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Individualism and Collectivism in a Korean Population

Diana D. Ahn
Scripps College

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INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM IN A KOREAN POPULATION

by

DIANA D. AHN

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR WALKER
PROFESSOR ABDULLATIF**

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Running head: INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM IN A KOREAN
POPULATION

Individualism and Collectivism in a Korean Population

Diana Ahn

Scripps College

Abstract

Though much research has been conducted concerning the horizontal and vertical attributes of individualism and, not much has been done comparing and contrasting an Eastern culture, collectivism to a specific aspect of American culture, individualism, such as Korean American. The 32-item INDCOL scale was used to measure the 4 attributes (Singelis et al., 1995). Contrary to the proposed hypothesis, this study found high scores in horizontal individualism in Korean American participants and high scores in horizontal individualism and horizontal collectivism in Korean participants. These results could indicate a shift towards a different attribute in the Korean and Korean American community.

Individualism and Collectivism in a Korean Population

There have been a number of attempts to more effectively understand the rather subjective nature of culture. Many different dimensions of culture have been explored, and one aspect that is often examined is the subject of individualism and collectivism. Individualism promotes autonomy whereas collectivism promotes interdependence. Collectivistic cultures prioritize the goal of the group. Using a cross-cultural approach, individualism and collectivism have been explored and compared primarily among Western and East Asian populations (Noguchi, 2007). Many studies have been conducted in order to consider the complexities of these cultures. Surveying Western culture, primarily the U.S., shows that there is great diversity amongst American communities. Unless specified as Euro-American or White-

American culture, there is no easy way to define American culture because it is a mix of cultures from all around the world. This study will be focusing on the culture of the Asian American population, primarily Korean American, in the U.S. Korean Americans is one of the youngest immigrant populations and their culture, unlike Chinese Americans, has not been explored in depth.

Korean Culture

The Korean culture places a lot of value on interdependence. In contrast to individualistic cultures of the Western hemisphere, Koreans develop a sense of identity through relationships made in their web of social connections. The core of these interpersonal relationships is the concept of what Kim and Choi define as “we-ness” (1998) in their study of shim-cheong psychology, which is unique to the Korean culture. Because of the close involvement of others in their social circle, Koreans tend to identify strongly with their in-group. They prefer to “immerse themselves in the in-group’s activities” in order to “[form] a consensus of opinions rather than respecting the individual opinions (Han and Ahn, 1994). However, these collectivistic tendencies shift towards individualism when Koreans receive more education that is beyond high school (Han and Ahn, 1994). Even though modernization and industrialization have changed the traditional structures of family and the workplace collectivism still thrives. Korean Americans brought these collectivist conceptions of we-ness, their values and ideologies they learned growing up when they immigrated to the United States.

Asian Americans: Korean Americans

Growing up in the U.S. with different values coming from an individualistic culture, the U.S., and a collectivistic culture, Korea, can be quite confusing. Often, the collision of individualistic and collectivist cultures can be problematic. However this was not the case for Korean immigrants. Over time, Korean and American cultures have been integrated into a hybrid of individualistic and collectivist cultures: the Asian American culture. In Miyamoto's study, the Japanese American Nisei illustrates one aspect of this hybridity in the "spontaneity and directness in American communication style and the self restraint in Japanese communication style," which she argues has developed into the joking style (1986-1987). This style allows Nisei to express themselves and not negatively affect interpersonal relationships. The longer a Korean immigrant has lived in the U.S., generationally speaking, the faster their acculturation rate (Lee, 2006). Lee's study looked into the development of values between Korean high school students and 2nd generation Korean American high school students. Lee found that 2nd generation Korean American students maintained some values that were similar to those of Korean high school students; overall, their values were more similar to those of Americans.

Individualism-Collectivism and the INDCOL Measure

Although there are distinctions between the two, at times individualist and collectivist cultures overlap. Individualist cultures have in-groups as well as hierarchies; it is just not as overt as it is in collectivist cultures (g et al., 1990). Individualistic cultures have personal goals that may or may not

overlap with the group's goal (Singelis et al., 1995). Therefore, it is not uncommon to see individualistic cultures displaying collectivistic goals and vice versa.

