

Impact of *Chemyeon* on Koreans' Verbal Aggressiveness and Argumentativeness

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Abstract

This study examines how the level of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness of Korean people is affected by chemyeon (roughly translated as “face”), a deeply pervasive Korean concept that pertains to one’s consciousness of how others perceive one’s performance, personality, and status. In particular, the relationship between chemyeon and Korean verbal aggressiveness was examined with regards to the type of argument taking place and the social status of one’s counterpart in the argument. All of these factors (i.e. chemyeon, type of argument, counterpart’s status) were found to have a decisive impact on the level of one’s verbal aggressiveness. Next, chemyeon was divided into social and personal chemyeon, and the interaction was again analyzed with regards to the aforementioned contextual variables. It was found that the effect of social chemyeon depended on the type of argument and the counterpart’s social status. Specifically, social chemyeon had a stronger effect on Koreans’ approach argumentativeness when the arguments concerned personal matters, as opposed to public. Also, it was observed that social chemyeon tended to increase the level of approach argumentativeness when the counterpart was of a lower social status. These results can be attributed to the characteristics of social chemyeon, which involves the need to meet social expectations and perform appropriately in public.

Keywords: *chemyeon*, face, argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, intercultural communication

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Introduction

In the 1990s, many studies were conducted on different aspects of verbal communication in Korea, particularly to compare Koreans' communication styles with those of their Western counterparts. Various studies compared Koreans and Westerners in terms of communication comprehension, argumentativeness, aggressiveness and assertiveness; in most cases, the differences in communication styles were attributed to cultural variables (see Merkin 2009a).

Korea has been defined as a collectivist, high-context culture, and such cultures are generally thought to employ more indirect communication strategies to avoid conflicts (Gudykunst, Yoon, and Nishida 1987). In addition, Korean culture is based on Confucianism (Hofstede and Bond 1987), and members of Confucian cultures also tend to be reluctant to engage in direct or explicit communication (Kim 2002; Klopff 1984; Becker 1986).

Most studies on the communication traits of Koreans seem to support these general assumptions. Previous studies have reported that, in terms of communication, Koreans tend to be more indirect (Kim 2002; Merkin 2009a, 2009b); less argumentative (Jekins, Klopff, and Park 1991); and more apprehensive than Americans (Kim et al. 2001; Yook and Ahn 1999). Related studies have shown that Koreans value silence as a communication competency (Shim, Kim, and Martin 2008; Yum 2012). But some conflicting results have also appeared. For example, Park, Klopff, and Cambra (1978) reported that Koreans were less apprehensive than Japanese, Americans, and Australians in terms of communication, and some other studies even showed that Koreans were more verbally aggressive than Americans (Song 2004; Klopff and Park 1992).

The contradicting reports on Koreans' communicative behaviors can be especially evident in conflict situations. Various studies have demonstrated that Koreans manage conflict differently than people in Japan or China. For example, one study found that Koreans are more likely to directly say "no" to others (Graham et al. 1988). Other research has indicated that Koreans can be very stubborn and aggressive when they believe

the other party does not appreciate their position, but become more flexible once sympathy is displayed (Yum 2012; Kim and Yang 2009; Paik and Tung 1999).

Based on these results, it is understandable that some Westerners consider Koreans to be somewhat illogical and unpredictable in their communication style (Tung 1991), but the myriad factors influencing Koreans' aggressive communication in conflict situations have rarely been explored. The contradicting results of previous studies suggest that Koreans' verbal aggressiveness likely stems from a mix of important cultural factors. One of the most integral cultural variables of Korea is *chemyeon* (Choi 2000; Lim and Choi 1996), which is usually translated as "social face" or "reputation," but is much more complex and pervasive, influencing every aspect of Korean life (Lim and Choi 1996). Previous studies have evinced the significant relationship between *chemyeon* and Koreans' communicative behavior in conflict situations (Kim and Yang 2011). Based on this previous research, this study examined the influence of *chemyeon* on Koreans' verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness.

Previous studies on Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness have focused on providing a comparative analysis with other countries (Klopf and Park 1992; Jenkins, Klopf, and Park 1991; Park et al. 1978). Therefore, the cultural factors behind Koreans' aggressive communicative behavior have rarely been addressed. However, those factors must be considered if such behavior is to be understood.

Therefore, this study examines the relationship between one of the most essential aspects of Korean culture—*chemyeon*—and Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Also, in accordance with the report by Song (1996) that Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness are influenced by contextual variables, the type of argument and the status of the counterpart were considered as contextual variables that interact with *chemyeon*.

Literature Review

Aggressive Communication

Communication traits can be classified into constructive and destructive traits (Infante and Rancer 1996). Constructive traits of aggressive communication include argumentativeness and assertiveness, while destructive traits of aggressive communication include verbal aggressiveness and hostility (Rancer and Avtgis 2006; Infante, Rancer, and Wigley 2011). Argumentativeness is defined as a predisposition to advocate one's position while simultaneously refuting the positions others take on controversial issues (Infante and Rancer 1982). A highly argumentative person has a strong tendency to approach arguments and experiences favorable excitement, while a non-argumentative person feels no such excitement and tends to avoid arguments (Infante and Rancer 1982; Infante, Rancer, and Wigley 2011). An individual's trait argumentativeness (ARGgt) is defined as the difference between the individual's tendency to approach arguments (ARGap) and tendency to avoid arguments (ARGav), which can be summed up in an equation: $ARGgt = ARGap - ARGav$ (Infante and Rancer 1982).

