

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Actor Yoo carefully considers his roles

By Jae-Ha Kim
Tribune Content Agency

Born and raised in Germany, educated in the United States and now based out of South Korea, BAFTA Awards-nominated actor Teo Yoo ("Past Lives," "Decision to Leave") doesn't take any of his success for granted. He had already spent many years turning down parts that cast Asian characters in a disparaging light.

In his latest role in the espionage series "The Recruit," he plays Jang Kyu, a South Korean intelligence agent, who teams up with Noah Centineo ("To All the Boys" trilogy). "This show is a testament to Alexi Hawley's writing and also to the leadership of (executive producer and star) Noah, who created such a warm and lovely environment for us all," Yoo said from New York City. "It was a very wholesome experience and a privilege to be part of the show." The second season of "The Recruit" is now streaming on Netflix.

This interview with Yoo has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: In "The Recruit," you speak Korean and English, which aren't your native language.

A: I grew up speaking German, then English, and then I learned Korean. On "The Recruit," the translator was more of a cultural translator, who was on set for us to pick up on things, on my (Korean) dialect. Even for me, it feels like sometimes things can get lost in translation.

Q: This second season



Actor Teo Yoo said filming "The Recruit" in South Korea and Canada added an international flair to the spy show. **NETFLIX**

of "The Recruit" is set in South Korea. How much of it was filmed there?

A: It was filmed in Korea and Canada. There's a scene that's supposed to take place at a dam somewhere in South Korea, but we shot it at a dam in Vancouver. Our set designer was amazing, so (viewers) really do get the feel that we are where we say we are. There's another scene where a boat is heading out of the Sockho port (in South Korea) and (the characters later) drive toward Russia. That was shot along the river in Vancouver. Also, there is a scene at a love motel. The interior was filmed on a Vancouver sound stage, but the exterior was shot in a neighborhood in Seoul. It's a testament to the teamwork behind the show that all of this looks so seamless.

Q: What was your childhood like?

A: I was born and raised in Germany. Most of my friends there were immigrants and refugees from North Africa, the Middle East and some were from Eastern Europe. It was a very rough environment that I grew up in, but because I was an athlete, I never fit a stereotype that was based on the context of American culture and the way American movies throughout Hollywood history have portrayed Asian men. My focus (as an actor) has been to step away from the context of

Asian men being dehumanized and desexualized.

Q: You recently released the country song "Texas Summer." How did that come about?

A: Oh my god, I can't believe you watched that. (Laughs.) That was part of a reality TV show ("Music Adventure by Accident") for Korea where we traveled to the United States and let ourselves be inspired by local culture, and then we wrote a song at the end of that show. The music video was cut together with actual scenes from that show, where we were on a ranch. I worked with cowboys and was hired as a ranch hand. We were working with cows, going in the pasture, basically experiencing part of the American heritage.

Q: Where in Texas did you film that?

A: It's a city called Devine, which is north of Pearsall. I'm actually going back there next week.

Q: When you were in school, did you think you'd be an actor?

A: When I went to (the Lee) Strasberg school (in New York) at the beginning of my acting studies, I thought that I would go back to Europe, either to Russia or to France, and go to clown school and top off my theatrical training.

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