

## Acculturative Understanding of Korean Social Psychology among Western Sojourners in Korea\*

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The present study investigated acculturative understanding of Korean social psychology of interpersonal interactions among Western sojourners in Korea. We examined 1) how the Western sojourners perceive social psychological characteristics of Koreans and 2) what types of individual differences influence this perception: we looked at the acculturation strategies (integration, separation, assimilation, & marginalization), the duration of stay, and Korean language proficiency. The acculturative understanding of Korean social psychology was assessed through critical incidents (CI) method. Eight CIs were constructed based on previous study and presented to 50 Western sojourners. The responses to the CIs were compared to those by Korean collegians. Response of Westerners who stayed more than six months was more similar to the response of Koreans than those who stayed less than six months. Westerners have a better comprehension for CIs that deal with issues concerning vertical relationships in Korean society than for CIs that deal with we-relationships (*cheong*, *woori*). Only those with some Korean language proficiency showed better understanding of *cheong* interactions. Four types of people using different acculturation strategy did not show any meaningful difference in their response to the CIs. Possible reasons for this no-difference were discussed.

**Keywords:** Acculturation; Critical Incidents; Sojourners; Korean; social psychology; hierarchy; *Cheong*; *Woori*

Every culture has its own unique psychology operating in interpersonal relationship. Several features of Korean social psychology have been pointed out as unique. Some of those representative features are *woori*, *shimcheong*, *cheong*, *hahn*, *yeongo*, *chemyon*, and hierarchy (Choi, 2000; Han, 2002). They can be said as working psychology of

Korean collectivism. They are very natural to Koreans but can be perplexing to foreigners. The present study investigated how those Korean social psychological phenomena are being understood by Western sojourners and the factors affecting those understandings.

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\* This paper is based on the first author's master's thesis under the guidance of the second author. The authors appreciate helpful comments made by the reviewers on the first version.

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#### Acculturation Strategy

When an individual moves from one culture to another, many aspects of self-identity are modified to accommodate information about and experiences in the new culture. This process, generally referred to as acculturation, involves changes that take place as a result of continuous and direct contact between individuals having different cultural origins (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936; Sam, 2006). As a result of attempts to cope with acculturation changes, after a period of time, some adaptations (relatively stable changes that take place as an individual or group responds to external demands) to the new cultural context may be achieved. This is more likely as the experience with the host culture increases. As the experience builds up, misunderstanding of local interaction will be replaced with proper understanding and proper manner of responding to the interaction.

A major contribution to the study of psychological acculturation and the prediction of acculturative stress is found in Berry's conceptual analysis of acculturation attitudes (Berry, 1989), also referred to as acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997). Psychological and behavioral changes that an individual experiences as a result of sustained contact with members of other cultural groups represent a core construct in Berry's model. Berry (1997) has argued that there are two fundamental dimensions of acculturation: maintenance of original cultural identity and maintenance of relations with host nation. If evaluative responses to these two dimensions are dichotomized, then four acculturation attitudes or strategies may be distinguished: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration strategy is taken when individuals want to maintain both their home cultural identity and the host cultural identity. Assimilation strategy is taken when individuals do not wish to maintain their home cultural identity and try to assimilate into the host culture. Separation strategy is taken when individuals place a value on holding onto their home culture and at the same time wish to minimize the host cultural identity.

Marginalization strategy is taken when individuals feel marginalized from both home culture and the host culture. Attitudes towards these four alternatives, and actual behaviors exhibiting them, together constitute an individual's acculturation strategy (Berry, 1989).

Many empirical studies have shown that the people with integration strategy show much better adjustment to the host culture with less psychological distress than the people with the other three types of acculturation strategy. Studies have been conducted with immigrants (Schmitz, 1992), with refugees (Dona, 1993), and with sojourners (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Berry (1997) has demonstrated that marginalization and separation are associated with a high level of acculturation stress, assimilation is linked with an intermediate stress level, and integration is associated with a low level of stress. The reason for this difference in adjustment may be due to many factors; one possible reason is that the integration people have better understanding of working psychology of interpersonal relationship in the host culture than especially those with separation or marginalization strategy. This better understanding helps to reduce the possibility of interactional misunderstanding and unnecessary conflict.

#### Characteristics of Korean Social Psychology

Westerners coming to stay for a various period of time in Korea inevitably face a great amount of culture difference along with the language difference. Perhaps the most prominent dimension of culture difference for the Westerners to face psychologically is collectivism (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Hofstede, 1980; Hui, 1990). The most important distinction between collectivists and individualists is the emphasis placed on the feelings and opinions of group members and the psychological closeness between a person and others in the ingroup (Kagitcibasi, 1990). Collectivists are more concerned with the consequences of their behaviors on their ingroup members and are more likely to sacrifice personal interests for the attainment of collective interests. Also people

spend more time with each other in social activities. Individualists are less concerned with the consequences of their behaviors on people in the social environment, be they of the same group or different ones. Individualists are more concerned with the relation of their behaviors to their own needs, interests, and goals. When there is a conflict between a person's own goals and those of the person's group, the individual goals are emphasized and the group goals are down played (Triandis, 1995).

Individualism and collectivism both exist in every culture, but one tends to predominate in many social spheres. Along with other Asian societies, such as Japan and China, Korea has been viewed as representative of a collectivistic culture (Devos, Marsella & Hsu, 1985; Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985; Hofstede, 1980). Indeed, according to Kim (1987) who reviewed studies on the social character of Koreans published since 1960, collectivism was considered to be the representative characteristic of Korean society. Rather than expressing one's own individuality and developing her/his ability independently, collectivists tend to identify themselves strongly with their ingroup and prefer group cohesiveness, immersing them in the ingroup activities. They emphasize group solidarity, favoring a consensus of opinions over respecting individual opinions. Despite common features of collectivism across societies, the operation of collectivism differs widely among collectivistic societies. In Korea, many scholars have pointed out key concepts capturing this operation such as hierarchy, *cheong* (情 human affection that binds individual members), *woori* (collective consciousness), *chemyon* (體面 social "face"), and *noonchi* (social perceptiveness). These concepts have been analyzed both conceptually and empirically (e.g., Choi, 2000; Choi & Kim, 2004; Choi, Kim, & Choi, 1993). They all reflect some aspects of collectivism or relationalism; therefore, some are inseparable from each other, and highly interrelated. For example, *noonchi* and *chemyon* are closely related to hierarchy. Some of those prominent features of Korean social

psychology are summarized in the following.