Verbal aggressiveness is defined as a "personality trait that predisposes persons to attack the self-concepts of other people instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication" (Infante and Wigley 1986, 61). Both verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness are aggressive forms of communication, but the two concepts are differentiated by the locus of attack. Argumentativeness involves attacking the positions that others take in regards to certain issues, whereas verbal aggressiveness entails attacking a person's self-concept (Infante and Rancer 1996). In other words, an argumentative person may attack the counterpart's position without resorting to personal attacks, while a verbally aggressive person is more prone to attack their counterpart's character and personality via profanity, teasing, ridicule, etc. (Rancer and Avtgis 2006).

Within the United States, argumentativeness was generally found to produce positive and constructive outcomes, such as intellectual develop-

ment, problem-solving, and enhancing the image of the communicator (Rancer and Avtgis 2006), while verbal aggressiveness had more negative and destructive results (Infante and Rancer 1996). Eastern cultures tend to be less argumentative, but this can be viewed positively. In Eastern cultures, people try to maintain social harmony by being less verbal (Kim et al. 2001), however a lack of verbal communication or argumentativeness does not necessarily mean failing to meet social norms or personal expectations, but rather, can be interpreted as sensitivity to social contexts (Kim 2002). In general, because collectivist cultures tend to regard aggressive communication as negative and disruptive, it is actively discouraged in such cultures (Suzuki and Rancer 1994).

If aggressive communication behavior is indeed affected by culture, then it is important to identify which cultural factors may be the most influential (Kim et al. 2007). This study considers *chemyeon*, or the Korean concept of “face,” as one of the most important variables defining Korean culture (Choi 2000; Lim and Choi 1996). *Chemyeon* has been shown to pervade every aspect of Koreans’ daily social interactions (Lim and Choi 1996), so it clearly influences Koreans’ communicative behavior (Lim 1994; Kim and Yang 2011). The importance of *chemyeon* and its relationship with communication behaviors will be discussed.

Conceptualization of Chemyeon

The concept of *chemyeon* is highly complex and thus transcends simple translation. Choi (2000) proposed two foundational elements of *chemyeon*: the need for self-fulfillment and the need for social achievement. The former is related to personalized aspect of *chemyeon* that is concerned with one’s desire to achieve moral or behavioral maturity and autonomy (Choi and Kim 2000). This is similar to Western concept of “face” (Lim and Choi 1996). The latter is concerned with social aspect of *chemyeon* that is related to one’s desire to gain others’ approval as an occupant of a social position or status but not as an individual (Lim and Choi 1996). In other words, social *chemyeon* is the aspect of *chemyeon* that differentiates *chemyeon* from Western “face” (Lim and Choi 1996).

Chemyeon is also different from Japanese or Chinese concepts of “social face.” In China, this concept is covered by two terms: *mianzi* 面子, referring to one’s social reputation, and *lian* 脸, referring to one’s self-evaluation of morality (Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998). Korean *chemyeon* incorporates aspects of both *mianzi* and *lian* (Choi and Kim 2000). The relevant Japanese concept is called *mentzu* 面子 and is considered to be more collectivist than the Chinese or Korean counterparts. *Mentzu* is externalized with regards to one’s success in fulfilling the “great cause” of whatever group one belongs to (Sueda 1995). Often for Japanese, the *mentzu* of one’s group (e.g., family or country) is more important than one’s individual *mentzu* (Choi and Kim 2000). Hence, while Koreans tend to be more concerned about social recognition and how they are evaluated by others, Japanese typically focus on engaging in socially appropriate behavior and modifying their behavior to fit into the group they belong to (Shim, Kim, and Martin 2008).

Chemyeon encompasses both personal and social aspects, but the social side is typically considered to be most dominant (Lim and Choi 1996). In this regard, *chemyeon* dictates the type of social image people believe they should convey, based on their supposed social position or status (Choi and Yu 1992). *Chemyeon* is an “inscriptive” image of the self as defined within social and cultural contexts, which means that Koreans are more strongly influenced by *chemyeon* in situations when they are seeking social acceptance, acknowledgement, recognition, and approval (Choi 2000). For Koreans, losing *chemyeon* means failing to meet social expectations, and therefore becoming “less socially desirable” (Lim and Choi 1996, 128). In short, the characteristics of *chemyeon* have been described as normative, competitive, authoritative, self-conscious, external, formal, and made-up (Choi 2000).

The contents of *chemyeon* have been most thoroughly described by Choi Sang-Chin and various colleagues (Choi and Yu 1992; Choi 2000; Choi and Kim 2000), as well as by Lim (1994), who proposed five dimensions of *chemyeon*: demeanor, personality, dignity, performance, and maturity. Choi and his colleagues have attempted to define social *chemyeon* by proposing “*chemyeon* sensitivity” (Choi and Yu 1992; Choi 2000;

Choi and Kim 2000). *Chemyeon* sensitivity is associated with one's fear of losing face, and can be divided into three subgroups: embarrassment, shame, and social formality (Choi and Kim 2000).

