

Understanding the Complexity of Marital Maintenance Process in Korea

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The United States has been classified as an individualistic culture where the emphasis of a romantic relationship is on romantic excitement, open communication, and egalitarianism. The Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea) has been described as a collectivistic culture where the emphasis is rather on harmony, implicit communication, and a hierarchical relationship (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). Korean married couples today, however, are in a unique situation where traditional collectivistic values and modern individualistic values dynamically coexist and conflict. Some studies attempted to address the relational maintenance phenomenon in Korea, but were unable to provide a meaningful examination of Korean relational maintenance by relying on Western-inspired measures and overlooking various cultural aspects of modern Korea. Recent studies conducted in Korea suggest that while Korean married couples highly regard individualistic values such as open communication and similarities in personality, they still tend to prioritize parenting issues over couple issues and concern about proper relational hierarchy. As these kinds of changes and confusions occur at different paces between husbands and wives, and also through generations, the marital maintenance phenomenon among Korean married couples becomes more unique and complex. Clinical implications and directions for future research based on these findings were discussed.

Key words : marital maintenance, individualism, collectivism, Korean married couples

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People spend more time maintaining relationships than initiating or terminating them. Studies on relational maintenance have addressed issues of what people do (or should do) in order to maintain their relationships (Dindia & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Among various relational types, romantic relationships, especially of married couples, have received the most attention in the field of relational maintenance. Substantial research has identified relational maintenance behaviors by which couples manage to sustain healthy, long-term relationships and has found significant relationships with desirable relational characteristics such as marital satisfaction, commitment, and intimacy (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994; Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2000). The majority of studies, however, have been conducted in the United States (hereafter U. S. or America), dominantly with Caucasian populations, raising a question of cross-cultural applicability of those studies.

While America has been classified as a representative country of individualistic cultures, the Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea) has been described as a highly collectivistic country (Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey et al., 1996; Kim, Hunter, Miyahara et al., 1996; Triandis, 1995). The cultural distinctions between individualism-collectivism has suggested that personal relationships are run by a different set of rules by collectivists (i.e., those who tend to understand self, others, and world from a

collectivistic perspective) than by individualists (i.e., those who tend to understand self, others, and world from an individualistic perspective). For example, partners of an individualistic culture tend to believe open, direct, and expressive communication is essential to maintain a healthy, long-term marriage, while partners of collectivistic culture rather encourage implicit communication for the sake of harmony in a marital relationship (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). From an individualistic perspective individuals likely leave a marriage if it turns out to be unfulfilling, whereas from a collectivistic perspective people may prolong an unhappy marriage for the sake of equilibrium of a larger relational network (Yum, 1988). Those cultural differences suggest a possibility that couples in different cultural contexts exhibit different beliefs and behaviors in approaching their relational maintenance.

Korea has been drastically transformed through industrialization, modernization, and westernization over the last few decades. Although their parents may have been maintaining their marriage exclusively through traditional collectivistic relational rules, younger generations of Koreans have learned various individualistic values. For example, young adults of modern Korea tend to prefer to date and marry someone of their own choosing (Yang, 2003). An increasing number of Korean people engage in non-traditional marital behaviors such as cohabitation and divorce (Chung & Choi,

2010). A survey reveals that more than 50% of female college students think that ‘either getting married or unmarried is fine’, indicating that their heightened sense of choice and individuality toward marriage (Park & Chun, 2011). Korean married couples are in a very unique situation where traditional collectivistic values and modern individualistic values coexist and sometimes conflict, causing tension and confusion between partners and within themselves (e.g., Nam, 2007). The purpose of this study is to understand the complexity and uniqueness of marital maintenance phenomenon as Korean married couples try to navigate tension and confusion caused by the cultural dynamics and maintain their marriage. To be more specific, this study attempts to point out limitations of previous cross-cultural studies on marital maintenance in understanding Korean married couples today, highlight how cultural dynamics of modern Korea affects their approaches to marital maintenance, and address potential marital problems that Korean wives and husbands may face in the culturally transitional context. Findings of this study suggest significant clinical implications for working with Korean married couples and directions for future research. These are also discussed.

