Background:

Paul Pyungsoo Kim, more often known as Kim Soo or Grandmaster Kim Soo, was born in Seoul in 1939. During his childhood, the war caused his family to move around often, including a remote village in the mountains of what is today North Korea. To defend himself from bullies at his new schools, he began to study martial arts. He received his first-degree black belt at 13 years old. He continued to study martial arts during his time at Han Kuk University of Foreign Studies, where he received a bachelor’s degree in Russian Language and Literature.

After opening a martial arts school in Seoul, Kim immigrated to Houston in 1968. Choosing Houston intentionally to be a “pioneer,” Kim spent his first year in Houston living in his studio, the dojang. After obtaining permanent residency, he invited his wife and young son the following year. Grandmaster Kim Soo is the founder of Chayon Ryu “Natural Way” Martial Arts and has been recognized around the world. He has served as the Korean correspondent for Black Belt Magazine and named Summa Cum Laude Professor at Rice University. He currently continues to travel around the world for demonstrations, workshops and judging competitions, and hold class at his headquarters in Houston.

Setting:

The interview centers on the areas of labor and capital to develop a working history around the context of childhood experiences, family life and daily activities. A major emphasis of this interview was on Grandmaster Kim’s accomplishments in martial arts.

The interview was conducted at Grandmaster Kim’s teaching studio, Kim Soo Karate. The interview required roughly one and a half hours. He had many binders of papers, photos, and magazine articles to show us. Included in this archive is a copy of a thesis one of his students completed about his life, along with some other letters, articles, and photos.

Interviewers:

Mini Bhattacharya is a junior at Rice University. Originally from India, she has spent most of her life growing up in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. She is studying ecology & evolutionary biology with a minor in business and is interested in public health/healthcare management.

Rachel Wong is a senior at Rice University, majoring in cognitive sciences with a concentration in neuroscience. Raised in the metropolitan Washington D.C. area, she looks forward to returning west to her birth state of California.
Interview Transcript:

**Key:**

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**Italics**

- Emphasis
- (?) Preceding word(s) may not be accurate
- [Brackets] Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

[First 19 minutes of recording not available.]

**KS:** Okay, what was the question again?

**RW:** Oh! Um, so you changed locations … to this location.

**KS:** Oh, changed location? Well, uh, this was, uh, my really intention to move here and downtown location is around 5,000 square feet. I remodeled with, uh, one of my old, uh, U.S. Army—I taught in a lot of U.S. Army in Korea, Korean Army, and many different organizations I taught. The one of the soldier, uh, whom I taught in Korea, you know, who’s stationed in Korea, and he—I met him over here in Texas. So like, he came here in Houston, and personally, myself and him built this school. Remodeling. Not professionally, just remodeled the old building. Then I start teaching.

> At the time, downtown area was like a slum area, nothing going on. Then 19—2011, uh … the Toyota Center—the city want to domain my building. [laughs] That’s why. I actually built this building is, uh—I had so many students in downtown area and, uh … opened this location as a branch. So I just moved back here. Downtown is the—I really liked teaching over there. Then the Toyota Center now.

**MB:** So how did you first start getting new students?

**KS:** I been—’68 when I came here was, uh … I was invited. Many different like television station—Channel 11, 13, Channel 2—I been doing lot of demonstration on the like the [indistinguishable] Show, the Morning Show, Chris Chandler Show, and [indistinguishable] Show, and so many different like program, they invite me. I show the demonstration. Yeah, then the people know me. Then also, the local martial art organization, whenever they have the demonst—the championship tournament, they invite me. They invited, so I demonstrated. I didn’t have any school at the time, but in the future, I was going to open school in Houston, so I gladly demonstrated everybody for free, then people—I was well known at the time. Nowadays, a lot of people don’t know, but at the time, I was very well known. Yes. [pause]

> So when I opened school in downtown after I got the green—you know, [shows picture]. That’s—as soon as I got my, uh, green card, open school. I expected a lot of people coming. [papers rustling] But surprisingly, just a few people sign up. I was starting a—very much struggling at the—at the beginning. At the downtown location.
RW: When did you found Chayon-Ryu?

