

## College Students' Re-Acculturation to their "Home" Country: Focusing on their Cultural Identity

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Among the cultural groups that increase South Korea's diversity, there are adolescents returning to Korea after their stay abroad. From 15 in-depth interviews with those who stayed abroad for longer than 5 years, 11 codes were generated. The codes were divided into two categories: "assets" when the multicultural experience served as resources for the returnees adapting to Korean culture successfully and "disadvantages" when the multiple experience remained fragmented for the returnees experiencing difficulty in re-acculturation. The distinguishing factors between the success and difficulty in re-acculturation appeared to be the cultural identity as Korean and the "openness to experience." The interwoven nature of personal and social factors stood out, along with the role of cultural identity throughout the process. Also the "openness to experience" as a strategy of integrating the past experiences is discussed, as well as the implications of the findings and the suggestions for future studies in the contemporary multicultural South Korea as a host society.

*Key words* : re-acculturation, returnees, cultural identity, openness to experience

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## Introduction

When social scientists investigate the phenomenon of cultural contacts in this era of global community, the process of change due to the constant encounter with a new set of culture, termed as acculturation (Berry, 1980), generally refers to the experience of immigrants who learn the culture of host society that is foreign to their culture of origin. Considering the contemporary trend of transnational migrations, however, re-entry to their country of origin is expected to be not uncommon. As a matter of fact, Korean adolescents who have lived abroad for various purposes, due to the family's relocation, the parents' job situation, and the move by themselves for education, are returning to South Korea. The number of these cases is reported to be over 20,000 per year (Korean Educational Development Institute, 2012).

While acculturation processes have been investigated with many different ethnicities, the re-acculturation process has not been given much academic attention to. As Martin (1984) specified, re-acculturation processes can be different from the general acculturation processes, first, because different expectations are involved, and second, because the internal and external changes have already occurred. Those who return to their country of origin, or their parents' country of origin in many cases, usually do not expect difficulties on re-entry, because it is their

“home.” By the same token, the friends and relatives of the returnees do not perceive the need for special social support that they may have provided otherwise. The changes that have occurred in the home country during the returnees' sojourn, as well as the internal changes that have occurred to the returnees themselves, bring about the issues of re-adjustment (Martin, 1984).

Among these returnees, there are adolescents who make to college in South Korea. Based on the diverse definitions of “home” country, whether it were to be a remote country where their parents were born or it were to be a good old town that they missed from abroad all the time, the decision to return is made for these adolescents. On top of the various tasks of readjustment, the public school system in South Korea may pose quite particular acculturation issues for the adolescents of secondary school age, due to its well-known strictness and competitiveness. In other words, for those who have to go through the Korean public education system, which may be very different from those of other countries they have lived in, the re-acculturation to Korean society could involve different demands from otherwise.

The purpose of the current study is two-fold. One is to examine the mechanism behind the associations between acculturation strategies and psycho-social adjustment. By employing a qualitative method, we aim to add a nuanced portrait to Berry's (1997) acculturation model,

which has been applied mainly to quantitative datasets. The other is to probe into the role of cultural identity in re-acculturation process that includes their adaptation in the Korean public school system. Returnees' cultural identity may be related to their definition of "home" country, which in turn may affect their re-acculturation attitude and adaptation in Korean society. By taking their life histories, if retrospectively, we aim to draw a more comprehensive picture of their re-acculturation process.

#### Re-Acculturation to the "Home" Country

The concept of acculturation is used mostly for first generation immigrants, who had been born in their countries of origin and migrated to another country, because they experience abrupt change of culture, social environment, and social networks. The current literature on acculturation draws on the model suggested by Berry (1997) most often, which distinguishes people's acculturation attitudes into four possible types depending on whether the immigrants consider the culture of origin and the culture of host society to be of value to maintain (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005). Depending on the individuals' acceptance or practice of the culture of host society and the culture of origin, four types were identified: *integration*, *assimilation*, *separation*, and *marginalization*. Those who accept both the mainstream culture and their culture of origin are regarded as *integration* type. Those who

accept only the mainstream culture, but not their culture of origin are regarded as *assimilation* type. On the contrary, the individuals who maintain their culture of origin, but reject the culture of host society, are thought as *separation* type. And those who neither maintain their culture of origin, nor accept the culture of host society, are thought as *marginalization* type (Berry, 1997).

