

Korean descendants in Cuba: ‘Thank you to OKA for inviting us to our homeland’

Descendants of independence activists set foot on their homeland to mark establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and Cuba



The descendants of Koreans living in Cuba who visited their homeland at the invitation of the OKA pose for a photo, saying, “Thank you to the Korean government,” on Dec. 9. From left to right are Teresa Huerta Guin, a prosecutor at the Special Prosecutor’s Office in Varadero, Cuba; Nora Im Alonso, the granddaughter of independence activist Gov. Lim Cheon-taek; and Maioli Correa Sanchez, a student at the Cuban Hangeul School.

The Overseas Koreans Agency (Commissioner Lee Sang-duk) held an event inviting three descendants of Koreans from Cuba from Dec. 9-13 to celebrate the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and Cuba in February.

The attendees were Nora Lim Alonso (59), the granddaughter of independence activist Gov. Lim Cheon-taek; Teresa Huerta Guin (59), a public prosecutor at the Varadero Special Prosecutor’s Office; and Maioli Sanchez (56), a student at the Cuban Hangeul School.

Gov. Lim founded the Cuban branch of the Korean Patriotic Corps after immigrating to Cuba in 1905, served as the president of the Cuban branch of the Korean National Association, raised money for the provisional government’s independence fund to support the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai and also served as the first president of the Cuban Korean Association. He was

posthumously awarded the Order of Merit for National Foundation in 1997 and was selected as the Independence Activist of October 2024 by the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs.

After arriving in Korea on Dec. 9, the visitors went to Daejeon National Cemetery, then visited the Independence Hall of Korea to look back on the footsteps of their ancestors. They also received health checkups with the cooperation of the Korean Red Cross, toured Gyeongbok Palace and the National Museum of Contemporary Korean History, and took part in various Korean cultural experiences.

“We expect that Korean descendants will not only serve as a bridge between the two countries but also become valuable diplomatic assets in strengthening the relationship between the two countries,” OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk said.

Window Into Overseas Koreans conducted an interview with the visiting Korean descendants at a cafe in Gwanghwamun, Seoul, on Dec. 9. They said in unison, “We are deeply grateful to the OKA for inviting us to our homeland.”

The following is a Q&A with the three Korean descendants from Cuba.

Please tell us about your impressions of visiting your homeland.

Nora Lim Alonso: “The moment I set foot on the land of my homeland, where my grandfather and father, who are from Incheon, had longed to visit so much while they were alive, I was overwhelmed with joy and mixed emotions. Unlike the image of Korea I had heard from my grandfather, when I actually came here, from the moment I set foot in Incheon Airport, I was surprised by the dazzling development of Seoul.”

After immigrating to Cuba in 1905, independence activist Lim Cheon-taek founded the Cuban branch of the Korean Patriotic Corps, served as the president of the Cuban branch of the Korean National Association, raised funds for independence and delivered them to the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai, and served as the first president of the Cuban Korean Association. He was posthumously awarded the Order of Merit for National Foundation in 1997 and was selected as the Independence Activist of October 2024 by the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs.

Nora graduated from the Calixto Garcia School of Medical Sciences and is currently working as an internal medicine specialist at a general hospital in Havana, the capital of Cuba.

Teresa Huerta Guin: “My grandfather and father had a dream of one day setting foot back in their homeland, but they were unable to achieve that dream, so I ended up achieving it instead. My grandfather’s hometown is Seoul, and I am grateful that I can spend a lot of time in Seoul. I would like to thank the OKA for helping me achieve my dream and the Korean people for welcoming me warmly. I will share the many things I have seen and felt when I return to Cuba.”

Teresa Huerta Guin graduated from the Department of Law at the University of Havana and has been working as a prosecutor at the Special Prosecutor’s Office in Varadero, Matanzas, for 34 years.

Maioli Correa Sanchez: “This is my second visit to my home country, following a summer visit last July, but now it is winter. Every time I visit, many people at Incheon Airport welcome me warmly, so I



Nora Im Alonso, the granddaughter of independence activist and Gov. Lim Cheon-taek



Teresa Huerta Guin, a public prosecutor at the Varadero Special Prosecutor’s Office



Maioli Correa Sanchez, a student at the Cuban Hangeul School

am very grateful. I feel that I am not alone in my home country but am with my late grandfather, father and mother, who dreamed of visiting my home country even in their dreams.”

(At this point she continued her answer with a tearful voice.)

“When I first visited, my goal was to find my grandfather’s name, and I want to try again this time. He first moved to Mexico and then to Cuba, but when he was living in Mexico, there was a fire and everything burned down, so all the records about him were lost. I think his name was Kim Jae-seong, and he was from Incheon, but I don’t know for sure.”

Maioli Correa Sanchez is learning Korean at a Hangeul school in Havana. She spoke Korean occasionally during the interview.

Do you have any memories of your grandfather or stories related to your homeland that you heard from your grandfather?

