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BIBIMBAP: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN KOREAN THIRD CULTURE KIDS DURING HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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DEDICATION

For Juae “Ellen” Kim, whose friendship opened my heart to this project. None of
these voices is your own, but your story echoes on every page.
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This project, as with any of its magnitude, would not have been possible without the sacrifice and investment of a community of people. First, to those individuals whose stories captured my heart through this research: you trusted me with the privilege of amplifying your voices. I hope to have done justice to your stories.

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To those educators whose influence made me the student and teacher that I am—John McCracken, who taught me “everything I need to know in life” in the third grade; Bob Ferris, a humble leader and scholar who challenged me to ask, “Who is my teacher?” (Luke 6:39-40); and Mike Welsh, who modeled excellence and fundamentally shaped who I am as an educator—I am indebted to you.

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All of this by the grace of my Creator, Redeemer, and the Lover of my Soul—Jesus Christ. Soli Deo gloria!
ABSTRACT

Amidst increasing interconnectedness and transmigration of the 21st century, a number of families are leaving South Korea for business, work, or education; their children are raised as Third Culture Kids (TCKs)—children who accompany their parents abroad. This study used the lens of cultural globalization to examine how Korean TCKs used their life experiences to inform their identity construction, especially during higher education.

Participants were Korean students and recent alumni from universities in Korea, the United States, and abroad who had spent at least three childhood years living outside Korea with their families. Data were collected through a series of unstructured biographical narrative interviews with each participant; the conceptual framework and three themes (cultural context, politics of belonging, and identity) emerged from constant comparative analysis of the data.

The data suggest that Korean TCKs construct their identity within the context of their home and host cultures and cultural globalization, that language functions as a currency with which participants negotiate their ability to fit in, and that ethnicity mediates their life experiences. Participant experiences reflect—and trouble—the distinctions of Korean culture in the marriage of education to family honor and co-constructions of ethnicity and national identity.
These findings suggest that the process of identity construction is not distinct to Korean TCKs—even while context fundamentally informs this process, implying broad applications within the context of globalization. Participants’ decontextualized English and Korean languages were devalued, and hybrid language emerged as way to assert a non-marginalized identity based on shared experience, language, and ethnicity. Finally, this study calls for special attention to Korean TCKs—and others who construct their identity in the wake of mobility across cultures—as they are uniquely positioned to assume key roles representing the world to Korea and Korea to a globalizing world.
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**Preface**

“Me”¹

My face says I’m Korean,
but my heart says I’m not—
My heart says I’m [Middle Eastern],
but my face says I’m not—
I come across as an American,
but my head says I’m not—
someday I’d like to say I’m Egyptian,
but everybody says I’m not—
I blend, I camouflage,
but really
I don’t.
and
everyday
is just one more day
in wandering, meandering, searching for
the likes of
Me.
but maybe,
really,
I’m just
You.

---

¹ This poem was written by a participant (Madeleine; see Chapter Three for a description of pseudonyms and Chapter Four for a full description of participants) and is shared by permission. It is presented in italics because it represents her own voice; I replaced the original text with bracketed information to protect her identity.
PART I

KOREAN TCK IDENTITY AS A PHENOMENON OF INVESTIGATION

This study examines Korean Third Culture Kids’ (TCKs’) identity construction during their college experience; in this section, I contextualize, position, and identify Korean TCK identity construction as a phenomenon of investigation.

In Chapter One, I situate Korean TCKs within the context of cultural globalization (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008); examine the constructs of home and host culture, cross-cultural kid (CCK), and third culture kid (TCK); and introduce the ways that the CCK and TCK constructs have been applied in Korea and have evolved in the wake of globalization. Within this context, I establish the significance of this research study, which is guided by the question, “How does the lived experience of Korean Third Culture Kids inform their identity construction?” Finally, I introduce the preliminary conceptual framework and its underlying constructs.

Chapter Two traces the conceptual genealogy of the TCK construct and positions this study of Korean TCK identity construction within research examining identity, culture, language, and education. In defining a body of literature, I chose to review research studies with Korean TCK and CCK participants, and I included peer-reviewed research studies published in English and in Korean. This literature review revealed a gap in the research literature that is filled by this study: first, by examining TCKs from non-Western families; second, by examining Korean TCKs within the population of
Korean CCKs; finally, by examining the process of identity construction (as opposed to traditional models of identity development within student development literature in higher education).

Chapter Three functions as a “recipe,”1 describing how this qualitative study was designed and conducted. In this chapter, I pay special attention to how my own identity, subjectivity, and positionality—especially my experience as a TCK and my relationship to the research participants—inform all aspects of this project, from research design to data collection, analysis, and representation. I articulate how I identified participants (largely using social networks and social media), how data were collected through a series of three unstructured individual interviews (conducted virtually through Skype) where participants reflected on their life experience. I clarify a constant comparative approach to data analysis and representation, heavily informed by grounded theory: I “fractured” data into codes and categories, then connected data to one another by allowing themes to emerge from the categories and by constructing narrative profiles in the words of participants. Finally, I describe and justify my use of alternative strategies (i.e., narrative vignettes, narrative profiles, and poetry) in data representation.

1 Special thanks to Dr. Julie Rotholz for sharing this analogy as part of the course “Paradigms of Inquiry,” which I took in the spring of 2012.
CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALIZING KOREAN TCKS

*Bibimbap* (비빔밥) is a quintessential Korean dish that augments the staple food of short-grain steamed sticky rice with an egg, various vegetables, and meat; it is seasoned with sesame oil and red pepper paste according to taste. Though the dish is thoroughly stirred with a spoon before eating, each of the elements retain their integrity while contributing to the balanced yet diverse texture, palate, and flavor of the dish.

When third culture kids (TCKs)—children who move abroad with their families—describe their experiences, common analogies include “having wings but no roots” or “being an island and a United Nations,” representing their tendency to assimilate features of their experience into their own identities (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001). When TCKs whose home culture is Korea describe themselves, their responses mirror this amalgam: they discuss “living a 20 kg life” (referring to international airline luggage restrictions) or being a “penguin” (a winged animal incapable of flight). However, some Korean TCKs describe themselves as “*bibimbap*” (H. N. Ryu, 2011): representing Korea and retaining essential properties of the various ingredients, yet the finished product is something greater than—and essentially distinct from—the sum of its parts. This study examined the process of Korean TCKs’ identity construction during their college experience.
Korean TCKs within Cultural Globalization

Cultural Globalization

For the past two centuries, accelerated technological developments have facilitated increasingly safe and convenient global travel; advances in the past two decades—most notably the advent of the Internet and its accompanying communication patterns—have increased international mobility and expanded expatriate populations, including business, state, and religious workers. The children of these expatriates—*third culture kids*—are raised in the wake of globalization and their lives are defined by high mobility across cultures.

**Definitions in context.** Phillips and Schweisfurth (2008) defined globalization as “the growing interdependence and interconnectedness of the modern world through increased flows of goods, services, capital, people and information” (p. 50). Within the study of globalization, *cultural globalization* examines “changing cultural identities” through “migration and the formation of diaspora… the prevalence of English as an international language… and hybridization of formerly distinct categories” (p. 51). The TCK experience—especially the Korean TCK experience—aligns seamlessly with the features of cultural globalization, and these features heavily informed the design and implementation of this research study.

**Home and host cultures.** The *host culture* is the culture in which the TCK lives, and the *home culture* is the culture of the TCK’s parents. For the purposes of this study, the home culture will be Korea. The host culture will vary for each participant, and will include the country or countries in which the participant lived during their formative
years. For participants who pursue higher education in the United States, the United
States will also be considered one of their host cultures.

*Third culture kid.* The TCK notion emerged from anthropologists John and Ruth
Hill Useem’s study of British expatriates living in India, where the Useems observed
expatriates constructing a “third culture” which was not fully aligned with either British
or Indian culture; the children of these expatriates were dubbed “third culture kids.”
Pollock and Van Reken incorporated the Useems’ third culture construct into their own
work with TCKs and produced the hallmark text *The Third Culture Kid Experience* in
1999, making discussion of the TCK phenomenon accessible to the general expatriate
population in a non-academic format that remained highly informative. In this text,
Pollock and Van Reken defined a third culture kid as

> a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years
outside the parents’ culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the
cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from
each culture are assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of
belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. (p. 19)

Nearly as soon as Pollock and Van Reken republished their book in 2001, Van Reken
developed the *cross cultural kid* (CCK) model in 2003 to address reader concerns about
why their experiences resonated with the TCK phenomenon even while they lacked the
international mobility that seemed to be the key characteristic of TCKs.

*Cross cultural kid.* A *cross-cultural kid* (CCK) is “a person who is living or has
lived in—or meaningfully interacted with—two or more cultural environments for a
significant period of time during childhood (up to age 18)” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 30). This definition not only encompasses what Pollock and Van Reken suggest be called the “traditional TCK” experience, but it is also sufficiently flexible as to describe children from bi- or multi-cultural families, bi- or multi-racial families; children of immigrants, refugees, or minorities within a majority home culture; international adoptees; and the emerging phenomena of educational CCKs and “domestic” TCKs.¹

TCKs in context. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) framed the CCK model as uniting—and simultaneously fracturing—the plethora of life experiences which have emerged in the context of globalization into a single construct; this is consistent with simultaneous “changing identities” and “hybridization of formerly distinct categories” within the trend of transmigration (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008, p. 51), as suggested by cultural globalization. Within this unified CCK construct the experiences of different “types” of CCKs are increasingly diverse, and Pollock and Van Reken (2009) called for continued research to understand the ways that these groups’ experiences may align with or diverge from what is known about the “traditional TCK” experience.

