

Experiences from Korea - Part I: Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Korean Student Sojourner Adjustment to and Culture Shock within the Host Country

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Abstract

This paper continues ongoing research into how student sojourners from Asia adapt to the host culture of a Western country when going on a student sojourn. Whereas previous research has shown that most, if not all, students experience some type of culture shock during their sojourn, this analysis is the first step in research focusing solely on Korean students. This paper discusses socio-cultural factors that may affect their overseas study, beginning with a look at the motivation behind the sojourn. This is followed by a review of education in Korean culture, its influence on a student sojourn and its place in their unique value system, stemming from the role of Confucianism in Korean history. Once abroad, various factors that may affect the Korean sojourner in a Western culture are discussed, including the role of the teacher in the classroom, student learning techniques and classroom interactions, as well as Korean classroom expectations. Various strategies for adaptation to the host culture are then reviewed, before concluding with a call for a future empirical study of Korean student experiences with culture shock and the related problem of re-entry shock.

Introduction

Although there are few, if any, completely mono-cultural societies in the world (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001), two East Asian countries are often cited as relatively homogenous societies: Japan and Korea (Kashima & Callan, 1994, cited in Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Coming from a culture that is highly homogeneous may result in sojourners from that country having unique experiences and/or difficulties when leaving home for a journey to a different culture. That is, they may experience some type of culture shock upon being thrust into a multi-cultural society with very different social norms, behavioral and communicative styles, and, of course, a new language. Previous work by the author has focused extensively on the experiences and effects of culture shock on Japanese sojourners (see Davis, Chapman, Bohlin, Jaworski, Walley, Barton, & Ebner, 2008; Chapman & Davis, 2006; & Davis & Chapman, 2007) due to the fact that it is often seen as highly unique (and more homogenous) than other Asian cultures. "The idea of 'being Japanese' with the perceived uniqueness stemming from being an island culture, and the homogeneity of the population, has led to . . . a rich body of literature going back to the end of World War II (Chapman, 2007, p. 37). Research on Japanese returnees has also confirmed that most, if not nearly all people coming back home to Japan suffer "some sort of culture shock upon re-entry" (Sorimachi, 1994, p. 1). While there has been an increase in research

specifically concerning Japanese (see literature review in Chapman, 2007), other populations within Asia have received far less attention in the literature.

As another unique culture within Asia, Koreans have been defined in ways that make them stand apart from Japan, and other cultures in the region. Koreans, for one thing, bring with them a high level of expectation for competition on all levels (educational, or otherwise), to achieve their goals (Ferguson, 2001). The role of Confucianism has also been said to be a very strong source of much within the Korean value system, particularly in education (detailed later). Within this value system, Park notes that “education has become like a religion for Koreans” (1999, p. 52). Without judging which culture between Japan and Korea is more unique, this research intends to add to the body of research that explains how they are unique! To further work on specific populations within the Asian region then, this current research should be considered the next step in an ongoing analysis of culture shock within populations of Asian students. Specifically, it is the first step by this author to study the adjustment process to host cultures from yet another unique Asian population: Korean student sojourners.

To begin its focus on the experiences of Korean student sojourners as they adapt to a host culture, this paper will first summarize the concepts and effects of culture shock and its relative, re-entry shock. This is followed by a review of some differences in character between Asian populations and Western populations. Then, a review is given of the popularity and motivation behind Korean student sojourns to foreign countries, followed by a discussion of the unique socio-cultural characteristics that Korean students bring with them to a sojourn. To understand what makes Koreans unique, the role of education in the Korean value system and the highly respected position of teachers within that system is then discussed, followed by a discussion of their learning techniques, classroom interactions and expectations. Lastly, the limited research available on how Korean sojourners adapt to host cultures is discussed. The paper concludes by calling for a future empirical study in this important line of research.

Sojourner Adjustment Issues: The Concepts of Culture Shock & Re-Entry Shock

When people enter a foreign culture, be it for living, working, studying, or simply vacating, briefly, for several months or years, or even the rest of their life, how they see reality is challenged. Research has commonly labeled this condition as “culture shock” (cf. Chapman, 2007). This is generally seen as the more pronounced emotional and physical reactions to the disorientation most people experience when they move into a culture different from their own, and such culture shock “can prevent sojourners from adequately adapting to their host culture [and] this can complicate the already difficult transition from a home culture to a host culture” (Chapman & Davis, 2006, p. 87). Extensive work by Bochner (1982) notes that culture shock can result in strain due to making psychological adaptations; a sense of loss in regard to friends, or social status; being rejected by and/or rejecting members of the new host culture; being confused about one’s role or own self-identity; surprise, anxiety, possible revulsion after becoming aware of various cultural differences; and even feelings of helplessness from not being able to cope with the new host culture. Other serious symptoms can include homesickness, loneliness, disorientation, frustration, and paranoia (Dodd, 1995). In extreme cases, sojourners can have physiological effects, mild to chronic mental disorders, alcohol or drug addiction, and they can

experiment with criminal behavior or suffer stunted personality development (cf. Kohls, 1984).