KS: Yeah, I … found the Chayon-Ryu. I organized Chayon-Ryu martial art in—in America. Uh, martial art was traditionally the educational thing, but, uh, it has been changing. All day was the martial—when I studied martial art, it’s educational purpose, but, uh, also combat, but the educational purpose. But later on … this tried to—people try to make it sport nowadays. So, I like to keep it original martial art, as a science and art. I like to keep it as a science and as an art. So I come to United States. I … uh, open the Chayon-Ryu martial art. If I stay in Korea, there I cannot continue because everybody want to make it as a sport. In America, it’s a sport too, but, uh … I keep it as—a science, as an art. Not only game, it’s not only—not as a sport.

[pause]

RW: So, what year did you first teach it as a different style?

[0:05:04]

KS: I’m sorry?

RW: When did you first teach it as Chayon-Ryu? Like, this style.

KS: Uh … I start teaching it Chayon-Ryu since 1970. Yeah. Then I been—I had the chance to study so many different Asian martial art. It’s like karate, and chuan fa kung fu, taekwondo, aikido—many different Asian martial art. But, when I teach in karate, some people said, “I wanna learn some jiu jitsu.” After later on, I teaching jiu jitsu. Say, “I wanna learn some tae kwon do.” So they can make ‘em as—all as one program. The Chayon-Ryu is a combined system, six different Asian martial art. And also, it’s more, uh, not as a game and as a sport. I t—I like to help out the people, who need build their mental physical confidence. Not only just for the game. Then I making little bit different program called the natural way martial art. Sports is just always talk about—sports …. In sports, it’s people—it’s important, like who get the first place, second place, third place. In Chayon-Ryu, there’s no such a thing. Everybody—everybody could be a—a champion. Everybody—I tell everybody, “You could be a champion.” It’s a educational program.

RW: [laughs] Um, is that the philosophy of Chayon-Ryu?

KS: Philosophy of Chayon-Ryu. Chayon-Ryu is, uh, all the movements from the human movements already what we have. People wanna learn martial art, but they already—always tell me, “This is too hard. No fun. I don’t have any energy. I don’t have any good reflex.” People have excuses first, so tell them, I organized martial art easiest way, for fun. I’m using natural human movement. It’s like walking movement, the running movement, body twisting. Any kind of movements, already what you have [pause] as a part of, as a exercise program. I design it. So people learn it so easy.

When you see the pictures like, one of …. [shows picture] This is one of the program where I teaching at University of Houston program at 150, 160 people at all one time at the big auditorium. Only one person teaching, it’s myself. [pause] I ask them there, “Do you know how to do this one? How to do this?” “Yes, all right, yeah I know.” “Do you know how to run? How to walk? That’s what you have to use here. This is natural way. Everything already what you have it. I’m not trying to teach anything, something new, secret thing. But I want you just to find out what you have it.
RW: So, very accessible style.

KS: I’m sorry?

RW: It’s—so, Chayon-Ryu style is very accessible to many.

KS: I think so. Chayon-Ryu is for natural movements. [clears throat] We use everything, already what we have. And as a—uh, not only for physical self-defense. Mental-physical balance education.

MB: So, when you first came here, you know, you said that you got all this attention from the networks. How did they first hear about you?

KS: How they what?

MB: The TV networks? The TV shows and stuff, how did they hear about you?

KS: Oh here?

MB: Yeah.

KS: Well I was a—before—actually, I was a—before I come to United States, I was, uh, known in martial art world in the world. Uh, I was, uh … a writer for the [shows press pass] Black Belt Magazine. It’s the only one magazine published in the world and in English. I was Korean correspondent for that magazine. I wrote a lot of articles, activity, uh, when I was in Korea. So people already know about me. And when I came here, I—I participated a lot of United St—you know, tournaments. As a re—as a demonstrator, and also as a judge. So I was very well known when I came to America already.

[0:10:20]

Then I decided to be a pioneer in Houston area. I do a lot of—participate in demonstration. Then I still writing lot of thing, everything (?) in Korea and here. Uh, I still writing. In English, I wrote a couple of books too. [Gets books and shows them] Yeah that—my orange book, that was, uh, my textbook at, uh, Rice—when I teaching Rice.

MB: Oh okay.

KS: Yeah that’s the Rice PE department. That’s the textbook. [RW and MB look through books]

RW: How did you grow your offices to such a large number? I think, currently, 43 across five countries? Right? You have some international offices.