**Hierarchy.** Korea has traditionally been a hierarchical society. Korea is what Hofstede (1980) called a high power distance culture (accept power as a basic fact of life in society). Kim (1987) suggests that the rigid hierarchy in relationship is the second most prominent characteristic of Koreans society. Highly ranked person (who is usually older as well) exerts power over people of low rank, resources (including knowledge), frequently takes initiative, and has the right to choose and exercises preference. Because the group takes precedence over individuals, the sense of order is emphasized as a rule for the different members to function harmoniously within the group. The hierarchy is ever present in interpersonal relationship due to the rigid honorific language people use in conversation (Choi, 2004; Han, Choi & Shim, 2004). Proper use of honorifics is essential for normal interaction in every situation.

**Cheong.** *Cheong* has been treated as the most outstanding characteristics of human relations that represent the charm of Korean life style (Kim, 1982; Yoon, 1970). The psychology of *cheong* refers to the state where each unit of "I" and "you" has turned into one unified unit of "we" (*woori*). *Cheong* arises and grows among close-knit family members and friends who share many activities together in close quarters in extended period of time. *Cheong* is a much intricate concept than love or friendship. As a relationship grows old, love often fades away, but *cheong* usually grows deep (Choi & Choi, 2001). It is often said that couples in long-lasting relationship maintain their relationships not because of love, but because of *cheong*.

**Woori.** *Woori* is Korean vernacular meaning "we". It simply means a group of people (such as our family)

where the speaker is a member. When Korean participants say *woori*, the most dominantly associated themes are such psychological affects as intimacy, closeness, caring, acceptance, comfort, and warmth (Choi & Choi, 1994). Once the other persons are recognized within the boundary of *woori*, the group is to incur instant and often ungrounded “sameness” ideas about the persons or to expect social interdependence and emotional support (Han & Choi, 1994). While *woori* refers physical plurality inclusive of I, *cheong* refers psychological glue bonding members in a *woori* group.

***Chemyon.*** Rather than being construed from social interactions (that characterizes Western sense of face), *chemyon* is based on fixed symbolic value systems of the society. It can be defined as a socially perceived or expected quality of an individual associated with his/her particular social position or status. It is the image of personal self that is claimed and negotiated through social interactions. Unlike face which is a general concern to most people, *chemyon* is more of prescribed property depending upon one's social status. *Chemyon* is socially and culturally codified qualities that are “offered” to individual of high standing in the relationship. The individual self has little to do with the specific contents of those qualities (Choi & Choi, 1991). People with lower standing need not concern about losing *chemyon*. It is the image of social self that one needs to uphold to function properly in social interactions. If one loses *chemyon*, one does not get the respect one deserves and becomes a target of ridiculing by the lower people.

***Noonchi.*** *Noonchi* is social tact developed to further smooth interaction in ingroup relationship. Where as *chemyon* is primarily confined to the superiors and elder in the social hierarchy, *noonchi* is more concerned with subordinates and the young (Choi & Choi, 1992).

*Noonchi* is to be exercised by the subordinates to decode the implicit communicative actions by the superiors. As Oh (1979) noted, the supreme purpose of *noonchi* operation is to establish or maintain a favorable and smooth relationship with the other parties, albeit one at a superficial level. If a subordinates act without exercising *noonchi*, he/she will be at risk of jeopardizing the relationship, putting the interaction in an awkward situation.

#### The Present Study

The present study is concerned with how Western sojourners perceive those Korean social psychological phenomena and what factors influence such perception. This acculturative understanding of Korean psychology invites research interest mainly for two reasons. Firstly, perception of Korean society by Westerners has been talked widely but rarely received rigorous treatment especially in the field of psychology. In this era of globalization, such investigation is necessary to design materials or course which aims to introduce Korean society to Westerners. So far, those introductory class or materials (film, documentary, etc.) deal only with Korean history and cultural artifacts, providing little help for understanding of the Korean psychology. Those people coming to Korea for extended period of time necessarily interact with Koreans and develop serious relationship. Because of differences in cultural psychology (Nisbett, 2003; Triandis, 1995), they often engage into conflict with Koreans which can be avoided easily if they understand Korean social psychology in daily relationships. Secondly, the globalization forces Korea to recruit Westerners to work as English teachers in all levels of education. It is reported that about 2000 Westerners were recruited officially by the Korean ministry of education in 2006 (Seoul Daily, 2006, 9.7). The unofficial workforce in the job market far outweighs this number by several times. Most of them are ignorant of Korean psychology and deal with culture conflict by trial and

error, often riddled with prejudice and bias.

The acculturative understanding of Korean social psychology among Western sojourners in Korea was assessed through critical incidents (CI) method. A CI is a short episode showing an interactional situation involving two or more well-meaning characters from different cultures. As the story unfolds, readers are given various bits of useful information for interpreting the episode, or incident. The conclusion generally involves a misunderstanding (or conflict) among the people involved in the episode or a sense of bewilderment. This happened in spite of the fact that the characters involved were attempting to behave in a socially appropriate manner. Because of cultural habit, each person is acting primarily out of his/her own cultural identity and often turns the situation unintentionally into an uncomfortable one. CIs are, in fact, very like the stories that sojourners tell about the experiences they and their acquaintances have with the host culture. CIs can be constructed in a way to capture an important cultural characteristic that is useful when thinking about, adjusting to, and interacting in another culture. Reaction to the CI can vary a great deal from individual to individual. Many factors will influence such reaction. Currently, we are interested in the duration of stay and acculturation strategy.

