

# In The Latest Edition of 'You're Not Korean Enough,' the Internet Attacks a Transnational Adoptee

Accusing a Korean adoptee of 'Not Being Korean Enough' isn't the slam dunk losers think it is

JAE-HA KIM

FEB 28, 2026

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Actress Kim Tae-ri is Korean enough. But naysayers argue that transnational adoptees are *not*. 😏 ([Courtesy of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism](#))

In another edition of *You're Not Korean Enough*, we have a contingent of cruel and clueless people on the internet who are taking a Korean adoptee to task for not being a

real Korean. Why? Because she initially mispronounced the name of a Korean folk song, “Arirang” (아리랑).

Are you done rolling your eyes yet? Because I’m not.

A few days ago, **Kat Turner** made an informative video explaining the significance of the Korean folk song “Arirang” as it applies to *her*. Thanks to BTS announcing that **Arirang** is the title of the group’s highly-awaited comeback album, “Arirang” has become a buzzword that is being dissected on social media. What could the significance of *Arirang* possibly mean? For me, it is a hint that the septet is going back to their roots in a way that is meaningful to *them*. Will all of their songs be in Korean, with no English tracks? Maybe? But I’m not a soothsayer. However, I am confident that whatever they release on March 20 will be reflective of who they are today.



KAT 문순자 on Instagram: "I didn't grow up with Arirang. I gre..."

All of this brings me back to Turner's video on Instagram. While the post went viral — drawing praise from BTS fans, adoptees, and the general public — there was a contingent of loud and entitled naysayers (most of whom appear to be westerners and/or Korean Americans) who criticized her at every turn for being a clout chaser, an imposter, and — most egregiously — *a Korean wannabe*.

*Why?* Because she mispronounced the word “Arirang.”

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*The ones who spew the worst hate are absolutely insufferable if you address them in public. FAFO.*

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Here's the thing. Most people who grew up in a Korean-speaking household — whether in Korea or overseas — are familiar with the song, have sung the song, and know how to pronounce “Arirang.” But would you expect a monolingual English-speaking person to pronounce it as well as a Korean in Korea, or even a Korean American who grew up bilingual? Most likely not. So why are we expecting adoptees — most of whom grew up in white families, in the whitest locations ever (Iowa, for Turner), with no Korean community to integrate into, and who were essentially raised *white* to assimilate into the majority — to be able to speak Korean properly?

## Perpetual Foreigner Syndrome

You know how **perpetual foreigner syndrome** works, right? It's when Asian Americans are viewed as foreigners rather than U.S. nationals because we aren't accepted as *real* Americans. According to a study by the **PEW Research Center**, almost 80 percent of Asian Americans have experienced some kind of **xenophobia and racism** in their lives — ranging from assumptions that we don't speak English to being told to go back to where you came from ... even if we are already there.

Yes, transnational adoptees *technically* came from somewhere else. Since 1953, South Korea has sent more than 200,000 children overseas to be adopted, earning the dubious distinction of being baby exporters. The majority went to the United States, while others grew up in Europe. Only a tiny fraction of adoptive parents raised their children to read and speak Korean. While it's easy to fault the parents, it should be acknowledged that this was the norm even a few decades ago, because that's what experts believed was best for the child. Little thought went into the very obvious fact that a Korean child growing up in a white family is going to stick out as a *foreigner*, regardless of whether they speak Korean or not.

So tell me, when you remove an infant from their birth nation, and move them to another country that doesn't share the same (or even similar) language, customs, or culture, how exactly are they supposed to retain a language that they never spoke? (I discuss this further in my review of *Return to Seoul* in *Salon*.)

It's as ridiculous as my first grade teacher was expecting me to point out where every single Asian country was on the world map. <sup>1</sup> I had never even gone to school in Seoul. How was I supposed to know? And yes, it was stressful for a six-year-old to be asked to do this. Though I never asked, I wondered why she wasn't expecting my white classmates to pinpoint where all the European countries were.