On the other hand, “re-entry” shock (also called “reverse” culture shock or “repatriation” shock) is when a person comes back to his/her home culture and is forced to readapt after a prolonged stay abroad, and this can also be equally, if not more, psychologically stressful (see Martin, 1986; Sussman, 2002). Such feelings of expecting to come home without negative reactions is daunting for many returnees and they can experience reverse homesickness, wanting to get away again, or even negative feelings against family and friends (Davis & Chapman, 2006; Davis, Desiere, Naughton, Payne & Valianos, 2001). Because living abroad gave them more freedom and independence, coming home can make returnees feel “boxed” into a place that restricts their mental growth. Tamura and Furnham (1993) note that returnees gain a feeling of dislocation, and feel that they stick out. They suffer from loneliness and often feel they have lost part of their identity. Also, the stages of re-entry shock are nearly as delineated as those of culture shock. Research has further shown the potentially significant problems the homogenous Japanese (as a specific population of Asians) has had due to unique socio-cultural characters of the Japanese, as well as educational pressures placed upon them (see literature review in Davis, et al, 2008; as well as Chapman, 2007). Following that research, this current work aims at an equally in-depth understanding of the problem in Korean sojourners. With this review of the concepts of culture shock and re-entry shock given, this paper now offers an overview of what personalities Asians may bring to a Western sojourn, and how they sometimes clash with the different personalities in the host culture.

The Clash of Personalities: Western vs. Asian

Research on personality traits of sojourners has noted that being open-minded, extraverted and flexible to societal change, as well as having increased cultural sensitivity are positively correlated with positive adjustment to the host culture (Crano & Crano, 1985), but the question is: how do traditional characteristics of Asian sojourners compare with those of a western host culture? (It should be noted most research cited in this paper was done on Korean experiences in North America, but that is not to discount any relevant research done on Korean experiences in other western cultures. Additionally, however, since the author is American and a future study analyzing Korean sojourner experiences will focus on Koreans within American educational institutions, most references given here do focus on interactions with American students.) Such western characteristics as open-mindedness and extroversion closely relate to Asian sojourners ability to learn new cultural norms, values and behaviors, all important if they are to reduce their experiences with culture shock.

While Americans put individualism high on the importance level of personality types, Asian cultures place a much higher value on teamwork, working for the benefit of the group, and overall collectivity. In deference to the group, Asian cultures stress harmony and respect for others, while also showing patience and deference to other people. They see the assertive style of communication Americans practice as too forward and overpowering. Doh (2001) notes that since many students from Asia place a strong emphasis on harmony and respect for others, “many Asian students are reluctant to share their feelings or emotions, express their opinions or oppositions to anyone, especially to authority figures [such as teachers]” (p. 12). All personality, communicative and behavioral differences make the prospect of culture shock very real and problematic. As Markus and Kitayama (1998) confirm,

people are influenced by the cultural norms they bring with them as their personality and attitudes develop to their surroundings. Research has shown that when the gap is larger between international student's traditional culture and the host culture, the acculturative stress placed upon the sojourners increases (although this was not limited only to Asian populations, see Andrews, 2000; Graham, 1983). This is further confirmed by Lin and Yi (1997), who explain that such differences between American culture and the Asian students' own culture can cause a student to experience both significant *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* problems and conflicts when pursuing studies abroad.

Work on highly homogenous Japanese students showed confusion in the use of language in everyday interactions, including the need to express oneself (Kawabata, Kune & Uehara, 1989), which is not only limited to verbal expression but also to non-verbal "extroversion" (Yashima, 1995; Yashima & Viswat, 1991, 1993). Such concerns with personal expression include the attitudes toward what people see as the appropriate thing to do in social situations. As noted in earlier research, Japanese are "widely seen as a polite, if not humble, culture that is reserved in its display of public affection and physical contact, [so] the Japanese may appear to be especially affected by culture shock" (Chapman & Davis, 2006, p. 87). Would Koreans, also from a highly homogenous culture with very well-defined social norms regarding interactions with "elders" (parents, relatives and/or teachers, among others) also show a fear of using dysfunctional communication or not acting "correctly" in a host culture? Will they know what is right or will they have an excessive concern with doing the "right thing" in social situation?

When studying Korean, Chinese and Caucasian students in the U.S., Chatterjee (1994) found significant differences in males on deference, autonomy and aggression variables, while among females, significant differences were found on deference, affiliation and endurance variables. With much research available for review on Asian vs. Western characteristics, making blanket assumptions that the "Asian" way of thinking applies to individual populations within Asia is unwise. The reader is advised against making stereotypical assumptions that all Asians abide by the same social norms, communicative and/or behavioral styles, and personalities. It is precisely in the interest of not making such assumptions that this author, after studies focusing on Japanese sojourners (see Chapman, 2007; Davis & Chapman, 2007; Chapman & Davis, 2006), moves on to a population of Korean sojourners. Prior to looking at the socio-cultural factors Koreans bring to a sojourn, research confirms the popularity of such sojourns, and, in turn, a need to research how to make Korean's adaption to the host culture as smooth as possible.