As the sojourners stay longer, they are to accumulate interactional experience with Koreans. This experience helps them to reduce misunderstanding and to develop better understanding of Koreans. Initially perplexing behavior would become understood as they stay longer. However, some people may develop better understanding than others. As discussed previously, Berry's model of acculturation (1997) can be used for this individual difference in acculturative understanding. Many studies report that people with integration strategy generally show better adjustment than the other three types of strategy (assimilation, separation, & marginalization). This finding has been reported with sojourners (Ward &

Kennedy, 1994), with immigrants (Schmitz, 1992), and with refugees (Dona, 1993). This is not surprising given that those who respond to acculturation pressures with integration strategy have bicultural resources to cope with a wide range of pressures and demands of life in a new society. People with assimilation strategy may be expected to have equal level of understanding of local culture. The reason is that they are eager to mingle with the local people. Few studies show that assimilationists report less sociocultural adaptation problems (Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999).

Based upon the above discussion, we hypothesized that people with longer duration of stay develop more similar response to the CI as the locals do. Secondly, we expected that people with integration or assimilation strategy will show better understanding of the social psychology of Korean interactions.

## Method

### *Participants*

50 foreigners participated in this investigation. They were 34 male and 16 female white English instructors living and working in Gwangju, all of them native English speakers. Their countries of origin were Canada (27), USA (14), England (6), Ireland (1), Australia (1), and New Zealand (1). Age range was from 22 to 54. The mean age of respondents was 30.6 years ( $SD = 6.2$ ). Length of residence in Korea varied from 1 month to 160 months ( $M = 33$  months,  $SD = 32$ ). When they first arrived in Korea, majority of them had *a little* (50%) or *none whatsoever* (32%) cultural understanding about Korea, followed by *good to some degree* (16%) and *quite good* (2%). Fifty percentage of them didn't have any contacts with Koreans before coming to Korea. And 50% had positive contacts with Koreans before coming to Korea. At the moment of investigation, 14% of Westerners described their fluency in Korean as *not at all*, 44% as *poor*, and 42% as *enough to communicate*.

In order to compare the understanding reflected in their response to CIs given by foreigners, a class of Korean participants was invited. 70 (40 male and 30 female) Korean students of a local university, age range of 20-25, read the 8 CIs and provided their understanding to each CI. For each CI, the responses were classified into few categories by an independent Korean graduate student who was unaware of research hypothesis. These categories were used to classify the foreign participants' responses.

#### Procedure

The questionnaire was presented to the participants in English and to Koreans in Korean. Questionnaires for foreigners were distributed through personal contacts and e-mail (more than 200 people were approached and about 25% replied). Participation in the research was anonymous and voluntary. The questionnaire for foreigners was composed of 8 critical incidents, cultural identity scale (Gudykunst, 1994), and background (personal and demographic) information. Completion of the questionnaire took about 30-40 minutes. Those who agreed to participate returned the questionnaire within a week. The questionnaire for Koreans was composed of 8 critical incidents and distributed during their class hour.

#### Materials

##### Critical Incidents

8 CIs were used in the current study. Four CIs were collected from a preliminary investigation where 20 foreigners through questionnaire were asked to elaborate on the difficulties and problems they encountered in Korea in spheres of work, social life, customs and daily living. The descriptions were then analyzed and problems that received most attention (work relationship, social rules, socializing, and traditions) were then transformed into the CI. One CI deals with the issue of *chemyon*, one hierarchy, one *noonchi* and one *woori*. Another four CIs in this research were borrowed from a research

conducted by Bruech (1989). The purpose of Bruech's study was to find out some central cultural differences between Germans and Koreans that can be used in a training program for German businessmen, who plan to work in Korea as expatriates. He collected 45 typical situations in 14 categories (hierarchy, partnership style, loyalty, role of women and etc.). Among them, we selected four CIs for the current research: one deals with the issue of hierarchy, two *woori* and one *cheong*. The 8 CIs are the following.

*CI 1 - asking a favor.* This CI describes a situation where a foreign teacher calls a senior Korean coworker on the phone, asking him to bring some important paper he forgot at the work, since the Korean coworker lived close to him and would be coming home soon. Korean coworker got very upset about the request. Critical theme of this CI is regarded as hierarchy.

*CI 2 - restaurant paycheck.* In this CI, Mr. Han, a deputy-director in Mary's academy who barely knew her, was among people from her academy having dinner together. After dinner he insisted on paying for everyone. Not understanding why Mr. Han pays for her, Mary insisted on paying for herself. But Mr. Han refused. The theme is regarded as *chemyon* in this CI.

*CI 3 - drinking heavily.* In this CI, Mr. Hong often insists on drinking heavily with his foreign business partner. But Mr. Cross is more interested in the business aspects and objectives in their relationship and has already refused several times to drink. He doesn't understand why drinking together should be so important. The theme is regarded as *woori*.

*CI 4 - scribbling on paper.* In this CI, Mr. Madson and Mr. Kim are colleagues working at a company and have developed quite a good relationship. However, Mr. Madson feels uncomfortable about Mr. Kim's habit to scribble on Mr. Madson's papers while they talk without asking for permission. The critical theme here is regarded as *woori*.

*CI 5 - karaoke.* In this CI, people from Tom's academy

went to a karaoke room for an extended social hour after dinner. Everybody took turns singing. Tom is wondering why Koreans pushed him to sing with no intention of listening. The theme is regarded as *woori* and *cheong*.

*CI 6 - moving academy.* In this CI, the branch of director Richard's academy has to move into new building. Since the budget for the branch is very tight, Mr. Richards had no idea how he can get the money. Korean instructors raised the money for the academy to support him. The theme is regarded as *cheong*.