Before I go further, I'm going to share some of the comments that people made to Turner. This man heard that Turner's pronunciation was off, but told her in a way that, to me, read as trying to be helpful and kind.



hapro220 1w

its pronounced A-Ri-Rang not pronounced as ari ang. just wanted to help you pronounce it correctly love your story and love to Korean culture



Reply Hide

Others weren't necessarily rude, but were on the blunter side.



cchhddvv 1w

Ah-RLhi-RLhahng 아리랑, not 아리앙



Reply See translation Hide



cjkowens 1w

It's AriRang, not Ariana!!!



Reply Hide



dmorinaka 1w

Its a Ri rang.....



Reply Hide



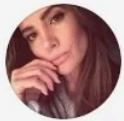
neoherhyung 1w

Lol 아리앙..... 미치겠네.....



Reply See translation Hide

1



san77\_0099 1w

and yet you missed pronounced it every single time 🙄



Reply Hide



mar.mac855 1w

It's AriRang not ariang.



Reply See translation Hide

To be frank, most of those comments weren't helpful. They clearly knew what Turner was saying, but decided that being antagonistic was *good for her* without considering

that it is difficult to use the English alphabet to address the Korean alphabet. It's *AriRang*, you say? No it's not. An English speaker who reads that will pronounce the second syllable as *rang* — as in, “*You rang, ma'am?*” — instead of the softer *rahng*.

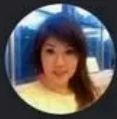
People who grew up hearing one language can have a difficult time hearing a second language properly. Here's an anecdote. People *who do not speak Korean* have tried to correct how I pronounce 엄마<sup>2</sup> — a word I have said since infancy — because they claim that [*checks notes*] their dry cleaner or their local Korean grocer pronounced it as *oh-ma*. I do not know these Koreans who they speak of, but I can assure you that these Koreans most certainly did *not* pronounce the word this way. More likely, that is how these English speakers — through no fault of their own — *heard* the word. The faulty part, though, comes when they decided it was appropriate to try to school me in the most basic of all Korean words that I am very familiar with.

My own friends who are in the process of learning how to speak Korean have told me that they can't differentiate the sounds between 오빠<sup>3</sup>, 아빠<sup>4</sup>, and 아파<sup>5</sup>. And to be honest, I don't blame them. They *can* sound similar.

Do you know how you become fluent in a foreign language without a trace of your native accent? Sure, there are exceptions to any rule, but the most efficient way is to move to the country where the language you want to learn is spoken and immerse yourself by speaking it every day, surrounded by the accent you want to emulate. For instance, I speak perfect American English. Why? Because I've lived in the U.S. since I was very young.

How difficult is it to understand that for all intents and purposes, Korean *is* a foreign language for adoptees who were raised in western countries and never given the opportunity to learn their birth language? To put things into perspective, there are diehard (non Korean) K-pop and K-drama fans out there who have enjoyed Korean content for more than a decade. Most of them cannot speak any Korean. And that's OK. So why is there this unrealistic expectation that adoptees would somehow find it simple to reclaim their birth language?

But hey, why consider all of that when it's easier to be an intrusive know-it-all who lacks empathy for a marginalized community?



dr.jj\_kim 1d

Please learn the proper pronunciation:  
A-ri -rang. You're not pronouncing the  
last R.



Reply Hide



thekatturner 1d · Author

It may not sound like I'm saying  
ARIRANG but that's what  
아리랑 sounds like with an Iowa  
accent. 😂😭



dr.jj\_kim 1w

@thekatturner: LOL. May not? Try  
definitely not. If you can pronounce the  
first R, you can pronounce the 2nd R.  
Your dismissive tone implies that you  
don't care about a word that is  
meaningful to Koreans.





dr.jj\_kim 1w

@nicoletubbs: Satoori is a Korea dialect. That's not to be confused with mispronunciation. People are trying to correct her as it's a word that is meaningful to Koreans and if she's claiming to be Korean, you would think that would matter to her even more. 🙄



8

Reply Hide



nicoletubbs 1w

@dr.jj\_kim she said she was trying. That's what's important. She is trying. It feels like you're wanting to help but it's coming across wrong. And any language learner after age 15 learning another language will never sound perfect. That's a linguistic fact. Because it's not her first language. So we'll agree to disagree. I still think DM her if it upsets you, not call her out while she's expressing a moment that's changed her in a positive way.