Korea: A Nation of Motivated Sojourners

An international student is defined as people who temporarily live in a country other than their country of citizenship for the purpose of participating in international exchange as students (Paige, 1990). International students from Asian countries to the U.S., Europe and Australia have been increasing substantially in the last few decades. With exceptions for economic downturns (such as the Asian economic crises in 1997-98, and the current global crisis of late 2008-2009), the number of Asian students who travel abroad is sure to increase, as it has been doing over the last few decades. As of the 2006/2007 academic year, there were an estimated 583,000 foreign students studying in the U.S. alone. Of these, approximately 62,400 of them were Korean, or 10.7% of the total, and a 5.7% increase from the previous year (Institute of International Education, 2008). The population of Korean students for

2006/2007 was third only after India and China. Of the top 15 origin countries of students studying in the U.S., nine were in Asia and all of the top five were from East Asia (Japan and Taiwan rounding out the top five, after Korea), adding yet more reason to increase research on specific Asian populations.

The notion of studying abroad is so common for Koreans, that it is a regular topic of discussion on TV and in newspapers. There has been no slow down in the number of Koreans traveling or studying abroad. In fact, recent news stories have highlighted the reasons student sojourners leave Korea to study (as well as for business and leisure). As a result, newspapers in Korea have run dozens of articles in recent years on the subject, including discussions on both the merits of the trip as well as on the negative aspects of going abroad, including the possibility of culture shock and the potentially strong effects of re-entry shock that sojourners may experience.

In the popular press, it was noted that of all the countries that receive Korean student sojourners, the U.S. and Canada are where 70% of the spending on overseas study goes, "reflecting the zeal to learn English" (Yoon, 2008). This has raised the interest of the European Union. It was noted that while the U.S. had approximately 63,000 student sojourners in 2006-07, the EU received only 14,000 (Kim, 2008). The same article noted that the EU recently began a new program to entice more Koreans to their countries. In order to keep up with this competition, and keep their position as the number one host country for Koreans, the U.S. recently signed a new memorandum of understanding with South Korea to boost the number of student sojourners (Jung, 2008). While these articles usually highlight the desire for Koreans to go abroad, and point out the many benefits of doing so, other news stories have stressed that doing so is not without its problems and challenges. Such research has noted the cost of separating families, differences in local customs and food, as well as the challenges of coming home and the experiences of re-entry shock (Mi-ja & In-kyung, 2008). Given the popularity of Koreans studying abroad, the questions of cultural preparation, cultural adjustment, and cultural re-adjustment are both significant and meaningful phenomena to research. To focus on such issues, it is important to learn what unique socio-cultural factors may affect the successful sojourn of a Korean student.

The Effects of Culture on Korean Sojourners' Education

There are significant social, cultural and linguistic differences between the U.S. and Korea (Jun, 2002). Several previous studies have shown that the different cultural, linguistic and learning characteristics of Korean students can have a big influence on their academic adjustment and ultimate success in U.S. schools (see Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006). Specifically, work has shown that the language and culture a Korean student brings with him/her to the U.S. plays a strong role in their ability to communicate and learn the English language (Oak, 2003; Regan, 1998; Robinson, 2003 and Suh, 1999), which is in line with culture shock research stating English is most often cited as the biggest difficulty for new Asian students when trying to acculturate to a new culture (cf. Chapman, 2007; Graham, 1983; Nicholson, 2001). Korean students display a number of behaviors and cultural preferences when it comes to their expectations in learning, both in and out of the classroom. This part of the research aims to clarify what specific social and cultural factors are unique to the Korean population. Let's begin with looking at the strong connection they have between education at home and school, and how this can affect a sojourn abroad. Reviewing the cultural background that so strongly affects education in Korea will lead to a better understanding of the needs of Korean student sojourners.

Korea, like Japan, is a very homogenous society, with only small pockets of ethnic minorities. Within this homogenous society, the role of the family and maintaining the status of one's family name is of utmost importance. Whereas in the past, class status was more often determined by family background, or the family name under which one was born, that is no longer the case since Korea has joined the ranks of developed countries with a strong middle-class. These days, however, one of the most significant factors affecting one's role in society is his/her education achievement. The connection between the level of education one achieves, then, is strongly related to how children can help keep up the status of the family name. Children in Korea are taught from an early age that their schooling is the biggest part of their life that will affect their future, which, in turn, means any and all choices affecting one's formal education could have great impact on his/her entire life (Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; Park, 1999).

When studying the influences that help determine a Korean person's educational choices, Lee and Carrasquillo (2006) note that Confucianism thrives in Korea more than in any other Asian nation, saying "the Korean way of life, teaching, and learning are all based mainly on Confucian principles, which form the cornerstone of Korean political, social and educational systems" (p. 2). If this strong influence is not evident in the current generation of students wishing to go abroad for study, most Koreans "grow up in a cultural repository which is largely influenced by the Confucian cultural tradition observed by their parents" (Park, 1999). Research comparing this elevated value of education in Korea to other Asian societies found that Koreans had the highest educational aspirations among a group of Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and Vietnamese students in American secondary schools (Park, 1997a). The same research showed that Koreans had the highest parental influence of the groups in that study. So what is it about the status and importance of education for Korean people that sets them aside from other Asian populations? Looking at the place of education in the Korean value system will help understand the answer to that question.