Some argue that the interactive nature of acculturation should be taken into account in understanding immigrants' lives (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997). When it comes to the ecology of any lives, nothing occurs in vacuum; the interaction between an individual and social environment, as well as the interaction among individuals, compose the force surrounding and shaping human behaviors (Trickett, Kelly, & Vincent, 1983). In that sense, immigrants' acculturation is heavily affected by the state policy enacted in the host society, where certain strategies can be encouraged more than others (Bourhis, et al., 1997).

This force also influences the re-acculturation process when the immigrants return to their home country. They go through a new process of acculturation, the re-acculturation, as much as they are by then acculturated to the culture they have lived in. As re-acculturation is a cultural transition, any acculturation strategies of Berry's model can be employed in re-acculturation as well. To examine this, Neto

(2010) applied Berry's model to the adolescents who returned to their country of origin, Portugal. Based on such measurements as acculturation attitude types, proficiency of the foreign language and Portuguese, social interaction with other returned emigrants, and social interaction with non-migrant Portuguese peers, he found associations between the acculturation types and the individual factors. Girls, rather than boys, and those who stayed abroad for a short period of time, rather than for a long period of time, tended to adapt to the Portuguese culture, without losing the feel of the other culture. They spoke the foreign language fluently, but at the same time, they interacted with non-migrant peers in Portugal. This group of adolescents can be viewed as practicing *integration* (Neto, 2010). However, boys, rather than girls, even if they had stayed abroad for many years, tended to have left their past experiences abroad behind and to adapt fast to Portuguese culture (*assimilation*). They were likely to have experienced discrimination abroad and maintained their Portuguese identity. Thus their re-acculturation to the Portuguese culture on their return did not seem to be hard for them. On the contrary, some adolescents maintained the culture from abroad and did not adapt to Portuguese culture (*separation*). And others held onto neither cultures (*marginalization*) (Neto, 2010).

Here, he suggested a potential explanation of the mechanism behind the associations between

acculturation types and psychosocial adjustment: the returned adolescents might have lacked the skills to penetrate into the Portuguese society. This lack of skills, he argued, might have resulted in such acculturation patterns as separation and marginalization. This argument provides a new perspective that the separation and marginalization acculturation types are not voluntary; they are the results of the lack of necessary skills and subsequently they involve poor psychological well-being (Neto, 2010).

To investigate how the returned students adapt to Korean society, Oh and her colleagues (2010) examined the college students' psychosocial adjustment. Their findings supported the literature with respect to the association between acculturation types and psycho-social adjustment outcomes (Oh, Park, & Oh, 2010). With relatively even distribution of participants among the four acculturation types, those practicing marginalization showed the worst adjustment level, followed by those who practiced separation. One thing to note here is that the gender ratio in assimilation pattern was different from that of other patterns: more boys were practicing assimilation. In other words, boys tended to leave their past experiences behind and adapt to Korean culture rather fast.

In many studies that examined the types of acculturation and psychosocial adaptation, what is missing is the mechanism behind the correlations. It is unknown exactly why the returnees who are marginalizing, or marginalized

by Neto's suggestion, and/or separating/separated feel less satisfied than those who are integrating/integrated. In this regard, the current study aims to investigate what works behind these known associations by adding qualitative inquiries. While Berry's model has been criticized on many aspects, including the typological approach that could lead to a priori assumptions about an individual of one specific category (Rudmin, 2003), one thing to note is that the current study attempts to better understand the nature of re-acculturation by using his model as a starting point.

### Cultural Identity and (Re)Acculturation

In studying the phenomenon of acculturation, scholars have noted the importance of cultural identity (Berry, Phinney, Kwak, & Sam, 2006; Birman & Trickett, 2001; Suinn, Khoo, & Ahuna, 1995; Ward, 2013). In an investigation of acculturation patterns of Korean American high school students in a Midwestern Metropolitan area in the United States (Jeong, under review), the adolescents' cultural identity stood out as Korean, while their behavioral participation and language competence were more American than Korean. Moreover, some adolescents expressed their cultural identity, on the blank of the questionnaire, as follows: *"I am 100 percent Korean, but I do not see the world through oriental eyes."*