3



dr.jj\_kim 1w

@nicoletubbs: Trust me, it doesn't upset me. But read the comments. Everyone is trying to correct her in the spirit of trying to help, but she's coming across as dismissive in tone with a "I don't give a shit because I'm from Iowa" attitude and I'm not going to change. I find it odd that she seems to speak with a sense of authority when she's learning a culture which she was not raised in. A bit of humility would go a long way. Korean adoptees suffered a great injustice and I



4

appreciate her desire to connect with our culture. But if she doesn't change her approach and response to being corrected, it will be very difficult for her to be accepted by Koreans and overcome the stigma that is unfortunately tied to adoptees.

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)



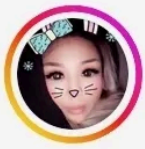
dr.jj\_kim 1w

@nicoletubbs: Thanks for your comment. I have been faculty at a few universities and am very familiar with adult education. So I appreciate the learning process and applaud you for taking the time, energy, and effort to learn a new language. One's response to direct feedback tells me a lot on how far a student will go. Those who get defensive will struggle a lot more vs. those who welcome feedback. Personally, I've met a handful of Korean American adoptees and anecdotally, they all have one thing in common: they have a chip on their shoulder. Perhaps it's because of their circumstances, but it's off putting and somewhat offensive. You just can't parachute into a culture and expect acceptance (in any culture). Being Korean is more than just ancestry: it's language, mindset, and being raised with Korean values that shape the way you think and act (aka family education). Not having this is why they will struggle with acceptance and belonging. It's very sad.



1

Reply Hide

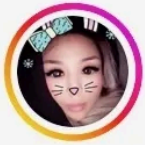


c.ccxxii 4d

I'm sorry to say this, but there is a huge difference in an accent and a mispronunciation. If you truly wanted to reconnect w your roots, the least you could do is properly learn the word. Did you even listen to the original folk song or any song including this word?



Reply Hide

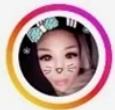


c.ccxxii 4d

AriRang\*\*



Reply Hide



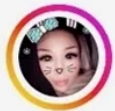
c.ccxxii 4d

@thekatturner no I'm sorry you're wrong you're missing an entire consonant no accent removes an entire letter, please just accept you were saying it wrong cuz you're butchering the pronunciation and blaming it on being American, I was born in America, we don't just remove entire consonants



1

Reply Hide



c.ccxxii 4d

@sportrocgirl55 I listened to her story however it's important to correct her because she's completely butchering the very word she is upholding. Accents do not remove entire consonants it's a mispronunciation not an accent



2

Reply Hide



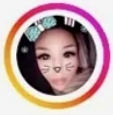
sportrocgirl55 4d

@c.ccxxii this is not how you go about



doing it.

Reply Hide



c.ccxxii 4d

@sportrocgirl55 don't be so soft. Only a fool gets offended by a simple correction, a wise person would thank you.



Reply Hide

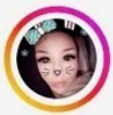


sportrocgirl55 4d

@c.ccxxii maybe you misunderstood. I said it was the way it was done. Not THAT it was done. Does that make better sense.



Reply Hide



c.ccxxii 4d

@sportrocgirl55 if you're that easily offended best to stay off the internet completely lol



Reply Hide

HFP

highfunctionproductions 1w

@thekattuner



1

Don't worry about your "accent" as it NOT AT ALL an accent problem.

The Korean language was designed scientifically, which is why slaves were able to read and write. And any new LEARNER can read and pronounce properly within the first three hours. Age doesn't matter accent doesn't matter!!!

The flat out truth is that you were just reading incorrectly and absolutely 1000% pronouncing the word incorrectly

Ex: instead of BANANA.....you are saying "BAANA"



Has zeeeeerio to do with an accent!!!

Got it ...thekattuner?

Kat-U-Ner.

(Not an accent problem. Just a lazy sloppy read on the spelling of turRner.