*CI 7 - staying late at work.* In this CI, Robert leaves his desk at 9:30 p. m. as soon as his lecture is over, but most of the teachers and Mr. Moon, the chief secretary of the academy, are still present. Robert tries to find an explanation for what keeps the Korean teachers in the academy even after they finished their hours. The theme here is regarded as *noonchi*.

*CI 8 - lunch offer.* In this CI, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Lee were heading to a restaurant and met young secretary and asked her if she had lunch. She answered "yes" and walked away. When Mr. Johnson and Mr. Lee came to restaurant they saw her dining there. Mr. Johnson is wondering why the secretary lied to them and declined to eat together. The theme is regarded as hierarchy and *woori*.

#### *Cultural Identity Scale*

To assess strength of cultural identity with home (Western) culture and host (Korean) culture, the Strength of Cultural Identity scale (Gudykunst, 1994) was used. The scale consists of 10 statements such as "I have a positive view of my culture." For the purpose of present study additional 10 statements, measuring the level of identification with host (Korean) culture, were created. An example was "I have a positive view of Korean culture." Participants responded to each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (*Always False*) to 5 (*Always True*). The total scores range from 10 to 50. The higher the score, the stronger participant identification with home

(SCIW: Strength of Cultural Identity–West) or host (SCIK: Strength of Cultural Identity–Korea) cultures. The alpha reliability indexes of SCIW and SCIK in the current study were respectfully .83 and .65. The two scales, presented in a mixed form, were completed after the response to 8 CIs.

## Results

### *Analysis of CI Responses Between Sojourners and Koreans*

In order to compare the Sojourners' responses to the Korean responses, we had two independent coders (both were racially white) classify each response obtained from the Western participants into several distinct categories which were obtained from the analysis of Korean responses to each CI. The mean of agreement rate was 85.3% ranging from 76% to 90% across the 8 CIs. The differences in classification were resolved through discussion. The three most common response categories and the other category were presented in each table where Westerners and Koreans responses were compared to each other. In order to test the similarity of responses between the Westerners and the Koreans, we conducted a crosstab analysis using SPSS-PC (version 12) for each CI. In order to locate group differences among diverse levels of response category, we carried out Fisher's exact test on a 2×2 tables where the group and the first two prominent response categories served as the variables.

*Asking a favor.* This CI described a situation where foreign teacher is upsetting a senior Korean coworker by asking him a favor improperly. Majority of foreigners (80%) see age differences as main point in causing the situation. The typical response was "Because Mr. Kim is older and it's important in Korean (Confucian) culture." Second most frequent response was dissimilarity in character (8%). Most frequent response among Korean students to this CI was age, authority (52.9% responses).

Table 1  
Comparison of Responses between West- erners and Koreans to CI 1 ( ) = %

Responses	Westerners	Koreans	Total
ignoring age differences	40(80.0)	37(52.9)	77(64.2)
dissimilarity in character	4(8.0)	13(18.6)	17(14.2)
fatigue	0(0)	4(5.7)	4(3.3)
other	6(12.0)	15(21.4)	21(17.5)
not answered	0(0)	1(1.4)	1(0.8)
Total	50(100)	70(100)	120(100)

$\chi^2(4, N = 120) = 10.70, p = .030$

The typical response was “Getting no proper respect for his age.” Second most frequent response was dissimilarity in character (18.6%). Inferiority complex and personality difference were part of this category. While both groups found age differences to be the main source of conflict in this situation, Koreans' responses were more diverse: many Koreans regarded dissimilarity in character and culture differences as a source of conflict in addition to the age.

*Restaurant paycheck.* This CI described a situation where Mary doesn't understand why Mr. Han pays for her meal. Majority of foreigners (62%) found here the superiors' duties. The typical response was “Person with a highest status usually pays.” Second most frequent response was Korean hospitality (22%). Similarly, most frequent response among Korean students to this CI was obligation of social status

Table 2  
Comparison of Responses between West- erners and Koreans to CI 2 ( ) = %

Responses	Westerners	Koreans	Total
obligation of social status	31(62.0)	32(45.7)	63(52.5)
Korean hospitality	11(22.0)	18(25.7)	29(24.2)
showing off	3(6.0)	8(11.4)	11(9.2)
other	4(8.0)	6(8.6)	10(8.3)
not answered	1(2.0)	6(8.6)	7(5.8)
Total	50(100)	70(100)	120(100)

$\chi^2(4, N = 120) = 4.74, p = .314$

(45.7% responses). The typical response was “Superiors' duties.” Second most frequent response was Korean hospitality (25.7%). Not much differences were shown in this CI between the two groups.

*Heavily drinking.* This CI described a situation where Mr. Cross is reluctant to drink together (often heavily) with his business partner Mr. Hong. Forty percentage of foreigners' responses were related to alcohol's function of bonding relationship. The typical response was “Mr. Hong relates drinking with being open to each other.” Second most frequent response was Korean drinking culture (34%). Most frequent response among Korean students to this CI was making a closer relationship through drinking (91.4% responses) such as “To get closer by drinking together.” Second most frequent response was Korean drinking culture (7.1%). Fisher's exact test shows that Korean response points out mostly intentions while Western response was more evenly distributed between the intention and culture,  $p = .000$ .

Among the diverse responses by the Westerners, the other category shows this drinking behavior is due to Mr. Hong's personality, especially his alcohol addiction: “Mr. Hong is an alcoholic” (8 counts), “He has an unfulfilling life at home” (2 counts), “Mr. Hong doesn't know how to relate to people socially without drinking,” and “He is insecure regarding status and position.” None of such responses were given by Koreans.