Relational Maintenance

Researchers in the field of close relationships

attempted to identify relational maintenance behaviors mostly by asking the participants to report what behaviors they engage in to ensure desirable characteristics of a relationship (Ayres, 1983; Bell, Daly & Gonzalez, 1987; Stafford & Canary, 1991). In this way, the researchers were able to tap into partners’ sense of perceived relational maintenance behaviors. A general pattern emerging from empirical studies indicated that behaviors largely characterized by proactiveness, expressiveness, and mutuality help couples maintain or enhance the quality of their relationship, although some other findings suggested a bidirectionality between maintenance behaviors and marital quality (Stafford & Canary, 1991). The problem is that those are the values that are highly regarded in Western culture. Individuals who grow up in an Eastern culture appreciating indirect and subtle expression, on the other hand, are likely to report engaging in those behaviors less frequently than Westerners (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996).

Some researchers proposed that promising relationships sometimes end due to couples’ poor management of conflict (Gottman, 1994). A strategy related to actively engaging in discussing problems was regarded as the most successful pro-social strategy, again reflecting Western relational values of proactiveness and expressiveness. Avoidant behaviors were viewed as negative, while those behaviors tend to be perceived as rather normative in Asian cultures (Kim, 2002). Such findings, thus, lead to a

question what accommodation looks like in a culture which emphasizes implicit communication. Goodwin (1999) noted, “although such work could be usefully applied to consider broader cultural norms and motifs, relationship research has as yet focused almost exclusively on laboratory work involving the information processing of Western couples” (p.12). In order to apply those findings to couples of Eastern countries in an appropriate manner, it is very important to consider cultural norms and motifs in the East.

Culture and Marriage

Keesing (1974) proposed that culture is a theory of the “game being played” in a society. According to Keesing, members of a culture behave as if there were general agreements on the rules without being highly aware of the rules of the culture. Anecdotal and empirical literature support that behaviors, expectations, assumptions about and attitudes toward close relationships vary across cultures (Argyle, Henderson, Bond et al., 1986; Epstein, Chen, & Beyder-Kamjou, 2005; Grice, 1975; Miller, 1994; Yum, 1988).

Korea was previously understood to be a very collectivistic country, but modern Korea has achieved a high level of industrialization during the past three to four decades. With its industrialization, accompanying attitudinal

changes toward individualistic values have occurred and are still occurring among Koreans (Chung & Choi, 2010; Nam, 2007; Park & Chun, 2011; Yang, 2003). In order to understand the marital maintenance process among Korean married couples, relational features and principles of both individualistic and collectivistic cultures need to be considered.

Individualism Versus Collectivism

Individualism-collectivism is the most widely used distinction of culture in understanding cultural variability in existing literature. According to Hui and Triandis (1986), individualism refers to the subordination of the goals of the collectivities to individual goals, and a sense of independence and lack of concern for others; while collectivism indicates a sense of harmony, interdependence, and concern for others. In other word, individualistic culture emphasizes the needs, values, and goals of the individual over those of the group and encourages an individual’s unique identity and direct expression; whereas collectivistic culture place a higher emphasis on the needs, values, and goals of the ingroup over those of the individual and encourages connectedness with others and indirect expression (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Individualism is typically associated with Western countries, mostly with the U.S., and collectivism with Asian countries. East Asian countries-China,

Japan, and Korea, in particular-have been known to share similar patterns of family and community structure and relational principles under the influence of Confucianism (Park & Cho, 1995).

Empirical research supported these explanations (Argyle et al., 1986; Epstein et al., 2005). For example, Argyle et al. (1986) found general differences of relational rules across culture (among British, Japanese, HongKong, and Italian samples). Results demonstrated that people in collectivistic countries (Japan and HongKong) endorsed more rules related to obedience, avoiding loss of face, maintaining harmonious relations in groups, and restraining emotional expression than those in individualistic countries (the United Kingdom and Italy). Individualists reported greater concern over intimacy in close relationships than collectivists.

Communication is another realm that renders important information about relational maintenance phenomena. Individualists and collectivists use quite different strategies for successful communication: While individualists tend to encourage explicit communication, collectivists emphasize implicit communication (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). Furthermore, in individualistic cultures, avoidance or silence has been typically conceptualized as uncooperative or non-accommodative strategies, whereas Asian cultures tend to describe avoidance or silence as somewhat normative (Kim, 2002; Putnam & Wilson, 1982).