Education in the Korean Value System

The role of Confucianism has been said to be the source of much of the Korean value system, and within the traditional value system, four dominant themes emerge which help form the characteristics and behavioral patterns of Korean people. First is obedience to the head of the family, usually a dominant father (or other male), thereby making subordination to parents indispensable. Such a belief not only places the father at the head, but his eldest son(s) fall in line after him. Koreans, like many East Asian cultures, have a familial structure that is hierarchical, with superior-inferior relationships that are not only part of the immediate but the extended family as well. This is followed by the second strongest value, a strong familism. In this sense, the family line and the protection of the family name is of utmost importance to its members. The interest of the family almost always overpowers the needs of any of its individual members. The third aspect of Korean values relates to males, in that Korea is a patriarchal and male-dominated society. Not unlike Japanese society, Koreans believe a woman's status is subordinate to a man's in virtually every aspect of life. The fourth, and last, dominant value for Koreans is that of education. Education to them is one of the driving forces of their success (a much more thorough discussion and history of this value system can be found in Park, 1999).

This perspective on education may seem to contradict the second important aspect of the Korean

value system, which states that the family unit comes above the individual. Rather than contradicting it, however, it compliments it in the sense that parents will go to any length possible in order for their child to achieve the best educational experience available. Having a child achieve success through education and then through his/her career, will only enhance the family name and its status in society. Although written a few decades ago, the words Underwood (1977) used to describe education within the Korean value system could mirror the way of thinking of today's Korean students:

Education is one of the most important factors in the life of the Korean people, and is one of far greater concern to the average citizen than to his counterpart in Western countries. . . In the Korean social structure of personal connections and group consciousness, jobs, institutions, factions, every facet of life is influenced by how much schooling one has and where one got it, who one's classmates are and what alumni are in the same organizations (p. 52).

It is this zest and enthusiasm for higher education that helps drive the increasing numbers of Korean students to make educational sojourns abroad, whether it is in their high school or college years. It is not at all uncommon for Korean families to sacrifice large amounts of money either on special preparatory schools within their country, or prestigious colleges and universities abroad. For the Korean child, no education is good enough.

Korean Education: Continuity Between Home & School

Given the strong influence on the part of the family in a Korean student's education, it is important to see how their home life is connected to their expectations of formal education. Specifically, what, if any, behaviors students bring with them from their home (and parents) in to the classroom should be discussed. The parent-child relationship among Koreans is far more formal and hierarchical than in Western societies. Research by Kim (1995, cited in Park, 1999) showed that when evaluating their own parenting styles as being authoritarian, authoritative or permissive, the majority of Koreans used authoritarian styles, while the authoritative style was seen as best for their children's self-esteem and social competence. Because Koreans tend to see all human relationships as hierarchical (Ferguson, 2001; Martin, 2003; Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; Park, 1999), there is a much clearer continuity from home to school. That is, it is expected that *both* parents *and* teachers will enforce "proper" behaviors, social norms and values. This includes the notion of teachers carrying on the same guidance and teaching of social mores by "rewarding conformity and obedience" at school.

To the Western observer, this may seem contradictory to what parents teach their kids at home. For example, American children are taught to be independent, making their own decisions and solving their problems where possible through their own ability, and to question others, even elders (albeit through appropriate means), when needed. In short, assertiveness is not only taught, but expected of them! It is just the opposite in Korea. They are told to defer to elders at both home and school, and if they don't, the continuity between home and school will insure that they are admonished at *both* home and school! This can negatively affect recently arrived students to American (or most Western) classrooms who may be shocked to see students behaving "wrongly" by Korean standards, but without reprimand. But what constitutes such "wrong" behavior in the eyes of Koreans? To further understand that, this paper now reviews the strong role the teacher is given in Korean culture and the expectations Korean families and students have of him/her in the classroom, including the cultural factors that put the

status of the teacher so high up in Korean society (something that is not uncommon in other Asian societies).

Koreans in the Classroom: The Role of the Teacher

Korean students have a much different perspective than westerners of the role of the teacher in the classroom. As noted by Martin, “The Korean teacher-student relationship is one that is quite hierarchical, the teacher has unquestioned authority within a teacher-centered classroom. Korean students have not been trained to engage in reciprocal dialogue with teachers” (2003, p. 19). Koreans see teachers as the main source of information (Ferguson, 2001; Lee, 1987), give them absolute control of the classroom environment (Skow & Stephan, 2000), rarely question teachers (Chu, 1993) and make eye contact with their instructors equally rarely (Ferguson, 2001; Oak & Martin, 2000). Adds Lee and Carrasquillo (2006), “according to the Confucian philosophy, respect and absolute obedience to parents, elders, and teachers is the *cardinal rule* [emphasis added by the author] (p. 2).” Korean students have come to expect a very structural, idealized and hierarchical style of education, first and foremost, beginning with the teacher. Ferguson adds “the most salient of Korean social rules for education is respect for the teacher” (2001, p. 23). It can be said that the overall relationship with not only teachers but also with the school administrators is much more formal with Korean teachers than with Western teachers. Korean students have a strong tendency to “defer to the judgment of superiors and avoid open disagreements, because in Korean culture contentiousness is a sign of conceit” (Park, 1999, p. 57).