KS: [overlapping] Well, I’m the only one place now teaching. But, uh, my students stay with me 10, 20, 30, 40 years. There’re people with me 40 years, 45 years even, training with me. You see, if I teaching only sports, they study and quit. But I teach it as art and science … there’re lot of things to learn. Just like a martial art is like they study as a—just like a religion, stay with me long time. Then they go back to their hometown, move back to, you know, different country. Then I—they then
teaching over there. They teach like even Russia, even one in Japan. And, lot of places in America. It’s not—our system is lot of, uh, rich history. Lot of things to learn. So, you won’t grow so fast. But slowly, you grow. You never—I don’t think you never disappear. In many different places in America, and many different places in—only three different places, Korea, Japan and [pause] Russia, we have our systems going on now.

**RW:** Did you, um, visit those different centers, around the world?

**KS:** I’m sorry?

**RW:** Did you go to visit those centers?

**KS:** [clears throat] Yes, uh, I visit Russia four times. And, nowadays I’m just … uh, going Korea. Uh, Korea for—this is my third year. I’m going back again this, uh, late part of August. Teaching at university in—in Pusan area. [pause]

Martial art is, uh … actually, it’s a time to really import. People think it’s Korea and Japan have a lot of martial art going on, but they don’t do old martial art, not like old days. It’s most of them, martial art is a sport they’re doing. So they need, uh—they need, uh—they need to import [laughs] old martial art again. I have to go over there and teach them. I’m going back this, uh, fall, to teach.

**RW:** Do you have family in Korea still?

**KS:** No, I don’t have any family in Korea. All of ‘em, I brought them to America. I have one sist—uh, I have a … for three sisters and brothers, and I brought ‘em all, their family too. I’m the first person, as a pioneer here. Then I brought ‘em all here. I don’t have anybody in Korea now.

[0:15:00]

**RW:** Mm-hmm. And your parents?

**KS:** I’m sorry?

**RW:** Your—your parents too?

**KS:** Oh my parents is both, uh, passed away. Oh yeah. [pause] My mom, uh, I—long time ago, I invited my mother to here. But she was—couldn’t be adjusted in American way of life. She just came here. “America is somehow this is heaven. But, I cannot be adjusted here.” She went back, she said [laughs], “Korea is lot of fun. It hell, but a lot of fun’s over there.” [MB and KS laugh] That’s what she said.

**RW:** So when you go back to Korea, are there any places you visit?

**KS:** Yes, Korea has quite different now. Not like old days. Old days was really nothing to … uh, not many place to go. But now, Korea is a completely different country. So, uh, when I go back, I try to travel many different places. Yeah. I enjoy very much, but it’s … feel like, Korea is, uh, like a foreign country for me now. When I’m coming back to Houston, feel more comfortable now. [laughs]
RW: So when you—your first time in the U.S., you came directly to Houston? Or did you stop—

KS: Yeah I come directly to Houston. On the way, I stopped by—well, at the time, I had to stop by anyway, because the airplane won’t come to directly, no direct flight. And stopped by Honolulu first, then I visit one of my student, who study—as a U.S. Army soldier—who study in Korea, he lives over there. So, I stopped by to see him. Then I come to, uh … Los Angeles. I visit my friends. My intention is just Houston. So I came to Houston.

But I been doing lot of demonstration. Before I come Houston though, my first demonstration was actually at Beaumont, Texas. In Port Arthur and Beaumont, I been traveling many places. So they want me stay in the College Station sometimes, in Beaumont, wherever I go. But for me, that’s too small town for me. I like to stay at bigger town to promote martial art. Then I decided to stay in Houston. Why, I was in homeless in Houston 1968! That’s why—that’s why I have a hearing problem. I used to hear the—you know, watch. I could hear that. I lost 85 percent ‘cause—no food, no money, stressful. And I lost—both sides I have hearing problem.

RW: So, during the first years here, did you meet your wife?

KS: No, I left—uh, before I come to United States, I opened the—I married in Korea. Then, I opened—after the university, I opened professional martial arts school. I taught few years. Then … [pause] then I brought my family—I couldn’t. Actually, when I leave, I don’t have any, no green card. I was just a visitor’s visa. It’s very, very difficult to get out from Korea. Uh, so I came without, you know, a visa. Not a visa, but it’s not a permanent visa, so couldn’t bring any family. I left them in Korea, then I came by myself. Then I applied a—a visa here. As soon as I got it, I invited. It take one year. But that was actually, uh, faster than anybody else. Most people take 10 years to get—sort out their own personal situation, bring the family for reunion. But for me, it took one year. But I was very stressful meantime. That’s why I have this hearing problem. Almost I was, uh, [sighs], you know, didn’t eat properly. I was so stressful. I was almost knocked out in downtown! My old building, you know?