This distinction of ethnic identity from

behavioral participation can be conspicuous among those who have moved frequently from country to country, from culture to culture. This population is oftentimes referred to as "third culture kids" (TCK from below) because they manage to practice neither the home culture (first culture) nor the host culture (second culture) after their frequent moves among multiple cultures. Rather, they seem to "build relationships to all of the cultures they inhabit, while not having full ownership in any" (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, p.1) and to practice the third culture. TCKs are reported to experience a reverse culture shock when their sense of belonging to their "home" country<sup>1)</sup> gets challenged on repatriation (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Pollock & VanReken, 1999).

While the increase of the returnee population has been a recent phenomenon in South Korea, TCKs have been researched for the past five decades in America since the term was first coined by Useem and colleagues (Useem, Useem, & Donoghue, 1963). Among the multiple topics of investigation on TCKs, the identity and sense of belonging were the foci of the past studies (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). As Useem and Downie (1976) found in their study of American TCK adolescents returning for college in the United States, those who had to return to the country where they did not feel belong were faced particularly with identity management

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1) "Passport country" or "parents' country" are also used to refer to the first culture of the TCKs.

issues, and they became socially marginalized.

In the process, however, the social environment of the home country can alter the direction significantly: where the TCKs' experience abroad and foreign language competence are viewed as assets, they will not feel forced to set their past experiences aside to adapt back to their home country (Bourhis, et al., 1997; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). On the contrary, if the countries TCKs have inhabited are disrespected for any reasons in their home countries, they might have to discard their cultural experiences rather fast, depending on the pride level they take regardless of the social pressure. At the same time, the third culture that is formed in the expatriates' community in the second culture is typically shaped in international schools that enact American or British standards and expectations (Bourhis, et al., 1997; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). Thus, American or British TCKs might not have to totally discard their third culture on returning to their home countries, whereas TCKs from other countries might have to learn their first culture anew on return.

South Korea is the latter case. The adolescents, who moved to other countries, typically according to their parents' decisions and job situations, might experience ambivalence in facing the pressure to adapt to Korean culture on return and to set aside their past experiences. Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009) reckoned that this derived from the adolescents' avoidance of

marginalization in the society they (re)migrate to. At the same time, however, the increasing cultural diversity in the contemporary South Korea might grant certain freedom of choice to the returnees, with respect to the re-acculturation types and strategies.

### Study Objectives

Based on what we know and what we do not know about the (re)acculturation patterns of TCKs and repatriates, we aim to answer the questions as follows: (1) what do the narratives of returnee college students in Korea tell us about their re-acculturation process, in terms of four different strategies of acculturation?; (2) how does their cultural identity affect their re-acculturation strategies?; and (3) are there any factors that distinguish the different acculturation strategies?

## Methods

### Participant Recruitment

This was a part of a larger survey study that involved 181 returnee college students. By including only those who had lived abroad for longer than 5 years, the research team intended to sample the returnees who could represent rather stable characteristics of living abroad while they maintained their Korean citizenships.

As the Departmental Review Committee

approved the research, flyers were posted on the message boards throughout the campus of the university that the authors belonged to at the time. On the first-come-first-serve basis, the authors selected 15 students, trying to make the distributions balanced, in regards to gender, college major, and the regions from which they returned to Korea.

### Procedures

The interviews took place on campus, varying from an unoccupied classroom to an available meeting room in the university's mental health clinic. The participant came to the designated space on the agreed time.

The research assistant who was trained for the interview inquiry methods conducted in-depth interviews. Employing a structured interview methodology, the interview started with open-ended questions regarding their migration from country to country, including the decision for them to return to Korea. More specific questions followed to probe into the process of the decision-making, if the college students themselves were involved, why and when they returned to Korea. Then the interview proceeded to hear about their perception of Korean culture, sense of belonging both in school and outside of school, their social relationships, and any factors that helped their re-acculturation in Korea.

### Data Analysis

The medium of communication was Korean, but the participants shifted their language codes between Korean and English as they wished. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, in the languages spoken. The first round of analysis was done to organize the responses according to the structured interview questions, by having regular research team meetings. After a break of time, due to the relocation of the researchers, however, the second round of analysis was done recently to answer the research questions laid out in the previous section. For the current study, the interview quotations were translated into English by the first author. Also, the acculturation types identified from the acculturation survey questionnaire for the bigger project served as another set of data for the current analysis.