The third culture construct has largely been used in the social sciences (especially psychology, mental health, education, and missiology²) to examine TCKs from North American and European home cultures. However, transmigration patterns have shifted such that expatriate populations are no longer predominantly Western families living in

¹ See Chapter 3 in Pollock and Van Reken’s (2009) text for a full discussion of the CCK phenomenon.

² Anderson (1998) clarified the definition of missiology as “the science of missions. It includes the formal study of the theology of mission, the history of missions, the concomitant philosophies of mission and their strategic implementation in given cultural settings” (p. 8), where mission is “the work of God in reconciling sinful humankind to himself” and missions is “the practical implementation of the mission of God” (Van Rheenen, 1996, p. 20).
so-called underdeveloped countries. In contrast to the 20th century mantra “from the West to the rest,” economies, information technology, worldwide infrastructure development, immigration, and increasing refugee migration have combined such that “from everywhere to everywhere” is a more accurate picture of mobility on a global scale in this millennium (Johnson & Lee, 2009). Thus, these changing transmigration patterns underscore the timeliness of research examining the experience of TCKs who are not of Western heritage (Kwon, 2006; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti, 2001; Tanu, 2008).

**Korea**

The Korean people have millennia of recorded history as a distinct ethnic group with a shared language and culture; in the decades since the Korean War, South Korea\(^3\) has fostered political stability through democratic elections, astonishing economic development, and rapid technological innovation during the past three decades, emerging as a significant player in the 21st century global landscape. Despite a resident population of only 50 million, approximately 7 million Koreans live overseas (“Overseas Koreans Foundation,” n.d.). This figure includes ethnic Koreans living outside Korea for any reason (see “Overseas Koreans,” below); these Korean families are often accompanied by families with children, who are then raised as Korean TCKs.

**TCK constructs in Korea.** In Korea, the term “TCK” (제3문화아이, jae-sam-mun-hwa aah-ee) has emerged into the vernacular, accelerated by the Korean translation and publication of Pollock and Van Reken’s book in 2008. This translated term for

---

\(^3\) While it is theoretically possible for this research to include TCKs from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, commonly referred to as North Korea) it will be highly unlikely due to the present political situation; for the purposes of this research, I will use “Korea” to refer to the Republic of Korea (ROK, commonly referred to as South Korea).
“TCK” is commonly used in master’s theses produced by Korean students of missiology; however, most Koreans do not use the term since Korea also has a number of terms to describe variations of the CCK phenomenon; four of these will be described below.

**Overseas Koreans.** The Overseas Koreans Foundation (OKF, 재외동포재단) encompasses all ethnic Koreans living outside the Korean peninsula; this includes those who are naturalized citizens of another country as well as Korean citizens living abroad as foreigners. Children of these Overseas Koreans are often referred to as *jaewae-dongpo-janyeo-deul* (재외동포자녀들).

**Kyopo.** Perhaps the most long-standing Korean term is *kyopo* (교포, occasionally transliterated as gyopo in English), referring to “a person of Korean descent who has lived abroad from Korea” (J. H. J. Kim, 2004, p. 12), with specific terms for those who live in Japan (제일 교포, jaeil kyopo) and the United States (제미 교포, jaemi-kyopo) reflective of the large number of ethnic Koreans living in these areas. These terms lack consistency in vernacular usage, especially with regards to whether *kyopo* children are raised in families with the intent to return to Korea (i.e., they reside in the host culture as foreigners) or not (i.e., they may be citizens of the host country and thus align more closely with the immigrant experience). Moreover, *kyopo* often carries a derogatory undertone because many *kyopo* lack Korean cultural knowledge or language fluency.

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4 Including initial and subsequent generations of ethnic Korean immigrants as well as international adoptees. This includes ethnic Korean minority populations such as the *Joseon-jok* (조선족; ethnic Korean Chinese who largely reside in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture [연변 조선족 자치주] of China) and *Koryo-in* (고려인; ethnic Koreans who were disseminated across the former Soviet Union), as well as Korean-Americans.

5 See Chapter Eight for a full discussion of how constructs of ethnicity and nationality overlap in a Korean context.
1.5 and 2.0 Generations. The more recent term 1.5 Generation refers to individuals who were born and spent a significant portion of their childhood (possibly into adolescence) in Korea before immigrating to another country (E. J. Kim, 2010). Borden (2000) described the 1.5 Generation as possessing “a core of Korean values and language learned in childhood as well as a veneer of Western characteristics” (p. 71). The second generation immigrants, often called 2.0 Generation, are generally understood to be the first generation of immigrants born in the host country. (Individuals of the 1.5 and 2.0 Generation who live in the United States are also commonly referred to as “Korean-American.”) While the 1.5 and 2.0 Generation phenomena align with the CCK construct, they are distinct from the TCK experience in that the family has no intent to return to the home culture.

Early study abroad students. A growing number of students from Korean families are being sent abroad—usually to English-speaking countries—for extended periods of study abroad. These students are commonly referred to as “early study abroad students” (조기 유향생, jo-gee yu-hak-saeng) or occasionally “study abroad orphans.” While this is a growing phenomenon and can be understood as aligning within the CCK construct, it is distinct from the “traditional TCK” experience in that these students do not accompany their families into the host culture.

6 C. Ryu (1991) noted that the 1.5 Generation fails to belong in either the “first generation” or the “second generation” of immigrants. The “first generation” immigrants—often parents of the 1.5 Generation—see their children as “second generation” because they adopt aspects of the host culture during their adolescence and may acquire the ability to communicate in the host language more quickly than the first generation. In contrast, the “second generation” immigrants (who were born or lived in the host culture through early developmental years) see the 1.5 Generation as “first generation” because they generally behave in more “Korean” ways and lack the second generation’s native-level language skills, native understanding of the host culture, and birthright in the host culture.

7 This phenomenon will be contextualized in Part Two.
Identifying Korean TCKs. Because of the many variations of the Korean CCK phenomenon, it is impossible to establish a credible number of Korean TCKs. However, some statistics are useful to approximate the widespread nature of the CCK phenomenon. First, the Overseas Koreans Foundation’s website reports the total number of Overseas Koreans\(^8\) at 7,010,000 people; yet only a fraction of these individuals and families align with the TCK phenomenon (i.e., moving abroad as a family for a significant period of time but with intent to return to the home culture). Korea’s Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) reported that 2157 Overseas Koreans returned to Korea for higher education in 2008 (a three-fold increase from 2004, as cited in *The Chosun Ilbo*, 2009). It is likely that a majority of these individuals are Korean TCKs, but this number cannot represent the total number of Korean TCKs because some never return to Korea—even if their parents do return—while others return during their primary or secondary education.

Research Problem Statement. Assimilating to Korea’s rigidly structured education system is difficult at best for a Korean TCK who has been educated outside this system (Baek, 2000; Borden, 2000; B. R. Kim, 2009; G. S. Kim, 2008; J. H. J. Kim, 2004; S. W. Kim, 2008; Kwon, 2006; E. J. Lee, 2002; S. G. Lee, 2009; H. N. Ryu, 2011), and adjustment issues are compounded by a lack of understanding of Korean language and culture despite their Korean appearance (Baek, 2000; Borden, 2000; E. J. Kim, 2010). Furthermore, the Korean TCK experience diverges from that of other TCKs in significant ways, highlighted by education, language, and Korean culture values.

\(^8\) As previously mentioned, this statistic is inclusive of all persons of Korean heritage living abroad, including adoptees and immigrants, as well as expatriates who live abroad as foreigners.
This study addresses a gap in the English-language research literature by examining the phenomenon of identity construction in Korean TCKs. First, this study fills a gap in the research literature by examining TCKs from non-Western families, and second, by examining Korean TCKs as distinct from Korean CCKs (e.g., 1.5 or 2.0 Generation Korean-American, Korean immigrants to other countries, kyopo, or early study abroad students). Finally, this study contributes to identity and student development literature in higher education by using a grounded theory approach to describe identity construction rather than imposing an established model of identity development.

Research Study

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand how Korean TCKs construct their intercultural identity during their college experience. The construct of *intercultural identity* underpinned the conceptual framework for this study; it assumes that life experiences inform an individual’s identity construction. This study’s findings contribute to the existing literature in the fields of higher education, missiology, comparative and international education, and Korean studies by providing a framework to describe the experiences of Korean TCKs as they use their life stories to make meaning of their intercultural identity.
Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study was, “How does the lived experience of Korean Third Culture Kids inform their identity construction?” Other contributing questions included:

1. How does Korean Third Culture Kids’ college experience inform their identity construction?
2. How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ lived experience distinct because of Korean home culture?
3. How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ identity construction distinct because of Korean home culture?

Type of Study

This study used a series of biographical narrative interviews to discover how participants’ “lived experiences have influenced their sense of who they are” (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009, p. 759). Because data collection methods (three-interview series with each participant [Seidman, 2006]) invited participant story-telling and self-reflection, they facilitate an understanding of how participants use their lived experience to construct their identity.

Significance

**TCK identity in higher education.** Third culture kids were presciently described by Ted Ward in 1984 as the “prototype citizens of the 21st century” (as cited in Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). In this second decade of the new millennium, the TCK experience has shed light upon the even more widespread CCK phenomenon, and within
a trend toward increasing mobility and connectivity across cultures, these phenomena are increasingly common. This globalization trend highlights the need for individuals who possess global competencies, and higher education—in the United States and abroad—is scrambling to define and develop these “soft skills” in their students. However, most TCKs already possess these skills and are uniquely equipped to address the needs of their institutions and succeed in their careers—if they can address the unique struggles that often accompany their internationally mobile childhoods.

