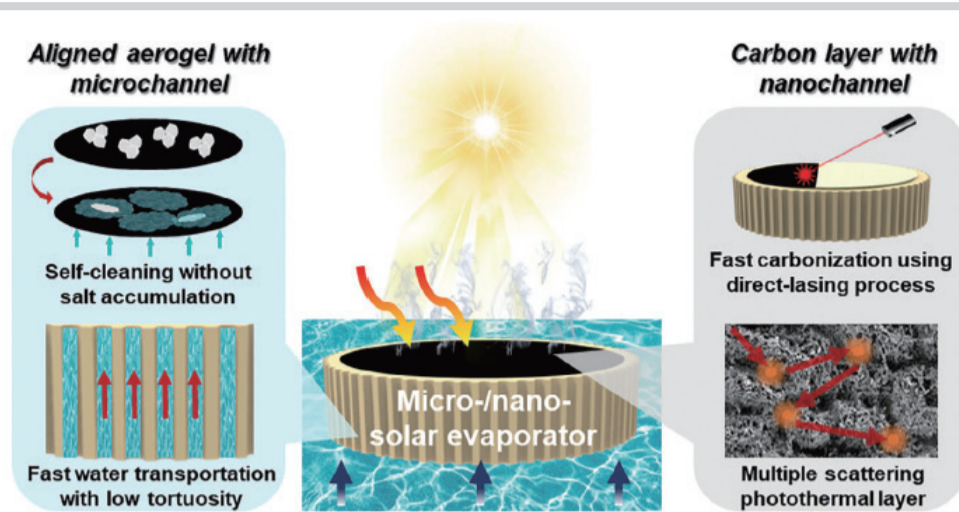


Figure 1. Schematic of the eco-friendly solar evaporator with a hybrid micro-/nano-architecture comprising an aligned CNF-based foam and a carbon layer that was directly carbonized by CO₂-laser irradiation.

Overall functions of the cellulose-based photothermal evaporator

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

Cellulose-based Photothermal Evaporator: A Step Toward Securing Sustainable Water Resources

The development of the cellulose-based photothermal evaporator is an advancement of a sustainable water supply.

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On November 17, 2024, a research team led by Professor You Jung-mok from Kyung Hee University's Dept. of Plant & Environmental New Resources announced the new paper *Nanocellulose-Based Interfacial Solar Evaporator: Integrating Sustainable Materials and Micro-/Nano-Architectures for Solar Desalination*. The research was published in *Advanced Functional Materials*.

Addressing the Global Water Crisis

Driven by the decline in global scarcity of clean water resources, Prof. You turned his focus to seawater desalination. Citing United Nations' data, he noted that one-fifth of the world's population is currently facing water scarcity due to environmental pollution. Prof. You emphasized, "As clean water resources be-

come scarce, seawater desalination technology is a practical solution as seawater covers 70% of the Earth's surface."

There are various ways of desalinating seawater, such as reverse osmosis, freezing, and multi-stage flash. However, Prof. You noted these technologies have limitations, including complex equipment, high infrastructure costs, low efficiency, and secondary pollution caused by fossil fuel usage.

To overcome these challenges, Prof. You chose to focus on evaporation-based desalination. This process removes salt in seawater through evaporation and condenses the remaining vapor to produce clean water. The traditional evaporation methods have been inefficient due to significant heat loss and low evaporation efficiency. This solar-driven evaporation method reduces heat loss and achieves an excellent photothermal conversion efficiency of over 90%.

Developing the Cellulose-based Solar Evaporator

The research team went further, deciding to eliminate synthetic polymers in the evaporator to reduce toxic substances. Prof. You stated, "In our research, we aimed to develop an eco-friendly photothermal evaporator based on cellulose to prevent the generation of microplastics and toxic substances."

The research team invented the photothermal evaporator using cellulose. Prof. You explained, "Cellulose is one of the world's most abundant

eco-friendly polymeric materials and is particularly suitable for the photothermal evaporator due to its high hydrophilicity and low heat conductivity." The research team created cellulose nanofibrils (CNF) through the fibrosis process. Subsequently, the CNF was liquefied and rapidly frozen to form a cellulose aerogel (CA), which serves as the main structure of the photothermal evaporator. "CA exhibits higher biodegradability than synthetic polymers, which enhances water supply performance and improves evaporation efficiency," said Prof. You.

Key Innovations in Research

To improve previous evaporators' water supply and heat absorption efficiency, the team implemented two key processes. The first process is ice-templating, a rapid freezing method, which was used to create specific structures within a substance. The process is applied in the formation of a homogeneous porous structure. The porous structure facilitated the seawater supply, as well as improving the evaporation efficiency through the

large surface area. In addition, the porous structure has a self-cleaning function. During the desalination process, the performance of the evaporator often becomes hindered by the accumulation of salt. However, the porous structure of the cellulose-based evaporator enables salt to be expelled through the continuous water flow, preventing the issue.

The research team mentioned formation of the porous structure was the biggest difficulty of the research. Prof. You explained, "In early experiments, the structure was often unevenly formed or did not follow the desired direction." However, these difficulties were solved by carefully setting the conditions for ice-templating. As a result, all the water desalinated during the experiment met the World Health Organization's drinking standards.

The second process is the Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) laser carbonization process. To further enhance photothermal absorption and conversion efficiency, the team used CO₂ laser carbonization to create a thin carbon layer on the evaporator's surface. Prof. You explained,

"The previous carbonization process required large amounts of energy and lacked precision. In contrast, CO₂ laser carbonization can be used by developing countries due to its lower cost and simpler technology and it can formulate a more elaborate carbon layer with low energy consumption."

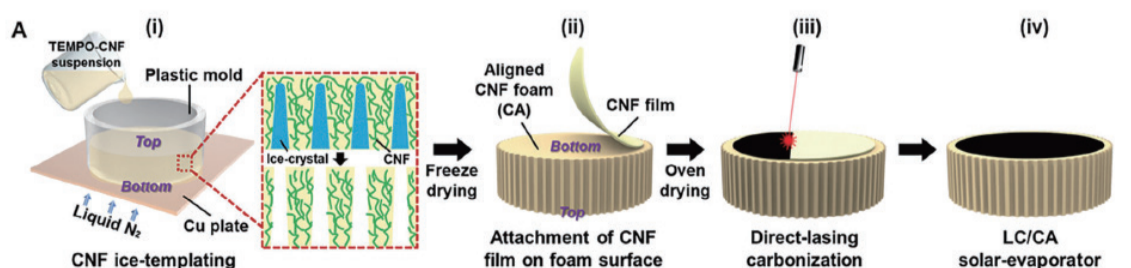
Potential Applications and Future Research

As a result, this research significantly enhanced the efficiency of photothermal evaporators. Prof. You stated, "Considering the evaporation efficiency of the previous photothermal evaporator was only 70-80%, this research achieved a 15-20% improvement of the evaporation efficiency."