Coding followed the process outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). We tried to "break open" the data in terms of what the participants intended to tell us, the thoughts and the meanings in their words, which are termed as themes. These themes were then refined as codes that group certain themes. The codes were then grouped into meta-codes or categories that were superordinate entities to the codes.

This open coding process started with the first interview and continued to evolve with the subsequent 14 iterations of the remaining interviews. The authors read the transcripts

independently and met to discuss their ideas about the codes generated and continued to modify the ideas until reaching at a tentative agreement. The consensus was formulated in the form of code-book that was applied to 15 interviews all over again.

Once the code-book was finalized, the dependability of the data was examined through the process of member checking and inter-rater reliability, as was guided by Guba and Lincoln (1989). The process for the inter-coder agreement was repeated after a four months' break. The first round of analysis was conducted with three team members, and the second round of analysis was conducted with a new member added to the team. In the first round of analysis, the team focused on the psycho-social adjustment of the college returnees and their acculturation types. In the second round of analysis, the team focused on the process of change and the factors related to both the different acculturation types and the adaptation outcomes. New codes were added and constant reorganizations of the codes were carried out in each round of data analysis. After several repetitions of the process, there was no new code added and no reorganization was needed. The final codes were used to generate the properties and categories.

As another method to ensure the credibility of the data, the team had set up another systematic comparison schedule: the code-recode consistency. To compensate for the time lapse

between the data collection and the data analysis, the team mobilized their own social networks who can check the validity of the codes generated. Five graduate students in the psychology department of the university in which the data had been collected volunteered to provide feedback. They had lived abroad for one year at least (from 1 to 14 years), and thus they were expected to provide insights on the meaning of the research participants' responses. Based on their own first-hand experience as returnees in South Korea, suggestions were made to focus on certain factors that either promote or hinder the healthy re-adjustment back in Korea. Their suggestions were reflected in the team's way of organizing the codes into categories. In the process of categorizing, the properties of the codes were taken into account.

## Results

The demographic characteristics of the 15 participants are shown in Table 1. Eight female students and seven male students participated and the average length of their stay abroad was 11.47 years.

Guided by the *Grounded Theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we tried to categorize the codes that emerged from the interviews. More than anything, the fact that they had moved from culture to culture at least twice before college years appeared to serve as the core predictor of



Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

Demographics		Number of Participants	Percent
Gender	Male	7	46.67
	Female	8	53.33
Year in College	1 <sup>st</sup>	3	20.00
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	5	33.33
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	13.33
	4 <sup>th</sup>	5	33.33
Length of stay abroad	5 ~ 10 yrs	6	40.00
	11 ~ 15 yrs	7	46.67
	16 ~ 20 yrs	2	13.33
Number of countries resided in (excluding South Korea)	1	10	66.67
	2 ~ 3	3	20.00
	4 ~ 5	2	13.33

Table 2. codes that emerged from the interviews

Categories	Properties	Codes	Prominent Acculturation Types
Assets	Personal	Enjoying new challenges and changes of the environments	Integration, Assimilation
		Adaptive personality / openness to new experiences	Integration, Assimilation
		Strong cultural identity as Korean	Integration, Assimilation
		Korean language competence	Integration, Assimilation
Disadvantages	Social	Social networks and support	Integration, Assimilation
	Personal	Undefined identity	Separation, Marginalization
		Difficulty of acculturation / stress from it	Separation, Marginalization
		Dislike certain aspects of Korean culture	Separation
		Wish to return abroad	Separation
	Social	Lack of sense of belonging	Marginalization
		Discontinuity of social networks	Marginalization

their other experiences and the subsequent interpretations. On a grand scheme, the returnees showed adaptive functioning when they integrated their past experiences with certain positive attitude. This led to the willingness to learn a new culture, the Korean culture in their re-entry. In other words, their multi-cultural experiences turned into assets to them. On the contrary, when their past experiences remained fragmented, they had difficulty in forming a secure identity and/or social network. In this case, the returnees felt uprooted and marginalized from either culture. That is to say, their multi-cultural experiences turned into disadvantages to them. The specific codes that emerged from the interviews are grouped by the *properties* (personal or social) and then into *categories* (assets or disadvantages), in relation to the prominent acculturation types (See Table 2).