The question, “Who am I?” is the epicenter of the TCK’s struggle, especially since these individuals cannot directly identify themselves with “place” or “people.” However, TCKs offer tremendous benefit to institutions of higher education in the 21st century—both for what they contribute to these institutions (a diversity of lived experience and perspective that defies traditional constructions of citizenship, ethnicity, language, and identity) and for what they can experience through them (a space for self-exploration and self-determination). A grounded understanding of TCK identity is the best way to recruit, enroll, challenge, and support TCKs as students and leaders in higher education and beyond.

**Korean context.** Despite the fact that “there is literature emerging that indicates that the same characteristics and qualities can be ascribed to young people of… nationalities [other than the United States] who share a similar experience of childhood abroad” (Langford, 1998, p. 29), many researchers recognize that recent numeric growth and differences in cultural heritage warrant focused research examining TCKs of Asian heritage (Kwon, 2006; Moon, 2012; Pollock and Van Reken, 1999, 2009; Schaetti, 2001;
Tanu, 2008), and Kwon (2006) highlighted the uniqueness of the Korean TCK experience, especially related to formal education, language, and home cultural context.

Korea has a rich history spanning five millennia and provides a Confucian-steeped home culture to its TCKs with a strong emphasis on family and education (Connor, 2009; Cumings, 2005). The rise of democratic elections in the late 1980s and peaceful transition of power in the early 1990s laid the foundation for Korea’s economic growth in the last years of the 20th century. Asia’s 1997 economic collapse forced an IMF bailout, and subsequent restructuring generated remarkable development: Korea is now a member of the G-20, signatory of ten free-trade agreements (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2014), and a formidable force in the global economy with expanding numbers of expatriate business people. In addition to economic progress, Korea has seen tremendous growth in organized Christianity, and recent missiological trends suggest that Korea sends more missionary personnel abroad than any other nation except the United States (Han, 2009; Kumar, 2009; Onishi, 2004).

The children of Overseas Koreans may return to Korea for higher education, military service, marriage, and professional purposes. When compared with their Western-heritage TCK peers, these Korean TCKs are likely to experience a heightened sense of dissonance upon their return due to Korea’s xenophobic history, the fact that

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9 Cumings (2005) estimated that 25% of Koreans were Christians, though more recent estimates were as high as 33% (Kumar, 2009; Sunquist, 2009).

10 Though the Korea Research Institute for Mission suggested that the number of Korean missionaries is still increasing, the rate of increase has slowed since 2008 (as cited in Moon, 2012), reflective of a similar slowing of church growth within Korea (Moon, 2012).
Korean language is exclusive to its culture, the salient role that education plays in Korean society, and even the mono phenotypic traits of ethnic Korean populations.

**Preliminary Conceptual Framework**

**Model**

The initial conceptual framework for this study emerged from a review of the literature (see Chapter Two) and proposed that language, education, home and host cultures, a Korean community abroad, and citizenship might inform identity construction (Figure 1.1). While this model suggested these contextual features might inform identity construction, it did not attempt to predict relationships between these features (i.e., no lines or arrows suggested relationships between these features and identity construction, or relationships of these features to one another). One purpose of this study was to allow a conceptual framework to emerge from the data; therefore the proposed model remained fluid throughout the processes of data collection and analysis.

**Informative Constructs**

I developed the preliminary conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) based on a review of the literature examining TCKs and Korean TCKs. This model was informed by cultural globalization (Philips & Schweisfurth, 2008), Y. Y. Kim’s (2001, 2008) intercultural identity construct, Kwon’s (2006) Fourth Culture model, and Pollock and Van Reken’s (1999, 2009) descriptions of home and host culture. In the forthcoming section I will discuss the ways that each of these lenses informed my inclusion of the contextual features in the proposed model.
Figure 1.1 Proposed model describing intercultural identity construction.
**Intercultural identity.** Cultural identity is often associated with “national, ethnic, ethnolinguistic, and racial identity” (Y. Y. Kim, 2008, p. 360), allowing a person “to belong to one, and only one, particular ethnic group” (p. 362). J. S. Lee (2002) suggested that “cultural identity is formed by the complex configuration of one’s awareness of one’s own culture and a recognition of the social group to which one belongs in practice” (p. 118).

In contrast, intercultural identity assimilates the features of the cultural context into a fluid, dynamic construct. In a theoretical essay, Y. Y. Kim (2008) suggested that “a person’s identity [undergoes] changes throughout life… [and] the ability to learn and change through new experiences… [is] the very basis upon which individuals acquire an identity” (pp. 362-363). Intercultural identity “points to a way of existence that strives to embrace and incorporate seemingly divergent cultural elements into something new and unique” (p. 366). In sum, “cultural identity links a person to a specific culture, [while] intercultural identity links a person to more than one culture and, ultimately, to humanity itself” (Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 191-192); as such, I included the construct of *intercultural identity* at the center of the proposed model because of its fluidity.

**Language.** Korean TCKs educated in international schools—especially those using English language and a Western curriculum—often speak Korean only with their parents while using English in formal education, entertainment, and peer relationships; these students may also use a local language. Thus, the inclusion of “language” as informing identity construction will include participants’ preferred spoken language(s),

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11 See below for a full discussion of how I define international schools for the purposes of this study.
language(s) of instruction in formal education, language(s) spoken at home, and language(s) used with peers.

**Education.** For the purposes of this project, I defined *international schools* as those schools which primarily educate children of expatriates and/or citizens who have a level of lived experience outside the country in which the school is found. *Korean international schools* were defined as schools outside Korea which use Korean curriculum. *Korean heritage language (HL) schools* were those schools which provide supplemental instruction—usually limited to language, but sometimes including history or culture studies—to ethnic Korean children living outside Korea. This diversity of educational forms informed my inclusion of “education” as a possible feature which might inform participants’ identity construction.

Kwon (2006) developed the Fourth Culture model to describe non-Western (specifically Korean) TCKs who are educated in Western-curriculum international schools because Pollock and Van Reken’s (1999) third culture model was inadequate to describe the participants in his study. The Fourth Culture model suggests that the Western international school environment functions as a distinct cultural influence in addition to the home and host cultures; as such, he suggested that Korean TCKs attending non-Korean international schools create their own *fourth culture* (rather than a third culture). This model proposed that the educational context (e.g., Western-curriculum international school, Korean-curriculum school outside Korea, a Korean heritage language [HL] school, a local school in their host culture, home-school) and the
educational landscape in Korea may inform students’ expectations about higher education and repatriation, and thus also inform their identity construction.

**Culture.** Though it seems obvious, the suggestion that context informs identity construction is the foundation to the constructs of *identity* and *third culture*, and it is mobility between the home and host cultures that frames the TCK’s identity construction (Tanu, 2008).

**Citizenship.** Though nation-state citizenship is a relatively recent phenomenon—and often understood to be the sole indicator of a person’s cultural identity—it is fast becoming an outdated construct with limited utility to describe the experiences and contexts which inform an individual’s identity, and it is almost useless to describe TCK identity. However, this model included citizenship as informative to TCK identity construction because nationality (or nationalities) may shape TCKs’ educational opportunities and expectation of repatriation.

**Korean community abroad.** An expatriate Korean family’s ties to their home culture may be preserved if a Korean community exists in their host culture. This community may include Korean church, community or student organization, geographic neighborhood, or HL school. Park (2011) suggested that “Korean ethnic churches in Montreal play a key role in immigrant students’ maintenance of the HL and cultural identity, beyond their religious role” (p. 199) because the church provided a context for speaking Korean, transmission and practice of cultural values and norms, and celebration of Korean holidays and ceremonies. Thus, this model proposed that a Korean community in the host culture might inform Korean TCKs’ identity construction.
Chapter Summary

This chapter situated the Korean TCK phenomenon within the context of cultural globalization, the CCK and TCK phenomena, and Korean home culture. It also established the significance of research examining TCKs and Korean TCKs, defined vocabulary to contextualize the TCK and Korean TCK population, and identified a gap in the literature examining Korean TCKs that is addressed by this study. Finally, this chapter introduced the preliminary conceptual framework—a model proposed at the outset of this study which I constructed based on a review of the literature (Chapter Two) —and described the constructs underpinning this model.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW:
POSITIONING KOREAN TCK IDENTITY RESEARCH

This chapter examines the underpinnings of the TCK construct, traces its conceptual genealogy, analyzes trends in identity research in the context of higher education, and explores how identity has been examined with TCK populations. The research studies reviewed in this chapter are largely delimited to those with Korean TCK participants and include peer-reviewed research published in English and in Korean. Reviews of these studies are organized thematically according to the preliminary conceptual framework, examining the relationships of identity to culture, language, and education.

Conceptual Genealogy

In an increasingly globalized world it is essential not to simply understand constructs or research results but to analyze their origins, especially when comparing across cultures, as this research seeks to do. Understanding the origins of the third culture construct, and discovering how it has been represented in Korea, will lay an essential foundation for this study.

Origin and Evolution of “Third Culture”

Anthropologists and husband-wife team John and Ruth Hill Useem developed the concept of third culture through their ethnographic study of expatriates in India in the 1960s. The Useems observed “patterns generic to a community of men which spans two
or more societies” (Useem, 1962, p. 484), where this community constructed their own culture by incorporating elements from their home culture (Britain, for their study participants) and the host culture (India) into an “interstitial culture, the third culture, which is created, shared, and carried by persons who are relating societies, to each other” (Useem & Downie, 1976, p. 103). Children of expatriate families, then, are third culture kids because they are raised in this third culture.