Gudykunst and Matsumoto (1996) asserted that, in such cultures (collectivistic cultures), being reserved is not viewed as a passive activity; rather it is viewed as an active activity. Speakers in collectivist cultures show concern for maintaining harmony and saving face, when speakers in individualistic cultures display more interest in the effectiveness of conveying their intentions. Research consistently evidenced the individualism-collectivism distinction in communication (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990; Kim et al., 1996; Kim & Wilson, 1994).

Further Studies on Marriage Across Cultures

Cross-cultural studies on marriage tended to confirm the individualism-collectivism distinction. There are tendencies that individuals in Western countries seek emotional rewards and individuals in Eastern countries pursue instrumental rewards. First, love in marriage was welcomed by members of Western cultures and recognized as essential for the establishment and maintenance of marital relationship, more so than by members of Eastern cultures (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto et al., 1995; Medora, Larson, Hortascu et al., 2002). According to Levine et al. (1995), 86% of the U.S. participants (college students) reported that they would not marry without love, whereas only 24% of the participants from India agreed to the same statement.

Second, personal characteristics of and rewards from interaction with a partner were greatly appreciated by people in individualistic countries, while people in collectivistic countries tended to place higher value on practical aspects of marriage (Buss, Abbott, Angleitner et al., 1990; Epstein et al., 2005; Kamo, 1993). Buss et al. (1990) found that members of collectivistic countries (e.g., China, India) placed great value on desire for home, children and good housekeeping, while members of individualistic countries (e.g., the U.S., European countries) accentuated an exciting and humorous personality as important traits in potential mates. Similarly, Kamo (1993) found that for Japanese couples marital satisfaction was largely determined by rewards from instrumental or socioeconomic aspects (e.g., husbands' income level), whereas for American couples marital satisfaction was predicted by rewards from relational interactions (e.g., emotional support and openness).

Finally, there was a stronger tendency to secure their relational hierarchy (mainly by males) and social and economic stability (mainly by females) in collectivistic cultures compared to in individualistic cultures (Buss et al., 1990; Higgins, Zheng, Liu et al., 2002). For example, Buss et al. (1990) found that a tendency of males seeking beauty and females seeking earning capacity was more salient in traditional collectivistic cultures although the tendency was somewhat universal. Overall, such findings suggest the likelihood that people who grew up

in traditional collectivistic cultures put less effort in engaging in relational maintenance behaviors in their marriages. Indeed, a study documented that traditional collectivists (i.e., Japanese) reported much less use of pro-relational behaviors in their marital relations than they did in non-intimate relationships such as work relations, doctors, and teachers, while individualists endorsed more pro-relational behaviors within intimate relationships (Argyle et al., 1986).

In terms of the role of communication in marriage, a couple of studies indicated a relative importance of non-verbal communication in collectivistic cultures based on data of married couples (Epstein et al., 2005; Juang & Tucker, 1991). Juang and Tucker (1991) investigated factors in marital adjustment among Taiwanese couples in America and Caucasian American couples. In this study, marital adjustment was defined as the accommodation of a husband and wife to each other at a given time. They found that marital adjustment among Taiwanese couples was significantly associated with perceptions of both nonverbal and verbal communication, whereas that of American couples was related only to verbal communication. Such findings highlight the importance of non-verbal and implicit communication in maintaining marriage among Easterners.

Epstein et al. (2005) compared urban community Chinese couples to suburban American couples on relational standards and

marital satisfaction. Noting that American couples endorsed a higher level of marital satisfaction than Chinese couples on a measure of marital satisfaction, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), Epstein et al. proposed that apparent differences on scores did not mean Chinese couples experienced lower satisfaction than Americans. Based on their post-hoc analysis, Epstein et al. asserted that the DAS is a culturally biased measure as it was developed on the basis of Western research. Epstein et al. suggested that the Chinese tradition (like other East Asian countries) of inhibiting open expressions of affection likely lowered their marital satisfaction scores as some items in the DAS measure how openly a couple display their affection toward each other.

Although the individualism-collectivism distinction provided useful information in understanding marital maintenance across cultures, the level of industrialization and westernization in each country was observed to moderate the relationship of culture to other variables (Levine et al., 1995; Medora et al. 2002). For example, Medora et al. (2002) found that endorsement in romantic love was proportioned by each country's level of industrialization and its adherence to traditional values. As such, the U.S. (individualistic country) placed the highest value on romantic love while India (collectivistic country) put the lowest value on it. Turkey (as a country in industrial and other transition) fell in the middle.