Table 3  
Comparison of Responses between West- erners and Koreans to CI 3 ( ) = %

Responses	Westerners	Koreans	Total
to get closer by drinking together (intention)	20(40.0)	64(91.4)	84(70.0)
Korean drinking culture	17(34.0)	5(7.1)	22(18.3)
other	12(24.0)	1(1.4)	13(10.8)
not answered	1(2.0)	0(0)	1(0.8)
Total	50(100)	70(100)	120(100)

$\chi^2(3, N = 120) = 37.61, p = .000$



*Scribbling on paper.* This CI described a situation where Mr. Madson is uncomfortable with Mr. Kim's casual behavior of scribbling on Mr. Madson's papers during their talk. This CI was most difficult to foreigners (26% did not answer and 56% of responses were classified to other category). Only eight people (16%) responded that the actor wanted to show intimacy related behavior (closeness and personal attachment). Among them, the typical response was "He wants to be close with a foreigner." In contrast, most frequent response among Korean students to this CI was the desire for closer relationship (67.1% responses). Second most frequent response was the desire to help (12.9%).

While Korean responses reflected that Mr. Kim wants to develop and confirm more close relationships with Mr. Madson, Westerners responses centered around Mr. Kim's personality. The other category responses were such as "Curiosity" (6 counts), "Mr. Kim is unaware of the personal space" (5), "Mr. Kim wants to practice English" (3), "He's nervous" (2), "It's his own personal behavior" (2), and "It's not impolite in Korean culture" (2). These diverse responses show this CI was very ambiguous or incomprehensible to many sojourners.

Table 4  
Comparison of Responses between Westerners and Koreans to CI 4 (%)

Responses	Westerners	Koreans	Total
making a closer relationship	8(16.0)	47(67.1)	55(45.8)
interfere well	0(0)	8(11.4)	8(6.7)
desire to help	1(2.0)	9(12.9)	10(8.3)
other	28(56.0)	5(7.1)	33(27.5)
not answered	13(26.0)	1(1.4)	14(11.7)
Total	50(100)	70(100)	120(100)

$\chi^2(4, N = 120) = 66.89, p = .000$

*Karaoke.* This CI described the situation where Tom is wondering why Koreans pushed him to sing with no intention of listening. Majority of foreigners (74%) answered that Tom misunderstood the purpose of the

Table 5  
Comparison of Responses between Westerners and Koreans to CI 5 (%)

Responses	Westerners	Koreans	Total
to make an atmosphere of involving	37(74.0)	43(61.4)	80(66.7)
disability to sing well	1(2.0)	4(5.7)	5(4.2)
lack of concern	3(6.0)	1(1.4)	4(3.3)
other	6(12.0)	16(22.9)	22(18.3)
not answered	3(6.0)	6(8.6)	9(7.5)
Total	50(100)	70(100)	120(100)

$\chi^2(4, N = 120) = 5.61, p = .230$

group outing, which was arranged to give them a chance to bond and to have fun together. The typical response was "To get Tom involved with the group activities." Second most frequent response for Westerners was lack of concern (6%). Similarly, most frequent response among Korean students to this CI was to make an atmosphere of involving (61.4% responses). The typical response was "To involve Tom in group fun." Second most frequent response was inability to sing well (5.7%). In the other category some responses are "Kim had something important to say," and "Tom was not comfortable with being in the spotlight." Overall, group differences were minor.

*Moving academy.* This CI described the situation where Korean instructors raised the money for the academy to move, surprising Mr. Richards. Foreigners see the main reason for such a behavior being the desire not to lose one's job (46%). The typical response was "They want to keep their jobs." Second most frequent response was helping someone in a difficult situation (26%): "They want to help director." But the most frequent response among Korean students to this CI was consolidatory effort by faculty members (81.4%). The typical responses were "Cheong;" and "Communitarian spirit." Second most frequent response was fear to lose one's job (8.6%).

Main differences between the two groups are in 'cheong and communitarian spirit' and 'fear to lose

Table 6  
Comparison of Responses between West- erners and Koreans to CI 6 ( )=%

Responses	Westerners	Koreans	Total
cheong, consolidatory effort by faculty members	13(26.0)	57(81.4)	70(58.3)
fear of loosing job	23(46.0)	6(8.6)	29(24.2)
other	5(10.0)	1(1.4)	6(5.0)
not answered	9(18.0)	6(8.6)	15(12.5)
Total	50(100)	70(100)	120(100)

$\chi^2(3, N = 120) = 38.62, p = .000$

job' categories. While Korean responses reflect that person should support collective purpose, Western responses concern consequences of one's behavior on one's needs. The other category responses were such as "Teachers were directed by their senior and it came in the form of order" (3 counts), or "Obligation" (2 counts). Fisher's exact test shows the group difference was significant,  $p = .000$ .

*Staying late at work.* This CI describes a situation where Mr. Roberts tries to find an explanation for what keeps the Korean teachers in the academy even after their work hours. Sojourners emphasized habitual behavior (30%) and hierarchy (26%) in the relationship between director and employees as the main reason for such a behavior. Third frequently mentioned response (16%) may be categorized as *noonchi*. The typical response for this category was "Teachers may wish to appear more diligent to the director." On the other hand, for the Korean students, the most frequent response was maintaining a favorable relationship with one at a superior level (44.3%). The typical response was "*Noonchi*, to appease to the director." Second most frequent response was about hierarchy in the relationship between director and employees (25.7%).

Main differences between the two groups were in habitual behavior and *noonchi* categories. This situation was understood primarily as a working long hours habit by

Table 7  
Comparison of Responses between West- erners and Koreans to CI 7 ( )=%

Responses	Westerners	Koreans	Total
noonchi, to appease to the director	8(16.0)	31(44.3)	39(32.5)
habitual behavior	15(30.0)	12(17.1)	27(22.5)
hierarchy	13(26.0)	18(25.7)	31(25.8)
other	12(24.0)	8(11.4)	20(16.7)
not answered	2(4.0)	1(1.4)	3(2.5)
Total	50(100)	70(100)	120(100)

$\chi^2(4, N = 120) = 12.86, p = .012$

Westerners (e.g., "Koreans feel like everyone should put in the same amount of time"), while Koreans regarded it more of *noonchi* or desire to appease to the director. Fisher's exact test shows the difference was significant,  $p = .004$ .