In order to develop a more robust and updated *chemyeon* scale, Kim and Yang (2011) analyzed 133 *chemyeon* items from previous literatures and condensed them into seven elements: ethics, social performance, social personality, social pride, competence, demeanor, and shame. These elements were then categorized into social *chemyeon* (social performance, social personality, and social pride) and personal *chemyeon* (ethics, competence, and demeanor). Social *chemyeon* is concerned with the evaluation of real and imagined others, while personal *chemyeon* shares the similar characteristics as the Western concept of "face" (Kim and Yang 2011).

Chemyeon and Aggressive Communication

There have been few attempts to empirically examine how *chemyeon* affects communication behavior, and no known study has yet investigated the direct relationship between *chemyeon* and aggressive communication. However, several studies have compared the argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness of Western and Asian cultures (Rancer and Avtgis 2006), including Korean culture (e.g., Klopff and Park 1992; Merkin 2009a, 2009b).

Prunty, Klopff, and Ishii (1990) found that Japanese college students had a significantly lower argumentativeness trait than Americans, while the two groups were about the same in terms of avoiding arguments (Harman, Klopff, and Ishii 1990). Other studies showed that the Chinese and Japanese share similar attitudes toward argumentation (Becker 1986), and that the Taiwanese tend to be less argumentative than Americans (Hsu 2007). Mainland Chinese were found to be more argumentative than their counterparts in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Chen and Yeh 2004). Sanders et al. (1992) compared the verbal aggressiveness of three ethnic groups in the United States (Asian, Hispanic, and European) and found that Asian Americans showed a higher level of verbal aggressiveness than the other two groups.

Studies of Koreans have shown that they are similar to Americans in

terms of avoiding arguments, but are less likely to approach arguments (Jekins, Klopff, and Park 1991). They show an overall lower level of argumentativeness (Jekins, Klopff, and Park 1991), but a higher level of verbal aggressiveness (Klopff and Park 1992). A more recent study of communication patterns concluded that Koreans tend to be more apprehensive and indirect than Americans, while the two groups were not significantly different in terms of verbal aggressiveness (Merkin 2009a, 2009b).

Various theories have been presented to explain these results, including cultural variables such as Confucian tradition (Merkin 2009b; Park and Kim 1992; Becker 1986), high-context culture (Merkin 2009a; Song 1996), and social face (Merkin 2009a). Confucianism, the foundation of Korean collectivism, seeks to bring harmony to the lives of people in communities (Shim, Kim, and Martin 2008) by emphasizing the importance of human relationships, and thus has a major impact on specific communication practices (Sue, Ino, and Sue 1983). The emphasis on preserving harmony and trust in relationships leads to a tendency to use more indirect communication in order to save face (Cheong 2007). For the same reason, direct argumentative communication is typically avoided (Merkin 2009a; Park and Kim 1992). Meanwhile, silence in conversation is valued as a sign of humility and modesty (Kim 2002). Moreover, the overall communicative apprehension of Koreans may be attributed to the abhorrence of embarrassment and shame that are associated with the loss of social face (Merkin 2009b).

While previous studies have empirically examined the relationship between *chemyeon* and the communication behavior of Koreans, no study has yet directly addressed Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. For example, it was found that *chemyeon* impeded the use of unethical bargaining strategies by increasing Koreans' awareness of a counterpart's potential loss of social face (Kim and Yang 2009). The sense of *chemyeon* also influenced people's conflict strategy and facework (strategies for saving their own social face) (Kim and Yang 2011). While the social aspect of *chemyeon* was found to hinder constructive methods of conflict resolution, the personal aspect of *chemyeon* was found to promote such methods (Kim and Yang 2011). Also, the sense of social *chemy-*

cheon was shown to influence people's willingness to engage in indirect communication, such as third-party mediation (Kim and Yang 2011).

Based on the previous studies, it can be assumed that the influence of *chemyeon* on Koreans' tendency to either approach or avoid arguments is related to conflict style, which has been shown to be closely related to verbal aggressiveness (Rogan and La France 2003). Rogan and La France (2003) found that high levels of verbal aggressiveness were associated with domineering styles of conflict, while low levels of verbal aggression were associated with non-confrontational, solution-oriented styles of conflict. As mentioned, social *chemyeon* has been associated with more confrontational styles of conflict, whereas personal *chemyeon* has been associated with more cooperative styles of conflict. Thus, the relationship between *chemyeon* and aggressive forms of communication can be construed, leading to the following hypotheses:

- H1. People who are more sensitive to *chemyeon* tend to be less argumentative.
- H2. Social *chemyeon* has a greater influence on verbal aggressiveness than personal *chemyeon*.

Contextual Factors: Type of Argument and Status of Counterpart

Studies have shown that argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness are influenced by contextual variables (Infante and Rancer 1996; Rancer and Avtgis 2006). In relation to *chemyeon*, research indicates that the most influential contextual variables are the type of argument and the status of the counterpart (e.g., Lim 1994; Choi and Kim 2000; Choi 2000; Park and Kim 1992; Song 1996).

The type of argument has been proposed as one of the most significant situational constraints influencing argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness (Infante and Rancer 1993). Johnson (2002) distinguished two main types of argument: public issue arguments and personal issue arguments. Public issue arguments focus primarily on social issues, such as politics, abortion, environmental conservation, the death penalty, legalization of drugs, etc. (Johnson 2003). Because they do not allude to the

interpersonal relationship of the parties, public issue arguments do not generally have any direct behavioral implications. Such arguments do not necessarily have a negative impact on the relationship, even though they often do not achieve any resolution (Johnson et al. 2007). On the other hand, personal issue arguments are directly related to the interpersonal relationship of the arguing parties (Johnson 2003). Some of the more common personal issue arguments include conflicts related to romantic partners, leisure time, problems with friends or roommates, housework, possessions, and hurt feelings (Johnson et al. 2007).