There are two categories, Triandis believes, that are important in defining this cultural dimension: the self and goal structure. The self is interdependent in collectivist cultures and independent in individualist cultures, whereas personal and communal goals were considered together in collectivism. From the self and goal structure, four attributes were implemented into the individualism-collectivism dimension: vertical individualism, horizontal individualism, vertical collectivism and horizontal collectivism. Vertical collectivism accepts inequality and understands that everyone is different from each other. However, vertical collectivists see themselves as part of a collective and promote communalism. Vertical individualism is the same as vertical collectivism except it values the autonomous self. Horizontal collectivists stress equality and view the individual as part of a collective group and tend to have communal living spaces. Horizontal individualism is similar to horizontal collectivism but, like vertical individualism, values the autonomous self. The horizontal attribute measures the individual as more or less equal to others and in contrast, vertical attribute measures the individual as different from (Chiou, 2001). In Li's and Aksoy's study, they found that the individualism-collectivism measurement is applicable cross culturally (2007). However, there are several factors that can be problematic when using INDCOL. Some of the threats are

culture and language (Robert et al., 2006). In some cultures, such as Korea and Singapore, people are more likely to respond with in “respect to people with whom they are familiar with” meaning that they may score lower on tests administered by individuals they do not know (Robert et al., 2006). Also, it is difficult to translate phrases directly into another language if no such phrase exists in the other language. Other studies have shown that Japan and Korea, when compared to North America, have shown varying results, not homogenous results (Fiske, 2002). Rhee and other colleagues believe that collectivism and individualism is best represented in a 4-factor model of kin collectivism, kin individualism, nonkin collectivism and nonkin individualism (1996), not with horizontal and vertical attributes. It appears that there is much opposition against the usage of the INDCOL scale.

Though INDCOL may be difficult to apply in certain cultures, Triandis and Gelfrand found that, like the individualist culture of the United States, horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism and vertical collectivism were found in Korea, which is a collectivist culture (1998). Thus, there is some applicability of the scale. These four attributes describing individualism and collectivism add more complexity and show some correlation with how one with the in-group and with interpersonal relationships (Gouveia and Espinosa, 2003). Horizontal and vertical characters of individualism and collectivism are used to describe countries in a more descriptive manner. The United States is a vertical individualistic culture whereas East Asian countries tend to be either vertical collectivistic

or horizontal collectivistic cultures (Sivadas et al., 2008). Since Korea has a Confucian background and share many values with the Chinese culture, South Korea is more vertical collectivistic than horizontal collectivistic (Sivadas et al., 2008). From all this, the following hypotheses will be tested in regards to the vertical collectivism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and horizontal individualism, South Korea and Korean Americans. *Hypothesis 1:* 0th generation, participants who live in South Korea, will be vertical collectivists (Sivadas et al., 2008). The generations that follow will change from vertical collectivists to vertical individualists due to acculturation (Lee, 2006). *Hypothesis 2:* As each generation follows, participants will still identify with family, friends and partners but will identify less with relatives, colleagues and neighbors. In the friend's category, there will be no difference in making new friends between generations whereas the number of close friends and the degree of friendship will be different. When vertical and horizontal attributes are not taken into account, collectivists identify more with in-groups, especially with traditional in-groups such as family and relatives, than would individualists (Gouveia et al., 2003). The degree of friendship will be negatively correlated with vertical individualism. The number of close friends will be negatively correlated with vertical collectivism. Vertical individualism is positively associated with the number of new friends whereas horizontal individualism would be negatively associated with the number of new friends.

Methods

Participants

There were a total of 112 participants that started the survey, but only 78 participants completed the survey. Participants were from California or were attending schools in the area and from South Korea, mostly from Seoul. Within the sample, there were 0th generation (n=15), 1.5 generation (n=14), 2nd generation (n=46), and 3rd generation (n=3). Out of all the participants, 92.3% were students (n=72) and 7.7% (n=6) were either employed or undeclared. Out of the 78 participants, 9 participants took the survey in Korean. The age of participants ranged from 18-24 (M=20.08, SD=1.62). The majority of the participant parent's occupations were professional (n=37) and business (n=32).

Test Instrument

The questionnaire that was given to the participants consisted of three parts. The first section was on general demographics such as age and occupation. The second part was the shortened INDCOL scale, which Singelis et al. selected from "a pool of 94 items (1995)." The scale was answered in a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). There were 8 questions each that measured the 4 attributes: vertical individualism, vertical collectivism, horizontal individualism, and horizontal collectivism. An English version and Korean version of the shortened INDCOL scale was made available (Ryu, 2008). The last part of the questionnaire was on the participant's identification with certain in-groups: family, relatives, colleagues, neighbors, partner, and friends. Afterwards, there was a short

part that looked into interpersonal relationship with friends: number of new friends in the last 12 months, number of close friends, and degree of friendship on a scale ranging from 0 (superficial) to 4 (stable) (Gouevia et al., 2003). The 1st and third part of the questionnaire was translated by Jeehyun Kim, a native Korean speaker, and was back translated by Yong Jun Ahn, also a native Korean. See Appendix for all survey materials.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through facebook and by email. On the facebook event and email, there was a link that would direct them to the survey. All participants gave their informed consent. The survey provided informed consent and there were no direct benefits from participating in this study. After completing the online questionnaire, the participants were quickly debriefed and were given contact information and counseling service information. On average, the participants took about 10 minutes or less to take the survey.