The cellulose-based evaporator has potential application in various fields in water-deficient areas, purification of agricultural water, and industrial wastewater treatment. It could be very beneficial to developing countries in maintaining drinking water and public health. Prof. You further noted, "This study can contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation and Goal 13 on Climate Action."

The research team is now preparing for follow-up research and commercialization. Prof. You explained, "We are looking for ways to cooperate with international organizations and non-governmental organizations so that this technology can have a practical impact in various regions, including developing countries."

In addition, the research team plans to expand experiments for practical use and conduct performance verification in various environments. Prof. You mentioned, "The study has been conducted in the laboratory and actual solar conditions, but long-term stability evaluation in real-world environments is needed. In future studies, we plan to verify the performance in various climate conditions and study the possibility of mass production of fresh water using evaporators." With continued effort, Prof. You's research raises high expectations for the future of seawater desalination and its potential to address water scarcity.



The process of producing cellulose-based photothermal evaporator through ice-templating and carbonization
Photo: Advanced Functional Materials (advanced.onlinelibrary.wiley.com)



Prof. Jo Dae-jean's Team Pioneers a Breakthrough in Spinal Surgery

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A research team led by Professor Jo Dae-jean from Kyung Hee University Hospital at Gangdong (KHUHG) has achieved a breakthrough in spinal surgery. On January 6, 2025, KHUHG announced that Prof. Jo and his team had presented a new surgical technique, for the first time in the world, that integrates the benefits of both the conventional anterior and posterior approaches while overcoming their limitations.

A Breakthrough in Spinal Surgery

The new extratransforaminal lumbar interbody fusion (ExTLIF) technique involves a special fusion cage developed by Prof. Jo and his team, and it is notably larger than conventional anterior lumbar interbody fusion (ALIF) cages. This innovation offers hope for patients who are at high risk for anterior spinal surgeries due to conditions such as obesity, vascular anomalies, or prior abdominal surgeries.

His team's findings, published last November in the prestigious medical journal *Clinical*

Spine Surgery, were presented in their study titled *Anterior Column Support with Anterior Lumbar Interbody Fusion Cage Through Posterior Approach Maneuver*. The publication highlights the global significance of the team's research.

Limitations of Conventional Surgeries

Patients with severe spinal disease, such as disc disorders, spondylolisthesis, spinal stenosis, spinal fractures, chronic lower back pain, or scoliosis, rarely experience significant symptom relief with conservative treatments such as medication or physical therapy. Instead, spinal surgery is often required, particularly for elderly patients whose daily lives are profoundly affected by their symptoms.

Conventional spinal surgeries include those with anterior and lateral approaches, such as ALIF, direct lumbar interbody

fusion (DLIF), and oblique lumbar interbody fusion (OLIF). In contrast, posterior lumbar interbody fusion (PLIF) and transforaminal lumbar interbody fusion (TLIF) are techniques that access the spine from the back.

Conventional anterior approaches provide a larger space for cage insertion, making them effective for restoring lumbar lordosis. However, they carry a higher risk of damaging vital organs such as the small intestine, large intestine, bladder, and major blood vessels like the aorta. Additionally, in young male patients, this approach can lead to retrograde ejaculation, a condition in which semen enters the bladder instead of exiting through the urethra, potentially causing infertility.

On the other hand, posterior surgeries are generally safer as they avoid entering from the front. However, they provide limited space for cage insertion, restricting the ability to restore

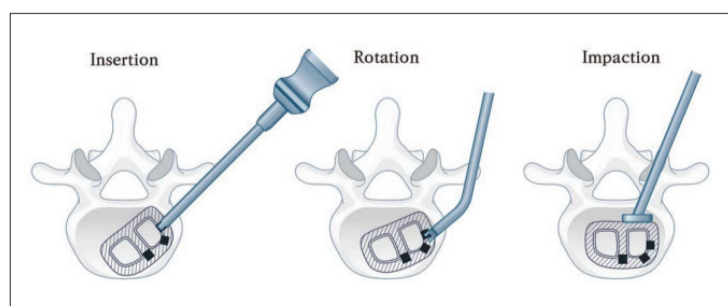


Illustration of how to insert the cage
Photo: Clinical Spine Surgery (clinicalspinesurgery.com)

“Surgeons should never underestimate even the simplest procedures. In medicine, there is no room for overconfidence—only for relentless pursuit of better outcomes.”

Prof. Jo Dae-jean during the interview in his office in Gangdong-gu, Seoul

lumbar lordosis effectively.

For patients whose conditions were not suitable for anterior surgeries, outcomes were merely satisfactory due to the limitations of PLIF and TLIF. Recognizing these challenges, Prof. Jo's team aimed to develop a surgical method that could address the shortcomings of PLIF and TLIF while providing an alternative for patients ineligible for anterior surgeries. Since most patients with severe spine problems are elderly, Prof. Jo and his colleagues sought to develop a new approach that could be applied to a broader range of patients. They had to think of a way to solve chronic issues in spinal surgeries leading to a breakthrough.

On the Road for ExTLIF Surgery

In this study, Prof. Jo's team developed a modified posterior approach called ExTLIF, which maintains the key advantages of ALIF, such as restoring lumbar lordosis and ensuring stable cage placement. ExTLIF also successfully reduces surgical time and minimizes complications. They used ExTLIF cages made of Polyetheretherketone (PEEK), which are suitable for molding and have an elastic modulus that closely matches that of bone. Prof. Jo noted that in the past, titanium and carbon cages were widely used. However, they either mismatched the elastic modulus or were too difficult to mold due to their monolithic structure. PEEK cages are more suitable for elderly patients with relatively weak bones.