While Korea is a country with a highly collectivistic and traditional past, it has transformed into a modern society with rapid economic growth over the last three or four decades. Modern Korea has achieved a high level of industrialization. According to the statistics released by International Monetary Fund in 2010, Korea's economy is now the 4th largest in Asia and the 15th largest in the world. However, its societal changes have been so rapid and drastic that Koreans may feel confused by two different sets of relational rules and principles: collectivism and individualism. The dynamic conflict between these two different cultural worldviews likely characterizes the marital relationships of Korean couples.

Maintaining Marriage in Korea

Most cross-cultural studies described Korea as a collectivistic country, meaning it is high on collectivism and low on individualism (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim et al., 1996; Triandis, 1995). Korean relational principles suggested by Yum and Canary (2003)-*eui-ri*, *jung*, *noon-chi*, and *yom*-appear to fit well in traditional (collectivistic) Korean society. Interestingly, a recent study found that Koreans scored higher on scales of independence and self-reliance than Americans (Kagitcibasi, 1996). According to a recent study conducted in Korea (Koo & Suh, 2011), individuals' characteristics such as personality and

beliefs in happiness played a far more significant role than objective resources such as levels of education or income in explaining happiness among Koreans. Such finding illustrates that individualistic values and principles have taken residence within the modern Korean mindset-one previously largely governed by collectivistic values and principles.

Traditional Relational Principles in Korea

Although there are general patterns of behaviors, explained by individualism-collectivism, each culture has a unique way of manifesting them (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). Yum and Canary (2003) suggested four cultural features and principles as potential influences on Koreans' relational maintenance behaviors and beliefs: *eui-ri*, *jung*, *noon-chi*, and *yon*. First, *eui-ri* means "one's attachment and loyalty to his or her important relational partner(s)" (Yum & Canary, 2003, p.281). When applied to marriage, it contributes to a married partner's belief that his or her partner will stay in the relationship whether they feel satisfied or not at the moment. A second principle is *jung*. *Jung* is a broader concept than love, based on unconscious and voluntary attachment. It indicates warm, caring, and understanding feelings between partners with a long history of going through good and bad times together (Lim & Choi, 1996). Even when partners find

their relationship no longer rewarding, they do not feel like they can break up from the relationship because of the "damned *jung*" (Yum & Canary, 2003).

Noon-chi is the third principle, presenting a unique Korean communication strategy. A person with *noon-chi* can figure out the intention, desire, mood, and attitude of the other person without resorting to the explicit verbal message (Lim & Choi, 1996). *Noon-chi* is similar to the Western concept of "reading between lines" in that it requires the process of figuring out the real meaning beyond what has been said. A person with "swift *noon-chi*" is quick at understanding what a partner desires, encoding and deciphering relational messages, and presenting himself or herself as a desirable relational partner. *Noon-chi* also places pressure to continue a marital relationship even when it is unsatisfactory because *noon-chi* warns you about others' negative perception and reaction to the potential break-up with your partner (Yum & Canary, 2003). The last one is *yon*. *Yon* is a belief that relationships are formed, maintained, and terminated by uncontrollable external forces, not by one's conscious efforts (Yum & Canary, 2003). Traditional Koreans believed that relationships are predetermined or sustained by *yon*. Yum and Canary (2003) asserted that one's belief in *yon* tends to discourage the one to engage in more active and constructive behaviors.

Eui-ri, *jung*, *noon-chi*, and *yon* have been

traditionally valued relational principles. These features correspond with traditional collectivistic culture in a couple of aspects: First, collectivistic culture emphasizes long-term, asymmetrical, and reciprocally obligatory commitment. Second, implicit communication using both high context and non-verbal strategies is portrayed as necessary for a successful relationship. Yum and Canary (2003) suggested that Koreans may stay in a marriage due to the cultural messages of *eui-ri*, *jung*, *noon-chi*, and *yon*. Statistics are at odds with this suggestion: According to the Korea National Statistical Office (the NSO), the total number of marriages has decreased, while the number of divorces and remarriages has been rising since the 1970s. Notably, the divorce rate (in ratio to the total marriage) has rapidly increased to 38% in 2006, compared to 3.9% in 1970. The major reason couples cited for divorce in 2006 was personality discord (49.7%). This trend indicates that Korean couples no longer adhere to the traditional notion of the permanent marital relationship.