Design

Central Tendencies and ANOVAs were used to analyze the data. For the comparison of between 0th generation and 1st, 1.5, 2nd and 3rd generation on the INDCOL scale, central tendencies were used. ANOVA was used to look into generation and intrapersonal relationships and identifications. This test was also used to analyze generation and the INDCOL measurements

RESULTS

The survey was available for participants to take from November 20, 2011 until December 7, 2011. On the INDCOL scale, Korean Americans scored highest on horizontal individualism ($M=7.19$, $SD= 0.93$). The next closest attribute was horizontal collectivism ($N= 6.51$, $SD 1.23$) and the lowest attribution was vertical individualism ($N=5.33$, $SD= 3.50$). Koreans had the highest score in horizontal individualism ($N=6.83$, $SD= 1.02$). The mean for horizontal collectivism ($N=6.48$, $SD 1.21$) was similar to the mean for vertical collectivism ($N=6.45$, $SD=1.27$). The lowest score was vertical individualism ($N=5.8$, $SD: 0.62$). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to look at the 4 attributes, the independent variable as generation and the dependent variables as the 4 attributes, and found significance at the $p<0.5$ level in vertical individualism [$F(3,74)=1.31$, $p=0.28$], horizontal collectivism [$F(3,74)=1.60$, 0.20] and vertical collectivism [$F(3,74)=1.094$, 0.36]. Horizontal individualism was not significant at $p<0.5$ level [$F(3,74)=0.684$, 0.57].

In the second generation Korean American group, the participants closely identified with family, partner, and friends. They had an average of 37 new friends made this year and an average of 7 close friends. They rated their degree of friendship as 3.62. In the 1.5 generation, the participants identified closely with family, relatives, partner, and friends. They made an average of 34 friends during the year and have around 8 close friends. They rated the degree of friendship at 3.29. In the 0th generation, they highly identified with family and friends. There was an average of 40 new friends. The number of

close friends they had was 9 friends and the degree of friendship they had was 3.47.

ANOVA was used to look more at the dependent variables, interpersonal relationship and identifications, and the independent variable, generations. Only relatives [$F(3,74)=0.50, 0.68$] and colleagues [$F(3,74)=0.61, 0.61$] was not significant with the $p < 0.5$ level. Family [$F(3,74)=1.05, 0.37$], neighbors [$F(3,74)=3.24, 0.03$], partners [$F(3,74)=1.001, 0.40$], friends [$F(3,74)=1.74, 0.17$], number of new friends in 12 months [$F(3,74)=1.42, 0.24$], number of close friends [$F(3,74)=1.43, 0.24$], and degree of friendship [$F(3,74)=1.31, 0.28$] were found significant.

Discussion

This study investigated the horizontal and vertical attributes of individualism and collectivism in the Korean and Korean American population. The research was looking for enough differences between the two cultures and found a few similarities in between. Though some difference and similarities were found across generations, 0th generation to 2nd generation, these findings did not support the hypotheses.

Much research has shown that East Asian cultures, including South Korea, score high on collectivism (Sivadas, 2008). However, in this study, Koreans had high scores in both horizontal individualism and horizontal collectivism. Americans tend to be more vertical individualistic due to market democracy, self differentiating from other and high freedom, but Korean Americans, in the study, scored highest on horizontal individualism, not

vertical individualism (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998). Even interpersonal relationships and identifications were somewhat off from previous studies. The 1.5 generation had the highest number of in-groups they identified with; the 2nd generation had the least number of close friends; and 0th generation had the highest number of close friends. These findings do not correlate with how collectivistic cultures being “characterized by a close association with in-groups...[whereas] individualist cultures is usually characterized by seclusion from the in-group (Cho, 1994). Though none of the hypotheses were correct, these findings still shed some light on this issue.

Though Korea and East Asia are collectivist countries, due to modernization, industrialism, and the arrival of American values and ideologies, much of what previously defined collectivist countries are changing. Due to globalization, Korea’s traditional collectivist manner was not well suited to the “modern era of international economic competition in global markets (Shim et al., 2008).” Attitudes shift away from collectivism and more towards individualism. This is not to say that collectivism is altogether disappeared from Korean culture. Instead, there has been a fusion of both individualism and collectivism, one method more preferred in certain domains than the other.