Behavioral styles (and changes in such styles due to trying to adapt to a new culture) can be seen in how Asian students interact with different types of people, including the teacher. Lee and Carrasquillo (2006) note that Korean students in the U.S. agree that the teacher has “absolute control” and that s/he should lecture rather than expect student’s vocal participation. In the same study, American teachers of Korean exchange students say they lack vocal participation, struggle with openly expressing themselves and expect “absolute authority” from them. In another study on acculturation of international students in the U.S, Doh (2001) notes that some Asian students do, over time, conform to some western ideas of the teachers role, and become more “casual” with them over time. The research by Doh said Asian students experienced moderate changes in their behaviors when they were with their American host even after only short-term exposure. Specifically, students from Korea (as well as China, Indonesia and Japan) showed that students change their behavior depending on who they are with: changes were greater when interacting with a stranger and a teacher than with a friend. That is, Asian student’s behavioral changes with their teacher confirmed previous research on the role of the teacher in America compared to their home (Asian) culture. Students said “American teachers are not very formal but maybe more casual . . . here I am close to the teacher,” “in my country we have to be very formal with a teacher. Here it seems like everybody is casual. So just casual [sic]” (Doh, 2001, p. 27). So while Koreans clearly carry certain expectations of the teacher with them, the good news is they do have the ability to adapt to Western norms of behavior when interacting with the teacher, even if it takes some time doing so.

Due to such differences in behavioral styles based on the teacher’s role, it is worth reviewing some behaviors western teachers may notice from the new Korean student sojourner in his/her class. Those

teachers in the west who are unfamiliar with some of the even simplest differences could, quite unwittingly, cause the Korean student in his/her class some discomfort at the least, and some horrifying public embarrassment and humiliation in worst case scenarios. The student who does not know how acceptable it is for teachers to casually chat with students may be surprised when seeing other students doing so. In other signs of respect for the teacher, Park (1999) explains that while Korean students may not bow at the beginning and end of class like they did back home in Korea, they are likely to hand in and receive papers with two hands (much like the Japanese), will look down rather than make direct eye contact with teachers, and will almost never cross their legs in class. Such personal communication when addressing teachers (and other “elders”), also requires that they avoid using first names, as it is deemed too informal (Oak & Martin, 2000). Similarly, calling the teacher by his/her name with *any* type of prefix (Mr., Mrs, or Ms.), will likely never occur since that type of language is used for superiors when addressing those ranked below them (Park, 1999). Instead, they are likely to simply say “teacher” or “professor” if studying at a higher level of education. Besides this understanding of how Korean sojourners may see the teacher’s role and responsibility in the classroom, educators would go far in reducing their culture shock in the classroom by also understanding the types of personal learning behaviors and classroom communication styles of their Korean students. That is the subject of the next discussion.

Korean Learning Techniques & Classroom Interactions

Once a Korean sojourner has joined the class, there are many aspects of their classroom behavior that educators would be wise to know. Koreans learning techniques are much more passive than active. For example, they prefer rote memorization of text and other information, with an emphasis on teachers addressing the class via lectures the entire time (Park, 1999). They feel far more comfortable in large groups (Ferguson, 2001), presumably where there is less chance for one-on-one discussion and debate. Overall, they place a much higher level of respect toward the teacher and his duty to control the classroom content and discussion than do western student populations (Chu, 1993; Ferguson, 2001; Skow & Stephan, 2000).

Lee and Carrasquillo (2006) confirmed many of these behaviors in their recent survey of professors who have experience teaching Korean students in the U.S. These professors note that “Korean students do not speak up in class, even if they do not understand,” “they avoid eye contact” (noted earlier, yet once again confirmed by 90% of the teachers surveyed in this study), and students “do not openly disagree with me in the classroom.” Such differences between Koreans and others in school has meant the structural and hierarchical style of education Koreans expect, but not being materialized in western countries, may lead to several problems on the part of the Korean sojourner.

American students have been characterized as open and expressive in communication, while also being critical and direct in their reasoning style. Teachers of such students expect them to use logic to work out problems (either on their own, or in discussion with others, including the teacher), be independent and personally responsible for their learning and comfortable asking questions in class and directly to the teacher (see Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; Skow & Stephan, 2000). Contrarily, Korean students take much the opposite approach, very non-individualized learning, with the teacher (as noted earlier) expected to control the classroom and learning environment at all times (also see

Ferguson, 2001). Open-ended discussion and questioning others, let alone the teacher, with direct questions is seen as behavior that leads to an uncomfortable and unproductive learning atmosphere.

An active classroom where students have a major say in what happens, and learning exercises that require leadership of students in small groups, is very likely to be surprising, let alone distressing for Korean sojourners unaccustomed to such classroom styles (Park, 1999). Korean students are also far less likely to speak up unless addressed directly. If they are asked something but can't answer correctly, or feel they can't answer correctly, they will keep quiet to avoid personal embarrassment, or if nothing else, may nod politely. When asked for a personal opinion, they may have difficulty giving it for fear of sounding presumptuous or opposing anyone else, especially the teacher. One way to sum up a general reason for Korean's lack of verbal participation is that they "may want to avoid appearing to insult the teacher who is working hard to teach them well. This behavior is rooted in the Korean culture and aptly expressed in the Korean saying, 'Silence is golden,'" (Park, 1999, p. 56).