Societal Changes in Korea

Noting the effect of modernization on individuals' behaviors in personal relationships, Goodwin (1999) proposed the *modernization hypothesis*. The modernization hypothesis implies that the degree of industrialization and westernization of the society makes a significant impact on the behaviors displayed in personal

relationships among members of the society. This hypothesis is quite applicable to Korean society. Korea has undergone "a turbulent history of foreign occupation, an international war, partition of the country, a major civil war, and recently dramatic economic development and social change" (Park & Cho, 1995, p.2) during the 20th century.

Traditional Confucian principles, values and view of family, governed Koreans' personal relationships at least into the mid-20th century (Park & Cho, 1995). Confucian values and its traditional family system were adopted by the late Chosun dynasty (1650-1910) and dictated hierarchical social relations such as those between ruler and subject, parent and child, and husband and wife (Park & Cho, 1995). The principles of *namnyo-yubyol* (sex difference) and *namjon-yobi* (honored men, abased women) governed the interactions between the sexes (Choi, 2005). Marriages were mostly arranged by fathers or elders. *HyungMoYangChu* (wise mother and good wife) was the image of the ideal Korean wife. Wives were expected to be "wise, proper, submissive, passive, and enormously patient" (Choi, 2005, p.69). An ideal wife was the one who silently sacrificed herself to take good care of her parents-in-law, husband, and children (Ryu, 2011). Divorce was rarely permitted, but the following seven vices were considered to be valid reasons for divorce by the husband, but not by the wife: disobediences to the husband's parents, failing to bear a son, adultery, jealousy,

contracting a harmful disease, malicious gossip, and theft (Park & Cho, 1995).

Rapid economic growth starting from the 1960s became the driving force behind societal changes. Since the 1960s, Korean GNP grew at an average annual rate of more than 8% from 1962 to 1986. Per capita income rose from \$87 in 1962 to \$6,940 in 1992 (Park & Cho, 1995). The standard of living and income in Korea rose considerably, particularly in the 1980s. Economic growth accompanied by rapid industrialization accelerated other societal changes as well (Lee, 2003). From 1946 to 1995, the proportion of urban population increased from 14% to 79%. People engaged in the primary sector (e.g., agriculture) decreased from 75% in 1946 to 12% in 1995. The proportion of the age cohort enrolled in secondary education rose from 20% to 96%. Along the way, young generations have learned individualistic values and egalitarian attitudes toward relationships through an increasingly Western-oriented education system and mass media.

Although relatively slow, traditional Confucian values surrounding marriage and family have undergone major changes. By the 1980s and 1990s, families began to value women's opinions. Young women and men mingle freely in public places, and date and marry the one of his or her choosing. Most parents are permissive about dating and courtship practices. Divorce seems no longer a serious stigma, as evidenced by the rising divorce rate of about 40% in

modern-day Korea. Yang (2003) conducted a survey of 2,000 Korean college students in Korea which supported the above-mentioned inferences. Among the respondents, 43.1% reported that they alone ("self alone") have decision-making power on marriage and dating, followed by 32.7% reporting the "family as whole" as decision-makers. Park & Chun (2011) conducted a survey on 200 Korean female college students in Korea and examined their perceptions of marriage and vocational consciousness. They found that 51% of the participants reported 'either getting married or unmarried is fine,' followed by 44.5% 'better getting married' and 'necessary getting married.' Additionally, it was noted that Korean female students tended to seek both marital success and vocational achievement. These results indicated that Korean families are in transition from a traditional Confucian ideology to a new ideology, most likely characterized by a fusion between Western and Eastern ideologies.