[0:20:01]

KS: So I—prepared all this kind of paper. Walk into the immigration office. So, I like to apply for the permanent visa, just to bring my family. [laughs] I had an interview with a inspector. That he, fortunately or maybe unfortunately, he was—he was—he was—in charge for the, uh, deportation and—uh, deportation for inspector for Korean student who doesn’t have any good school grade. Then inspector have interview with them, and they just kick ‘em out. I was supposed to have interview with them. But later on, he become my good friend. [laughs]

I was uh, just like, very nervous when I had interview. He ask me …. He saw the couple of papers. “Why do you like to live in America? You have only visa, two months to go.” I was so nervous. I just told him …. I forgot everything what the—what I was going to say. What my—what my intention was: I didn’t want to live in America here for myself. I just—America need me. That’s what I came here. I told him about, America need me. That’s what I’m here. He looking at me, he thought I was kind of crazy man. And [indistinguishable two words]. “What did you say?” I’m very nervous. I cannot say anything, but, uh, America need me. “Okay you come back one week later with, uh—for interview, uh, you know, again.”

Then I have that even. What I wrote it, I turned it him. He been reading, all the what I have prepared, the papers, what I taught. I was taught the—I taught the presidential bodyguard in Korea,
Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University
U.S. Army, Korean Army. I was—you know, like many places I taught important peoples. He looking at all these paper and also the, you know, I was—I wrote lots of the articles on the Vietnam War and things like that. He been reading, looking at me. I thought, “Mm-mm.” [laughs] What then? Then is he going to kick me out. He say, “We need me—we need you like—like you for America.” He shake. Then I my green card without any—spending any money, and I really, really appreciate that. Since then, I’ve been teaching in—in martial art at—at Rice University. Rice University actually I—my first class started 1968 September I started over there.

MB: Oh, okay.

KS: Yeah, the club—I found the club. That club is still going on. I’m not teaching there. My student’s teaching there. That club is going on still. I taught the PE department since 1982 to 2008. [pause] And also I have a lot of old Rice club, uh … president and also student [pause] that’s training here. You know, they told me, said, “whenever you need me, give me call.” So maybe if you need any information, want to talk about them, old days, I can give you his telephone number or maybe email address. You can—you can hear from him too, what’s going on. [Shows picture] This is one of the old Rice club president. He’s Dr. Thomas … Tom—Tom Cook. He’s a Rice student. [pause] Well, excuse me. [Opens door]

MB: So at the time, when you came here, did you already have children?

KS: No, I just by myself. Then, uh, at the time, my son was two years old.

MB: Okay.

KS: Then they left—I left here, nothing promised to country. I come here. One year later, I straighten up my situation, then I invite ’em. Then they came. My son is a—he was two years old now he’s 48!

RW: Um…what was it like as a family in Houston, in those days? Was there a good size Asian community?

[0:25:04]

KS: Well, I have a lot of difficult, uh, communication problem with my children too, because they grew up in America. I’m still at old stay—old—old timers, you know, old mind. They’re not like, uh … they’re not like a Korean. You know, you know, like American grown, American way. So, sometime we have a little bit communication problem. [laughs]

MB: How many children do you have?

KS: Only two.

MB: Two.

KS: One son is working here, is teaching martial art with me.

MB: Okay.
KS: And my daughter is—she’s, uh, working for Nokia. Senior designer. And she was born here. That’s her. [shows picture] She’s—her picture’s right there. That’s my daughter. This is my son, and when he was a little boy. Mm-hmm. [shows picture]

MB: So they’re both—they both learned martial arts.

KS: Oh yeah, they—all of them martial art. All my family is martial artists. And my daughter is a black belt, but she—you know, I don’t want my family, everybody stick with, like, teaching. She’s, uh, working for Nokia, freelancer now, after she got married. And my son is, I have only one son. I have a big organization. He say he doesn’t have any choice. He want to be instructors. Now he’s teaching. My granddaughter—I have one granddaughter. She’s in college now.

MB: Oh okay.

KS: She’s, uh, also a martial artist. Not quite black belt yet.

RW: When your children were growing up, did you try to teach them, uh, Korean culture?

KS: I’m sorry?

RW: Did you try to teach your children Korean culture?