Other terms for third culture kids include cultural marginal, coined by Bennett (1993) and used by Schaetti (2001) and Killguss (2008); transcultural/transnational, used by Willis, Enloe, and Minoura (1994) and McDonald (2009, 2010); and the more pervasive global nomad, which was developed by Norma McCaig in 1984 and used extensively until Pollock and Van Reken first published their landmark book The Third Culture Kid Experience in 1999. Langford (1998) suggested that “‘TCK’ and ‘Global Nomad’ have now become interchangeable terms to describe… internationally mobile children” (p. 30).

Pollock and Van Reken’s (1999) text was not an academic research study, yet its definition of ‘TCK’ has been useful for research studies and become the definition generally known and preferred by the TCK population who are participants in these studies (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). This 1999 text also compiled interview and anecdotal data from hundreds of individuals to develop a TCK Profile (based on Pollock’s earlier work) that summarized benefits and challenges, personal characteristics, practical skills, and other traits common to the TCK experience. Finally, the text discussed strategies to maximize the TCK experience that could be implemented by
parents, policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders. The book was “acclaimed as the first and only book to fully examine the legacy of transition and change shared by those who have grown up globally” (Hoke & Taylor, 2009, p. 150) and is the best single resource for a layman’s introduction to the TCK phenomenon.

Pollock and Van Reken’s text also had a secondary impact on the academic community. As TCKs and their families became more informed of this phenomenon, gained language to articulate their perceptions, and developed strategies to maximize the benefits of their experience, the felt need for research studies examining this population has increased.

**Trends in the Research Literature**

Peer-reviewed TCK research in English\(^1\) has examined identity (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Killguss, 2008; Kwon, 2006; Leong & Ward, 2000; Sears, 2011; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009), the characteristics or benefits of the TCK experience (Bonebright, 2010; Keuss & Willet, 2009; Lyttle, Barker, & Cornwell, 2011; McDonald, 2010; Willis et al., 1994), or mental health (Greenholtz & Kim, 2009). The above-mentioned research is limited to articles appearing in professional peer-reviewed journals and does not include the more than thirty doctoral dissertations examining TCKs at the time of this writing, the majority of which have been submitted since the year 2000. The limited number of peer-reviewed sources and the

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\(^1\) Military and missionary dependents (“military brats” and “MKs”) are distinct TCK subpopulations and have been studied in detail in a smattering of dissertations, books, and a limited number of peer-reviewed journals across the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, missiology, and education. However, since research on military dependents is population-specific and results of studies on missionary kids are largely consistent with more general studies of TCKs (Langford, 1998), I have left these bodies of literature unexamined for the purposes of this review.
increase in TCK research for dissertations over the past decade underscores the value of TCK research as an emerging area for inquiry that deserves attention from researchers in a myriad of fields.

This literature review is largely delimited to research studies with Korean TCK participants and is organized thematically according to the preliminary conceptual framework (see Chapter One). Because Korean TCKs are still an emerging population (H. N. Ryu, 2011) peer-reviewed research examining Korean TCKs could best be described as embryonic. Kwon’s (2006) conference paper (reviewed below) noted that most of the research studying Korean TCKs has been published since 2000 and focuses on “cultural identity and methodological approaches” to education (p. 6). Peer-reviewed studies of Korean TCKs have been limited to a few journals and doctoral dissertations in English and a handful of master’s theses largely produced by graduate students in Korea; this body of literature is the focus of this review.

**Identity and TCK Research**

Identity describes one’s essential nature, the essence of who an individual is—or who they see themselves to be; it can also be used to describe the essential characteristics of a group, as in ethnic or cultural identity. Erikson (1959) described identity as progression through a series of developmental stages that is catalyzed by crisis in response to internal and external stimuli. Rooted in Erikson’s fifth stage of “identity versus identity diffusion”, Marcia (1966, as cited in Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010) extended Erikson’s work to adolescents (Erikson’s participants were
Caucasian males), and Josselson’s (1978, as cited in Evans et al.) research applied Erikson’s principles to identity development in women.

**Identity Theories in Higher Education**

The “traditional body of college student development theory” encapsulated in Evans and colleagues’ 2010 textbook (p. 213) lacks a suitable conceptual framework for this study. Much of this literature approaches identity from a developmental perspective “built on Erikson’s theoretical framework” (p. 59); in contrast, this study examines identity construction as an ongoing process of assimilating one’s life experiences into one’s sense of self.

Within the student development literature, Chickering’s cornerstone theories of identity vectors (original [1969] and updated [Chickering & Reisser, 1993], as cited in Evans et al., 2010) and Schlossberg’s transition theory provide “a counterpoint to age and stage perspectives” (p. 213). However, these are limited in that they approach identity from a monocultural perspective; Schlossberg’s transition theory fails to adequately address the unique nature of cross-cultural transition as experienced by TCKs during childhood.

Theories which describe the influence of race, class, gender, and privilege on college student’s identity (e.g., Abes, Jones, and McEwen’s multiple dimensions of identity, 2007; Sue and Sue’s racial and cultural identity model, 2003; the racial identity development models of Cross and Fhagen-Smith, 1991, Helms, 1995, or Kim, 2001, as cited in Evans et al., 2010) may be more useful for TCKs but still fail to adequately
capture the depth and breadth of the ways in which a TCK’s experiences have influenced their identity before and during their college experience.

Research examining university students who study abroad may not be applicable to TCKs because study abroad students travel abroad for finite periods of time during their university experience; in contrast, TCKs move abroad during their formative years—often indefinitely—and accompany their families. Finally, much of the research examining identity in a higher education context has been conducted in North America, while the participants for this research study were from a Korean home culture. In sum, none of the identity theories common in higher education provide a conceptual framework that adequately describes identity construction in TCKs, especially those from a Korean home culture.

Identity Models in TCK Research

Researchers who examine TCKs use models of *marginality* (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Killguss, 2008), or *cultural hybridity* (Greenholtz & Kim, 2009; Schaetti, 2001; Wurgraft, 2006), both of which describe the TCK experience with a negative tone, suggesting that the TCK must be marginalized or irrevocably distorted. Other researchers describe TCKs as *transcultural* (McDonald, 2009; McDonald, 2010) or *multicultural* (Moore, 2011), and both of these terms are ambiguous. While each of these models has some value, none adequately describes the unique nature of TCK identity in a positive way.

In contrast, Y. Y. Kim’s (2008) model of intercultural personhood, based on earlier work examining *intercultural identity* (Y. Y. Kim, 2001), offers a useful construct to
understand the experience of TCKs: it not only portrays difference as an asset but allows for assimilation of diverse experiences into one’s identity construction. Y. Y. Kim’s intercultural identity model addresses many of the inherent weaknesses of previous models and is sufficiently flexible as to be useful in describing non-Western populations; this construct is appropriate for examining the intersection of Korean TCKs’ experiences and identity.

**Culture and Identity**

**Cultural Context**

Though it seems obvious that context influences an individual’s identity development, it should not remain unstated. This supposition is foundational to the very constructs of identity and third culture, where an individual’s relationship to his or her surroundings shapes perceptions of “self”, “other”, and “belonging”. Both Willis and colleagues’ (1994) study of students at an international school in Japan and Walters and Auton-Cuff’s (2009) phenomenological study of TCK adult women echoed the importance of context. Konno’s (2005) dissertation (reviewed below) described the “process of identity development [as largely] dependent on one’s social context and interactions with the environment” (p. 20). Tanu (2008) observed that mobility between these contexts frames the TCK’s identity development.

Konno’s (2005) dissertation study compared two populations of Asian students (Asian international students (N=26) and Asian-heritage TCK students (N=11; total N=37) to discover the cognitive and affective components of ethnic identity development using the Multigroups Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) and Homesickness and
Contentment Scale (HCS). The number of months lived abroad during adolescence served as an independent variable and ethnic identity was the dependent variable. Konno found that “there appeared to be very little relationship between months lived overseas during adolescence and one’s level of ethnic identity” (p. 34) and that “there appeared to be no relationship between lower level of ethnic identity and one’s emotional and psychological adjustment. Moreover, there appeared to be no significant relationship between the factors hypothesized to account for one’s adjustment” (p. 35). Unfortunately these findings were not statistically significant due to the small sample size and imbalance between the two populations in the sample, which undermined the generalizability of her study.

Despite the lack of statistical significance, Konno’s research emphasized the importance of TCKs’ repatriation to their identity development, noting that “TCKs’ sense of ethnic identity, to some extent, is dependent on whether or not they have had the experience of returning to their country of origin” (p. 42). Expected repatriation is the most significant factor distinguishing TCKs from immigrants (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) and living as a hidden immigrant upon return to one’s home country is one of the classic conundrums of the TCK experience.

J.H.J. Kim’s (2004) doctoral dissertation examined the repatriation experiences of kyopo using a series of qualitative individual interviews with each participant. She developed a thorough and comprehensive review of globalization and transmigration literature, and situated the experience of kyopo within these theoretical lenses. She evaluated the transnational ties of kyopo and found that most of these ties were rooted in
personal relationships rather than institutional or professional affiliations. Furthermore, the absence of professional networks in Korea hindered kyopo in establishing themselves there, especially in securing housing and developing themselves as influential and effective in their professional fields. Conversely, kyopo underestimated the level of investment expected by their extended family networks when they repatriated to Korea, and they failed to anticipate the level of resistance to change they found in Korean culture and the Korean church. Finally, participants reported their unique contributions relative to the “growing international community in Korea that needs social service” (p. 137).