A major distinction of ExTLIF

is its ability to insert an ALIF cage via a posterior approach, which was previously challenging without anterior access. By utilizing this posterior method, the procedure minimizes nerve damage and eliminates the need for abdominal incisions. This design significantly reduces the risk of injury to major blood vessels and organs, which are typically vulnerable in ALIF procedures. Additionally, the simplified surgical process leads to shorter operation times. To evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, Prof. Jo's team performed the surgery on 51 patients and analyzed the outcomes. The patients were divided into two groups:

Group one: 35 patients who underwent standard spinal fusion

Group two: 16 patients with severe spinal deformities requiring correction

The average age of the patients was 69.4 years for group one and 71.4 years for group two.

The study results demonstrated that ExTLIF achieves clinical outcomes comparable to ALIF, including high fusion rates and preserved lumbar lordosis, while also facilitating faster patient recovery and lowering the risk of complications. Notably, the study analyzed subsidence rates, which refer to the sinking of the cage into the vertebral body.

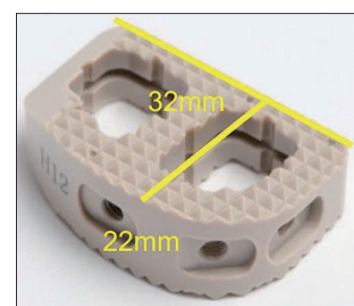
Group one had a subsidence rate of 85.4%.

Group two had a lower rate of 68.8%.

Furthermore, in group one, subsidence was found to be significantly correlated with cage height, indicating that a taller cage increased the likelihood of subsidence. Logistic regression analysis revealed that for every two-millimeter increase in cage height, the risk of subsidence increased by approximately 1.8 times.

ExTLIF has broadened the range of patients eligible for surgical treatment, particularly those for whom ALIF was previously unsuitable. Through this research, Prof. Jo's team has successfully overcome the limitations of conventional techniques, marking a significant advancement in South Korea's medical technology.

He is now moving on to the next step while keeping one principle in mind: “Surgeons should never underestimate even the simplest procedures. In medicine, there is no room for overconfidence—only for relentless pursuit of better outcomes.”



A conventional ALIF cage
Photo: Clinical Spine Surgery (clinicalspinesurgery.com)

Jeonse Fraud Spreading Across University Districts, Threatening Housing Stability for Young Adults

Jeonse fraud, a growing financial crime targeting university students and young professionals, has become a serious housing crisis in South Korea. The fundamental cause of *jeonse* fraud is the imbalance of information between tenants, landlords, and real estate agents.



A *jeonse* fraud victim sits in despair, highlighting the housing insecurity faced by young people. Photo: dailypop (dailypop.kr)

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Jeonse fraud, a growing financial crime targeting university students and young professionals, has become a serious housing crisis in South Korea, particularly in areas with major universities. According to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MOLIT), Gangseo-gu—where universities such as Yonsei University, Ewha Womans University, and Sogang University are located—has suffered 10 billion won in damages, while Gwanak-gu, home to Seoul National University, reported 1,300 cases—the highest in Seoul. With 73.3% of victims in their 20s and 30s, young adults, who often lack financial security, are disproportionately affected, under-

scoring the urgent need for countermeasures.

Understanding Jeonse Fraud and Its Methods: How Jeonse Fraud Works

Jeonse is a unique rental system in South Korea where tenants deposit a lump sum instead of paying monthly rent. At the end of the lease, the landlord is supposed to return the deposit in full. While this system alleviates the financial burden of monthly rent, the substantial deposit transferred to landlords makes tenants vulnerable to fraud.

A growing number of cases have emerged where landlords refuse to return deposits even after lease agreements expire, leaving tenants financially devastated. One common *jeonse* fraud involves landlords defaulting on excessive loans, failing to return deposits, or us-

ing properties as collateral for loans and then deliberately allowing them to go into foreclosure—thus stripping tenants of their deposits.

Real estate agents sometimes play a role in the deception. In some cases, real estate agents misrepresent contracts, tricking tenants into signing agreements that offer fewer legal protections than they realize. This scheme could even be conducted through government-certified real estate agencies have fallen prey to these fraudulent schemes.

Causes and Consequences of Jeonse Fraud

The fundamental cause of *jeonse* fraud is the imbalance of information between tenants, landlords, and real estate agents. Professor Kim Joong-baek from the Dept. of Sociology at Kyung Hee University explains that young renters, particularly university students, often lack the financial experience and resources to verify a property's security before signing a lease. Financial limitations compel them to seek affordable housing with limited transaction histories or insufficient information, making them prime targets for fraud. He also noted that the lack of mandatory disclosure requirements for villa transactions and the difficulty of maintaining a public transaction record further exacerbate the information gap.

Due to rising *jeonse* fraud, many young tenants are opting for monthly rentals instead. According to 2024 Housing Market Analysis by the Korea Housing-finance Corporation, the proportion of monthly rental transactions nationwide in the first half of the year surged to 57.5%, compared to the five-year average of 46.0%.

However, this shift toward monthly rentals has driven up rental prices. In university districts, rental prices have seen steep increases, with monthly rent near Sungkyunkwan University rising from 530,000 won in August 2023 to 620,000

won in 2024 according to *Newsis*. According to Dabang, a real estate information sharing application, rental prices near Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and Hanyang University rose by 6.6% and 5.7%, respectively. Ultimately, the damage caused by *jeonse* fraud is not limited to individual victims but extends to a broader housing crisis, further destabilizing the living conditions of young adults.

Government Measures to Combat Jeonse Fraud

In response to the growing crisis, the government has implemented policies to prevent *jeonse* fraud and support victims. In June 2023, the *Jeonse Fraud Victims Special Act* was enacted to expedite legal assistance for affected tenants, and response teams were deployed in areas with high fraud concentrations.

The MOLIT also introduced financial and housing support policies to aid victims in recovering their deposits and securing stable housing. In May 2024, the MOLIT unveiled the *Jeonse Fraud Victims Housing Stabilization Plan*, under which the Korea Land & Housing Corporation (LH) acquires auctioned properties previously occupied by victims and converts them into public rental housing, allowing victims to remain in their homes. Additionally, special loan programs have been introduced to ease financial burdens by relaxing eligibility requirements and lowering interest rates.

The MOLIT is actively sharing information on different types of *jeonse* fraud and preventive measures to protect tenants. To enhance transparency and legal protection, the MOLIT has launched the Safe Jeonse application, which enables tenants to verify a property's ownership and financial status before signing a lease. Stricter regulations now hold real estate agents more accountable for fraudulent transactions to minimize potential fraud risks.