### When Multi-Cultural Experiences Turn Into Assets

Some of the participants expressed how much they liked being in different places. Even though the new environment posed them new demands and challenges, they tried to make the best out of the circumstances, no matter whether they had chosen the change or not.

“Maybe thanks to my past experience of transferring schools, I mean primary schools, even, I liked new environment... I enjoyed

meeting new people and I basically loved to experience new things,” “I think I am adaptive. I don’t like thinking something as stressful. The weather here was really cold to me at first, but then after a while, I came to even enjoy the cold weather.” (Participant D)

This type of statement was made mostly by those who were practicing integration acculturation. They expressed how it helped them develop adaptive personality and their openness to learn new things. In the results, the latter is distinguished from the former: “enjoying new challenges and changes” focuses on the participants’ attitude toward the changes of the environments by moving; and “adaptive personality” means rather an outcome of the former attitude described and serves as a personality that can be applied to other aspects in life than the changes in the environment.

Another code that stood out was their strong ethnic identity as Korean. After all the moving from country to country, they maintained their cultural identity as Korean.

“It has been really important to me to know that I am Korean. I felt so connected with other fellow Koreans wherever I was in the world.” (Participant D)

“In Germany, I lived with the label ‘foreigner’ no matter how fluent I was in German language and no matter how good

relationships I had with German friends, because I looked different... More than anything, in any aspects of me, I feel more Korean than German. I am a Korean citizen. Also the experience as a foreigner led me to hold onto my identity as Korean." (Participant E)

The returnees who succeeded in integrating their past experiences also pointed out the significant difference that their Korean language competence made in their acculturation. They responded to the question, "what do you think helped your adjustment in Korea?" as below. The Korean language proficiency opened up the chances for social networks as well, which follows later:

"Korean language was most important in the adjustment. I always felt more confident in Korean than in English, and then as soon as I returned to Korea, I even almost forgot English." (Participant D)

"(In acculturating to Korean society) I can tell you that language is the Number One. Whether you can make yourself understood or not affects everything." (Participant E)

The adaptive personality was also mentioned often. Furthermore, there was found a tendency among the respondents to attribute the adjustment success or failure to individuals, rather than to resources available or to settings.

The potential reason of this rationale will be discussed more in detail later.

"You know.. you have to be patient and persistent. That helped me.. I had to preview and review all the materials to keep up with classes. I read a lot of books voluntarily, and that helped" (Participant E)

In their acculturation, there were external resources that helped expedite the process as well. The social networks and the support from them were significant encouragement for the returnees' re-acculturation to Korean society.

"Friends! All I needed was informed by my friends here." (Participant D)

"First of all, teachers were patient. They took into consideration that it (acculturation) would take some time. Then, my friends. My close friends were listening to me while I talked like a baby.. really patient." (Participant E)

In sum, when the returnee college students have developed the openness to new experiences and willingness to learn the new culture, accumulatively from their migrations from culture to culture, they were likely to incorporate their past experiences. This tendency seemed to help them make the best out of the changes, even out of the challenges, in their lives.

### When the Multi-Cultural Experiences Remain Fragmented

Contrary to the patterns and interpretations of acculturation shown in the previous section, the same factor of frequent moving from culture to culture yielded different outcomes among other returnee college students in Korea. When their past experiences remained fragmented, they functioned rather as disadvantages than as assets.

The most notable response was the undefined identity. It was sometimes unexplored yet; sometimes it was undecided yet after certain occasions of crises; and other times it was assumed as expected by others.

“I have not thought about it (identity).. um.. because nationality doesn’t matter when you meet people.” (Participant F)

“Well.. the physical appearance. People would not know that I am from abroad unless I tell them so... I have lived in many different countries and in Korea for the longest time among them, so you can say that I feel as Korean because of that. People see me and say ‘oh, you are Korean’ and I think... ‘yeah... I am...’ Well, I have no other specific one to identify myself with. Do I?” (Participant J)

“First of all, I am Korean, racially, so I think... even though I have lived in many different countries, my parents are Korean, and even though I was not born in Korea,

I grew up in Korean family. So I think I am Korean.” (Participant M)

Particularly, the conclusion quoted above from the participant M does not seem to derive from the active process of questioning and seeking for an answer about his/her own identity. This also means that most of these college returnees either conformed to the identity expected by their parents or the third parties without exploring the alternatives through their crises or deferred the commitment because they are still exploring. Thus the participants’ responses to their cultural identity question remained at the level of racial identity.