Empirical Studies on Korean Marital Maintenance

There is a paucity of cross-cultural studies directly addressing marital maintenance among Korean couples living in culturally transitional situations of modern Korea. Only a few studies have attempted to compare relational maintenance in Korea and in the U.S. (Yum, 2000, 2004; Yum & Canary, 2003); those

studies indicated that culture has significant bearing on relational maintenance behaviors and relational quality. There were studies which suggested that Koreans use maintenance behaviors less frequently than Americans (Yum, 2000; Yum & Canary, 2003). For example, Yum and Canary (1997, as cited in Yum & Canary, 2003) compared Korean college students to their American counterparts when involved in a romantic relationship on the perceived use of relational maintenance behaviors and relational quality. The results indicated that Americans reported using maintenance behaviors, such as openly discussing the nature of the relationship and displaying love, significantly more than their Korean counterparts and scored higher on all the relational characteristics. The results further indicated that culture moderated the relationship between maintenance strategies and relational qualities: Although there was a significant correlation between maintenance strategies and relational qualities for both Koreans and Americans, the correlation was greater for Americans than for Koreans (Yum & Canary, 2003).

Yum and Canary (2003) proposed that Koreans might not have been as motivated as Americans to put forth effort in relational maintenance due to Korean relational principles, such as *jung*, *yon*, *eui-ri*, and *noon-chi*. This argument receives some support in light of the fact that traditional collectivists tend to believe in fate or external conditions, rather than

conscious effort, as a force to keep a relationship together. However, as discussed earlier, Koreans no longer seem to be traditional collectivists. An alternative explanation may be that those measures better capture relational maintenance phenomena in America than in Korea, particularly considering that the authors used measures developed in the U.S. based on Westerners' self-reports. A closer examination of items on those measures reveals that many items reflected Westerners' virtues in personal relationships (e.g., an explicit mode of communication, an egalitarian basis of a relationship).

In regards to accommodative behaviors, findings were mixed (Yum, 2000, 2004). According to Yum (2000), there was no difference in the frequency of using accommodative behaviors between the two groups. Both Koreans and Americans reported employing strategies of actively attempting to improve conditions (*voice*) or waiting for positive changes (*loyalty*) more often than those of leaving or abusing the partner (*exit*) or avoiding discussion (*neglect*). Contrary to the previous findings, Yum (2004) did find a difference in the use of reactive maintenance behaviors among Korean college students and Americans. Koreans reported a greater use of neglect than Americans while both Koreans and Americans reported employing similar degrees of loyalty, voice, and exit. As Yum and Canary (2003) suggested, these confounding findings may reflect Koreans'

reaction and resistance to Korean traditional relational principles in the face of rapid societal change.

In summary, Yum and her colleagues (Yum, 2000, 2004; Yum & Canary, 2003) documented differences between Korean relational maintenance versus American relational maintenance. However, their findings were somewhat confusing. On one hand, Koreans appear to engage in relational maintenance behaviors less frequently than Americans due to their traditional collectivistic values. On the other hand, Koreans appear to use “active” accommodative strategies (i.e., voice and exit) as frequently as Americans in spite of the fact that Koreans traditionally have been portrayed as reticent communicators.

As Korea has gone through industrialization, westernization, and globalization over the last few decades, Koreans have been exposed to Western ideals of romantic love and marriage, especially through popular media. Korean partners likely feel fairly divided between opposing messages from both collectivistic and individualistic cultures. When they were born, economic growth and urbanization had just started to challenge patriarchal structures of family and conservative values toward marriage in Korea. They were raised by parents whose relationships were primarily governed by the traditional collectivistic culture. As they grew up, however, these younger generations have been confronted by constant societal changes, challenging their values and beliefs that they

have learned in their family relationships (Chang, 2006).

In this way, Korean married couples’ relationships do not fit easily into either the Korean traditional marriage or the contemporary Western notion of marital relationship. The fusion of two cultural worldviews—collectivism and individualism—has led to unique and complex marital dynamics among Korean married couples. On one hand, they highly value individualistic ideas and behaviors in maintaining their marriage. Similar to members of individualistic countries, they find that open and proactive communication strategies are strongly associated with their heightened sense of marital satisfaction (Hong & Chae, 2010; Hwang, 2009; Hwang & Ko, 2010); and that the higher level of similarities in personality traits a married couple share, the higher level of marital satisfaction they experience (Kim & Park, 2010). On the other hand, they still adhere to some traditional collectivistic principles. For example, parenting issues still tends to take a precedence over couple issues (Chang, 2006). Maintaining proper relational hierarchy is still considered important (Chang, 2006).