Status of *jeonse* fraud victims by age group by January 5, 2024

20s	2713
30s	5271
40s	1717
50s	770
60s	343
over 70s	129

Source: "Jeonse Fraud Victims Support Committee Determines 688 Cases of Victims, etc." by MOLIT (molit.go.kr)

Remaining Challenges and Potential Solutions

Despite these efforts, *jeonse* fraud remains a pressing issue. According to a MOLIT report published on December 20, 2024, 910 cases of *jeonse* fraud were reported within a recent month, bringing the cumulative total to 25,578 cases.

Additionally, existing government initiatives face limitations. LH's property acquisition program also faces obstacles, as support is only available for properties that have completed auction procedures, excluding properties still undergoing legal processes. Consequently, landlords often neglect building maintenance costs, shifting additional financial burdens onto victims.

While the Jeonse Fraud Victim Support Centers provide assistance with filing claims and information access, they fall short in offering substantial legal consultation or direct financial recovery. Under current laws, victims must provide evidence of fraud and initiate lawsuits, adding financial and emotional strain. Moreover, under current regulations, at least two victims must be identified for a case to qualify for government support, excluding single-victim cases from receiving aid.

Given these limitations, tenants must take proactive steps to protect themselves. Tenants are advised to conduct thorough due diligence, including checking property registration certificates, verifying *jeonse* insurance coverage, and assessing landlords' financial status before signing contracts.

As *jeonse* fraud continues to inflict economic and psychological distress on young adults, it has evolved into a nationwide housing crisis with no immediate resolution. Legislative reforms are needed to bridge the information gap, strengthen preventive measures, and ensure victims receive timely support. Until then, raising public awareness remains crucial in fostering a more transparent and secure rental market.

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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The views expressed in The University Life are those of the editors or the signed contributors and do not necessarily represent official positions of Kyung Hee University. Readers' opinions, feedbacks or interactions are always cordially invited. For subscription or address change, contact us: khunilife@khu.ac.kr

The newspaper is published four times a year during the semesters. The newspaper has been registered as the periodical by the Ministry of Culture & Information since July 1, 1974.

The Hidden Risks of Sharenting



Photo: Dong-A Ilbo (donga.com)

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“Sharenting”—the practice of parents sharing their children’s lives on social media—has become increasingly common. It allows parents to document their child’s growth while connecting with friends and family.

In February 2021, Save the Children, a child rights organization, surveyed 1,000 parents with children aged 0 to 11 to find out their perceptions of sharenting. It was found that 42.7% of parents engaged in sharenting more than once a week, with the other 7.5% doing so more than three times a week. However, there are risks that the contents could be misused for criminal purpose. Sharenting carries serious risks, including privacy violations and the potential misuse of children’s images for criminal activities.

Privacy Risks and Online Exploitation

According to Kim Ah-reum, a researcher at the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, “Sharenting can be exploited for deepfakes. In fact, over half of child pornography involving real children’s photos originate from child-related content,” she said.

In January 2021, a Chinese online media platform *The Paper* reported distributing photos of child actors with inappropriate captions. These images were circulated online as emojis.

Sharenting also increases the risk of identity theft due to leakage of personal information. Barclays, a British multinational bank, predicts that by 2030, two-thirds of identity theft involving today’s children will

stem from sharenting. Criminals can capture children’s online identities, including their names, dates of birth, and school details from sharenting posts.

The Right to Privacy and Consent

Another major concern is the violation of child’s right to self-determination. Survey from The Save the Children found that 44.6% of parents had discussed sharenting with their children. It reveals that more than half of children are not aware of them being exposed on social media.

Some children are beginning to push back. 13-year-old Darren Rundall from Canada filed a lawsuit against his parents in October 2016 for sharing his photos without his consent, demanding a settlement of 300 million won. His case highlighted the growing issue of children’s digital identities.

Furthermore, Kim expressed concerns about social stigma. She mentioned a television program called “My Golden Kids”, which documents the growth of children struggling with behavioral issues. “There is a risk that these children will carry the label of ‘golden kid’, which means troublemaker, even after their behavior is corrected. With this, cyberbullying can hurt the children,” she said.

How Governments Are Responding

Due to the potential danger of sharenting, legal regulations are being implemented in many countries. France became the first country to regulate sharenting in March 2023. The law requires parental consent from both parents before sharing content involving their children. Even if one parent disagrees, sharenting is prohibited and family judges can intervene.

In the U.S., Illinois amend-

“Children’s digital footprints last a lifetime, and safeguarding their privacy will ensure their security in the future.”

out the lacks of clarity on the boundary between labor and personal entertainment. As such, there is a movement to strengthen privacy protection known as the right to be forgotten, but it is challenging to impose restrictions on sharenting as it falls within the private sphere.

Kim emphasized the need of stronger measures: “There is a need for a bill that guarantees children’s right to be forgotten, as well as strengthening children’s consent and protecting their privacy, as in the case of France.” She highlighted the role of education: “Education about sharenting should not only target parents and teachers, but also the children themselves to enhance digital literacy capabilities.”

How to Share Safely

Despite its risks, sharenting does have benefits when done responsibly. Kim Seolah, a mother who posts her child at online more than five times a week, said, “It is good to record memories with my children through sharenting.” According to researcher Kim, sharenting can also relieve parental depression and create family bonds. She recalled, “The children I have interviewed said they felt their parents’ love through sharenting.”

She acknowledged the risks of sharenting. Therefore, Kim suggested the following guidelines for safe sharenting: avoid sharing nude or potentially embarrassing content; refrain from posting personally identifiable information, including current locations; prevent deepfake by taking photos from the side or back than directly facing the camera; be mindful of whether a post might cause the child shame or embarrassment later in life. Kim also emphasized, “It is necessary for the online platforms to provide protective methods for children, such as sending warning messages through artificial intelligence based monitoring.”

Sharenting is a double-edged sword. While it allows parents to document and celebrate their children’s lives, it also poses significant privacy and security risks. While governments and online platforms continue their efforts to safeguard children’s privacy and safety, it is also important for parents to practice sharenting responsibly. Children’s digital footprints last a lifetime, and safeguarding their privacy will ensure their security in the future.

ed its *Child Labor Law* in July 2024 to ensure that children benefit financially from sharenting content. The law required a portion of revenue from sharenting to be deposited for the children. This is the first law in the U.S. to protect the children from being exploited for profit. It was proposed by 15-year-old Shreya Nallamothu, who pointed out many viral videos that exploited children for profit.