KS: Well, they don’t have really much time. I spent most of my time in martial arts school, teaching. I just come here this country without any money, no—you know, nothing. So, I’ve been working. Me and my wife working almost 12 hours a day, then didn’t have much time spending time with the family get together. Actually, I could say maybe I’m a failure, in a family-wise. Yeah, didn’t have time together. I have a lot of family though. All my students, they are my family. Equally, I love everybody. I don’t specially my—you know, love to my children. So, that part is some missing.

I’m spending too much time for everybody—I’m still—still teaching. I’m still demonstrating, I’m still …. And it’s my age. When I go to Korea, visiting, most places, my age is nobody really teaching and demonstrating. I’m still doing that.

MB: What did your wife do?

KS: Sorry?

MB: What did your wife do?

KS: She’s, uh, helping for paperwork

MB: Okay.

KS: Yeah, two times a week.

MB: Okay.
RW: So, when your family came here, for—to the US, when you were able to bring them here—

KS: Yes.

RW: —where did you live?

KS: That’s a good question. Yeah, I used to live, uh—when they—when I—when they— I invite them, one year, exactly one year. I left 1968 January, then I brought them 1969 February. They came. At the time, still, I don’t have any apartment. I don’t have any money. Just barely start school, you know? So, I stayed … first one of my students said, um, “Why don’t you, uh, to live the, uh …” he—he left his apartment. He want me stay over there, you know? So I think, maybe. I don’t know why he said …. So I invite my—my—br—I brought my family to there, uh, West Main—not West Main—West Alabama, or somewhere in that area. Then little—my boy was a little boy, was—he jumping around, and the next door man—I think it’s landlord lady was hit broomstick, [makes noise] [all chuckle]

[0:30:00]

So, I didn’t know what it was. So we couldn’t—no freedom. Yeah, kind of a nervous, you know, she was, uh, quite often hit stick with broomstick. So we decide to move to the downtown, to where I—my building. There’s no A/C, nothing but there was, uh, no furniture, no …. Actually it was an empty building, old empty building, and no A/C, nothing. We would live—used to live over there. At the downtown, that’s the—this is the place right here. [points to picture on desk] You know, this is the backside of another building. We live upstairs. We live and … that’s my first home.

MB: How long did you live there?

KS: We live over there … mmm, around three year—three years, living up there, then after that, we moved to the Spring Branch area. Bought a house.

MB: Okay. Are you still there?

KS: We—we moved. Did—not there anymore.

MB: Okay, yeah.

RW: So, your children also changed schools a couple of times, yeah?

KS: Mm, no.

RW: Same school?

KS: No, same school. They grew—went to the, uh, Spring—I don't know what they call it. Gessner and Kempwood area, there’s a Terrace Elementary. Both of them went to the Terrace Elementary and then Spring Wood High School. And then went to, uh, Art Institute. They went to the Art Institute, my daughter went to the Art Institute in—Art Center in California.
RW: Did you feel comfortable in that neighborhood?

KS: At the time it, uh—the Spring Branch area was a good school district. That’s what I—my students recommend to buy the house this area. So we bought it. It was a very good area at the time. It’s still—still good, but, uh, at the time it was a very good area. Spring Branch.

RW: Were your neighbors friends?

KS: I’m sorry?

RW: Were you friends with your neighbors?

KS: I didn’t really—didn’t have much time to with, uh, have the fun with neighbor. My—all my spending time with the fam—uh, at the school, with the school students, and this activity. That’s what I—I’m really little bit a failure in life sometime, you know, spending too much time with martial art all the time. [laughs] I—I don’t have any—any other activities going, with me.

RW: But you followed your passion.

KS: I’m sorry?

RW: But you followed your passion.

KS: Maybe. Yeah. That’s all my—my life. I’m spending time in the martial art. So I lost—sometime I—you know, my family like … not like other—other people. [laughing] Too much time with my martial art family.

MB: So in Houston, what is the Korean community like?

KS: Korean—Korean community?

MB: Yeah.

KS: Korean community. I don’t really much participate the Korean community. They ask me …. Well, they ask me, “Well you’ve been teaching here in Houston martial arts so long, and you must making a lot of money, and why don’t you just delegate your job? Come on and help out some Korean community, and meeting, participate activity.” They think it’s I’m too greedy to make more money. That’s what I’ve been doing this. I’m not doing this for to make money. If I want to make more money, looking for my safety, I even didn’t come to the United States. I left everything, with $100, without no green card, that come to America. I’m still teaching for years. You know, I’ve been doing almost a six days a week. They come—they want me come to their meeting and usually the evening time, like, uh, during the week day.