This type of vague cultural identity is related to their sense of belonging. Many of the participants mentioned how frequent moving kept them from feeling belonged to certain groups or cultures.

“I... do not blend in well... so.. regarding the feel of membership... I feel I am rather isolated, as a matter of fact. I have moved a lot. I have lived in many different countries. Maybe because of that, I mean, I have not stayed in one place for longer than 3 years. So it is hard for me to feel attached to one place.” (Participant A)

“I do not feel belonged to a group or to a country. Maybe because I moved in and out of South Korea so many times since young. Even the Korean identity, I think,

was injected, like being brainwashed. Singing the national anthem altogether every week (in primary and secondary schools), comparing South Korea with China, Japan, and North Korea... These things rather incite the feel of nationality purposefully (than it forms naturally)." (Participant K)

As in the participant J's case above, other people's perception affected the adolescents' identity formation and their feel of separation in the following case.

"People talk about me, essentially, 'he has lived in America and so he is American.' I do not feel accepted perfectly.. I do not think so. The document says yes (that I am Korean). I even completed the military service here, but still I feel like... in talking with others... not so belonged here." (Participant L)

Their sense of belonging and the lack thereof were exacerbated by the discontinuity of their social networks. While the college returnees with integration acculturation attitude reported they had helpful relationships with their Korean peers and/or with Korean teachers, these returnees who were marginalized felt uprooted and unconnected in Korea.

"I went to a high school where all the students were required to live on campus.

And the classes were small, and so they experienced a lot of happenings, fun things together in grade 9. Then in grade 10 and 11, they still talked about their grade 9 experiences. I felt bad because I could not join them in that kind of thing (because I entered in grade 10)." (Participant K)

"I transferred to this school in the fall semester (which is the second semester of an academic year in Korea) and so I couldn't be included. It was hard. You know, in the first semester, everyone is new to each other, but then after one semester passes, they know each other well and only I am new. It's hard to jump into the circle in the middle of the year. Also I transferred to a different class that was an overseas-college prep class in the middle of the first year. Then I had to make new friends there again..." "Especially when they ask 'where is your home?' it took time for me to learn that it's asking my hometown, not where I live at the moment. Then later, I found myself perplexed at that question because I did not have any friends who went to the same primary school, secondary school, and college. Other Korean peers seemed to have that kind of friends from young." (Participant M)

The problems that were found prominent among those of either marginalization or separation types were their difficulty of

acculturation and the stress from it. These returnees described certain aspects of Korean culture that they had to get adjusted to but that they were reluctant to acculturate themselves to. Above all, the collective culture among Korean peers was strange, at best, to the research participants.

“Well... since my return to Korea, I became so conscious of how I look. I used to not care about the appearance. But here, everyone is so dressed up. And it’s stressful because everyone else but me seems to care about what to wear...” “And the way they hang out... I do not like their drinking culture in college. I feel like an outsider because I do not drink with them, because I do not eat with them. Eating alone in a cafeteria makes me feel so self-conscious.” (Participant A)

Another prominent code that emerged was Korean people’s disrespect of diversity. This aspect caused discomfort as much as they thought it wrong.

“It does not apply to everyone, but some (Korean) people are so narrow-minded. They can’t think other ways to look at it. They do not respect difference.” (Participant J)

“Well.. how can I say it? They (Koreans) are rigid. They are not flexible in mind. It is very oppressive that you have to be

always self-conscious. It is choking. It appears that all live the same lives in the same fashion..” (Participant L)

Among these returnees, there were some who expressed their wish to go back abroad. It went along with their pattern of maintaining the foreign culture, while distancing themselves from the Korean culture. Thus this possibility of going back abroad was present particularly among those of the separation type.