Empirical studies have found that individuals report less argumentative behavior with personal issue arguments than with public issue arguments (Johnson 2003). Later, Johnson et al. (2007) confirmed a strong correlation between the public argument condition and an individual's motivation to approach, rather than avoid, communication. Verbal aggressiveness was not found to be influenced by the type of argument (Johnson et al. 2007).

Another contextual variable that has been shown to influence an individual's argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness is the social status of the counterpart (Kim et al. 2007; Song 1996). A person's perceived social status is exceptionally important in all forms of social relations and human interactions, particularly in Confucian societies (Shim, Kim, and Martin 2008). East Asian cultures with a strong basis in Confucianism emphasize a social hierarchy wherein people must respect and obey anyone with more authority (Yum 1988). Hence, previous studies have found that the status of a counterpart is one of the most influential variables on communication behaviors in East Asian cultures (Merkin 2009a; Kim et al. 2007; Tasaki, Kim, and Miller 1999). It has also been argued that the important role of social status in interpersonal communication in Korea was rooted in Confucianism (Merkin 2009b).

People of East Asian cultures typically have a more interdependent self-construal, which means that they tend to define themselves according to their relationships with others. Empirical findings have supported the claim that such people display a higher level of communication apprehension when the counterpart's status was higher (Kim et al. 2001; Merz 2009; Tasaki, Kim, and Miller 1999). Similar findings have been reported

for Koreans, as Song (1996) found that Koreans were less argumentative when the counterpart was older (higher status) and more argumentative when the counterpart was younger (lower status).

Based on previous studies, it can be assumed that the aggressiveness of Koreans' communication behaviors is influenced by the type of argument and the status of the counterpart. Moreover, some studies have suggested that these two contextual variables could interact with *chemyeon* to affect Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Lim (1994) explained that individuals tend to be more concerned with *chemyeon* in the public context than in the personal context. Also, *chemyeon* was shown to be more problematic between acquaintances, as opposed to people with a close relationship (Choi and Kim 2001). Based on these tendencies, social *chemyeon* is emphasized more than personal *chemyeon* in the context of Koreans' aggressive communication behaviors (Lim 1994).

Choi (2000) found that *chemyeon* is directly and strongly related to age and status. In Korea, a person's age and social status increase synchronously, and the two are often inseparable (Park and Kim 1992). Therefore, any two Koreans who begin to argue will automatically place themselves in a hierarchy with their counterpart, based on age and social status (Song 1996). *Chemyeon* typically becomes more important to people who are older or who have an elevated social status (Lim and Choi 1996). Thus, the perceived status of the counterpart would seem likely to influence Koreans' level of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in relation to *chemyeon*. This discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

- H3. *Chemyeon* will have a greater influence on Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in public issue arguments than in private issue arguments.
- H4. *Chemyeon* will have less influence on Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness when the counterpart's status is higher than when the counterpart's status is lower.
- H5. In relation to the type of argument and the status of the counterpart, social *chemyeon* will have a greater influence than personal *chemyeon* on Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness.

Methodology for Testing Hypotheses

Participants and Process

Four weeks of purposive sampling were used to recruit 431 people according to age and sex. Since this study aims to evaluate people's communication traits in various situations, it was very important that the experiment groups be similar in terms of age and sex. The participants were divided into six groups to be tested on six different communication situations based on scenarios. The six groups featured a similar sampling profile in terms of the number of participants, the male/female ratio and the average age. Within the six groups, the mean age of participants ranged from 30.3 to 32.9, and the overall mean age was 31.29 (SD=8.01). By proportion, 226 (52.4%) participants were in their twenties, 151 (35%) participants were in their thirties, and 54 (12.5%) participants were in their forties or older. The proportion of women in the six groups ranged from 39.7% to 56.5%, and the proportion of men in the six groups ranged from 43.5% to 60.3%. Overall, 47.3% of the participants were women, and 52.7% were men.

Participants were randomly assigned and asked to read a scenario describing one of six communication situations (public issue argument with someone of higher status, same status, and lower status, and personal issue argument with someone of higher status, same status, and lower status). The participants were then asked to report their level of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in each situation. Lastly, the participants were asked to answer regarding the perception of *chemyeon* on a scale.

Manipulation

The specific topics of both the public issue and personal issue arguments were taken from previous research (Johnson et al. 2007). The public issue argument involved the death penalty, while the personal issue argument referred to a conflict over the use of common possessions in an office.

The topics that the participants received were subjected to a manipulation check. Specifically, for both public and personal argument types, the social status of the counterpart was manipulated between three possibilities: a person with higher status (e.g., professor or elder), with the same status (e.g., friends or co-workers), and with lower status (e.g., subordinate or junior). Thus, the following six scenarios were developed: an argument over the death penalty with a professor, a friend (or co-worker), and a subordinate, and an argument over the use of common office equipment (e.g., voice recorder or laptop computer) with the same three status types.

