

Four quick definitions of the Korean concept of **Nunchi** (pronounced “noon-chee”):

눈치
Nunchi (Korean)

Lit. “eye measure”; the subtle art and ability to gauge others’ moods; the awareness of your surrounding that allows you to read the atmosphere and react to it appropriately.

눈치 (nunchi)
(n.) the subtle art of listening and gauging others' moods; the ability to know what not to say in a certain social situation

Nunchi
눈치 - Korean
(n.) the subtle art and ability to listen and gauge others' moods.

Nunchi (눈치)
The art of understanding what people are thinking and feeling; sensitivity to the dynamics within a given group.



According to Keith Kim (2013), when someone has nunchi, they are perhaps “quick-witted and can understand the situation quickly”. They can act in accordance with the situation especially in terms of social roles and expectations. On the other hand, there is a term in the Korean language (*nunchi eopta*) that translates as *not* having nunchi. That refers to individuals who lack common sense and may be missing the skills that we may call “emotional intelligence”. It is important, especially in collectivistic and high-context cultures such as Korea to be able to “read the room” and to be sensitive to the many roles, expectations and relationships present in order to maintain harmony and be successful. Euny Hong argues in her book (2019) that nunchi is the key to happiness and success!

That's when I discovered a Korean concept called "nunchi". Nunchi roughly translates to "eye measure", a sizing-up of people, situations, and rooms.



In other words,
heightened social awareness.

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"Quick nunchi"

means adapting your assumptions based on words, gestures, and expressions so you can respond tactfully.

- Notice who speaks/listen
- Who interrupts
- Who apologises
- Noticing silence
- Noticing avoidance
- Facial expressions
- Body language
- Focusing not only on the individuals, but the entire vibe/character of the room

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Video Resources

- 2 ½-minute video: Korean-Australians explain the word nunchi, You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oi8hZFHdHDk>
- 7-minute video interview with Euny Hong: The power of nunchi could change your life, You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0ImdHF3kZk>
- 20-minute podcast discussion: How to properly harness the power of nunchi. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bfn2p0uSzfM>
- 40-minute podcast discussion: What is nunchi, the Halfie Project Podcast. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bfn2p0uSzfM>
- 1-minute (Youtube shorts), The power of nunchi. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/U2VXqLA4Spw>

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Thinking Further:

Visit some of the resources listed in the references list to learn more about the Korean concept of “nunchi. I recommend the comic guide by Robert the Otter at boredpanda.com as it’s a fun way to see some definitions and examples. Also, watch at least one of the videos listed in the video resources list.

1. How would you describe your own nunchi? Would you say that you excel in nunchi (have “quick nunchi”) or would you say you are more on the other end of the continuum (have “slow nunchi” or lack nunchi)?
2. Provide two or three examples of quick nunchi and two or three examples of situations where someone lacks nunchi. Explain how each of these may, or may not, promote success.
3. Describe how nunchi represents the Korean values inherent in a collective community and how nunchi helps maintain harmony in relationships.
4. Do you watch K-dramas or listen to K-pop music? Search for and describe some examples of nunchi in some popular Korean culture.