When I go over there, the people come and they—they see me from the—some people from Pasadena, some people come from Galveston, some people in from Beaumont. They come out to see me and to training under me. I don’t want to sit down at the meeting over there, sit down talking with people. I believe this is my mission. I like to help out the people this way. I like to teach people! I don’t want to go over there, you know, talking with the Korean community, talk about
some other thing. This is the way I can dedicate it. This is the way—eh, you know, my mission in my life. They don’t understand me sometime. They think it’s I’m still greedy, that’s what I’m still teaching. It’s my niece—you met while ago—Gigi Lee. She’s, uh—she’s, uh, very active in Korean community.

[0:36:00]

RW: So, you came to Houston before most of the Korean community?

KS: Yes, when I came here, there was only handful Korean student. I don’t see anybody at Rice students at the time. Most of them went to—going University of Houston. It’s around—maybe around 10 people. And, no businessmen. Few people who marry the American lady and they living here. And I met one man who—who used to station in Korea. He met his wife in Korea. They live here. But, uh, there wasn’t really many big Korean community at all, only handful student. I’m the one of the first pioneer, actually in Korean, uh, community. First businessman, I think.

Even Korean consul, uh, office wasn’t here. When I came—when I was in Korea I decided, this will be very, eh … someday will be very important place. I like to be a pioneer. I did decide to come to Texas. The people always say, “Why Texas? There’s no—no people.” I think that Texas will be very important place. I came—Korean communit—Korean Consul General’s office they come 1968? Six months later, I came. So I had the chance to introduce Korean Consul General, Mr. Ahn, at the, uh, uh—what’s it? My … mentor retired—retired—children’s some … big demonstration. At the time I introduce them, then also on Korean television—not Korean television—channel 13 television, I—I introduced them, while I was doing demonstration.

RW: So, do you think Texas has become an important place?

KS: I’m sorry?

RW: Do you think Texas has become an important place yet?

KS: Very unknown in Asian people, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese people. Texas wasn’t known at all. Known as “wild west” and also very—lot of people using gun after watching television cowboy movie. Things like that, like a John Wayne fighting movie and lot of cowboy movie people. Texas, lot of car, uh, lot of cows and ma—you know, whores, and—rough area. Asian people, they don’t wanna come here. Why? ‘Cause. Why? You know, it’s a good place to live like, New York, San Francisco and L.A. Nobody wants to go down South. There hot weather, rough, lot of cockroaches, [laughs] no reason to go over there.

That’s what I came here. People ask me, “Why you Texas?” “Because nobody wants to go over there. That’s what I came.” Some people think it’s I’m crazy. “You should go to L.A., there’s, you know, open school. You’re a well-known person. You go over there, you know, you’ll be famous!” Yeah, I could be a famous student. I was used to be—I was supposed to do demonstrate with [indistinguishable word] in 1964. [indistinguishable] my picture right here. Uh, not clear, but here, that’s his first debut demonstration. I couldn’t go—I couldn’t come at the time, but my picture’s still here.

[0:40:08]

RW: So, what do you think about yourself? Do you think you are a Houstonian or a Texan?
KS: Houstonian, Texan. It’s a very—first my impression to Texan is very kind. Very kind, good people. Yeah, at the time the, who—who helped me is all Texans. My friend was Eddie Krickson, also Mr. Nick Hawkins. Original Texas people are very, very kind and friendly. Now is so many people to coming just like New York, you know, [laughs] everywhere! But, the people originally who, you know—Texas people are very friendly and nice people.

RW: Are you a Texan?

KS: Yes!

RW: Are you a Houstonian?

KS: I am Houstonian. I’m proud to be—proud to be a Houstonian and Texan. Yes. When I go, uh, speech and I talk at some big tournament time, when I’m up judging people [laughing] sometime they’re laughing at me because, “You speak like a Texan!” They—I think they feel, uh, my Southern accent. I don’t know. That’s what they say! [KS and MB laugh]

RW: Did you ever consider leaving?

KS: Leaving? No. No, I like to, uh … I like to here. I like to die in Houston, ‘cause all my students, uh, they’re here. They’re my family.

RW: Wow.

KS: I don’t want to move. I came over, you know—intentionally I come to Texas. I like to stay here. I—past five mayors give me, uh, proclamation of Grandmaster Kim Soo Day in Houston. Started out from: Kathy Whitmire, then Lee Brown, Bob Lanier, Bill White, and this one is Annise Parker.