Korean women, in particular, may experience further challenges. They are likely to favor those new ideals as they try to compensate women’s disadvantages of traditional marriage and create a new relational dynamic in their relationships with men. However, they may feel deeper conflicts as they try to maintain the quality of

marital relationships with their husbands who are less likely to participate in creating a new family ideology (Cho & Bang, 2005). Meanwhile, Korean wives may further struggle with applying their ideals to their current marriage due to social pressure from older generations.

Kim (2009) investigated factors that affect marital satisfaction among Korean married women residing in Korea depending on age cohorts of 30s, 40s, and 50s. Results indicated that while the relationship with a husband remained important in maintaining marital satisfaction for all ages, some factors bore different weights for each age cohort: for 30s and 40s, fairness in the division of labor significantly affects their marital satisfaction, but for 50s it does not. For 50s, instead, the harmonious relationship with the in-laws played an important role. The findings illustrate that while Korean married women endorse individualistic marital ideals with an emphasis on a couple's relationship over other familial relationship to a certain degree, Korean women of younger generations are more perceptive to modern individualistic values such as egalitarianism. However, even younger women in their 20s and 30s seem to feel conflicted about how much they will maintain and/or resist the traditional view of marriage (Lee, Suh, & Jung, 2011). Chung and Choi (2010) suggested that those who recognize that their parents' marital relations were harmonious tend to adhere to a more traditional view of marriage.

Implications for Counseling and Research

This study explored the complexity and uniqueness of marital maintenance phenomenon in Korea. By describing the relationship between culture and marriage, it addressed potential problems and cultural issues that marital studies on Korean married couples need to consider. Previous cross-cultural studies in the field of relational maintenance were short of adequately explaining the marital maintenance phenomenon among modern Korean couples. The main problems of these studies were two folds as follows: (1) they heavily relied on the Western measures of relational qualities which resulted in overlooking subtle nuances of traditional relational values and strategies in Korea; or (2) they tended to take an overly simplified cultural distinction between collectivism and individualism, thus failing to capture the dynamic cultural transitions among Korean couples today.

Reviews of some empirical studies in Korea delineated how cultural dynamic of modern Korea affects Korean married couples today, which informed potential marital problems that Korean wives and husbands may face. For example, some studies suggest that modern Korean couples value individualistic relational values such as open and proactives communication and similarities in personalities (Hong & Chae, 2010; Hwang, 2009; Hwang & Ko, 2010; Kim & Park, 2010). Others indicate

that they still prioritize parenting issues over couple issues and concern about proper relational hierarchy (Chang, 2006). Overall, findings demonstrate that the marital maintenance process among Korean married couples is very complex, dynamically influenced by both individualism and collectivism. It is also discussed that Korean wives, especially of younger generations, who were once at disadvantages of traditional marriages or had parents who seemed to sustain a disharmonious marriage, are likely to be more perceptive of individualistic values such as egalitarianism (Chung & Choi, 2010; Lee et al., 2011). This illustrates tension and confusion that modern Korean couples may experience, as an individual as well as as a couple, as they attempt to maintain their marriage in the culturally transitional society.

This study can be utilized to inform mental health professionals of the psychological needs of Korean married couples or couples residing in communities undergoing similar cultural transitions between collectivistic and individualistic thoughts. Several important clinical implications can be drawn. First, mental health professionals should be aware that understanding young Korean couples' marital dynamics based on measures developed in the Western culture can be misleading (Chang, 2006; Nam, 2007). As these measures reflect Western relational values such as proactiveness and explicit expressiveness, Korean couples would likely come across as putting less effort into their

relationships, and therefore experiencing lesser marital satisfaction.

Secondly, as indicated in a rapidly rising divorce rate in Korea, Korean married couples no longer passively stay in their marriages due to their belief in fate or external conditions as couples of older generations used to do. Constantly exposed to individual cultural messages through education and mass media, they psychologically embrace their own individuality. It is also possible that they are increasingly drawn to this concept of choice, particularly if they grew up observing couples in the older generations (e.g., married couples in 1980s or before) preserving an unhappy marriage due to social barriers and pressure (Chung & Choi, 2010). Marital therapists working with Korean couples may benefit from exploring the couple's emotional reactions toward their parents' marriages in order to elicit deeper meanings behind their views of marriage and strategies in conflict.