In research focusing on Korean-American students and other Asian populations studying in the U.S., Park (1997b) found that the biggest difference in learning styles was between Korean and Anglo students, is that Koreans had a higher preference for visual learning techniques (the Anglo students had the lowest of all groups). Important to this study is the fact that, as Korean-Americans (whose parents immigrated to the U.S. with the children) their preference for visual learning was not at all related to their length of time in the U.S. (whether they immigrated as children, or as school-age children), nor to whether they were enrolled in ESL classes (as most sojourners are) or in regular English courses (with English-speaking students) (Park, 1997c). The author of that study notes that such information is important to teachers who, if they use more visual materials in classes, have an increased chance of enhancing the learning of Koreans in their class. The same research confirmed, however that Koreans have a negative preference for group learning activities, which came with a warning: teachers should minimize the use of such activities *especially during the initial adjustment period of Koreans to American classrooms* (emphasis added) (Park, 1997c).

Whereas Korean preferences for certain learning styles have been noted, a comment on the two genders in the same classroom should be given. In Korean classes, boys and girls never attend the same school at the junior and senior high school level. In the cases where western teachers engage in group activities or cooperative learning of any kind, they should remember that if the Korean sojourner is new to the country, such learning could be a source of discomfort or detrimental to the learning task. Having to work with (or compete, in some academic exercises) to achieve a task would be that much more traumatic for the Korean student who first, isn't used to group tasks, let alone having to do them with members of the opposite sex.

Other features of a classroom environment Korean students come to expect include few opportunities to develop analytical thinking skills, little positive reinforcement (which they see as unnecessary), few disciplinary actions taken (handled by the parents at home in order to save face in public) and above all, students obedience to the teacher never wavers (Park, 1999). Mentioned earlier, Koreans bring with them a high level of expectation for competition on all levels (educational, or otherwise), to achieve their goals (Ferguson, 2001). In education, they see academic knowledge as public domain (Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006), and use it as they see fit, leading to some being accused of plagiarism for not citing sources where necessary. Educators must keep in mind not only the previously noted personality, learning and communicative styles Koreans may have that differ from

western students, but also the overall cultural background and value system that drives them to higher education in the first place. The more aware schools are of these unique traits, the better they can train and equip themselves to usher in a smoother adjustment to the institution, improve the students ability to adapt to the new culture and, in turn, reducing as much culture shock as possible on campus or in the classroom.

Not only teachers but any administrators and staff who work with Korean student sojourners must refrain from assuming something is “amiss” or wrong if the Korean student does not engage in communication the teacher would assume from a Western (e.g. American) student. That is, the lack of eye contact is not a sign of disinterest, but just the opposite: a sign of respect for the “elder” status of the teacher. The lack of inquisitive questions in either the classroom or in a dyad is not poor communication or low enthusiasm for the topic at hand, it is out of respect and fear of “offending” the elder speaker. Teachers and educators must see Korean behavior as the product of Korean culture. Rushing to make Koreans “Americanized” (or “Westernized”) on campus or in class before they are comfortable with such behavioral or communicative styles is not only bad, it can be counterproductive. With this review of expectations, learning techniques and classroom interactions Koreans may carry to a Western sojourn given, this paper will now discuss what research has shown to be effective when adapting to a host culture, beginning with challenges faced by various Asian populations, before looking at Koreans specifically.

Asian Adjustment to the Host Culture

Given all the unique characteristics, classroom behaviors and learning expectations Asian students may bring with them, the question of how Koreans successfully adapt to overseas sojourns must be examined more. Besides the research done on multiple populations from Asian cultures, there has been some work focusing on Koreans, albeit not nearly as much as on Japanese populations. Previous studies have shown that English as a second language is most often the dominant challenge faced by international student sojourners. This includes the author’s previous work on Japanese populations living abroad (see Chapman, 2007; Chapman & Davis, 2006), but this was also confirmed in studies of other Asian populations. Nicholson (2001) says 60% of Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese and Thai students in his study cited English as the biggest hurdle. Chinese students in the U.S. cited the same problem at their American university (Henderson, Milhouse & Cao, 1993), as did Taiwanese students (also in the U.S., Ying & Liese, 1994). Other research adds populations from South East Asia citing English as their number one problem on a sojourn (Meloni, 1986). Similar problems were found in the U.K., where Chinese students cited social interactions with non-Chinese as problematic, thus resulting in psychological stress (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

Given that most sojourners seem to strive for integration into the host culture, using the target language to try and increase their contact with the host members is one way to help them adapt (and overcome symptoms of culture shock). Research suggests that increased contact with the host culture will help reduce culture shock (see Davis, et al, 2008, and Chapman, 2007 for a review of literature on Japanese populations), as well as help facilitate acculturation within the host culture (Amarasingham, 1980, Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama, Fujihara & Minami, 1997; Udoh, 2000). Wang, Sedlacek and Westbrook (1992) found that Asian student sojourners liked to mix socially with “their white counterparts” and

rarely felt ignored. Doh notes that “Interpersonal relationships are one of the most important factors in international students’ adjustment and especially interpersonal relationships in which Americans help international students learn culturally appropriate behaviors and attitudes in American society” (2001, p. 12-13). Overcoming culture shock and achieving successful adjustment to the host culture is clearly associated with close contact with members of the host culture (Tanaka, et al, 1997). When studying a population of Taiwanese students in the U.S., Ying and Leise (1994) confirm that the students achieved higher levels of adjustment to the U.S. and, in turn, lower culture shock, by getting an in depth understanding of America through direct contact with their hosts.