RW: Who’s your favorite mayor? [MB laughs]

KS: I—I love them, all of ‘em. All of ‘em good people. [RW laughs] And … Kathy Whitmire, she’s—a—she’s a very beautiful mayor. When I see her, she was—she was really beautiful. [all laugh] And last year, two times, I got Senate Resolution 989. They talk about Rice University here, too. Want to see that? [passes copy to DB and RW; deep rumbling in background]

I used to give—I always go high school, university. I give a lot of speech. I’ve been talking … about the martial art, uh, this kind of thing. But, somehow since I have—since I lost my hearing, 85%. It’s all from—most people, when they come and ask me, “You got hurt because of the martial art training? Somebody hit you, something?” No. This because of the old days when I started in America. Hot weather, this kind of hot weather, no A/C, and lot of stress. That’s what I got this.

MB: Mm-hmm. What were some of the most difficult parts about starting and running your own business, here?
KS: I have to learn everything like, uh—everything from the beginning. First—first, language. I don’t know really any business in America. Cultures between Korea and America at the time—was ’68—was around 100 years different. Nowadays, is—Korea is pretty much developed its wealth, yeah, good business now. But at the time, was—Korea was a very poor country. I have to learn everything from the beginning like a baby. That’s what I stressful. I don’t have any place to go have consultation, no Korean lawyers, no nothing. Now it’s easy. Even no Korean restaurant to eat at the time. No Korean restaurant, no Korean community. Everything have to start it from the beginning.

MB: How did you learn English?

KS: Learning—?

MB: English.

KS: Well, I had the chance to study and learn English in high school days. I can write English better than American. Yes, but … conversations, completely different. But I … my dream was teaching martial art in the world. So, I s—I went to the, uh, U.S. Army. I opened the club over there. I taught the—wanna learn mainly for the teaching [inaudible] GI. Same time I wanna learn English from them. So I had, eh—I learn some English from while I was teaching. I wasn’t good at it, and also writing, neither, but I become the first writer for the—this magazine. And I have, uh—I wrote lots of articles on the Black Belt Magazine. I have a—a quite a—a few in there.

Let’s see, maybe I have, uh, here, some over here. [shuffles around some article prints] This is a lot of articles about me and what I wrote it. [points] About me and [points] what I wrote it. Just, yeah, for example here, this is, uh, some magazine. It is published in Los Angeles. This is martial art magazine … publishing in—in America. This is only one magazine in the world at the time. I was representing Korea. So I wrote about all this. [flips through] I introduce what—what’s going on in Korea, what’s going on in Japan, and that kind of thing. That’s my demonstration in the newspaper. Yeah, this is some of my—I have more but, uh, no room to put it in! [MB laughs]

RW: Wow.

KS: If you need any, uh—you know, this is one assignment for the—from Black Belt Magazine. If you need any copy or anything like that, and let me know. I can make it for you.

RW: So, do you like that now, there’s more Korean opportunities, Korean store, Korean restaurant, here in Texas?

KS: Of course, yes. So I have a chance to go eat some Korean food and I go to the restaurant. But I enjoy all—all food though, not only Korean food.

RW: Were you able to eat any Korean food, um, when you first came here?

KS: No, no. [laughs] There’s no Korean food. There was a handful of Korean students go to U of H, and some—some of ‘em invite their, uh, wife. Uh, they are here. So … I—sometime I visit. There wasn’t really Korean food at all.
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RW: Did your wife bring any ingredients from Korea, when she moved here?

KS: Yeah, she did. She brought some. [KS and RW laugh]

RW: Was it nice to have some Korean food finally?

KS: Yeah, but she can make it here, and all the materials here, and she could cook here.

RW: Yeah. Were—there were some Chinese stores then?

KS: Yeah, there was a, uh, Chinese—there was only Chinese community when I come to here. Uh, there’s I guess is, uh … they been living here over, a long, long time, I think, from China. Chinese people is everywhere in the world. There were quite a few Chinese restaurants. So I go sometime, Chinese food. Mm-hmm. It’s only—there’s no Vietnamese people at all, at the time. 19—middle of 1970, they move in. After the war is over and they coming from…from the camp, they move down. But, 1960, no Vietnamese.

[0:50:30]

MB: When did most Korean people come over? Was it more gradual?

KS: I’m sorry?

MB: Koreans? When did they come over mostly?

KS: They—

MB: Was it more gradual?