However, some argue that such regulations infringe on free expression. Kim responded, contrary to some arguments, regulation bills does not significantly restrict freedom of expression. In French case, involving children in the decision-making process does not entirely prohibits parents from engaging in sharenting. Similarly, the U.S.’s laws prioritize safeguarding children’s personal information rather than completely limiting parents’ freedom of expression.

South Korea’s Approach to Sharenting Regulation

In 2021, South Korea proposed amendments to the Popular Culture and Arts Industry Development Act. This bill prohibits the withdrawal of profits from videos starring children or adolescents. The bill requires any guardian or parent who films for public content to report it to the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

However, critics pointed

More than a Sport: Running as a Lifestyle

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More and more people are taking up running, a simple yet fundamental sport. Social media, technological advancements, and the rise of running communities have further fueled this trend, turning running into more than just a workout. As it continues to evolve, running is expected to expand beyond personal fitness.

Running Becoming a Major Fitness Trend

The rising interest in running is evident across various platforms. The number of mentions of the keyword running indicates that the running boom, which gained momentum during the pandemic, has continued to expand, reaching its peak in 2024. Google Trends reflects this enthusiasm, showing a consistent rise in searches for terms, such as running and running crew.

According to KREAM's 2024 second-half insight report, there has been a sharp increase in global transactions of running brands. While established brands like Nike and Adidas continue to thrive, specialized running brands such as Hoka, Brooks, and On Running have gained a significant amount of sales volume.

Among them, Satisfy has experienced the most dramatic growth, with its transaction volume increasing by approximately 5,160% compared to the first half of 2024. Additionally, On Running and Hoka recorded growth rates of 1,252% and 70%, respectively, highlighting the rising demand for high-performance running gear.

Signs of the running boom are also evident in the domestic market. According to the Korea Federation of Textile Industries, the total value of the domestic running shoes market has surpassed one trillion won, driven largely by the growing number of young runners in their 20s and 30s.

This growth is also fueled by the rising demand for high-performance running shoes, some of which are priced at over 300,000 won per pair. As a result, terms like the running shoes hierarchy have emerged, reflecting the premiumization of running gear.

The trend can also be observed through application



KHU's plogging program in Jeju Island

Photo: KHU (khu.ac.kr)

installation rates. Runable, a popular running application, saw a roughly 25% increase in 2024 compared to 2023, largely due to its integration with major events like the Seoul Marathon. Similarly, applications like Run Day and Nike Run Club (NRC) recorded 15% and 10% year-over-year, respectively, reinforcing the idea that running has firmly established itself as a dominant trend.

Why Running Has Gained Widespread Popularity

Running's widespread appeal lies in its accessibility and flexibility. Unlike other sports that require specific facilities or expensive equipment, running can be started by anyone, anywhere, at any time. Kim Young-jun, the president of Kyung Hee University (KHU)'s official running crew, Running With Kyung Hee (RWK), shared his thoughts, "I think the good thing about running is that there are no barriers to entry. Everyone can start anytime. Especially, the fun of running with the crew gives you the strength to continue running."

One of the factors sustaining the running trend is the running crew. Through these communities, runners are able to find both pleasure and motivation in running together. Since 2023, the Seoul Metropolitan Government has operated the 7979 Running Crew program, which runs from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. The program has recruited participants weekly and conducted running sessions throughout the city. Compared to 2023, the number of participants in 2024 has roughly doubled to around 5,000.

Kim shared his running crew memory regarding the motivation, "Looking back on my experience with the crew, my first open run was very challenging. But the memory of my RWK teammates cheering me on continues to motivate me to run consistently."

Kim Jin-uk, the president of the Sunday Seoul Running Crew (SSRC), added, "With the crew, you can enjoy running more and have extra fun. I cannot wait for the running day every week. Also, especially during marathons, giving and

receiving support to each other is very helpful in continuing running."

Another key factor sustaining the running trend is increasing running application usage and activation of social media. With running applications like Run Day and NRC, runners can track, analyze performance and share their achievements.

Kim from RWK commented, "I have seen a lot of cases where not only RWK but also non-RWK friends post NRC proof shots on Instagram stories and feeds. This makes me realize how strong the running trend is."

Kim from SSRC added, "You can find informations about the activities of the running crew through social media, and you can also join the running crew through these platforms."

The Future of the Running Trend

As running's popularity continues to grow, companies and organizations are leveraging this trend for marketing by sponsoring running crews, hosting events, and creating

dedicated spaces for runners to foster new opportunities within the running community.

For example, the Seoul Metropolitan Government has opened Seoul Runner Station in Yeouinaru, serving as a rest hub for runners exercising along the Hangang. Through this facility, it has also promoted the Fun Station project, which is part of the subway station innovation project.

Another emerging aspect of the running trend is its alignment with environmental initiatives. Some running crews have incorporated "plogging," a combination of jogging and picking up litter. For example, KHU organized a plogging program in Jeju Island, aiming to help students improve both their fitness and environmental responsibility.

Moreover, RWK has participated in a local cleanup project, called Hoegi Cleanup, reinforcing the idea that running can be a socially responsible activity. Kim from RWK said, "I am optimistic about how environmental protection and running are combined through plogging. I believe running has the potential to become a sustainable lifestyle rather than just a passing trend."

Running's accessibility, strengthened by technology and social media, has made running one of the popular trends of recent years. The rise of running communities has transformed it into a social experience, while its connection to sustainability has given it a broader purpose beyond individual fitness goals.

With all these elements combined, running is no longer just about how fast or how far one can go. It is about who they run with, what values they uphold, and how they contribute to a larger movement.

As this trend continues to grow, running seems to likely remain not just a popular sport, but a lifelong, sustainable lifestyle embraced by generations to come.



Sunday Seoul Running Crew

Courtesy of SSRC



Running With Kyung Hee's plogging activity

Courtesy of RWK



Musical "Chicago" Photo: Segye Ilbo (Segye.com)

The Rise of Musicals in South Korea: Trends and Challenges



Social Media Photo: Unplash (unplash.com)

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Musicals are becoming increasingly popular among younger generations. According to the Korea Performing Arts Box Office Information System (KOPIS), domestic musical ticket sales have surpassed 170 billion won, reflecting a 5.7% increase compared to the same period last year. Popular performances like "Kinky Boots", "Chicago", and "Aladdin" are drawing strong interest from young audiences, leading to intense competition for reservations and ticket sales.