Though J. H. J. Kim anticipated that neoclassical economic theory might explain the transmigration of kyopo, she found instead that “the main reason for migration to Korea is for work,” “the search for identity,” or “the paramount importance of family” (p. 138). Most of J. H. J. Kim’s participants described experiences of racial discrimination in their host culture and described its effects on their identity formation, but their responses also reflected disappointment at their perceived “reverse discrimination when they arrived in Korea” (p. 144). Despite these obstacles, J. H. J. Kim suggested that kyopo have high capacity “to be cultural and language brokers between [Korea] and the United States” (p. 204), serving as a bridge “to chart the course of Korea in the era of globalization… [and as] significant player[s] in the growing international relations between Korea and the world” (p. 206).

**Korea as a Home Culture**

King and Christou’s ongoing qualitative study of second-generation immigrants who return to their parents’ homeland (an essay discussing the implications of this
research relevant to diaspora, migration, and transnationalism was published in an edited volume in 2010) may apply to Korean-American immigrants. They discovered that for some returnees born abroad, the individual’s return to their parents’ home culture “serves only to accentuate differences of culture and nationality, and to reinforce a heightened sense of their American (i.e., “host culture”) identity. A definitive return seems out of the question” (pp. 170-171). The discomfort of repatriation described by King and Christou’s participants may be applicable to Korean returnees, especially since Korea maintains a largely homogeneous (monocultural, monolingual, monophenotypic trait) society where “a very strong sense of ethnic solidarity and family integrity has become part of the Korean psyche” (Borden, 2000, p. 21).

In fact, the experiences of repatriation and living as a hidden immigrant in the home culture may be even more traumatic for Korean TCKs than for Western-heritage TCKs. When Korean TCKs repatriate to Korea, their experiences and their very identity distinguish them from their Korean-raised peers despite their similar physical appearance. Western TCKs often repatriate to home cultures that value independence, applaud individuality, and celebrate diversity; in contrast, Korean TCKs repatriate to a culture that values the good of the group, emphasizes conformity, and celebrates uniform heritage. In sum, experiencing life in other cultures significantly influences the Korean TCK’s identity, and their difference from peers who have been raised in a Korean context conflicts with the Korean value of conformity within a group.
Language and Identity

Language reflects culture and serves as a vehicle for maintaining and preserving cultural identity. Thiong’o (1986) described language as “the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history” (p. 15), noting that “culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next” (p. 15). While Hans (1967) described foreign language learning as “the surest method to wean the mind from national prejudices” (as cited in Hayhoe, 1998), Moore (2000) noted that language is not always a positive influence; in fact language “has the power to control, to limit and to confuse as well as to empower, to liberate and to illuminate” (p. 88). Korean TCKs, especially those educated in English, are susceptible to the confusion Moore described since they may speak Korean only with their parents but use English in formal education, entertainment, and peer relationships (Kwon, 2006), and may use a local language as well (H. N. Ryu, 2011).

TCK Multilingualism and Identity

DeWaele and van Oudenhoven (2009) examined the relationship between personality and multilingualism by comparing TCK students (N=41) with non-TCK students (N=38; total N=79) at an international school in the United Kingdom, using the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) to measure personality differences relative to multilingualism/multiculturalism and acculturation. They found that both students classified as TCKs and students classified as linguistically multidominant scored significantly higher in Openmindedness, marginally higher on Cultural Empathy, and
significantly lower on Emotional Stability than non-TCKs and monolingual students, respectively (p. 454). Furthermore, their results suggested a relationship between personality and multilingualism, since “multilinguals scored significantly higher on the dimensions of Cultural Empathy and Openmindedness, and scored significantly lower on the dimension of Emotional Stability compared to… classroom learners of a second language” (p. 454). Results further suggested that “being born abroad… exerts a very strong effect on the degree of Openmindedness and on the degree of Emotional Stability of an individual, and a somewhat weaker effect on the degree of Cultural Empathy” (p. 454). They noted that since they did not collect social data it is impossible to distinguish “a genuine TCK effect from a social class effect” (p. 455) in their results. While it is impossible to know whether these results are generalizable to Korean TCKs, the inclusion of students of Caucasian, African, Arabic, and Asian descent in the sample suggests that this study may be useful to describe all TCKs.

Dewaele and van Oudenhoven (2009) cited Guiora and colleagues’ (1975) suggestion that “to speak a second language authentically is to take on a new identity” (p. 456); though they acknowledged that this new identity “create[s] stress, uncertainty and anxiety” (p. 457), the authors suggested that multilingualism is an asset and can “[open] one’s eyes to the world” (p. 456).

Chung (2010) observed the interactions of a family unit containing three Korean-English bilinguals (a father—first generation Korean-American—and his two children, both second-generation Korean-Americans) to study the use of code-switching (CS) in their communication. The sample was extremely limited and included only her
immediate family members (her own husband and children), severely limiting the
generalizability of this research; however, her intimate knowledge of the research
participants and sensitivity to the distinctions of language uniquely equipped her for data
collection and analysis.

Chung’s in-depth linguistic analysis of the data suggested “that CS could be
brought about and shaped by the dynamics of the relationship of the speaker-addressee
and by cultural features embedded in the Korean language” (p. 293). She noted that the
children practiced CS differently in their conversations with one another, with the father,
and with their mother (the researcher). Chung suggested that CS “functions as a
communicative strategy” (p. 293) and was practiced to maximize comprehension and
“lower language barriers” (p. 293). Consistent use of honorific titles for adults outside
the family demonstrated one child’s acknowledgement of the traditional Korean
hierarchical structure that governs relationships; the son’s use of familial title rather than
first name for his elder sister also demonstrated this hierarchy. Chung suggested that
both children’s “linguistic choices… entail knowledge of [their] cultural background and
values… [and] consolidate cultural identity” (p. 304). This study suggested that “CS in a
family setting provides a resource for assisting communication and bonding cultural
identity across generations” (p. 305).

**Minority Subculture and Identity**

Involvement with an ethnic Korean community organization, religious
organization, or heritage language school while in the host culture provides Korean TCKs
an avenue for speaking Korean language and deepening ties with their home culture. Jo
(2001) and Park (2011) (both reviewed below) studied Korean heritage language (HL) programs, and both Jo and J. S. Lee (2002, reviewed below) studied college students and their use of Korean heritage language.

Jo’s (2001) year-long participant observation of a heritage language course cohort examined the relationship between language and ethnic identity for Korean-American students. Jo described participants’ language expressions in terms of “third space” (p. 28), where participants used English vocabulary within proper Korean sentence structure. Students also struggled with the honorific expressions embedded within Korean speech, and used “personal ‘standard’ Korean” (p. 34) to construct their own words or used “Koreanised English words” (p. 37). Jo found that for these students, “becoming an English speaker does not necessarily mean the loss of [Korean] ethnic identity” (p. 26) nor did “learning Korean... necessarily lead to a homogeneous ethnic identity formation” (p. 26). Rather, participants’ “self-evaluation of their own language performance interacts with their sense of ethnic identity” (p. 39), and their “personal language repertoire and use reflect[ed] diverse social worlds and locations (including time of immigration, place of residence, and relationship to the homeland)” (p. 26).

J. S. Lee (2002) studied second-generation Korean-American undergraduate and graduate students (N=40) to determine their “level of heritage [Korean] language proficiency and language use” (p. 117), the extent to which informants identified with Korean and American cultures, and the relationship between participants’ heritage language proficiency and cultural identity. Data were collected via a four-part questionnaire that requested demographic data, a self-assessment of Korean language
proficiency, a modified Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale for self-reporting affiliation with Korean and American cultural identities, and response to “open-ended questions about the informants’ attitudes towards cultural identity and heritage language maintenance” (p. 121). J. S. Lee found that “males and non-US-born informants were more likely to have a stronger ethnic attachment [to Korea] than females and those who were born in the United States” (p. 132). Of special importance to this review was the regression analysis of cultural identity (Korean orientation and American orientation scales) by heritage language proficiency which suggested that “the stronger the identification with the Korean orientation items, the higher the Korean-language proficiency” (p. 129) and that those who were more proficient in Korean “tended to be more bicultural” (p. 132). Thus, “for these second-generation immigrants, language is a representative marker of their cultural identity” (p. 129).

Park’s (2011) qualitative study also examined the formation of cultural identity in subculture populations through language and religious institutions. Park studied Korean immigrant children living in Montreal (N=15, at two research sites) to determine the role of Korean churches in heritage language (HL) transmission. This study incorporated participant-observation, group discussion, individual interview, and survey methods of data collection. Results suggested “that the Korean ethnic churches in Montreal play a key role in immigrant students’ maintenance of the HL and cultural identity, beyond their religious role” (p. 199), evidenced through the language and socio-cultural environments cultivated by the church. In Park’s study, Korean churches provided a context for HL relationships, transmission and practice of cultural values and norms, celebration of
holidays and ceremonies such that “the atmosphere in the church made [one participant] feel more Korean” (p. 203).