Measurement

A *chemyeon* scale was developed to measure seven *chemyeon* elements, based on 29 items taken from the study of Kim and Yang (2011). To measure the perception of *chemyeon*, respondents were asked "To what degree would you feel you have lost *chemyeon* in the following situation?" and asked to respond based on a scale of 1 (= no loss of *chemyeon* at all) to 5 (= very large loss of *chemyeon*).

The Cronbach's alphas for the *chemyeon* scale ranged from .75 to .88. Argumentativeness was measured by Infante and Rancer's (1982) argumentativeness scale, with 20 items measuring an individual's tendency to approach (ARGap) and avoid arguments (ARGav). The difference between the two components equals the individual's overall argumentativeness (ARG). Examples of items that measure ARGap include statements such as "I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue" and "I am energetic and enthusiastic when I argue." Examples of items that measure ARGav include statements such as "arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves" and "I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I am about to get into an argument." The Cronbach's alpha of ARGap was .86 and the Cronbach's alpha of ARGav was .84. Verbal aggressiveness was measured by Infante and Wigley's (1986) verbal aggressiveness scale, consisting of 10 positively worded items (such as "I refuse to participate in arguments when they involve personal attack" and "When I try to influence people, I make a great effort not to offend them") and 10 negatively

worded items (such as “If individuals I’m trying to influence really deserve it, I attack their character” and “When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of really telling them off”). The verbal aggressiveness scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .90. All of the items were measured in 5-Likert type scales.

Statistical Analysis

Based on a previous study (Kim and Yang 2011), the *chemyeon* elements were computed into social *chemyeon* (mean score of social performance *chemyeon*, social personality *chemyeon*, and social pride *chemyeon*) and personal *chemyeon* (mean score of ethics *chemyeon*, competence *chemyeon*, and demeanor *chemyeon*). Argumentativeness was computed into overall argumentativeness (ARG), “approach argumentativeness,” i.e. the tendency to engage in arguments (ARGap), and “avoid argumentativeness,” i.e. the tendency to avoid arguments (ARGav).

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to identify the main and interaction effects of independent variables. Sex and age were entered as control variables. The independent variables were the type of argument, counterpart’s social status and *chemyeon* (social *chemyeon* and personal *chemyeon*), and the interaction terms between these variables. In order to determine the moderating effect of *chemyeon*, social *chemyeon*, and personal *chemyeon*, interaction terms were created between the type of argument and *chemyeon*, social *chemyeon*, and personal *chemyeon*, and between the counterpart’s status and *chemyeon*, social *chemyeon*, and personal *chemyeon*. The variables were argumentativeness (ARG), “approach argumentativeness” (ARGap), “avoid argumentativeness” (ARGav), and verbal aggressiveness. For the analyses, dummy variables were created for sex, type of argument, and counterpart’s social status. Since these variables were categorical variables, they had to be converted into continuous variables for the regression analyses. Female, personal issue argument topic and lower status were dummy-coded as the reference group. The same-status group was excluded from the analysis for a more distinct comparison.

Interaction terms were produced between *chemyeon* and the type of topic, and between *chemyeon* and the status of the counterpart. To adjust the level of measurement with *chemyeon* variables, the type of topic and status of the counterpart were dummy-coded as personal issue topic and lower status counterpart as the reference group. To eliminate the problem of multicollinearity between independent variables, independent variables were mean-centered (Cohen and Cohen 2003). To test the moderating effects, the control variables including sex and age were entered in the first block; *chemyeon*, type of argument, and the counterpart's status were entered in the second block; and the interaction terms were entered in the third block. Model 1, model 2, and model 3 were compared for each of the dependent variables.

Results

The results of the first hierarchical regression model appear in Table 1. Sex was positively significant on argumentativeness (ARG), "approach argumentativeness" (ARGap), and verbal aggressiveness, but negatively significant for "avoid argumentativeness" (ARGav). Age was negatively significant for ARG and ARGap.

Chemyeon had a significant effect on ARGav (std. $\beta = .153$, sig. ≤ 0.01) and verbal aggressiveness (std. $\beta = -.122$, sig. ≤ 0.05), as did the type of argument and the counterpart's status. But *chemyeon* was not significant for ARG and ARGap. Therefore, H1 was partially supported. The direction of the beta coefficient showed that *chemyeon* was positively related to "avoid argumentativeness," but negatively related to verbal aggressiveness.

Among the three predictors, the type of argument was the strongest predictor (std. $\beta = -.389$, sig. ≤ 0.05) influencing "avoid argumentativeness." The directions of the coefficients show that the type of argument is negatively related to ARGav, while the counterpart's status is positively related to ARGav. The three variables were all negatively related to verbal aggressiveness, where once again the type of argument showed the strongest predictive power (std. $\beta = -.145$, sig. ≤ 0.05). Type of argument and

Table 1. Results of Multiple Hierarchical Regression

	ARG			ARGap			ARGav			Verbal Aggressiveness		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Demographics												
Sex	.218***	.169**	.161**	.188**	.171**	.160**	-.198**	-.127*	-.125*	.180**	.160**	.152*
Age	-.120*	-.110*	-.112*	-.158**	-.166**	-.166**	.054	.028	.032	-.021	.016	.017
Main Effects												
Chemyeon	-.061	-.061	-.057	.047	.047	.050		.156**	.153**		-.123*	-.122*
Type of argument	.374***	.374***	.386***	.282***	.282***	.294***		-.380***	-.389**		-.150*	-.145*
Counterpart status	-.130*	-.130*	-.130*	-.062	-.062	-.054		.169**	.177**		-.129*	-.117*
Interactions												
Chemyeon × type of argument			.000			-.053			-.054			-.077
Chemyeon × counterpart status			-.077			-.078			.058			-.037
F	8.286***	14.544***	10.668	7.916***	9.039***	6.846	5.736**	15.634***	11.488	4.550*	5.547**	4.257
ΔF		17.706***	.982		9.307***	1.312		21.379***	1.096		6.043**	1.030
R ²	.057	.212	.217	.055	.143	.151	.040	.224	.230	.032	.093	.100
R ² _{adj}	.050	.197	.197	.048	.127	.129	.033	.210	.210	.025	.076	.076