The Reasons Behind the Musical Boom

One key factor driving the popularity of musicals among young people is the widespread sharing of short-form videos on social media. Clips featuring humorous moments or musical numbers, which are individual songs, resonate with audiences and quickly gain popularity. Professor Lee Grace from the Dept. of Theater & Film at Kyung Hee University noted that, "Briefly edited musical videos in various media

resonate well with the general public, boosting their appeal." This trend began with "Bare the Musical" and expanded with viral song like the "Muk-ji-ppa Zero" from "Rita" and the puppet show scene from "Chicago". Parodies of these scenes have further fueled their popularity. A notable example is "Land of Lola" from "Kinky Boots", which gained renewed attention after comedian Lee Changho uploaded a parody video. His imitation led to a surge in views of the original performance.

Another contributing factor is the increasing number of solo theatergoers. While performing arts have traditionally been attended in pairs or groups, a growing number of young

people now prefer watching musicals alone. This shift aligns with the younger generations' preference for focused, immersive experiences. According to KOPIS, the proportion of solo viewers for original, licensed, and touring musicals rose from 39% in 2018 to 43.2% in 2020.

Changes in Performance and Marketing

As musicals attract more audiences in their 20s and 30s, industry players are introducing new formats and marketing strategies to enhance their appeal. One such innovation is musical pubs, where audiences can enjoy a meal while watching a performance. These settings provide a more relaxed, inter-

active experience, allowing audiences to engage with actors in an informal atmosphere. Prof. Lee explained that this concept, already well established as dinner theater in the U.S., has been reimagined for Millennials and Generation Z in Korea.

Beyond the stage, musical actors are also gaining greater public recognition through television programs and advertisements, reinforcing the industry's influence. For instance, musical actor Choi Jae-rim recently appeared in a Subway commercial, demonstrating the growing appeal of musical performers beyond the stage. Meanwhile, social media has amplified the spread of parody content, strengthening marketing strategies and elevating the visibility of musicals in mainstream culture.

Additionally, a variety of musical-themed events have emerged. A pop-up event for "Aladdin" at The Hyundai Seoul garnered significant attention, reflecting younger audiences' preference for immersive, interactive experiences. These developments have positioned musicals as a key trend in public culture, extending beyond the stage into daily life.

Challenges Facing the Musical Industry

Despite the industry's rapid growth, it faces several challenges. One ongoing issue is star casting, where well-known actors are given lead roles primarily for commercial appeal. This strategy ensures ticket sales and investment security for production companies, but it also creates barriers for less-known or newly graduated actors trying to enter the field. The so-called crowding effect—where fan bases for specific musical stars heavily influence casting choices—has made it increasingly difficult for emerging actors to secure roles, even in smaller productions. Prof. Lee acknowledged this issue, stating that since it is difficult to overcome, it is essential for actors to continue refining their skills and competitiveness.

On the other hand, the term "gwanck" refers to audience disruptions, such as talking, using phones, or taking photos during a performance. These behaviors are often observed among newer attendees, while longtime theatergoers express discomfort over them. Prof. Lee emphasized the need for mutual understanding, suggesting that new audiences review performances beforehand to enhance their appreciation, while longtime theatergoers adopt a more inclusive attitude. She also noted that resolving these issues will require continuous public dialogue.

Stems from gwanck, the new audience etiquette "corpse-like watching", which means remaining completely still and silence, rose as a new challenge. Initially coined as a critique, it has now become a widely accepted norm in musical theater etiquette. However, some newer audiences feel pressured by these strict rules, where even the slightest noise is discouraged.

With the growing popularity of musicals among young audiences, the Korean musical industry is experiencing a major breakthrough. The rise of social media-driven trends and the increasing number of solo theatergoers have contributed to this expansion. However, challenges such as star casting issues and audience conflicts have also become more pronounced. Public attention and ongoing dialogue will be essential in addressing these concerns.

South Korea's musical market now ranks fourth in the world—an impressive achievement given the country's relatively small population. Additionally, Korean original musicals like "Frankenstein" and "Werther" have gained widespread popularity. Most notably, "The Great Gatsby" recently won the Costume Award at the Tony Awards, further elevating Korea's presence in global musical theater. With its endless potential, the Korean musical industry is poised to continue expanding on the international stage.



Parody scene of "Land of Lola"

Photo: Bbangsongguk YouTube (youtube.com/@bbangsongguk)



Musical "The Great Gatsby"

Photo: OD COMPANY (odmusical.com)

The YONO Tribe: How Frugality Is Reshaping Consumer Culture

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With prolonged inflation and economic uncertainty, frugality has emerged as a dominant trend, giving rise to the “You Only Need One (YONO)” movement. The YONO Tribe, predominantly composed of individuals in their 20s and 30s, prioritizes essential purchases while minimizing unnecessary spending. The concept contrasts with the You Only Live Once (YOLO) lifestyle, which promotes spending on experiences and self-indulgence.

According to a Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation survey conducted on December 24, 2024, 80.7% of 2,000 respondents stated that they consciously purchase only what they need and actively avoid non-essential expenses. However, YONO is not just about frugality—it is a shift toward evaluating, curating, and sharing consumption patterns, ultimately shaping broader market trends.

The emergence of the YONO Tribe is largely driven by ongoing inflation and economic stagnation, which have led consumers to adopt more cautious spending habits. *Asia Business Daily* reports that since 2022, slow economic growth and rising inflation have increased consumer price by 6.5% over two years. However, wage growth has failed to keep pace, leading to a decline in net income. Under growing financial pressure, many consumers felt burdened and began prioritizing cost-cutting measures in their daily spending.

A 2024 survey conducted by New Worker, a gig economy platform, targeting 827 adults, found that 88.4% believed their financial situation had worsened due to rising prices and tax burdens. Among them, 42.7% reported experiencing

With prolonged inflation and economic uncertainty, frugality has emerged as a dominant trend, giving rise to the You Only Need One (YONO) movement.

significant financial strain, while 45.7% acknowledged feeling some level of impact.

Kim Ye-ryeong, a student at Kyung Hee University’s (KHU) College of International Studies, shared her experience: “I previously purchased snacks and instant food without much thought, but recent price hikes have made me reconsider my spending. I carefully compare product sizes and prices to ensure cost efficiency.” As economic constraints persist, younger consumers are increasingly adopting frugality as a strategic approach, carefully evaluating price efficiency ratios to optimize their purchases.