“One sure thing is that I cannot bear with living here. I am thinking only ‘I do not fit in here, how can I get out of here?’ Well, at the moment, I can’t help thinking that this is not for me.” (Participant L)

“I feel as if I am labeled as foreigner here. So I was thinking like.. should I go back..” (Participant C)

In sum, as was discussed in the earlier section, the college student returnees who had not developed the openness to and the willingness to learn from new experiences seemed to practice different acculturation types from those who had. This involved diverse statuses of their cultural identity, which was not integrated in their interpretation of their own past experiences.

## Discussion

### Relations among codes

This study aimed, first, to add a qualitative nuance to the well-known acculturation type model of Berry (1997). The college returnees' responses in the current study, which were shown in Table 2, suggest that the codes that emerged from the interviews can be re-organized based on the relations among them. More specifically, for those who managed to integrate their past experiences abroad and to successfully adapt to the Korean way of living, the Korean language competence seemed to be the key factor to their re-acculturation. When they were competent in the Korean language, building social networks and getting social support from them were not hard. This also means the personal domain and the social domain are interwoven in the returnee's acculturation. Somewhere in this link, their strong identity as Korean factored in as well. Those who retained their cultural identity as Korean tended to make more social networks with Korean peers and adults, which was helpful to their re-learning of the contemporary Korean culture.

One thing to note here is that the adolescents who were successful in re-adaptation to Korean culture were not limited to the integration type. Very similar characteristics were also found in the assimilation type. The language competence, strong identity as Korean, and social networks with Korean peers and adults were the codes that also emerged from

the assimilation type returnees' responses. Particularly for them, the sense of belonging to the college, developed by participating in multiple activities with fellow students, appeared to have helped their re-acculturation substantially. This is in accordance with the literature (Chae & Han, 2003; Neto, 2010). In reporting the result that the adolescents found in the assimilation type, he argued that they tended to leave their past experiences abroad behind and acculturate to the Portuguese society rather fast. Also their identity as Portuguese helped this process.

On the contrary, among those who were found in the marginalization or separation type, no mention of Korean language competence was made. At the same time, however, they showed the vague cultural identity that appeared to have been taken, just as others expected the returnees to have. Racial identity as Korean without an exploration process for themselves was prominent among these students. Even though it is unclear whether the identity issue precedes their sense of belonging issue or whether it worked the other way around, these returnee students expressed the sense of uprooted-ness and the lack of sense of belonging in Korea, mainly due to the discontinuity of social networks.

Maybe because of this lack of sense of belonging in Korea, multiple aspects of Korean culture were incomprehensible to their eyes. The collectivistic culture that pressures individuals to

conform to the group's norms, including excessive interest in the physical appearance and drinking together so often, was not appreciated by these adolescents. Particularly when they disliked those aspects of Korean culture, their re-acculturation process was even harder. Furthermore, some returnees, in the separation type in particular, showed their wish to return abroad. No matter whether it was feasible for them to go back abroad, their wish to be not in this country might as well have functioned to hinder their adaptation to Korean culture.

All these can be summed up as the bidirectional nature of multiple factors in the acculturation process, as was argued by Bourhis and his colleagues (Bourhis, et al., 1997). The possibility is that individual's cultural identity helped language proficiency, which in turn facilitated social networking and culture learning. However, at the same time, it is also possible that social networks enhanced their language learning, which in turn promoted their cultural identity as Korean. The same nature applies to the adolescents who feel marginalized or separated in Korea. It is possible that their lack of language proficiency stopped them from forming sturdy relationships with Korean peers, which might have affected their sense of belonging and cultural identity. When all these did not work out for them, they might have wished to return to the country they were from. Another possibility is that they did not want to leave their life abroad behind and could not

develop appreciation for Korean culture, which might as well have influenced their social networks and cultural identity. To sum up, with the qualitative research method, we were able to identify what went on in the college returnees' minds, beyond the acculturation typology they were grouped into. Their experiential narratives suggested the diverse relations among factors in their re-acculturation, and thus, the future research topics to probe further into.