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

counterpart's status were also significant for ARG, with type of argument showing stronger predictive power (std. $\beta = .386$, sig. ≤ 0.001). Type of argument was positively related to ARG, while counterpart's status was negatively related to ARG. Type of argument was the only significant predictor for ARGap, and was positively related (std. $\beta = .294$, sig. ≤ 0.001). In the first set of hierarchical regression analyses, no interaction effect was found between *chemyeon* and the contextual variables.

Chemyeon was divided into social *chemyeon* and personal *chemyeon* in order to assess the predictive power of each type. Thus, another set of hierarchical regression analysis was conducted, with sex, age, type of argument, counterpart's status, social *chemyeon*, and personal *chemyeon* entered. In the second analysis, the effects of sex, age, type of argument, and counterpart's status were similar to the first regression analysis. However, differentiating between social *chemyeon* and personal *chemyeon* had a significant effect on the results, which are presented in Table 2.

In the first regression analysis, *chemyeon* was only significant for ARGav and verbal aggressiveness among the four dependent variables. However, when *chemyeon* was divided into social *chemyeon* and personal *chemyeon*, each *chemyeon* variable influenced different dependent variables. Social *chemyeon* was negatively significant for ARG (std. $\beta = -.123$, sig. ≤ 0.05) and positively significant for ARGav (std. $\beta = .285$, sig. ≤ 0.001). Meanwhile, personal *chemyeon* was negatively significant for ARGav (std. $\beta = -.133$, sig. ≤ 0.05) and verbal aggressiveness (std. $\beta = -.263$, sig. ≤ 0.001). Neither of the predictors was significant for approach argumentativeness.

Hypothesis 2 referred to the predictive power of social *chemyeon* and personal *chemyeon* on verbal aggressiveness. While personal *chemyeon* was significant for verbal aggressiveness (std. $\beta = -.263$, sig. ≤ 0.001), social *chemyeon* was not significant for verbal aggressiveness. Therefore, H2 was rejected. Although social *chemyeon* was not significant for verbal aggressiveness, it was significant for both ARG (std. $\beta = -.123$, sig. ≤ 0.05) and ARGav (std. $\beta = .285$, sig. ≤ 0.001). Personal *chemyeon* was also significant for ARGav (std. $\beta = -.133$, sig. ≤ 0.05).

Interaction effects were found between social *chemyeon* and the contextual variables. In model 3 for ARGap, the interaction term of social *chemyeon*-

Table 2. Results of Multiple Hierarchical Regression

	ARG			ARGap			ARGav			Verbal Aggressiveness		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Demographics												
Sex	.218***	.183**	.173**	.188**	.173**	.158**	-.198**	-.152**	-.149**	.180**	.141*	.130*
Age	-.120*	-.126*	-.135*	-.158**	-.165**	-.175**	.054	.056	.063	-.021	.035	.026
Main Effects												
Social chemyeon	-.139*	-.139*	-.123*	.045	.045	.064	.293***	.285***	.285***	.097	.097	.092
Personal chemyeon	.093	.093	.080	.029	.029	.010	-.136*	-.133*	-.133*	-.268***	-.263***	-.263***
Type of argument	.374***	.374***	.406***	.278***	.278***	.317***	-.384***	-.403***	-.403***	-.149*	-.149*	-.121*
Counterpart status	-.122*	-.122*	-.104	-.063	-.063	-.033	.153**	.153**	.153**	-.148*	-.148*	-.136*
Interactions												
Social chemyeon × type of argument			-.089			-.151*			.005			-.043
Personal chemyeon × type of argument			.068			.066			-.054			-.035
Social chemyeon × counterpart status			-.167**			-.203**			.092			-.147*
Personal chemyeon × counterpart status			.083			.136			-.010			.116
F	8.286***	12.990***	8.884+	7.916***	7.611***	6.334**	5.736**	16.449***	10.222	4.550*	6.930***	4.940
R ²	.057	.224	.250	.055	.145	.192	.040	.268	.278	.032	.133	.157
R ² _{adj}	.050	.207	.222	.048	.126	.162	.033	.251	.250	.025	.114	.125

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$ + $p = .056$

on and the type of argument and the interaction term of social *chemyeon* and the counterpart's status accounted for an additional 3.6% of variance, which thus supports the hypothesis that the interaction effects between social *chemyeon* and the contextual variables influence one's approach argumentativeness. The results partially support H3 and H4, which proposed that there are interaction effects between *chemyeon* and the contextual variables (i.e., H3 with type of argument and H4 with counterpart's status). When the beta coefficient values were compared, the predictive power of the interaction term of social *chemyeon* and the counterpart's status (std. $\beta = -.203$, sig. ≤ 0.01) was stronger than the predictive power of the interaction term of social *chemyeon* and the type of argument (std. $\beta = -.151$, sig. ≤ 0.05). This indicates that the influence of social *chemyeon* on approach argumentativeness was moderated more by the status of the counterpart than by the type of argument.