Yet a few studies on Asian populations in the U.S. have suggested that trying to make more contact with the host culture has led to increased stress from their efforts. Lam (1997) gives the example of Taiwanese students in America, who stated that the language and cultural differences led them to *try* more interaction with the host Americans, but that the effort led to more stressful interactions. To overcome the stress, they then resorted to more communication with fellow Asian sojourners, and tried to keep their interactions on an individual one-on-one basis, rather than with groups. Doh (2001) confirms this idea, saying “More acculturated [Asian] international students are likely feel [sic] more comfortable with the target population. However, more acculturated international students consistently experience *uncomfortable* feelings with the target population than less acculturated international students” (p. 29). In short, changes in student sojourners are not always the result of being more acculturated. Problems of adjustment and lingering culture shock can continue for many months into a sojourn. Another study notes that Asian student sojourners felt that interacting and communication with Americans was more stressful than doing the same with other international students. The reasons cited were similar to other research on acculturation: cultural differences and language barriers (Lam, 1997). The idea that “we international students are all strangers” brings sojourners closer together as equals who are having difficulty fitting in with “mainstream” Americans. Given the various tactics used by Asian populations to adapt to a host culture, and the benefits as well as challenges of immersing oneself via relationships with members of the host country, the question for this study is what specific socio-cultural traits and experience do Koreans have that can lead to overcoming culture shock and successful adaptation?

Korean Sojourner Adjustment

Whether or not such types of stress as discussed above can be attributed to Korean sojourners needs to be studied more, but if the acquisition of the English language is not problematic, then the style in which they communicate with English in the host country could lead to problems. Specifically, in Korean culture (and in some ways, Japan), asking personal and direct questions about age, financial earnings, whether one is married and religion are not unusual, yet in the U.S., such topics would be “off limits,” at least until a much closer relationship is formed. This is also true of Korean sojourners, who have a great fear of offending elders (whether it is a relative, a senior at their workplace, or a teacher) if they use the wrong “level of politeness” in their language. It is because of this fear that they need potentially personal information in order to address elders appropriately (see Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; Park, 1999).

Of course not all problems on adaptation come from struggles with the target language (usually

English) or appropriate communicative and behavioral styles. Finding equilibrium between one's own culture and that of the host culture can be equally challenging. It is not uncommon for Asian students to encounter difficulty when trying to balance their acculturation to a host country while also keeping a sufficient and active maintenance of their own culture (Lin & Yi, 1997). In doing so, sojourners must deal with multiple challenges and issues that force them to balance their own cultural norms with those learned while making contact with members of the host society. Meloni (1986) found that among different populations, Asians (as well as Africans and Latin Americans) perceive their host culture and community as unfriendly, thus integrating through making friends and increasing social contact difficult (also see Udoh, 2000 for work on comparing different populations of international sojourners). Previous research by Berry (1984) on one model of acculturation on the part of sojourners shows four strategies, or acculturation attitudes: integration, separation, assimilation and marginalization. Koreans were found to be one of the ethnic groups that *most* favored integration in multicultural societies (such as the U.S.). Lee and Davis (2000) confirm the high value of Asian-American college students in adjusting to college, citing as important one's "secure" cultural orientations (being in touch with one's own culture and that of the host country), including the perception of oneself as bicultural.

Research on social support networks help with sojourner/immigrant adjustment to the host culture shows such help can have a significant impact on adapting. In their work on Korean immigrants to Canada, Berry, Kim, Minde and Mok (1987) found that those who had close Korean friends had less acculturative stress to Canadian culture. In a landmark and longitudinal study on Korean immigrants to Canada, Noh and Avison (1996) studied factors that may affect immigrants coping with their new culture. Among other factors, they note that support from Korean sources (social support networks) within Canada had significant and direct effects on their depression. Other research on Asian populations found positive correlations between having home-culture friends and successful adaptation to the host culture. Ying and Liese (1991) show this is not unique to Koreans. In their work on Taiwanese students in the U.S., which confirmed the idea, they say post-arrival "mood improvement" in the sojourners was associated with having more Chinese friends. Chhuon and Hudley (2008) studied Cambodian-American students and note that successful adjustment to college life was aided by maintaining contact with their prior Cambodian community (social network).

Coping with and adjustment to a host culture, no matter how it is done, can have both positive as well as many averse effects. While the merits abound (learning a new language, a new culture and new friends, etc.), there are costs. That is to say culture shock can be hard. One negative effect of sojourning on the part of Koreans can be found in their fear of losing traditional values and norms. Moon and Pearl (1991, cited in Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001) found that elderly Koreans who followed their children abroad were worried about their offspring's attitude toward aged people, and the accompanying respect for them in Korean tradition. (Koreans are usually expected to take care of their parents when they reach old age, in return for raising their kids). In other words, the more time they spend with members of the host country, the less likely they may be to retain traditional norms.