The results of these studies suggest that both language and affiliation with a minority subculture are complex yet profound aspects of Korean TCKs’ identity construction. Nicholas Hans (1967, as cited in Hayhoe, 1998) underscored the interrelationship between language and identity, noting that

In the case of a nation, language, as the repository of racial and national memory, should be considered as the most important influence in the formation of national character. *The native tongue... often decides the adherence of the individual to a particular nation irrespective of the place of his birth or citizenship.* (p. 8, emphasis added)

**Education and Identity**

Phillips and Schweisfurth (2008) described education as “a key social institution that can affect the values and behaviours [sic] of individuals, shaping the citizens and workforce of the future, and therefore impacting on national development” (p. 69). The education of TCKs in the context of globalization reinforces the idea that a central purpose of education is cultivate future citizens; however, these educated TCKs will likely be citizens of a global society rather than a single nation-state. In their critique of international education in a global context, Cambridge and Thompson (2004) suggested that globalization views international education as meeting the needs of a global market, where “the practice of international education will be shaped by the transnational practices that are identified with the processes of globalization” (p. 168). This critique
provides some context to the experiences of Korean TCKs who are educated in international schools dominated by Western curriculum and pedagogy and English language of instruction: Cambridge and Thompson noted that international schools “are frequently sites of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, either because of the diversity of nationalities represented among the students or because of the synthesis of a ‘third culture’ from the collision between expatriate and host country cultures” (p. 171).

Pollock and Van Reken (2001) advised parents to educate TCKs in their home language to facilitate their repatriation for higher education. However admirable this advice may have been, the very statement privileges Western and native English speakers as it assumes that expatriate families will have access to educational options in their home language; for many expatriate Korean families the only Korean-language option is homeschooling or tutoring. The issue of education is significantly absent from TCK research in English, but is a dominant focus in all of the Korean language research studies. Education is likely the single most significant divergence between the experience of Korean and Western-heritage TCKs.

**Role of Education in Korean Society**

In order to appreciate the dominant role that Korean TCKs’ education experiences (both primary and secondary) play in their identity construction, it is essential to understand the function of education within Korean society. Seth (2012) described Korea’s “zeal for education, often referred to as ‘education fever’ ([교육열] *kyoyukyol*) [as] among the society’s most striking features” (p. 13). Cumings (2005) noted that “national devotion to education” (p. 60) has been “the practical glue holding the system
“together” (p. 59) through Korea’s millennia-long dynastic history. In the present-day, education is not only a mechanism for social mobility but the means of fulfilling one’s Confucian duty to honor parents and family (filial piety).

**Problem of Education for Korean TCKs**

Current research examining Korean TCKs reflects the fact that education is woven into the very fabric of Korean society: *every* research study of Korean TCKs at least mentions education, and in many studies it is a recurring theme. The question of how instill Korean cultural values, cultivate appreciation for history and heritage, and develop language fluency in the Korean TCK is of special importance in Korean TCK research (G. S. Kim, 2008; S. W. Kim, 2008; E. J. Lee, 2002; S. G. Lee, 2009) and is the primary focus of H. N. Ryu’s (2011) thesis. B. R. Kim (2009), G. S. Kim (2008), E. J. Lee (2002), and J. H. Park’s (2002) master’s theses focused on the current status, alternatives, and future directions of education for Korean TCKs. This review included only those studies that examined Korean TCK education or Korean TCK identity in an educational context.

**Analyses of Korean TCK education.** B. R. Kim (2009), H. S. Lee (2009), and H. N. Ryu’s (2011) master’s theses examined Korean TCK education and will be reviewed chronologically.

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2 Historically Korean education used Chinese characters (Connor, 2009), relying primarily on lecture and memorization and a civil service examination system that mirrored China’s. Though King Sejong directed the development of the Korean alphabet in the 15th century (Cumings, 2005) and students no longer had to rely exclusively on Chinese characters, the methodology of lecture and memorization was ingrained in the philosophy of education (Borden, 2000) and persists to the present-day, reinforced by a standardized-test-driven hierarchy of performance (Seth, 2012).
B. R. Kim (2009) synthesized much of the research examining educational alternatives for Korean missionary kids (MKs). She noted that Korean missionaries reported family dynamics, specifically the education of their children while living abroad, as their most significant difficulty and used her thesis to address the issue of education for Korean TCKs. She situated Korean MKs within the TCK population, then described the realities of Korean TCK education and recommended a structured program for Korean TCK education. B. R. Kim relied extensively on Pollock and Van Reken’s (2001) text to describe the social and psychological characteristics of TCKs, including questions of identity formation, then outlined alternatives for TCK education in great detail. Possible alternatives included a Korean school in the host country, foreign or international school (often Western-based), local school, missionary/boarding school, homeschooling, leaving children in Korea, or employing a tutor from Korea, and B. R. Kim outlined benefits and challenges for each option. B. R. Kim’s synthesis and recommendations were timely and well-grounded in her analysis of the current literature about the Korean TCK experience. Though perhaps unavoidable in any TCK research, she relied almost exclusively on Pollock and Van Reken’s work yet failed to cite the text or its authors.

H. S. Lee’s (2009) master’s thesis studied the phenomenon of Korean MK education among expatriate families in Mongolia, where Korean families may choose from Western-curriculum international school, Korean-curriculum elementary/middle school, local Mongolian school, or homeschool educational alternatives. The literature review is a significant asset to this thesis, offering a broad overview of research
examining Korean MKs and their education since 1994, brief history of missionary efforts originating in Korea, rudimentary profile of Korean MKs, and essential information about Mongolia and a detailed analysis of the educational options available to Korean missionaries. H. S. Lee used document analysis, survey (N=81), and interview, and presented his findings through comparative case studies of four families who each took advantage of different educational options for their children. Results suggested that establishment of Korean identity, schooling, and faith education were the most influential factors in educational decisions, and 15 of 33 respondents reported spending 20-40% of their financial support on their children’s education.

H. N. Ryu’s (2011) master’s thesis was the first to examine Korean language and culture education of Korean missionary kids from an educational rather than religious perspective. She conducted unstructured interviews (N=20) with Korean TCKs, performed participant observations (at retreats for Korean TCKs and seminars for Korean missionaries and missionary educators), distributed a survey (N=45), and conducted document analysis of a 4-volume series of Korean language and culture curriculum. It is unclear how H. N. Ryu used the data collected from interviews or participant observations in her study since it was not directly presented as part of her findings; the majority of her results and analyses related to data collected from the qualitative survey and document analysis. She did not clearly state a conceptual or theoretical framework or discuss the validity of her survey instrument; however, the embryonic nature and felt need for more information about her topic of inquiry was appropriate to data collection and trend analysis to illuminate areas for further research.
Ryu distributed a 14-item survey (N=45; 75% response rate\(^3\)) with seven items using a Likert-style scale, three fixed response items, and four free-response items. She found that 78% of survey respondents used only Korean in communication with their parents and 20% reported using both Korean and a local language. All survey respondents reported eating Korean food at home (7% “normally,” 18% “often,” and 76% “always”), 89% reported celebrating Korean holidays in their host country (20% “normally,” 36% “often,” and 33% “always”), and 89% reported having read a book in Korean outside of their school curriculum while in their host country. Unfortunately, the return rate on this survey was not sufficient to analyze the results for significance; this study was not designed to be generalizable but to describe the state of language and culture education for Korean TCKs and to illuminate the need for further research in this area. Ryu’s document analysis of the Korean language and culture education curriculum suggested that this curriculum was consistent with the ideals of establishing learners’ identity as religious “believers,” “Koreans,” and developing their “international personhood.” Her adept justification of the timeliness of Korean TCK research, especially related to the intersection of their education, language, and identity, was arguably the greatest contribution of this study.


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\(^3\) Ryu noted that those who chose not to complete the survey (N=15 out of 60) reported that the survey was burdensome, that their Korean writing ability was insufficient to complete the survey, repatriation stress, discomfort talking to those who were not Korean MKs, or disinclination to participate in a survey that was limited to Korean MKs.
A. G. Baek’s (2000) master’s thesis used a case study approach (N=4) to analyze identity formation in Korean TCKs, all of whom were children of Korean missionaries who were attending college in Seoul. A. G. Baek analyzed data from in-depth individual interviews according to five variables: time frame of participants’ first move to a different (non-Korean) culture, number of years lived in a different (non-Korean) culture, number of international moves, influence of each country in which participants lived, and gender (two participants were male and two were female). Gender difference emerged only in the area of faith, where male participants were described as more critical and rational than female participants.

Participants described themselves as “Korean” in their appearance, citizenship, and lineage (family/bloodline), but described their thought patterns, values, and culture with a level of flexibility. Themes of relationships emerged from the data: participants described the ease with which they developed relationships with those who shared their experience (of being missionary kids) and the difficulty of developing relationships with others who lack this experience. Participants also described close-knit family relationships, especially with their parents. Finally, A. G. Baek found that neither the number of moves nor the amount of time spent in a non-Korean culture had as significant an influence on participants’ identity development as did the period of their formative years during which they moved to the host culture.
A. G. Baek clearly stated her research questions and conceptual framework and described her methods for data collection and analysis, but discussion of inherent limitations of these methods was noticeably limited. While the use of direct quotes adequately captured the voices of her participants, the direct insertion of entire pages of transcript rather than distillation of themes and representation of statements or paragraphs detracted from the continuity of her data presentation and analysis.

S. H. Kim (2006) administered a survey (N=97) to students in middle school grades at an international school in South Korea where the number of Asian TCK students increased from 42% in 1991 to 84% in 2003, providing access to a large population of Korean TCKs. The questionnaire included demographic information, questions modified from the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to identify ethnic identity of Korean American students, the traditional MEIM, the Iowa Form CES-D to measure depression, the Stress Test Screening Test, and a series of binary response questions to determine potential sources of stress. Finally, S. H. Kim invited participants to submit two journal entries. The first examined the theme of relationships (students examined their own attitudes toward people the student considered “foreigners, Koreans, peers (friends), parents, and teachers,” p. 70) and the second asked them to reflect on and explain whether they liked living in Korea.