There has also been research that supports this shift away from collectivism. Sri Lankans are mostly collectivistic in nature and hold importance in family, respect for and service to the elders and service to country and others. However, they believe that certain individualistic goals, such as

health and happiness, a good job, and money, are important as well (Niles, 1998). In Rhee and colleagues' study on kin-nonkin individualism-collectivism, they found that for Koreans and European Americans, "collectivism and individualism toward kin overlapped completely and collapsed into one bipolar dimension (1996)." Korean culture is not just collectivistic and not just individualistic. Even in Asian American culture, Asian Americans are not only going to follow American ideals. Instead, the relation between ethnicity and individualism-collectivism tends to be domain specific (Wink, 1997). Asian American children tend to develop "autonomous sense of self in achievement domain and relational sense of self in relationship domain," which illustrates the fusion of both American values and Asian values (Koh et al., 2009). Also, the shift from vertical to horizontal attribute may be due to the age group and also the level of education the participants are at (Han and Ahn, 1994).

Limitations

There are several reasons to why this study did not follow through so well. One is the lack of participants. Though there was a good number of participants from the 2nd generation, there was not enough 0th generation and 1.5 generation participants. There were very little 3rd generation participants, but that could be due to the fact that Koreans are a relatively new immigrant population in the United States. Another reason could be due to mathematical errors. All the calculations of the scores of vertical individualism, vertical collectivism, horizontal individualism and vertical individualism in the

INDCOL scale were done by hand. Because of this potential error, this may have affected the statistics as well.

Also, there could be translation errors. Though the Korean version of the INDCOL scale was used from another study, people who do not have a degree in Korean linguistics translated and back translated the 1st part and 3rd part of the questionnaire. Looking at the online survey, many people have left the questionnaire unfinished, suggesting that it was too long. The participants who continued and finished the questionnaire may have been not as focused and bored near the end of the questionnaire, not giving the correct, personal answer. Last, but not least, the participants were from a convenience pool. The majority of the participants was getting a college education and was young. Thus, they do not represent how the real population of Korean and Korean Americans look.

Future Research

More research has to be done in the individualism and collectivism aspect of culture. One way to further expand on this is by comparing more than two cultures. In Chiou's study, Taiwanese participants and U.S. participants shared equal tendencies in horizontal collectivism and vertical individualism whereas Argentina participants and U.S. participants had equal tendencies in horizontal collectivism (2001). Even though Taiwan and Argentina are more vertically collectivistic, that does not mean they do not have characteristics that tend to be found in individualistic cultures.

It would be interesting to see a study using multiple, different methods to measure individualism and collectivism. Not only would this study use the INDCOL scale, but also open-ended questions, the twenty statements test, kin-nonkin individualism-collectivism subscales, and the circle of closeness scale (Rhee et al., 1995; Uleman et al., 2000). Also, having a longitudinal study looking into the change and shift in collectivistic and individualistic ideals participants from different generations. The study would start when they first immigrate to the U.S. or when they first attend school because that is when American values and ideologies are constantly presented to children, especially if they come from a community that has a heavy concentration of his or her ethnic group.

Conclusion

This study looked into the differences of vertical and horizontal attributes of collectivism and individualism in Korean and Korean American populations. Though the hypotheses were not supported by the data, there is still something to take away from it. The fact that Korean Americans had the highest scores in horizontal individualism shows that not all Korean Americans are vertical individualists like the majority of Americans. Also, there appears to be a shift in Korea as well; a shift towards the horizontal attribute. The different scores from the survey not only show that generalizations of a culture do not hold true all the time, but also suggests that that these generalizations may be changing toward a new definition of collectivism and individualism in Korea and Korea America.

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Appendix
Survey Questions

Part 1: Demographics

Age:

Occupation:

City and state/country one grew up in:

Immigrant generation (0th generation, 1st generation, 1.5 generation, etc):

Parent's occupation:

Part II: INDCOL Scale

1. My happiness depends very much on the happiness of those around me.

2. Winning is everything.
3. I usually sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group.
4. It annoys me when other people perform better than I do.
5. It is important to maintain harmony within my group.
6. It is important that I do my job better than others.
7. I like sharing little things with my neighbors.
8. I enjoy working in situations involving competition with others.
9. The well-being of my co-workers is important to me.
10. I often do "my own thing".
11. If a relative were in financial difficulty, I would help within my means.
12. Competition is the law of nature.
13. If a co-worker gets a prize, I would feel proud.
14. I like my privacy.
15. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.
16. When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused.
17. Children should be taught to place duty before pleasure.
18. Without competition, it is not possible to have a good society.
19. I feel good when I cooperate with others.
20. Some people emphasize winning; I'm not one of them.*
21. I would do what would please my family, even if I detested that activity.
22. One should live one's life independently of others.
23. Children should feel honored if their parents receive a distinguished award.