KS: You, mean what, graduation?

MB: Gradual, like, over time more?

KS: Well, because, Kor—Texas was well-known, first of the south part of, you know, this United States, people—no relationship, like no relatives, and no—they heard about something, bad weather, or something. People afraid to come, I guess, no friends. Then start … uh, maybe late part of, uh, 1980?

MB: Okay.

KS: Yeah, they start coming, slowly. But still, the community’s not that big.

MB: Right.

KS: Comparing other—other community like, uh, Vietnamese community was a lot of people, but the Korean community was not big at all. They—most of ‘em, they living in L.A. Some L.A., some New York area.
RW: What are the things that you want your students to remember the most?

KS: I want them remember martial art is not only physical part. Martial art is a science … art … philosophy. Yeah. I don’t teach martial art is just only sports. Sports last not long. I want them …. I want all my students grew up and be happy and be successful with the—this martial art, you know, training. I don’t want to make only just, uh, a few people champion, you know. I want them als—I want them successful in their field.

At Rice—at Rice University, when I’m teaching my student in class, I tell them, “I want all of you be successful in your field. You don’t have to be a martial art instructors or don’t have to be a champion.” In the old days this class, even Rice student, they’re very intelligent, all of ‘em intelligent. But even—while I train them was no—very so quiet. Not even yelling. [indistinguishable 2 words] When I teach them yelling, they go [quietly] “Yuh.” Not strong. And I tell ‘em, “Even you have intelligent. You have master’s degree. Even you have, pH degree, if you don’t have any mental, physical confidence, you cannot put it out—your knowledge out! So you got to yell, become—become a positive attitude! Where you get it? Through the training.” Yeah, I want them be successful in their business, in their—what their fie—their field, not only become a sportsman. The martial art is not only sports, really.

MB: [to RW] Do you have anything else?

RW: What do you hope will be your legacy to Houston?

KS: My …?

RW: Your legacy?

[0:54:16]

KS: My legacy in Houston? … My legacy in Houston. My knowledge, my Chayon-ryu—my, uh, my Chayon-ryu, my knowledge, my system. This the unique system in the world. Most people do martial art as combat strategy, as a sports. But I teach martial art. This Chayon-Ryu, is mental-physical education, and … using natural body movement. So whenever I go to other, uh, places, even I go to Korea, the big Master’s convention, I talk about … theory of martial art. Using our human natural movement. Most people try to teaching some secret movement, some … very talented [indistinguishable]. I say martial art is very natural thing, already what you have everything but you just don't know what you have it. Natural way. That’s my legacy. That’s what I like to hand them out to my student. I don’t know maybe—I don’t know—I don’t really good speaker so it’s very difficult for me to … [laughs]

RW: Not at all.

MB: No, that was good!

KS: Do you understand what I say?

MB: Yes, yes.
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KS: I hope you can some editing what I’m saying.

RW: [laughs] Anyway, thank you very much. [phone rings]

MB: Thank you.

KS: Oh, you’re welcome.

[0:56:04]
End interview
Interview Preparation

Childhood in Korea (Seoul):
• Can you tell us about your family?
• What did your parents do for a living?
• What was the house/neighborhood like?
• What kind of school did you attend? Did you enjoy school?
• Did you have many friends?
• What kind of activities did you do?
• How did you first become interested in martial arts?
• Can you tell us a little bit about your name? Does it have any meaning?

College in Korea: Han-Kuk University of Foreign Studies
• What prompted you to study Russian language and literature?
• What did you do in your spare time during college?
• How did you continue your pursuit of martial arts while obtaining a degree?
• Did you do any traveling during your college years?

Immigration:
• Why did you decide to leave South Korea and come to the United States?
• How did you choose to come to Houston?
• Transition from Seoul to Houston:
  o Where did you first live when you came to Houston and what was that experience like?
  o Has Houston changed since you first came here?
  o What has made you choose to stay in Houston?
  o What was it like being a martial arts teacher in Houston at the time?
  o Was interest in martial arts high here [in Houston]?
• Why did you decide to found Chayon-Ryu martial arts?
• Issues with running a business/ how did he get it up and running
• How did you expand to your current 43 offices across 5 countries?

Family:
• How did you meet your wife?
  o Met in Korea?
• Did she immigrate to Houston with you at the same time?
• [Do you have children?] How many children do you have?
• How have you integrated Korean culture into their upbringing here?
• Did you teach them Chayon-Ryu?