However, no interaction effects were found between personal *chemyeon* and the contextual variables. Thus, H5, which proposed that social *chemyeon* had a greater influence on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness than personal *chemyeon*, was also proved to be true. For a more in-depth examination of the moderating effect of social *chemyeon* and contextual variables, additional simple regression analyses were conducted. To examine the moderating effect of the argument type (i.e. public or personal), cases were selected for each type, and approach argumentativeness was regressed on social *chemyeon*. Results showed that when the argument was personal, social *chemyeon* positively predicted approach argumentativeness (std. $\beta = .157$, sig. = 0.023), and when the argument was public, social *chemyeon* negatively predicted approach argumentativeness (std. $\beta = -.157$, sig. = 0.608). These findings revealed that individuals with a higher level of social *chemyeon*, i.e. those who are more sensitive to normative evaluation of invisible others (Lim and Choi 1996), tended to become more argumentative in personal issue arguments than in public issue arguments.

To examine the moderating effect of the counterpart's status, cases were selected for counterparts with a higher and lower status (respectively), followed by simple regression analyses to determine the effect of social

chemyeon on approach argumentativeness. Results showed that the predictive power of social *chemyeon* was stronger when the counterpart's status was lower (std. $\beta = .157$, sig. = 0.062) than when the counterpart's status was higher (std. $\beta = .157$, sig. = 0.987). The findings suggest that individuals with a higher level of social *chemyeon* tend to become more argumentative when the counterpart's status was lower.

Lastly, the effects of the interaction term of social *chemyeon* and the counterpart's status on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness are noteworthy. Although the p values for the increased amount of adjusted R^2 were only slightly above the level of significance ($p = .056$ for argumentativeness and $p = .124$ for verbal aggressiveness), the beta coefficient for the interaction term was determined to be significant (std. $\beta = -.167$, sig. ≤ 0.01 for argumentativeness and std. $\beta = -.147$, sig. ≤ 0.05 for verbal aggressiveness). The results suggested that individuals with a higher sense of social *chemyeon* might possibly be more argumentative and verbally aggressive when the counterpart's status was lower, though further investigation is required.

Discussion

This study analyzes the influence of *chemyeon* on Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. The type of argument and the status of the counterpart were examined as contextual variables closely related to *chemyeon*.

Among the four independent variables that influence Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness, the type of argument was revealed as the strongest predictor. The subjects showed a higher willingness to engage in arguments about public issues, while tending to avoid argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in cases of arguments about personal issues. These results support previous studies that reported a higher level of argumentativeness for public issues and a higher level of verbal aggressiveness for personal issues (Johnson et al. 2007; Johnson 2002).

As for the status of the counterpart, the results showed that when the

counterpart's status was higher, individuals tended to avoid argumentativeness, and when the counterpart's status was lower, individuals tended to become more argumentative and verbally aggressive. These results are consistent with previous studies that indicated Koreans tended to be more argumentative when conversing with people of a lower status than when conversing with people of a higher status (Kim et al. 2001; Song 1996).

One of the primary interests of this study was the impact of *chemyeon* on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. The initial finding was that individuals with a higher sense of *chemyeon* tended to avoid argumentation and were less verbally aggressive. However, when *chemyeon* was divided into social *chemyeon* and personal *chemyeon*, social *chemyeon* increased Koreans' tendency to avoid argumentativeness, while personal *chemyeon* reduced the level of verbal aggressiveness.

The findings suggest that individuals with a higher sense of social *chemyeon* tend to avoid argumentation. The social aspect of *chemyeon* is closely related to one's perceived reputation and social standing, i.e., how the individual is seen by others, both real and imagined.

Since Koreans typically associate arguments with negative results, including the loss of social face, it seems likely that individuals with a higher sense of social *chemyeon* seek to avoid direct argumentation for fear of a possible negative outcome. In Korea, arguments often result in less intimacy with, emotional discomfort with, and avoidance of the counterpart, and even violence in some cases (Song 1996). Moreover, in Korea, opposing someone in an argument often means becoming a personal rival of that person (Cheong 2007; Becker 1986). Argumentativeness, often valued as a constructive form of communication in Western cultures, is interpreted differently among Koreans, who are burdened by the sense and obligation of social *chemyeon*. In a culture where the ultimate purpose of communication is to maintain harmony among its members (Yum 2012), silence or indirect communication is often more valued than direct communication, and is seen as evidence of a person's communication competence (Shim, Kim, and Martin 2008). Thus, individuals with a higher level of social *chemyeon* likely tend to avoid arguments in order to avoid uncomfortable situations that could result in the loss of social face.

On the other hand, personal *chemyeon* is related to self-appraisal of one's own personality and competence (Lim and Choi 1996; Kim and Yang 2011). Personal *chemyeon* includes elements of ethics, demeanor, and competence (Kim and Yang 2011), which are related to the maturity of an individual's personality or competence. Personal *chemyeon* is more reminiscent of the Western concept of face, which is about an individual's autonomy and independence (Kang 2009). Thus, Koreans with a higher sense of personal *chemyeon* tend to avoid verbal aggressiveness and become more argumentative. While social *chemyeon* causes Koreans to try to preserve their own social face through either strong confrontation or avoidance, personal *chemyeon* causes them to try to maintain their own social face by respecting the other person's social face (Park and Hur 2011).