#### Personality that is Developed

The mapping and grouping of the codes in terms of the factors in the re-acculturation of college returnees led us to the construct of openness to experience (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to the Five Factor Model of personality, people who are open to experience tend to show divergent thinking, intellectual curiosity, and preference for variety. The college returnees who had these characteristics were successful in integrating their past experiences and making the best out of them, which yielded adaptive re-acculturation in the Korean society. On the contrary, those who are closed to experience (McCrae, 1996) are likely to be conventional and traditional, and to endorse authoritarian, ethnocentric, and prejudiced views. The current study's findings correspond to these descriptions of the Five Factor Model.

We did not measure this construct in the current study, and thus we are unable to draw



conclusions on the exact role of the trait like the openness to experience. Nevertheless, college returnees' certain experience in multiple cultures seemed to have nourished the tolerance and respect for diversity. Considering that this trait can be developed through education and cultural environment, as was suggested by McCrae (1996), getting to the bottom of the mechanism behind the development of the openness to experience deserves further research.

### Future Suggestions

The current study relied on the participants' retrospective narratives on what had happened when they were going through re-acculturation. Thus, the accuracy of their recall is compromised. Particularly, the college returnees who were found in the integration acculturation type reported the importance of personal attitude in the re-acculturation process. They tended to attribute their successful adaptation to the quality they themselves had, rather than to the resources that were available in their community or to the public system from which whoever migrating could benefit. This could be a manifestation of the fundamental attribution error in the actor-observer bias (Ross, 1977). In other words, the returnees might have interpreted that their success derived from their own disposition and personality; while those who were marginalized attributed their failure to Korean cultural aspects that did not value their

past experiences as assets.

In either case, examining more returnees would help us to better understand the re-acculturation process of repatriates. With a bigger and diverse sample, we will be able to investigate the role of diverse cultural backgrounds in re-acculturation, how different cultures define and affect individuals' acculturation, and the impact of the length of the stay abroad. Also with a bigger and diverse sample, we will be able to examine the contribution of the resources versus personality to the successful adaptation to a new culture.

Lastly, because this study was conducted as a part of a larger survey study, it has certain limitations as a complete qualitative inquiry. In designing this qualitative part of the study, the positivistic perspective was maintained, which might have compromised the appropriateness of the questions asked, including the directiveness of the questions. If designed as an independent qualitative research, more appropriately open-ended questions could have yielded richer data that could have been analyzed strictly following one of the diverse analysis methods, including Grounded Theory and Phenomenology. This limitation leaves many insights for future studies that can be conducted more coherently.

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## 해외거주 귀국 대학생들의 “모국” 문화재적응: 문화정체성을 중심으로

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현대 한국의 문화적, 인종적 다양성이 크게 증가하는 가운데, 일정기간 해외 거주 후 한국으로 귀국함으로써 한국사회 내의 문화적 다양성을 증가시키는 인구가 있다. 특히 매년 2만명이 넘는 학령기 해외거주 귀국자들 중 한국에서 대학교에 진학한 학생들을 대상으로 심층면접을 실시하여 그들의 문화(재)적응 과정을 조사하였다. 해외거주 기간을 5년 이상으로 한정하여, 15명(남7명, 여 8명)의 귀국대학생을 면접한 결과, 11개의 주제가 도출되었다. 이 주제들은 크게 2개의 대분류로 나뉘었는데, 귀국학생들의 과거 경험이 다문화 사회의 일원으로서 살아가는 데에 자산으로 기능한 경우와, 반대로 다양한 문화적 경험이 오히려 개인의 문화적 정체성을 형성하는 데에 방해가 된 경우가 그것이다. 어느 부류에 속하는가를 결정짓는 변인은 한국인으로서의 문화적 정체성과 “경험에 대한 개방성”이라는 성격특질인 것으로 나타났다. 문화적 정체성은 다른 주제들의 유기적 관련성을 이어주는 핵심이었고, 경험에 대한 개방성은 회상적 연구의 특성 상 연구참가자들이 지난 경험에 대해 선택적인 기억을 하고 이를 통합하는 과정에서 사용된 인지적 책략일 수도 있음을 논하였다. 사회적 환경과 개인의 성격특질이 교차적으로 작용하는 단면으로서의 문화(재)적응 현상을 관찰한 결과들을 토대로, 현대 한국사회의 문화적 다양성을 연구하는 데 있어서의 함의 및 적용점을 논하였다.

주요어 : 문화재적응, 해외거주 귀국자, 문화정체성, 경험에의 개방성