Thirdly, it is expected that Korean couples feel conflicted regarding their roles as husbands and wives. On one hand, based on traditional family ideology, men desire to be esteemed as a respectable husband who works hard to provide for the family and plays as a head of the household. On the other hand, they may wish to attend to their individualistic needs for emotional support by managing to maintain a good relationship with their wives. Likewise, wives may desire to adopt the role of a

traditionally idealized wife who sacrificially attends to her husband's needs as the sacrificial woman set the ideal image of woman during their childhood. On the other hand, they may wish to have their individualistic needs for care and support attended to by their husbands (Cho & Bang, 2005; Park & Chun, 2011). Mental health professionals should be aware that this kind of internal conflict can be common for individuals who grew up in a culturally transitional society where diverse cultural values and beliefs coexist and conflict. Helping them find a meaningful balance between self (individualism) and other (collectivism) is expected to facilitate their process of integrating seemingly contrasting cultural values within themselves, which in return will help them engage in better negotiating roles and values with their partners.

Lastly, it would be invaluable to develop a marital counseling model which is specific to and fitting with the understanding of cultural challenges in a culturally transitional society like Korea. This study suggests that marital counseling based on Western-inspired values and strategies has the potential to discourage Korean couples from seeking marital counseling. For example, although Korean couples express their desires to improve their marital relationship, they may feel reluctant to seek marital counseling due to the traditional focus on the parent-child relationship over the couple's relationship (Chang, 2006). Some reticent partners would

often feel misunderstood, but they may find it embarrassing verbalizing their thoughts and feelings in counseling. A marital counseling model which delineates ways to address those kinds of challenges in Korea would motivate many couples with similar cultural challenges to seek help and move toward a healthy and strong marital relationship.

The current study documents the importance of understanding the relationship of culture to the ways in which Korean married couples manage to sustain their marriages. Although existing literature suggests that culture has significant impact on relational maintenance phenomenon, it does not provide a meaningful understanding of Korean couples' marriages in this generation. Thus, to understand how Korean married couples today navigate the tension and confusion caused by contrasting sets of cultural values, that is, individualism and collectivism, and maintain their marital relationships, it would be important to examine how Korean partners interacted with cultural changes at various stages in their lives and how conflicting cultural values are being negotiated in their marital maintenance process. It is discussed that a case study can be particularly useful for a cross-cultural study which requires examining multiple and complex issues embedded in the unique context (Merriam, 2009; Pak, 2006). Therefore, a case study utilizing a life story method, in particular, is expected to yield rich and meaningful results in further understanding

the phenomenon (McAdams, 1993).

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한국 결혼 생활 유지 과정의 복잡성에 대한 이해

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미국은 커플 관계에서 낭만적 흥분감, 직선적 의사소통, 그리고 평등주의를 강조하는 개인주의 문화로 분류되어 왔다. 반면에 한국은 조화, 은유적 의사소통, 수직적 관계를 강조한다는 면에서 집단주의 문화로 설명되어 왔다(Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). 그런데 현대 한국의 부부들은 전통적인 집단주의적 가치와 현대적인 개인주의 가치가 역동적으로 공존하고 갈등하는 독특한 상황에 놓여있다. 한국에서 나타나는 관계 유지 현상에 대해 설명하려는 몇몇 비교문화적 연구가 있었지만, 그 연구들은 서구화된 가치를 반영하는 측정도구를 사용하고 현대 한국에서 나타나는 다양한 문화적 측면을 간과하였기 때문에 의미있는 설명을 하지 못했다. 한국에서 이루어진 최근 연구들을 살펴보면, 한국 부부가 부부 간 소통에 있어서는 개인주의적 가치를 중요시 하지만, 여전히 부모-자녀 관계를 우선시하며 적절한 관계적 위계질서를 중요시 한다는 면에서는 집단주의적 가치를 선호한다는 것을 알 수 있다. 이러한 가치의 변화가 남편과 아내, 또 세대 간 복잡하고 다양하게 나타난다는 점에서 오늘날 한국의 결혼생활 유지가 특히 독특하고 복잡해진다. 이러한 결과를 바탕으로 상담 및 연구를 위한 제언을 하였다.

주요어 : 결혼 유지, 개인주의, 집단주의, 한국 부부