A direct example to help you own that your mispronunciation has zeeero to do with an accent.

Three hours is all it takes for foreigners to master Korean pronunciation? Kindly shut the fuck up with this nonsense.



veronatitica 1w

AriRang!!! No Ariiang! Listen to BTS, listen all korean people! I'm not korean, but you are, not ok for you!



Reply Hide



ymkcollins 1w

What the... dang girl, imagine you're trying to say "yummy rice" but then you say "yummy lice" instead.



Reply Hide

So she acknowledges that Koreans (in Korea) have a difficult time saying "r," but is too dense to understand that it is similarly difficult for some westerners to pronounce Korean words. And yes, Koreans who were adopted as babies *are* westerners.

Turner made a second video to address some of the complaints about her pronunciation, which, again was thorough.

@thekatturmer



KAT 문순자 on Instagram: "I recently posted a reel about what ..."

She reiterated again that she is an adoptee who didn't grow up speaking Korean. And she was met with comments like this, written by a person who clearly does not respect or even like Koreans.



Oxelf 8m



People are aware of adoptees. It is a heavy subject, but it is not news. You are conflating Koreanness with correct pronunciation. You can be Korean and have bad pronunciation. You can be Korean and But you also cannot force acceptance of bad pronunciation as tolerable or something that should go without comment because it grates directly against educational standards that are high precisely because they are exacting. You cannot have one without the other. Koreans are very particular about education (there is a long historical background to this) and with that culture comes a painfully direct feedback loop, positive and negative, involving everything from looks and posture to tone and pronunciation, not to mention facial expression, hygiene, body composition, skin condition, hair texture, and more. The analysis simply does not end. That is part of the culture. The directness and the OCD fixation on details. When Koreans are not including you, they don't give negative feedback. They don't give any feedback. You experienced criticism? Welcome to Korean culture. I'm sure people said nice

things also. You just can't pick and choose.

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

I say this as disrespectfully as I possibly can: kindly fuck off.



**Oxelf** 5m

Actually, it would be more insulting and discriminatory if they didn't even bother to correct your incorrect spelling/pronunciation of the name of a very culturally loaded, meaningful song. The correction itself is indicative of inclusion and expression of care about your ongoing ability to represent the culture accurately, where you may be and wherever you may go, because you deserve to know you said arirang incorrectly. It isn't to embarrass you. Wouldn't it be worse if you said it wrong and no one bothered to say anything bc they dismissed you as an adopted who doesn't know any better and can't be expected to learn?



Reply Hide



**Oxelf** 2m

wrong\* adoptee\* wish ig would allow edits after accidental enter presses



Loss of language is a profound loss of culture, something that too many of the *well-actually* commenters didn't consider before venting their spleen on the internet. And

without naming names, it surprised me that there are quite a few people who still don't know the difference between ethnicity and nationality. I never thought I'd have to explain this on Beyonce's internet, but you can be both ethnically Korean *and* a U.S. national.

I interview a lot of celebrities, including Koreans who were born in the U.S. and are therefore U.S. nationals, but moved to South Korea and permanently live there. Their English is no longer fluent. Why? Because they live in a country where Korean is spoken and have few people to speak English with.

**The Rose's** lead singer Woosung, who grew up all over the world, told me that he has gotten to the point where he is no longer fluent in either Korean or English. He was exaggerating, because he is the perfect example of someone who is completely bilingual. But I understood exactly what he was saying, because language is fluid. It evolves whether you're living in that specific country or not.

## The FSI Categorizes Korean as *Exceptionally Difficult* for Native English Speakers

The School of Language Studies provides training in over 70 languages.