Nora Lim Alonso: “I only knew it as my grandfather’s country, but in truth, I didn’t really know much about it. I only had the image of a difficult life that I heard from my grandfather, but when I came here, I was surprised to see how much it had developed. My mother is from Spain, so my grandmother taught her how to make kimchi and many other Korean dishes, so I grew up eating Korean food since I was little.

“In particular, my grandfather not only established and operated a Korean language school in Cuba but also diligently learned Spanish to adapt well to Cuban society, which was a Spanish colony, and taught it to Koreans who immigrated with him. He

also showed great passion for educating his children so that they would not forget their roots as Koreans. That is why my uncle, Jeronimo Lim (Korean name: Lim Eun-jo), served as the vice minister of industry and food in the Cuban government and the president of the Korean Association, and my surviving aunt, Marta Lim (86), published a book called ‘Koreans in Cuba’ in Spanish and Korean.”

Eng Lim Penjan Antonio (28), the great-grandson of Gov. Lim Cheon-taek who is currently pursuing a master’s degree in artificial intelligence at Chungnam National University Graduate School, was awarded citizenship of the Republic of Korea by the government last August through a ceremony to award citizenship to descendants of independence activists.

Teresa Huerta Guin: “I only knew Seoul, where my grandfather

lived. When he was alive, he always thought about how to maintain Korean culture and pass it on to his descendants. That's how I was able to even know that my roots are in Korea. I will see, learn and feel many things in my home country during my visit."

Maioli Correa Sanchez: "I am a fourth-generation immigrant. My great-grandfather passed away before I was born, so I was able to hear stories about Korea from my father and aunt. The family gathering culture of having a meal together once a week on the weekends since my great-grandfather's time still remains."

"As civilian diplomats, we will work to serve as a bridge between Korea and Cuba and to pass on Korean culture to the next generation."

Do you have any plans to engage in activities related to Korea in the future, taking advantage of your visit to your home country?

Nora Lim Alonso: "The Korean Association was maintained while my grandfather and uncle were alive, but it has now fallen into disrepair. Due to political circumstances, such as forced migration, the Korean community has virtually disappeared compared to what it used to be. However, as Korea and Cuba have established diplomatic relations and exchanges are expanding, I plan to use my visit to my home country as an opportunity to serve as a civilian diplomat and will work to serve as a bridge between Korea and Cuba and to pass on Korean culture to the next generation."

Teresa Huerta Guin: "There is a large organization called the Jose Marti Cultural Association, named after the poet and national hero of Cuba, Jose Marti. There are various small-scale clubs and interest groups under it, and one of them is the Korean Descendants Group. There, we hold networking cultural gatherings where we share Korean food and build friendships. Our goal is to develop it into an official association that is recognized by the government."

Maioli Correa Sanchez: "Most Koreans in Cuba are people who immigrated from Mexico. Since 2014, there has been a permanent exhibition of materials related to immigration from Mexico to Cuba."



A commemorative photo taken of independence activist couple Gov. Im Cheon-taek (1st on R, back row) and his wife with their grandchildren in the early 1970s. Nora Im Alonso is located in the second row, the second person on the right. (Courtesy of Nora Im Alonso)



Korean descendants wear hanbok at a meeting in Cuba during Chuseok last year. The second from the right is Maioli Correa Sanchez. (Courtesy of Maioli Correa Sanchez)

That's the most impressive thing. There are quarterly exhibitions of 'hanbok,' traditional culture and traditional musical instruments. They also offer Korean language classes and Korean cooking classes. Not only do Korean descendants come here, but Cubans who are interested in Korean culture also visit. They even filmed Korean movies and dramas."

How big is the Korean Wave in Cuba?

Nora Lim Alonso: "They say that among young people, if you don't know about the Korean Wave, you can't even join in on a conversation. That's how big 'hallyu' is in Cuba."

Maioli Correa Sanchez: "Even before Korea and Cuba established diplomatic ties, Korean youths came to Cuba through the Overseas Koreans Foundation to sing and perform traditional dances. We even had an event in Cuba for Liberation Day on Aug. 15."

If you have something to say to your home country and Koreans, please do so.

Nora Lim Alonso: "I would like to thank the Korean government and Korean people for providing me with this opportunity and for welcoming me warmly. Through this opportunity, I was able to feel my identity as a descendant of Koreans. And I hope you remember that there are 1,099 descendants of Koreans in the small country of Cuba. I hope there will be more opportunities to invite descendants of Koreans in the future."

Teresa Huerta Guin: "I live in Matanzas, the province where most Korean immigrants live. I hope that there will be more exchanges between Korea and Cuba so that Korean culture can be shared more."

On Dec. 11, Korean descendants visited the Daejeon National Cemetery, where Gov. Lim Cheon-taek is buried, to pay their respects. Nora Lim Alonso said, "What I looked forward to the most during this visit to my home country was visiting my grandfather's grave," and expressed her gratitude to her grandfather, saying, "I am proud of my grandfather, and thanks to his efforts, I have been able to enjoy many things since coming to Korea." 🇰🇷