*Lunch offer.* This CI describes a situation where Mr. Johnson is wondering why the secretary declined casual lunch offer and lied about having her lunch. The sojourners most frequently mentioned habitual behavior and manner (32%). The typical response was "It's just a polite statement." Second most frequent response was unwillingness to eat together (28%). On the other hand, the most frequent response among Korean students to this CI was manner and avoiding being a burden (58.6% responses). Second most frequent response was unwillingness to eat together (35.7%).

It is interesting to see the Westerners responses in the other category. They were "Because she's female and it would not be proper" (4 counts), "She is not at the same social standing at work" (3), "She feels uncomfortable having a lunch with foreigner" (2), "She may have misunderstood," and "She cannot say that she's eating alone, because they will think something is wrong with her." Thus, many Westerners placed focus on the secretary's internal factors while Koreans' concern focused on situational context.

Table 8  
Comparison of Responses between Westerners and Koreans to CI 8  
( )=%

Responses	Westerners	Koreans	Total
manner, to avoid burdening	16(32.0)	41(58.6)	57(47.5)
unwillingness to eat together	14(28.0)	25(35.7)	39(32.5)
other	16(32.0)	1(1.4)	17(14.2)
not answered	4(8.0)	3(4.3)	7(5.8)
Total	50(100)	70(100)	120(100)

$\chi^2(3, N = 120) = 24.80, p = .000$

*Analysis of Individual Differences in CI Responses of Sojourners*

*Effects of Duration of Stay*

In order to examine the differences in acculturative understanding among individuals by the duration of stay in Korea, we adopted six months of stay as the dividing period. The reason for this decision came from a previous study (Ward et al., 1998). They showed that the greatest difficulties and stress sojourners encounter occur upon entry to a new culture and then these difficulties decrease markedly within the first (up to 6) months of residence in a new culture. In the current study, among 50 sojourners, 10 people (20 %) stayed less than six months in Korea and 40 people (80 %) stayed more than six months.

Hypothesis that sojourners' understanding of CIs will resemble more closely to Koreans as their cultural experience increase (over 6 months) received partial support. In CI-1 (hierarchy) 92.5% of Westerners who stayed over 6 months pointed age differences as a main factor in miscommunication while more diverse responses were reported by those who stayed less than 6 months.  $\chi^2(2, N = 50) = 10.804, p = .005$ . In CI-2 (hierarchy) 60% of Westerners who stayed over 6 months saw obligation of social status as main factor while more diverse responses were reported by those who stayed less than 6 months.  $\chi^2(4, N = 50) = 9.979, p = .05$ . In CI-3 (*woori*) majority (55%) of Westerners who stayed over 6 months considered a desire of making a closer relationship as

the main reason while more diverse response were reported by those who stayed less than 6 months.  $\chi^2(3, N = 50) = 11.570, p = .01$ .

*Effects of Korean Language Proficiency*

In order to investigate another individual differences, we regrouped the Westerners into two groups based on their report of Korean language proficiency. 21 (42 %) sojourners reported they have some knowledge of Korean language while 29 (58%) have no or little knowledge at the time of this investigation. We compared the responses of these two groups to each CI by running a crosstab analysis. The results show that in the CIs where the issue centered around *woori* and *cheong* (e.g., CI-3 & 6), the group difference approached marginal level of significance,  $\chi^2(3, N = 50) = 6.79, p < .08$  for CI-3 and  $\chi^2(3, N = 50) = 6.24, p < .10$  for CI-6. In CI-7 where the issue was *noonchi*, the groups were significantly different,  $\chi^2(4, N = 50) = 10.99, p = .03$ . The pattern of group difference showed that responses of those with some Korean language resembled more closely to Korean respondents than those with poor level of Korean language.

*Effects of Acculturation Strategy*

In order to classify the respondents into acculturation types, we used the two scale (SCIW & SCIK) scores for host identification and for home identification. The scores were subjected to a bipartite split, resulting in the four acculturation styles. More specifically, HH (high host identification + high home identification) represents integration, LL (low host identification + low home identification) represents marginalization, HL (high host identification + low home identification) indicates assimilation, and LH (low host identification + high home identification) indicates separation. This procedure yielded 17 HH (Integration), 11 HL (Assimilation), 9 LH (Separation), and 13 LL (Marginalization).

For each CI responses, the response patterns were

compared among the four types. No differences were significantly distinguishable in any CI.

## Discussion

The present study examined acculturative understanding of Korean social psychology among Western sojourners in Korea. While a great amount of such work on acculturation has been conducted in Western countries (mainly in US and Canada), such investigation has been rarely, if not at all, conducted in Korea (see Sam & Berry, 2006). As the globalization spreads, Korea is attracting many immigrants, sojourners, and visitors as well. It will be informative to see how the foreigners understand the Korean interpersonal relationship when it involves intricate social psychology. This inquiry will serve two functions at least: first, the information may be used to design culture-proper orientation program of Korean social life to foreigners. Second, it will shed fresh light on the indigenous aspect of interpersonal relationship in Korea. This light will show how much those aspects of social psychology (e.g., *cheong*, hierarchy, *chemyon*, *noonchi*) are indigenous and construe cultural characteristics of Korean social life. For this purpose, the foreigners are being served as a reflecting mirror of Korean society.

### *Differences Between the Two Cultural Groups*

We employed 8 critical incidents (CI) for this investigation. Each CI was characterized as containing one or two themes of Korean social psychology. For instance, CI-8 (lunch offer) contains two themes (*woori* & hierarchy), CI-7 (staying late at work) contains two themes (*noonchi* & hierarchy). In fact, some themes are highly interrelated with each other (e.g., *noonchi* & hierarchy) in reality. Despite this characterization of each CI, each CI may be regarded something else by the respondents. The current study simply used the CIs as a mirror to reflect the difference exhibited by the two groups.