Consumption Patterns of the YONO Tribe

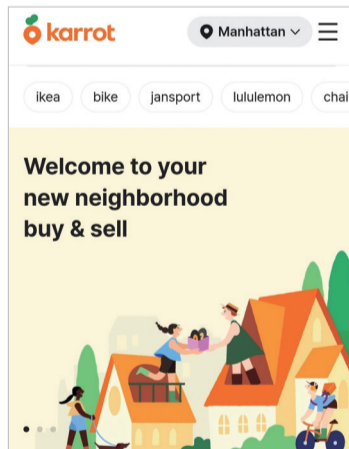
The spending behavior of the YONO Tribe revolves around two key themes: low consumption and sustainable consumption. To achieve low consumption, YONO Tribe members actively cut expenditures on food, transportation, and clothing. As a result, budget-friendly brands and cost-effective alternatives have gained popularity, with convenience store meals emerging as a preferred option to minimize food expenses.

The Sports Seoul reported that as of April 2024, convenience store sales increased by 5.9% compared to the previous year. Sales of budget-friendly beverages and meal replacement products rose by 7.3%, while instant food sales saw a 3.5% increase.

A similar trend is observed in transportation habits. According to Nong Hyup Bank, the number of taxi rides taken

by individuals in their 20s and 30s fell by 21% year-over-year in the first half of 2024, whereas other age groups showed only a 3% reduction. This shift suggests that young adults, as the core members of the YONO Tribe, have increased their reliance on public transportation as a cost-saving measure. Additionally, rental car usage surged by 258%, indicating a growing preference for economical mobility solutions.

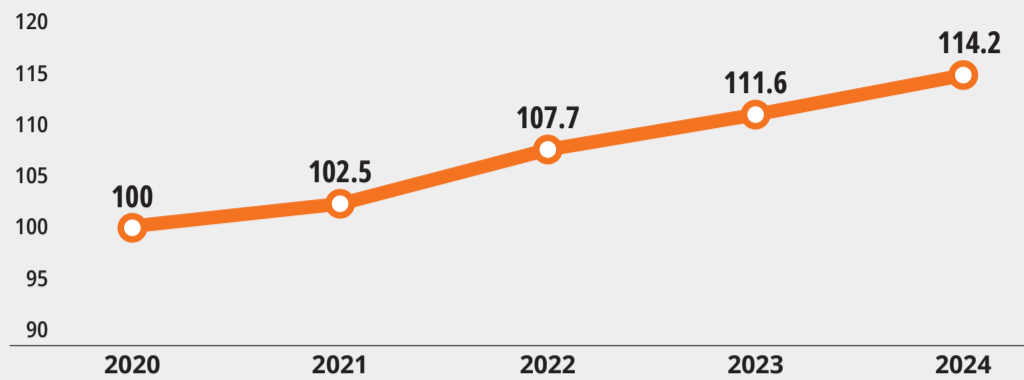
The coffee and fashion industries have also been impacted by the YONO movement. Data from NH Nong Hyup Card shows that in 2023, spending at budget coffee chains increased by 37% year-over-year. For fashion industry, *Dailian News* reported that searches for private label apparel brands, which lower costs through integrated manufacturing and distribution, surged by 1,967% compared to the previous year.



Karrot Market, a secondhand trading platform mainly used by the YONO Tribe. Photo: Karrot Market (karrotmarket.com)

Sustainable consumption, another key aspect of the YONO Tribe’s behavior, is not just driven by environmental concerns but also by financial efficiency. This shift has contributed to the rapid expansion of secondhand markets. A report by IGAWorks Mobile Index analyzing YONO consumer trends found that engagement with major secondhand trading platforms increased significantly between 2023 and 2024. Among them, Karrot Market saw a 2.7% rise

Rise of Consumer Price



Graph depicting the rise of consumer price

Source: Statistics Korea (index.go.kr)

in users, bringing 50,000 more users. Bungeo and Junggonara recorded 9.9% and 11.6% growth, respectively.

This growing secondhand market appeals to YONO tribe due to its lower prices and convenient local transactions. Additionally, buyers benefit from real user reviews, which enhance purchasing reliability.

The YONO Tribe also embraces sustainability in other ways, such as using reusable containers instead of disposable ones. Through these methods, YONO consumers contribute to sustainability both economically and environmentally.

The YONO Movement Spreads Through Social Media

During the YOLO era, social media was primarily used to showcase luxury purchases and extravagant lifestyles. In contrast, YONO Tribe members leverage these platforms to share budgeting strategies and track their spending habits.

KakaoTalk’s opened chat room feature has become a key space for frugality-focused discussions, with dedicated YONO lifestyle chat rooms attracting thousands of members. Some chatrooms have over 23,000 participants actively exchanging insights on mindful spending. Members openly disclose their monthly expenditures, receive feedback, and humorously critique each other’s splurges. Many users prominently display their financial goals alongside their usernames, allowing them to track progress and compare habits with peers.

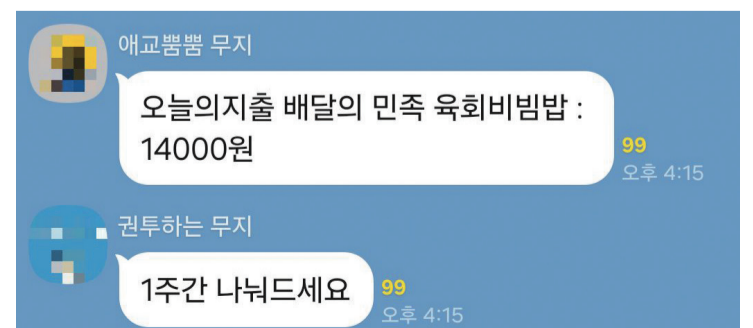
Instagram and YouTube have

also played a crucial role in amplifying the trend. Frugality-themed content, particularly the No-spend Challenge, has gained popularity. Participants document extreme budgeting experiences, sharing vlogs on cost-cutting strategies such as preparing homemade meals instead of dining out. As of February 9, 2025, the hashtag No-SpendingChallenge in Korean, on Instagram has accumulated over 15,000 posts, reflecting the trend’s widespread appeal among young, digitally active consumers.