Research on the adaptation of Koreans to the U.S. by Jun (2002), focusing on the wives of graduate students in the Georgian state of the U.S.A. gave a 3-step "process" of adaptation: first came culture shock through a type of "identity crisis" where finding one's place was most problematic. Characteristic of culture shock, this came from a "disorienting dilemma" which resulted from the massive socio-cultural gap between American and Korean culture they witnessed in their new

surroundings. This was overcome through time by forming friendships and immersing oneself in ESL classes. The third stage was achieving an equilibrium through “thinking positively.” The Korean subjects said this process changed their world view by pushing them to be more independent, which they expressed as “standing alone.” In line with other research (cf. Lee & Carrasquillo), achieving this type of independence was in conflict with how they were raised in their patriarchal Korean society back home, further supporting the challenges of finding a successful equilibrium between one’s home culture and the host culture.

Rationale for Further Study

When East meets West clashes are bound to occur. To expect otherwise would be naïve. There should be no debate on the notion that cultural differences can lead to vastly different learning styles on the part of Asian learners in foreign countries. Such differences may not only significantly affect the quality of academic work, but also the personal attitudes of student sojourners toward the host institution, the culture, and thus the entire sojourn itself. Another important step in the growing field of culture shock research is to focus on the specific needs of *particular* populations of Asians, in this case Korean students, as one group within a growing number of Asians studying abroad. Not only researchers, but Korean students *themselves* noted that such factors as learning, culture and use of language in the host country may influence their level of academic achievement while studying at an American university (Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006).

More focus must be done on their learning and cultural expectations, as well as the accompanying difficulties and fears they may expect when making a sojourn. It was demonstrated that there are specific cultural and learning expectations that Korean students bring with them to the classroom, and their interactions with teachers. If the teachers were aware of these, even something as simple as not expecting direct eye contact from their Korean students, it would go a long way toward not expecting them to do what their western students do, and in turn, not embarrassing them or scolding them when they fail to live up to such “normal” (i.e. “western”) classroom behaviors. Would any new Asian sojourner to a western classroom not feel shocked by a teacher who expected western behavior from someone whose culture trained him/her in just the opposite style of classroom communication? When issues such as these are understood better, educators as well as administrators of student exchange programs in Western institutions may have a better chance of preventing a difficult acclimation and, in turn, a detrimental and unnecessary amount of culture shock.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of acculturation, adjustment and experiencing culture shock when going abroad for a student sojourn, are the effects of coming home. The concept of re-entry shock (or reverse culture shock) has been well documented (see Martin, 1986; Sussman, 2002), including within some Asian populations of students (cf. Chapman, 2007; Davis & Chapman, 2006). This paper described the significant role education plays in a Korean student’s life, not only in its aiding his/her personal growth, but also in maintaining if not enhancing the family name within Korean society. As Park explains “Korean parents continually exhort their children as to the virtues and values of education. . .” (1999, p. 53).

If, then, the Korean sojourner is successful in his/her educational endeavors while studying in a Western culture, and if, as a result, s/he adapts the learning and classroom styles of that foreign

culture, what does s/he bring back home to Korea? That is, when a Korean student successfully adapts to Western education, including the communicative and behavioral styles of expressing his/her opinions, raising issues for discussion with others, including the teacher or other elders, how will s/he be received back home? By adopting the creativity and individuality so prized by and taught to Western students, does the successful Korean sojourner risk something taking such behavioral traits home? The answer is yes, and it could be in the form of reverse culture shock. A very recent story in the press highlighted the pitfalls of coming home after a sojourn. Mi-ja and In-kyung (2008) summed up some popular fears of Korean returnees: the different and more difficult school curriculum back home, inability to get along with classmates, decreased level and reduced ability to study the Korean language, and general loss of interest on the part of friends and classmates in one's overseas experience. In short, the excitement can wear off quickly once back home. On the family level, there may be disappointment that all the financial investment did not yield a sufficient reward.

These types of assumptions in the popular press, and previous scholarly research shows that Asian populations from different countries can suffer from various symptoms of culture shock and re-entry shock as a result of their sojourn overseas. They can be seen as "outsiders" or in some way as "different" than they were before, and not always in a good way! We know that Japanese can experience trauma upon returning home due to feeling "un-Japanese" or an "outsider" within his/her own country (cf. Davis & Chapman, 2007) in the highly homogenous society that is Japan. With Korea being highly homogenous as well, would a Korean student sojourner experience that same feeling of "shock" upon return? Do they experience both culture shock and re-entry shock equally? Work focusing specifically on Korean student populations in this area is lacking. Much work has been done on culture shock, but not enough focusing on specific Asian populations (with the possible exception of Japanese sojourners), and even less on reverse culture shock. The next step in this research project will be to undertake a study of the experiences of Korean students who take a student sojourn abroad in Western countries, focusing specifically on the impacts and experiences of culture shock and re-entry shock in their adaptation to the host culture. With the U.S., as one of the most popular destinations, getting an increase in the number of Korean student sojourners recently (see Institute of International Education., 2008), there is much work to be done in this area.

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