S. H. Kim found that “almost all participating students achieved Korean Ethnic Identity,” and “half of the participants achieved Korean-American identity” (p. 102). She also found “a relationship between ethnic identity and [students’] distress and stress level” (p. 102): participants who achieved Korean-American identity “had a lower
distress and stress level” and “the most positive attitude towards all people around them, regardless of what country the other people are from.” Three students who described themselves as American experienced “identity conflicts… distress and stress [because] they felt out of place, or lacking a sense of group belonging to their peers” (p. 102). Finally, those who described themselves as “solid Korean had some degree of stress” (p. 103), which S. H. Kim attributed to their lack of English ability in the English-only academic setting. Despite a lack of clarity in the site selection process (she claimed that she used “convenience sampling”), S. H. Kim developed a strong argument for selecting her site but failed to frame it this way in the methods section.

Kwon (2006) studied the effect of multiple cultural influences (home culture, host culture, international/western school culture) on the “communication patterns and media preferences” of the population of Korean missionary kids (MKs) attending an international school in the Philippines. The single-school case study used in-depth group interviews, self-administered media use logs, and a quantitative survey (N=65) to compare students who had been in the international school for an extended time with those who had just entered that context. Kwon found that the third-culture model inadequately describes those Korean students who receive much of their education in an international school context because their issues of identity deal with “the clash or integration of cultures between the third culture and the international school culture (or western education)” (rather than the clash of home and host culture experienced by many TCKs), and this clash is highlighted by “learning to speak English fluently rather than Korean” (p. 3).
Kwon’s results suggested that participants learned Korean language and culture from their parents, used English in their formal education, and had relatively little contact with the host culture. “Personal community indicators” (“nationality of friends, church attendance, and media consumption”) replaced the influence of the host culture and “show[ed] strong western cultural influences” (p. 20). Kwon collected data over a three-day period, and it is unclear how or whether the media diaries would have yielded different results if data collection had been longitudinal; he also failed to discuss the limitations of his chosen research methods.

S. W. Kim (2008) examined issues of identity in the context of globalization and demonstrated specific concern surrounding the education of Korean TCKs. S. W. Kim interviewed Korean TCKs (N=6: three of traditional college age and three mid-life adults) to determine the extent to which participants identified as Korean. Unfortunately, he did not establish whether the interview questions adequately or accurately measured Korean identity. While the literature review and data analysis directly relate to the nexus of identity, language, and education, S. W. Kim’s failure to establish the trustworthiness of his research instruments (himself and his questionnaire) severely limited the viability of his research and the validity of his findings.

G. A. Lee (2011) used a quantitative survey (N=409) to measure the relationship between ethnic identity, intercultural sensitivity, and self-esteem in Korean TCKs attending international schools in Korea. Relying heavily on Western constructs and research studies, G. A. Lee’s examination of the theoretical background of each construct was well-organized and thorough, defining and examining previous research for each
construct and culminating by examining previous studies that relate the three constructs to one another and adequately situate the research questions within the existing literature.

G. A. Lee’s research questions examined 1) the relationship between demographic variables and intercultural sensitivity and 2) the effects of self-esteem and ethnic identity on intercultural sensitivity. G. A. Lee provided a detailed description of participant criteria and site and participant selection methods. The survey instrument included 15 demographic questions and used Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (10 Likert scale items), Phinney’s (1992) Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, 12 Likert scale items), and Chen and Starosta’s (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (24 Likert scale items). Data analysis included “descriptive statistics, correlation, simple regression and multiple regression” (p. 81). Results suggested a “meaningful difference” in intercultural sensitivity depending on “gender, age, grade level, the periods of residence abroad and the proficiency of English/other language” (p. 82). In addition, “self-esteem was the significant a positive predictor” for intercultural sensitivity, but the data did not suggest a relationship between ethnic identity and intercultural sensitivity.

Korean TCK Experience

Expatriate Korean parents do not make decisions about their children’s education in a vacuum: history, values, and meanings associated with education such as filial piety, social mobility, and identity influence these decisions. Korean parents feel a great weight of responsibility for the education of their children as their primary duty within the Confucian parent-child relationship (Cumings, 2005). Seth (2012) analyzed Korea’s education system in the context of citizenship and the state, noting that “the high rates of
literacy brought about by this drive for education, the establishment of a universal and uniform school system, and the intensity of the educational experience all contributed to a common sense of community” (p. 13); it is this shared educational experience that Korean TCKs lack. Their TCK experience fundamentally shapes their identity and as such, this experience troubles their sense of belonging in Korea. Borden (2000) described the relationship between education and identity as determining the future of Korean TCKs and ultimately their family lineage:

Korean school creates Korean adults; international education creates either Western adults or bicultural adults who eventually are at ease in both the East and the West. Which route to take is a critical family decision affecting not only the child but also the family and the family’s future. It is a question of whether or not future generations will be Korean. (p. 84, emphasis added)

Chapter Summary

This chapter traced the conceptual genealogy of the third culture phenomenon, both generally and in academic research. This review included studies published in English and Korean; due to the embryonic nature of research with this population, many of the studies were master’s theses and dissertations from universities in both Korea and the United States. The bulk of the literature review was organized thematically according to the preliminary model proposed in Chapter One, with studies examining culture, language, and education and their relationship to identity construction. This review began by describing trends in the research literature, examining identity in higher
education and TCK research, and identified gaps in the research literature published in
English examining identity in Korean TCK participants.

This study fills several gaps in the literature. First, by examining identity
*construction*, this study provides an alternative to traditional models of identity,
cognitive, or psychosocial development within the student development or study abroad
literature in higher education. This study also fills a gap in TCK identity research by
examining non-Western heritage TCKs. Finally, this study fills a two-fold gap within the
study of internationally mobile Korean families, both by examining Korean TCKs (as
distinguished from Korean families immigrating abroad) and by writing about Korean
TCKs in English.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY:
IDENTIFYING AND DESCRIBING KOREAN TCK IDENTITY

This study investigated the ways that Korean Third Culture Kids’ (TCKs’) life experiences inform their identity construction by asking, “How does the lived experience of Korean Third Culture Kids inform their identity construction?” as well as the following supporting questions:

1. How does Korean Third Culture Kids’ college experience inform their identity construction?

2. How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ lived experience distinct because of Korean home culture?

3. How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ identity construction distinct because of Korean home culture?

I used a comparative lens to “explore how [participants’] lived experiences have influenced their sense of who they are” (Walters & Auton-Cuf, 2009, p. 759). Because data collection methods (three series interview [Seidman, 2006]) invited participant story-telling and self-reflection, they facilitated my intellectual goals of understanding how Korean TCKs make sense of their experiences and their identity. This study addresses a gap in the literature (Kwon, 2006; Pollock and Van Reken, 2001; Schaetti,
2001; Tanu, 2008) by focusing on TCKs from non-Western families, specifically delimiting to Korean TCKs.

**Researcher Identity**

**Researcher Assumptions**

Prior to conducting this research, I assumed that the experience of higher education heavily shapes a student’s development, self-definition, and identity construction (Astin, 1997; Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and this assumption was informed by my professional training and practice within the field of higher education and student affairs. However, I also questioned the extent to which the established models of student development in higher education would be useful to describe identity construction for TCKs (Quick, 2010), and especially TCKs from a different home culture than the United States. Furthermore, I assumed that the presence of a Korean community or subculture within the host culture, and the type of education the TCK received in the host culture would also inform the Korean TCK’s experience.

These assumptions—that higher education was a unique context for identity construction, and that established models were limited in their applicability to TCKs and thus also Korean TCKs, and that a Korean community abroad and the type of education the TCK received abroad would inform TCK experiences and identity construction— informed the framing and design of this research study. First, the literature review which situated this study was largely delimited to those research studies which used Korean TCKs as research participants, and this included studies published both in Korean and in English (see Chapter Two). Second, I purposefully selected participants whose
experiences, when taken together, could reflect the diversity of experiences within the
Korean TCK phenomenon. While I paid special attention to participants’ K12 and higher
education experiences in this selection, I also selected one participant from a Korean-
American immigrant family. Finally, my desire to allow a framework to emerge from the
experiences of Korean TCKs rather than impose an established framework onto this study
meant that data analysis methods were heavily informed by grounded theory and required
constant comparative analysis of all data (see “Data Analysis”, below).

**Researcher Subjectivity and Positionality**

At age 5, I began my life as a TCK when my family moved from our home
culture of the United States into the host culture of Korea, where I lived until age 16.
Furthermore, my professional experience of three years working as Dean of Students at
an intercultural college institute in Korea allowed me to interact with TCKs from the
United States and Korea who were actively navigating the process of identity
construction. Thus, I have both a personal and professional interest in this topic that is
grounded in my own experience, and this experience became the lens through which I
conducted this research.

My own internationally mobile childhood sensitized me to the experiences of
Korean TCKs, and it was impossible for me to divorce my experience from data
collection, data analysis, or the development of the conceptual framework. Thus, through
data analysis and representation I am implicitly comparing the collected data with my
own experience: my own positionality as a TCK who lived in Korea as both a child and
adult became the filter through which I determined which data to include and highlight.
(Table 3.1 summarizes this researcher-participant positionality.) My background as a TCK raised in Korea challenged me to guard against becoming overly invested in this study. However, it also provided me intrinsic motivation to represent participants’ stories.