Examination of those responses to CIs shows that the

sojourners in general demonstrate a better understanding of CIs that contain the theme of hierarchy in Korean society as reflected in CI-1 (asking favor) and CI-2 (restaurant paycheck). Compared to this better understanding of vertical aspect of relationship, they show rather poorer understanding of horizontal aspects (*cheong* & *woori*) of relationships in Korean society (see CI-3, 4, 5, & 6). The difficulty of understanding this aspect does not get eased out by simply staying longer as measured by the duration of stay. More important is the effort to actively engage in interactions with Koreans. Those who have some knowledge of Korean language tend to show better understanding to *cheong* and *woori* operation<sup>1)</sup>.

### *Perceiving Korean Social Psychology*

Why such differences show up? We can speculate, based on previous literature and experience, that Korean characteristic of valuing hierarchies and seniority is strikingly odd to the Western sojourners and easily noticeable. Authority and age differences are heavily emphasized in Korean culture. That is probably the first thing that foreigners notice when they interact with Koreans. The importance of knowing one's place and proper behavior in interpersonal relationship seems to be easily noticed by Westerners for the explicit relational grammar such as honorific and bowing practice. Easy notice, however, does not mean necessarily correct understanding of hierarchy. Grasping the cultural meaning of hierarchy is different from catching hierarchy-based behavior. Cultural meaning of hierarchy can vary vastly across nations (e.g., Han, Choi & Shim, 2004). For example, hierarchy is more temporally operating in individualistic societies but it is rather fixed and permanent in collectivistic societies. The current study looked at perception of hierarchy merely on superficial level. It would be interesting to see in a future study

1) We appreciate a reviewer's comment on suggesting this analysis.

whether the understanding of hierarchy changes as cultural experience builds up.

Unlike the hierarchy, the operational context for *cheong* and *woori* is not so obvious. The context is primarily of family or family-like such as long-term and intimate relationship. The cultural grammar of *cheong* operates at more implicit level. The behavior may be often mistaken even by other Koreans. Korean social interaction can be best summarized as *cheong*-oriented interaction (Han & Choi, 1998). Although *cheong* is psychology operating within a close relationship, *cheong*-building activities (e.g., bathing together, sharing meals and possessions) are widely practiced even with not-close partners. Treating the partner as psychological *woori* allows many intimate behaviors (i.e., discouraging exercise of individuality & encouraging more of communal behaviors) for such behaviors convey indirect intention of getting close with each other; thus such communal behaviors facilitate the *woori* psychology. For example, scribbling on the other person's papers (CI-4), drinking heavily (CI-3), or going to karaoke (CI-5) are frequent ingroup activities of showing and confirming *woori* sentiment among the parties. In such activities, the boundary between individuals disappears. Trust is more of inherent quality of ingroup relationship in Korea (Choi & Han, in press). Even business relationship, from Korean point of view, is not free from *cheong*-relationship; trust must be established through *cheong* activities for the partnership to function smoothly (CI-3). This could be very perplexing to Westerners who regard business relationship as something that goes separately from private relationships.

Another aspect of Korean social psychology is the concern for personal relationship with the partner. In the sphere of *woori*, each member is very conscious of the relationship with the other members. Individuals show often caring mind (e.g., offer of lunch, CI-8) to the other and get concerned about the burden it may cause to ingroup members. The essence of *cheong* or *woori* psy-

chology is caring mind (Choi & Choi, 2001). When this caring mind does not meet the partner's expectation, the relationship faces difficulty which needs to be addressed through ingroup specific mode of communication (see Choi, Han & Kim, 2007).

Communication can take different mode in *woori* relationship. Response differences to CI-3 & 4 (drinking & scribbling) may be understood from this point. Westerners tend to prefer directness and Koreans are usually more comfortable with indirectness. These results may be understood from Hall's (1976) communication theory, which argues that members of individualistic cultures predominately use low-context communication and tend to communicate in a direct fashion, whereas members of collectivistic cultures predominately use high-context communication and tend to communicate in an indirect fashion. Because of this property of *cheong* mode of communication, the operation of *cheong* often gets misinterpreted even among Koreans.

#### *Effects of Cultural Experiences*

The hypothesis suggesting that sojourners' understanding of CI will resemble more closely to Koreans as their cultural experience increase (over 6 months) received partial support. These results might be interpreted as following; majority of Westerners when they first arrive to Korea have very little understanding of Korean culture. Coming from the low power distance cultures (Hofstede, 1980) they certainly notice that relationships in Korea are vertical and strict. So the CIs describing age difference and social status received a higher level of comprehension by those who spent more time (over 6 months) in Korea compared to newcomers (less than 6 months). An important finding from the current study is that simply staying long in Korea is not enough for understanding of *woori* psychology. *Cheong* mode of interaction gets to be understood only by the sojourners who acquire some proficiency of Korean language. This proficiency is not automatically acquired

by simply staying long<sup>2)</sup>. Deliberate attempt to interact with Korean people using Korean language brings about greater understanding of Korean social psychology.

The research hypothesis that sojourners' understanding of CI will be greater among those Westerners who show integration and assimilation types of acculturation compared to those who have separation and marginalization types of acculturation didn't receive any support. This is sharply contrasted to the previous studies on acculturation; integration strategy appears to be consistent predictor of more positive outcomes than the three alternatives of assimilation, separation, or marginalization (Berry & Sam, 1997). Sojourners who adopted an integration strategy experienced significantly less psychological distress than did others; those who preferred assimilation style reported less social difficulty (Ward et al., 1999).

Since the current study deals with population totally different from previous studies on the subject, several explanations can be explored to account for these contrasting findings. One potent explanation for this finding is that most sojourners in Korea may not try hard to integrate or assimilate into Korean way of life. They are sojourners or visitors who may not have genuine intent to let the host culture invade into their original cultural identity. Unlike the participants (i.e., immigrants, students, & refugees) in the studies conducted in U.S.A. or Canada who have exigent need to adjust to the host culture, the participants in the current study are teachers who do not have to struggle to adjust to the host culture. They may experience culture shock but they can maintain their lifestyles without much influence by the host culture. That is, the acculturation for Westerners in Korea is more by choice rather than compulsory. This difference plays probably a very important role.