But the interaction between *chemyeon* and the contextual variables was even more noteworthy than the impact of *chemyeon* on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Triandis (1995) explained that Koreans are more likely than Westerners to shift their behavior depending on context. In this study, the type of argument and the status of the counterpart were considered as the variables that moderate the effect of *chemyeon* on aggressive communication behaviors.

As discussed, Koreans' level of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness were higher in arguments about public issues than in those about personal issues. However, social *chemyeon* was shown to have a greater influence on argumentativeness in personal issue arguments than in public issue arguments, which was basically the opposite of the previous findings. That is, individuals with a higher level of social *chemyeon* tend to be more argumentative about personal issues and less argumentative about public issues.

This can perhaps be explained by the characteristics of social *chemyeon*, which tends to be activated more in a public context than in a personal context (Lim 1994). People with a high level of social *chemyeon* feel that it is very important to meet social expectations, and thus strive to make a good *public* showing of themselves in front of others (Lim and Choi 1996). In certain situations, people can raise their own social *chemyeon* by showing off or displaying themselves (Kim 2000). Kang (2009) has

explained that Koreans have two basic needs related to *chemyeon*: the need to be recognized as loyal follower of group norms and the need to be *publicly* recognized as superior. In either case, social *chemyeon* must be protected and elevated within a *social* and *public* context (Shim, Kim, and Martin 2008). Social *chemyeon* matters more with people who are mere acquaintances than with total strangers or people with whom one is very close (Lim 1994). Therefore, people with a higher level of social *chemyeon* were more reluctant to engage in arguments about public issues, because they had a greater risk of losing social *chemyeon* through a public issue argument with an acquaintance than through a personal issue argument with a close friend or family member.

The second contextual variable that moderated the impact of *chemyeon* was the status of the counterpart. Social *chemyeon* was shown to have a greater impact on Koreans' tendency to approach arguments when the counterpart's status was lower, showing that people with a higher level of social *chemyeon* tend to be more argumentative when the counterpart's status is lower.

"Status" is a crucial concept related to social *chemyeon* (Choi 2000). Confucian cultures inherently justify the unequal distribution of power. In those cultures, people with a higher status and more authority are considered to have more power, which increases the need to protect their social *chemyeon* (Lim 1994). Crucially, Koreans feel the need to protect the social *chemyeon* of a person with high status, because they would never wish to insult or embarrass someone with a higher status. Thus, when the counterpart's status is higher, Koreans will try to protect the counterpart's social *chemyeon* in order to maintain a harmonious relationship (Shim, Kim, and Martin 2008). However, when the counterpart's status is lower, the need to protect the counterpart's social *chemyeon* decreases, resulting in a more aggressive manner of communication.

In this sense, Koreans' sense of social *chemyeon* is closely related to authoritativeness (Cheong 2007). Since Koreans with a lower status or position will seek to protect the social *chemyeon* of people with a higher status or position, social *chemyeon* serves to emphasize concepts of social authority by constantly reinforcing power relations between people (Choi

et al. 2000). People with a higher level of social *chemyeon* will be more likely to support the imbalance of power in a relationship, so they are usually more conscious of the counterpart's social status. For this reason, Koreans with a high level of social *chemyeon* will typically evaluate a person's social status or position before engaging in communication with that person. Such practice is considered a necessary step to maintaining the appropriate levels of *chemyeon* during the conversation (Kim and Yang 2011).

To summarize, this study suggests that *chemyeon*, especially the social aspect of *chemyeon*, is an important predictor for explaining Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Moreover, the predictive power of social *chemyeon* is moderated by contextual factors such as the type of argument and the status of the counterpart, indicating that the effect of social *chemyeon* is strongly influenced by the context of communication.

Rancer and Avtgis (2006) contended that not enough research has been conducted on argumentative and verbally aggressive communication behaviors within an intercultural context. Understanding the role of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in intercultural discourse could increase the effectiveness of dialogue and promote greater diplomacy (Rancer and Avtgis 2006). This study aims to enhance the understanding of the cultural factors influencing Koreans' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness by delineating elements of *chemyeon*, an essential cultural variable of Korea, and examining its relationship with aggressive forms of communication. Also, the results of this study help to explain the somewhat inconsistent descriptions of Koreans' communicative aggressiveness in previous literature. Specifically, the contradicting behavior of Koreans in argument situations is likely tied to their sense of social *chemyeon*.

One limitation of this study is that trait argumentativeness and trait verbal aggressiveness were not measured before testing the context-specific argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Thus, this study could not examine how *chemyeon* interacts with trait argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness to influence the reported argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. As argumentation is not usually viewed positively in

Korea, individuals may have attempted to provide answers that they felt would be socially desirable. Future studies should account for both traits and reported levels of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Moreover, the concept of *chemyeon* must be elaborated beyond the Confucian context. Although *chemyeon* is certainly closely related to Confucianism, it also incorporates other aspects of Korean cultural tradition. Also, a review of previous studies suggests that similar concepts of *chemyeon* exist in other East Asian cultures, such as China and Japan; therefore, future studies should extend the concept of *chemyeon* to incorporate similar concepts from other Asian cultures, in order to examine whether those concepts exert similar influence on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness.

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