**Category I:** Languages closely related to English.

Danish, Dutch, French, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Swedish

**Category II:** Languages that take a little longer to master than Category I languages.

German, Indonesian, Malay, Swahili

**Category III:** Languages with significant linguistic and/or cultural differences from English.

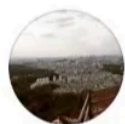
Albanian, Amharic, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Bengali, Bulgarian, Burmese, Czech, Dari, Estonian, Farsi, Finnish, Georgian, Greek, Gujarati, Hausa, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Kazakh, Khmer, Kurdish, Lao, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Mongolian, Nepali, Pashto, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Sinhala, Slovak, Slovenian, Somali, Tagalog, Tajiki, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Tibetan, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, Uzbek, Vietnamese

**Category IV:** Languages which are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers.

Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean

According to the U.S. State Department's **Foreign Service Institute (FSI)**, Korean is one of the most difficult languages for native English speakers to learn.

When white westerners try to speak Korean, they are often allotted at a least a modicum of grace, because they don't look like they *should* be able to speak Korean, right? Maybe it's because haters are too willfully ignorant about the realities of adoption that they spew shit like, "Getting adopted by a white family was literally the best thing that could have happened to you" — which illustrates that the commenter below literally doesn't know the actual meaning of the word *literally*.



greenbusride 1h

Smdh you were doing okay at the beginning of this, until you hopped on the woke merry-go-round. Getting adopted by a white family was literally the best thing that could have happened to you. South Korea literally exported babies, in part, due to the very deep cultural failure of not tolerating adoption. It's only until some celebrities do it that Koreans get it out of their thick skulls that it's not socially harmful. But I suppose it's no surprise: look at the Korean birth rates. They seem to loathe bringing children into this world more than anybody. So rather than being this poor, oppressed 'person of colour' by the system, try reflecting and smartly criticising South Korea for letting you down. This here is the problem with multiculturalism and why remigration efforts need to happen, ngl.



It's likely that this person/troll/bot doesn't give a toot about adoptees and is just cobbling together rhetoric they've heard here and there, rather than doing any meaningful research. Two things can be true: you can have a good life with your adoptive parents, and you can still carry generational trauma from losing your first family. While well-meaning people congratulate westerners for adopting their kids, what most don't know or even think about is that adopted children are more likely to

experience anxiety and PTSD than children who weren't adopted. And adoptees are also four times as likely to attempt suicide than kids who grew up with biological parents.

So when someone says, "*Getting adopted by a white family was literally the best thing that could have happened to you,*" it reeks of white saviorism, xenophobia, and willful stupidity.

After responding to a few of her detractors, Turner said she decided to stop. It is hurtful to read comment after comment intent on erasing a rightful part of her identity.

"I think ultimately, the emotion I felt the most was sadness that humans are capable of treating other humans in such a way over the pronunciation of a word," Turner told me. "The only thing I present myself as an authority on is my own experience as a K-adoptee. And how many times did I say I didn't have access to my language? In what way am I supposed to show more humility?"

Earlier this past week, I interviewed a well-known Korean American woman who asked me, "When you are attacked online, what do you do? Do you get sad, or maybe angry? How do you deal with it?" I thought about it, and the truth is that I get both sad and angry. Most of the time, I say nothing to defend myself because that only ramps up their hatred. There is no reasoning with people who know they are lying, but don't care. But I told her that what I do for myself is that I write about it, not necessarily for others to read, but because I want a record of their hate on my own terms.

Everything lives on forever online, right?



**my.hiiiiie** @goawaywithjae



Jaewha Learn proper Korean & our culture to show basic respect when you take advantages of it



17m Reply



**my.hiiiiie** @goawaywithjae bye



검머외아줌마 파이팅

16m Reply



**my.hiiiiie** @goawaywithjae



hahaha your job is just writing craps using my country's lmaooooo

15m Reply



**goawaywithjae** Mmmmm, you would be wrong.



10m Reply



**my.hiiiiie** Isn't there anything else you can do except taking advantages of Korean stuff while you are not even Korean? #검머외



9h Reply

— View 10 previous replies



**my.hiiiiie @my.hiiiiie** 🤔🤔🤔  
calm down This old ajumma is  
NOT Korean but just 검머외



5m Reply



**goawaywithjae @my.hiiiiie** Hi  
sweetie. You should get your  
money back from whatever  
hagwon taught you English.



2s Reply

I don't ordinarily shame people for not speaking English well, regardless of whether they are native English speakers or learned it as a foreign language. But I am not here to be your shit catcher. And for the record, I am the first one to say that I'm always surprised at how my Korean skills are simultaneously really good and really bad. (Diaspora may relate to this feeling.) While I maintain my uncontested status as the Queen of Typos™, I can hold conversations and conduct on-the-record interviews in **grammatically correct Korean** and English. I know for a fact that people like her cannot. <sup>6</sup>

FWIW, she deactivated after my final response. Score one for this Maudlin Crone. <sup>7</sup>

If this post resonated with you, please share it.  
And thank you very much for reading and  
supporting *K-Culture with Jae-Ha Kim*.