In addition, the classification scheme of the types in

2) We compared response pattern of Korean language proficiency between the two groups of the duration of stay. No relationship was found ( $\chi^2(1, N = 50) = .74, p = .390$ ), meaning staying long did not lead to Korean language proficiency in this group of people.

the current study must be pointed out. We took scalar means to divide all the participants into different groups. When this procedure is applied to a small group of people, the resulting types may not reflect the characteristics the theoretical model proposes. Therefore, only a few people from each type are adequate for the proposed model. In order to examine the validity of Berry's model of acculturation types with sojourner population, a large number of participants is necessary in the future research.

#### *Limits and Future Research*

The participants of the present study were a small number of English teachers working in various institutions in a provincial region of Korea. This restricts the findings in several ways and necessarily invites future investigation. Firstly, the acculturative understanding shown by the Western sojourners in this study may not generalize into other types of foreign people in Korea; especially to those from the third world countries. What concerns particularly here is the acculturation by immigrants and workers from the third world nations. Increasing number of women come to settle down with a Korean spouse from other parts of Asia like Philippines, Vietnam, and Mongolia. They share collectivism with Korea but the working psychology of collectivism may be quite different. Future research of the present kind with such population will be necessary to finely tune theoretical understanding of collectivism (see Choi & Han, 2000; Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Lillard, 1998 for criticizing bandwagon treatment of collectivism) and to practically help their settlement in Korea.

Another concern relates to the small number of the participants in this study; only 50 Westerners participated in the study and only 10 of them were people with short period of stay in Korea (less than 6 months). This number is more tolerable for the interest of showing the differences of perception across cultures but is unjustifiable for testing a theoretical model such as Berry's model. Although Berry's model of acculturation is widely

accepted, the model was developed with people (mostly from the Third world countries) who underwent acculturation in Canada and US. Therefore, the model needs close examination with a large dataset especially when the data is like the current one (i.e., Westerners in the Third world nations).

Third point is related to the nature of participation. The participation was voluntary and through email solicitation. 25% of the people contacted returned the questionnaire. This response rate is not low in internet survey but still poses the problem of nonrandom participation. Although studies show that low response rate is not significantly related with the quality of data (see Langer, 2003), the willingness to cooperate with the research by returning the questionnaire can be a distorting factor of the current results. So it is possible that the participants were more friendly than the nonparticipants. Since this can not be completely ruled out, future studies employing diverse methods of data collection need to be conducted.

The use of Korean university students yielded several advantages like an easy access to large samples but at the expense of representativeness. The college population in Korea tends to espouse more individualism than their seniors (Han & Shin, 1999) when assessed on a standardized questionnaire. Despite this change, it is still interesting to see that their understanding of CIs is very different from the sojourners. Nevertheless, comparing the understanding of CIs by people of different age groups would show where similarity and difference are and would present the changing perception of Korean social psychology.

The present study contains a set of cross-cultural materials that can be useful to Westerners coming to work in Korea. Most of the CIs describes academic or work related setting and can be useful as a training tool to help properly orient Westerners to Korean psychology and thus, reduce cultural conflict. More such CIs (see Brislin & Cushner, 1996) need to be developed in more

diverse settings. Finally, the current study indicates that the language proficiency of host culture can be far more important factor facilitating acculturative understanding. We used subjective response as the measure of language proficiency. Future study is needed to explore this factor with some behavioral measures.

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## 한국에서 체류 중인 서구인들이 보이는 한국인의 사회심리 현상에 대한 이해

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본 연구는 대인교류에서 나타나는 한국인의 사회심리 현상에 대하여 한국에서 일시적으로 체류하는 서구인들이 어떻게 이해하는지를 한국인의 이해와 비교하고, 이들의 이해에 영향을 주는 개인차 변인이 무엇인지를 보고자 하였다. 핵심적 사건(critical incidents: CI) 방법을 이용하여, 호남지역에서 영어를 가르치고 있는 50명의 백인들에게 8개의 사건장면들을 설문으로 구성하여 제시하고 개방형 답을 받아 이를 분석하였다. 이러한 인식은 동일한 핵심적 사건에 대하여 70여명의 한국인 학생들이 보인 것과 비교되었다. 개인차를 보기 위해서 서구인들의 체류 기간(6개월 미만과 그 이상)에 따라 차이가 있는지를 분석하였다. 아울러 이들에게 문화적응 양상을 구분하는 척도를 시행하여 그들의 적응 유형에 따라 4가지 유형(통합화, 동화, 고립화, 및 소외화)으로 구분하여 유형간 비교를 하였다. 연구결과, 서구인들이 위계적 관계(위계)를 반영하는 CI의 상황에 대해서는 한국인들의 인식과 큰 차이가 없지만, 우리성 관계(정, 우리성)를 보여주는 CI 들에서는 한국인들의 인식과 상당히 차이를 보이는 것으로 드러났다. 아울러 CI 들에 대한 인식의 분석에서 체류 기간이 긴 사람들은 짧은 사람에 비해서 한국인의 이해양상에 보다 근접한 것으로 나타났다. 그러나 우리성 관계의 작용에 대한 이해는 한국어를 익히는 사람들에게서 그렇지 않은 사람들에게서 보다 적절한 것으로 나타났다. 한편, 적응 유형에 따른 분석을 했을 때 통합화와 동화 유형이 고립화와 소외화의 적응 유형과 아무런 차이를 보이지 않았다. 연구의 의미와 기존 서구의 연구결과와 달리 나타나는 차이에 대한 논의를 제시하였다.

**주요어 :** 문화적응, 핵심적 사건, 정, 우리, 체류서구인, 한국, 사회심리학, 서열

원고접수 : 2006년 12월 11일

심사통과 : 2007년 1월 22일