24. What happens to me is my own doing.
25. We should keep our aging parents with us at home.
26. I prefer to be direct and forthright when discussing with people.
27. I would sacrifice an activity that I enjoy very much if my family did not approve of it.
28. When I succeed, it is usually because of my abilities.
29. I hate to disagree with others in my group.
30. I am a unique individual.
31. Before taking a major trip, I consult with most members of my family and many friends.
32. I enjoy being unique and different from others in many ways.

Part III: Interpersonal Relationship and Identification

How much do I identify with (from 0 (not identified) to 4 (very identified)):

-family: 1 2 3 4

-relatives: 1 2 3 4

-colleagues: 1 2 3 4

-neighbors: 1 2 3 4

-partners: 1 2 3 4

-friends: 1 2 3 4

Number of new friends in the last 12 months:

Number of close friends:

Degree of Friendship (0 [superficial] to 4 [stable]): 1 2 3 4

Part I

나이:

직업:

도시:

부머님의 직업:

Part II

1. 내 주변에 있는 사람들이 행복해야 나도 행복하다.

2. 어느 경쟁에서나 이기는 것이 가장 중요하다.
3. 내가 속한 집단을 위해 나의 이익을 양보한다.
4. 다른 사람들보다 어떤 일을 못한다면 기분이 언짢다.
5. 내가 속한 집단의 구성원들과 사이 좋게 지는 것이 중요하다.
6. 내가 매사에 다른 사람들보다 더 잘해야 한다.
7. 나는 이웃과 사소한 것도 나누는 것을 즐긴다.
8. □렬한 경쟁 사회에 참여하는 것을 즐긴다.
9. 나의 동료가 잘 되는 것이 나에게 중요하다.
10. 나는 내 방식대로 산다.
11. 만일 친인척이 재정적인 어려움을 겪고 있다면, 나는 능력이 되는 데까지 도와줄 것이다.
12. 경쟁은 삶의 원천이다.
13. 만일 동료가 상을 탄다면 나도 자부심을 느낄 것이다.
14. 나만의 개성을 추구하는 것은 나에게 중요하다.
15. 나의 즐거움은 다른 사람들과 함께 있는 것이다.
16. 다른 사람들이 나보다 좋은 성과를 얻었을 때 나는 자극받아 더 노력하게 된다.
17. 아이들은 자기 할 일을 먼저 한 다음에 놀아야 한다.
18. 경쟁 없이는 좋은 사회를 만들 수 없다.
19. 사람들과 함께 어떤 일을 같이 할 때 기분이 좋다.
20. 어떤 사람들은 이기는 것을 중요시하지만 나는 그런 사람이 아니다.
21. 내가 속한 집단들의 결정 사항을 존중하는 것이 나에게 중요하다.

22. 나는 다른 사람들에게 의존하기보다는 나에게 의존한다.
23. 가족들은 어떠한 희생이 요구된다 하더라도 서로 단결해야 한다.
24. 다른 사람들을 믿기보다는 나 자신을 믿는다.
25. 부모님들과 자식들은 가능한 한 함께 살아야 한다.
26. 다른 사람과 달리 독립적인 인체가 되는 것이 나에게 중요하다.
27. 내가 원하는 것을 희생해서라도 나의 가족을 부양해야 한다.
28. 나는 내가 하나의 인체라는 사실이 중요하다.
29. 나는 내가 속한 집단의 대다수의 의견을 존중한다.
30. 나는 다른 사람과는 구별되는 독특한 사람이다.
31. 어떤 일을 결정하기 전에 친한 친구의 의견과 자문을 구하는 것이 중요하다.
32. 나는 독특한 개성을 가지고 있는 것을 자랑스럽게 생각한다.

나는 _____ 과/와 동일시하다 (0 [누구랑 동질감을 느낄수 없다]부터 4 [누구랑 동질감을 많이 느낄수 있다])

-가족: 1 2 3 4

-친척: 1 2 3 4

-동료: 1 2 3 4

-애인: 1 2 3 4

-친구: 1 2 3 4

지난 12 개월 동안 새로운 친구들 만들었다:

친한 친구들 몇명 있다:

친선의 우정 (0[가벼운 우정]부터 4[안정한 우정]): 1 2 3 4