While many view the trend as a responsible and practical approach to financial management, some argue that excessive frugality may lead to inconvenience and stress. Critics also suggest that the movement reflects deeper economic difficulties rather than voluntary lifestyle changes.

Lee Seok-min, a student in the School of Tourism and Entertainment at KHU, who identifies himself as part of the YONO Tribe, shared his perspective on frugal living: “I acknowledge the benefits of reducing wasteful spending, but extreme thriftiness can become mentally exhausting.”

Despite contrasting perspectives, the YONO Tribe continues to shape consumer behavior and influence market trends. More than just a shift in spending habits, the movement reflects broader socio-economic changes. As rational and efficient consumption becomes the norm, the challenge lies in balancing financial discipline with personal well-being in an increasingly uncertain economic landscape.



Members pointing out each other’s expenditures in opened chat rooms

Better Than New? The Resurgence of Classic Films in Theaters

Re-released films are bridging generations and gaining popularity by offering enhanced quality through advanced restoration technology. Yet, it remains uncertain whether this trend will be temporary or become a lasting shift in the film industry.

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In recent years, re-released films have been gaining significant traction in the film industry. According to the Korean Film Council, 84 films were re-released in 2024, nearly double the 48 re-releases from 2023. These films incorporate advanced technology and innovative marketing strategies to provide audiences with a fresh experience, reshaping the culture of movie-watching.

How Re-released Films Are Winning Over Audiences

Re-released films are not merely bringing past works back to the screen; they are becoming a new box office phenomenon. Iwai Shunji's Japanese melodrama "Love

Letter", which gained immense popularity after its release in late 1999, was re-released on New Year's Day 2025 to mark its 25th anniversary. On its first day back in theaters, it attracted 14,957 viewers and achieved a seat occupancy rate of 42%. This record is higher than most new releases, demonstrating the competitiveness of re-released films. Additionally, the re-release fully restored vertical subtitles from its first screening in South Korea in 1999 and corrected previous mistranslations in the Japanese subtitles, enhancing its overall quality and garnering positive audience feedback.

"The Fall: Director's Cut", which underwent a 4K re-mastering after 16 years, was re-released in December last year. Despite a limited release in 66 theaters nationwide and only 15,025 available seats on its opening day, the film maintained long-term success thanks to a dedicated fan base and strong word-of-mouth. By February 4, in its seventh week of re-release, the film surpassed 100,000 cumulative viewers, proving its steady popularity. Other re-released hits include "Begin Again", "Better Days", and "The Notebook" each attracting around 200,000 viewers, reaffirming their strong demand.

Why Are Re-releases Thriving?

The growing popularity of re-released films stems from changes in audience movie consumption habits, cross-generational appeal and strategic responses from the film industry. Following the pandemic, the rapid growth of online streaming services, over-the-top (OTT), has led audiences to be more selective about which films they watch in theaters. As a result, rather than taking



The poster of "Love Letter"
Photo: Waterhole Company (waterholecompany.net)

risks on new releases, theaters have opted to re-release previously successful films, providing audiences with proven classics. Film critic Lee Ji-hye noted that recent Korean films lack original storylines and rely too much on computer graphics and sensational elements, making it harder for audiences to connect emotionally. In contrast, she explained that older films explore diverse themes and deeper storytelling, making them more appealing than contemporary movies.

In addition, re-released films bridge the generational gap. "University students, who rarely encounter nostalgic romance and retro love stories in modern cinema, are experiencing them through re-released films," said Lee. "This growing interest is driving the demand for re-releases." Technological advancements have also revitalized older films. With improvements in video restoration technology, older films are being reborn with sharper visuals and enhanced sound quality, attracting audiences back to theaters. Lee stated, "Re-released films are not merely restorations. They serve as cultural bridges connecting the past and present." She further explained, "As digital platforms evolve, the fusion of past cinematic sensibilities with modern visual enhancements is making older films feel new again."

The Future of Re-released Films

As restoration technology and audience demand evolve, re-released films are expanding beyond traditional re-screenings. Recently, the selection criteria for re-released films have shifted beyond past

box office performance, with increasing emphasis on fan base potential and marketability. Lee explained that when selecting films for re-release, distributors consider not only their original box office performance but also their relevance to modern audiences.

The value of re-released films is also increasing as they integrate with technological advancements. Films originally shot on film stock are being digitally enhanced with 4K remastering and artificial intelligence-powered super-resolution technology. Some re-releases are even screened in Image Maximum and Fourth Dimension Experience formats, offering a fresh cinematic experience. With these technological improvements, re-released films go beyond simple restorations and are presented to audiences with a modern sense.

Beyond screenings, re-released films are expanding to offer interactive experiences such as merchandise sales, special screening events, and Guest Visit (GV) programs where audiences engage with filmmakers. For example, "Love Letter" offered limited-edition postcards and posters featuring key scenes to audiences during its re-release, while "The Fall: Director's Cut" hosted GV sessions where the director shared insights into the film's creative vision. These strategies boost engagement and attract new audiences, helping older films compete in the modern market.

This strategy not only enhances audience interaction with the films but also helps attract new fan bases. Theaters and streaming platforms are increasingly working together. Lee said, "Major OTT ser-



The poster of "The Fall: Director's Cut"
Photo: AUD (facebook.com/audcine)

vices like Netflix, Watcha, and Disney+ are likely to adopt a model of exclusively streaming re-released movies simultaneously with their theatrical releases." She analyzed, "Previously, re-released movies were limited to simple restoration screenings, but now they are expanding into digital-exclusive content through collaboration with OTT services." This hybrid approach is expected to diversify distribution methods, allowing classic films to reach wider audiences. In this way, as OTT platforms and theaters collaborate in a complementary manner, the distribution methods for re-released films are expected to become more diverse.

Despite the current success of re-released films, their long-term sustainability remains uncertain. Lee predicted, "While re-released movies are currently gaining attention, this is likely a temporary trend aimed at overcoming the stagnation in the film industry, and there is a high possibility that it will change into new content or methods in the future." However, the theater industry views re-released movies as an independent content market, and there is a strong possibility that attempts will be made to incorporate the latest technologies.

Re-released films are no longer just nostalgic throwbacks—they are being reborn through cutting-edge restoration, immersive formats, and innovative marketing strategies. With collaboration between theaters, OTT platforms, and fan communities, the audience base is expanding even further. While it remains to be seen whether this trend will last, one thing is clear: old favorites are finding new life on the silver screen, proving that some stories never fade.