\* I am working on a long-form reported newsletter that I hope to publish in the upcoming weeks. I hope you will look forward to it.

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*If You'd Like To Discuss This and More,  
Join Me at Our Next ZOOM Meet-Up on March 27, 2026.*

*PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS A PERK FOR PAID SUBSCRIBERS.*

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## K-DRAMA INDEX

JAE-HA KIM · FEB 1



These are some of my reviews and essays about K-Dramas (and also Korean films and other Korean-centric projects). You may also read more about my take on Korean pop culture in outlets such as Rolling Stone, Mashable, Victoria & Al...

[Read full story →](#)

- 
- 1 A reminder: I am *not* an adoptee.
  - 2 **엄마** means mother.
  - 3 **오빠** is what a younger sister calls her older brother.
  - 4 **아빠** means dad.
  - 5 **아파** means hurt/pain.

6 Whether any of us like it or not, English is the world's No. 1 international (and dominant) language. If you can speak fluent, unaccented English, that is a huge asset in the South Korean job market, which is why many parents try to send their children to study in the U.S., England, and Australia. In the U.S., being able to speak Korean is an advantage, but not to the same extent as being fluent in Spanish.

7 I described myself as a Maudlin Crone to a friend, and she said that would be the perfect name for our (never-to-happen) punk rock band.



53 Likes · 11 Restacks

← Previous

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## Discussion about this post

Comments Restacks



Write a comment...



**Kat Turner** 문순자 Kat Turner 문순자 5d Edited



♥ Liked by Jae-Ha Kim

Can you feel the bow I am doing in front of you right now? Your righteous indignation on the behalf of me and K-adoptees in general means more than you'll ever know. 😊 The mention of BTS and Woosung in a piece about my struggles made me smile. We've never met in person but you feel like a kindred spirit. 💜

감사합니다 🙏

♥ LIKED (21) 💬 REPLY

📤 SHARE


3 replies by Jae-Ha Kim and others



**Scarlett** KdramAstrology with Scarlett 5d Edited



♥ Liked by Jae-Ha Kim

(Tone: Grateful) Thank you, Jae-Ha x  for ceaselessly sharing authentically from your heart what many would do well to read/hear! 🙏🙏🙏

(T: Reflective) Many are so quick to police identity when what we're really confronting is their own discomfort with it...Pronunciation is not proof of belonging. Fluency is not a moral credential. And cultural reclamation is rarely linear — especially for adoptees who were separated from language before they ever had the chance to choose it.

Expecting linguistic purity from someone who was never given linguistic access isn't cultural protection. It's projection.

Perhaps here is a deeper truth:

Many of the loudest gatekeepers are not defending heritage — they're defending a fragile idea of authenticity that feels threatened when identity refuses to behave neatly.

Belonging is not earned through perfect vowels.

Ethnicity is not revoked through accent.

And diaspora is not a performance.

If someone mispronounces "Arirang," but feels its meaning in their bones, that resonance matters more than phonetic precision.

Language lives in the mouth.

Culture lives in the body.

What I appreciated most in your article is the clarity around the distinction between correction and cruelty. Between preservation and gatekeeping. Between education and ego.

When we truly care about culture, we create space for those finding their way back to it — especially when that return was never theirs to interrupt.

Compassion expands.

Contempt contracts.

And expansion will always build more...at least...in my neck of "reality." 🙏😊💜❤️👉

 LIKED (8)  REPLY

 SHARE

2 replies by Jae-Ha Kim and others

27 more comments...