**Empathy.** While I was heavily invested in this project and believed in its value during the proposal crafting and data collection phases, I was utterly unprepared for the depth at which I connected with participants’ stories once I began to analyze and represent the data. Because I shared many similar experiences with participants, I could relate to the frustration of being unable to communicate, or feeling limited, in another language; the fear of never fitting in; the simultaneous freedom and dissonance of standing out compared to the majority of the surrounding culture based on physical appearance; and the tension and stress of constant mobility between cultures.

During the early stages of coding I was emotionally overwhelmed—not only at the vast volume of collected data, but at the *content*. I invited participants to tell stories about life experiences that were often uncomfortable, wrought with tension, or painful: stories of rejection, crisis, and fear. I was not only overwhelmed with the depth to which I dove into the data through line-by-line coding, but I was emotionally overwhelmed at the weight of the conflict I carried. Instead of only bearing the weight of my own journey through identity construction, I now carried the burden of the journeys of thirteen other people whose life choices I could not control.
Table 3.1

*Researcher-Participant Positionality*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self (researcher)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male/female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>race</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heritage</td>
<td>American heritage, American parents</td>
<td>Korean heritage, Korean parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td>native English speaker, competent Korean speaker</td>
<td>native or competent Korean and/or English speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>may be native or competent speaker of host culture language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural identity</td>
<td>Experienced American culture (home culture) as insider and outsider</td>
<td>Experienced Korean culture as insider and outsider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experienced Korean culture (host culture) as outsider</td>
<td>Experienced host culture as outsider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>Ph.D. student</td>
<td>undergraduate student or alum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once our interviews concluded, participants moved on with their lives while I waded through their identity struggles, re-living the tension, angst, and dissonance they had described for months on end as I analyzed the data. This weight was compounded by the fact that I made an international move near the mid-point of data collection to a country I had never even visited prior to this move. Although I have led a highly mobile life, this was my first move to a truly “foreign” country (China) rather than Korea or the United States. My utter inability to communicate in my new home combined with my visible and undeniable identity as a foreigner sensitized me to the ideas of “minority” and “ethnicity” and the ways in which they mediate life experiences.

**Privilege.** Despite the fact that I was able to empathize with many aspects of participants’ lived experience, I was also sensitized to my own position of privilege in the areas where my participants’ experiences diverged from my own. This privilege is not limited to my positionally as a Caucasian from the United States (where I identify with the majority population in my home culture) but also as a TCK from a Western culture (when I return to my home culture, my international childhood is something that is celebrated or envied), with access to schooling abroad that prepared me to re-enter my home culture, and from a home where my TCK experience was embraced without becoming “the” label for my life experience and identity.¹

In contrast, participants who returned to Korea after living abroad described intense feelings of dissonance and even ridicule because of their international experience.

¹ My parents proactively introduced TCK vocabulary; engaged me in dialogue before, during, and after our international moves; and allowed me the freedom to navigate my own identity construction without imposing expectations that I align with external constructions of “American” or even “TCK.”
All of the participants in this study attended schools abroad that were in English, with curriculum designed to prepare students for higher education in the United States or the host country. Some even felt that to embrace their TCK experience would mean denying their “Korean-ness,” dishonoring their parents as failures for their inability to bring their children up as Koreans.

Finally, because I am not ethnically Korean my own Korean language ability is celebrated despite its limitations by Koreans and non-Koreans alike; in contrast, my participants are expected to speak perfect Korean with no regard for their international upbringing. Their English fluency, while envied by many of their peers, drives a wedge between themselves and their home culture. If participants lack perfect fluency in Korean and a thorough understanding of and willingness to abide by Korean cultural norms, they may be judged as shameful, bringing disgrace to their families, their country, and the Korean people as a whole.

The burden of participants’ stories combined with a fuller understanding of the ways in which they had overcome hardships I have never had to experience to produce a level of investment in their stories—and in this research—that I was unprepared for at the outset. I was often moved to tears when processing interviews and especially during data analysis—I felt anger at the injustices of their experiences in their lives abroad, their schooling, and at home when compared to my own.

**Culture.** During the processes of data collection and analysis, I began to realize the ways that my own cultural identity was embedded within this project, both in design and implementation. First, while I knew that one of my responsibilities as a researcher
would be to interpret Korean TCKs and represent their stories to an English-speaking audience in the United States, I was still surprised when I realized—during the first interview series I conducted—that I shared a context with my participants that my readers could not be expected to have. While I did provide some brief introductions to Korean culture in the proposal for this project, my own subjectivity as someone who has lived in Korean culture for more than half of my life blinded me to my need to contextualize this project for those who lacked the same knowledge of Korea.

Furthermore, the years I spent in Korea as a child and an adult were a positive and formative experience for me, and I care deeply that foreigners have positive interactions with Korea and Korean people. This outlook informed the way I interpreted the data, as well. Subconsciously, my desire to represent Korea in a positive light led me to ignore some data (e.g., Korean constructions of ethnicity, race, and bloodline as aligned with national identity). Peer readers—Korean and non-Korean—were an invaluable asset to me in identifying my own blind spots to the negative aspects of Korean culture.

**Ethnicity.** Furthermore, this project is largely informed by a grounded theory approach, where I attempted to allow conclusions about identity construction to emerge organically from within a Korean context. Thus I delimited the literature review to those including Korean TCKs as participants and purposefully selected participants who were Korean by ethnicity and heritage. However, despite the fact that I intentionally bounded this project to be “Korean”—even rejecting the use of a culturally-constructed conceptual framework from outside—I am not Korean. I am at the epicenter of this project in design, I am the very instrument of data collection and analysis, and I exercise
tremendous—nearly absolute—power in data representation; yet for all of my efforts to establish an authentically “Korean” context from which a grounded theory could emerge, *the entire process was filtered through a non-Korean lens*. Finally, the results of this study suggest that the process of identity construction for Korean TCKs is *not* distinct from other TCKs, even while ethnicity and the Korean home culture matter very much.

**Data Collection**

*Site Selection*

One purpose of this study was constant comparative analysis across participant life experiences. Because international schools within Korea are only permitted to admit students who either hold a foreign (non-Korean) passport or have lived at least three years outside Korea, these schools were ideal institutions through which to identify potential participants for this research project. I selected participants through an online demographic survey and informal networks of alumni from these schools. Because graduates of these international schools largely enroll in universities outside Korea, I also distributed the demographic survey link through a Facebook group for the TCK Network (an organization providing networking and professional development events for TCKs and others living in the Seoul area) in order to identify potential participants who attended university in Korea.

**Demographic survey.** I contacted gatekeepers from five international schools in Korea via email, explaining my research study and sharing a link to a demographic survey\(^2\) (Appendix A) and asking them to distribute the link to their recent alumni. Four

\(^2\) This survey was modified from one that I developed for a pilot study conducted in Columbia, SC in the spring of 2012; the original survey was a useful way to identify TCKs.
of these five schools responded;\(^3\) two schools posted the survey link to their alumni Facebook pages, one school provided me contact information for well-connected alumni, and one school hand-selected a group of alumni who met the selection criteria (see “Participant Selection,” below) and emailed them directly on my behalf. Survey respondents were entered into a drawing for a gift certificate to Amazon.com. While the Korean version of the survey received no responses, the English version of the survey received 42 unique responses. Based on the information respondents provided, I identified thirty respondents who met the selection criteria and contacted them by text or email (according to the information they provided) to determine their interest in participating in this research study. Of these, three responded and one survey respondent agreed to participate in this study.

**Informal alumni networks.** Patton (2002) suggested that snowball or chain sampling, where well-informed and well-connected individuals identify potential participants, is also a useful method of identifying qualitative research participants. One alum from an international school in Korea introduced me via Facebook to seven potential participants who met my selection criteria; six of these agreed to participate in this study, and one of these six introduced me to another participant. Another alum of an international school in Korea, now a professor at Harvard University, introduced me via email to six potential participants who were former students and acquaintances of hers; three of these agreed to participate in this study.

\(^3\) Incidentally, the one school that did not respond was the only school with which I did not have a prior relationship. Three of the schools that responded were “sister schools” located in different cities, and during my time in Korea I had worked as a substitute teacher and facilitated college admission workshops in one of these networked schools. The other school that responded was the international school I had attended as a child, and because of that relationship I was classified as part of their alumni organization.
Finally, in order to identify potential participants who had attended university in Korea, I posted an invitation for participants to the closed Facebook group “TCKs and Cosmopolitans in Korea,” of which I am a member. By directly contacting (via Facebook “Inbox” message) group members who commented on this post, I identified four more potential participants, three of whom ultimately joined this project.

**Participant Selection Criteria**

Participants in this study were selected using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Participants were college students or recent alumni between the ages of 18 and 30, with two Korean parents, who had accompanied their family and lived outside Korea for at least three years before graduating from high school. The age limit of 30 was appropriate to allow for potential participants who were male Korean citizens to complete university and fulfill their mandatory military service commitment. This age limit also provided recent alumni sufficient distance from their higher education experience to allow for in-depth self-reflection. One participant, Maria, was intentionally selected because she was older than the maximum age criteria so as to provide a “retrospective” voice on the Korean TCK experience. In order to capture the essence of the TCK experience (rather than an “early study abroad,” “bicultural,” or “immigrant,” experience), participants had

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4 This is the Facebook group for the TCK Network, which coordinates monthly networking and professional development opportunities for TCKs and internationally mobile individuals in Seoul.

5 A growing trend in Korea, where elementary- or secondary-school-aged children are sent abroad, usually to an English-speaking country, for an extended period of study; this phenomenon will be contextualized in Chapter Five.
to accompany their family abroad and live abroad as foreigners, with the intent to return to the home culture—Korea.

Given this study’s emphasis on the Korean TCK experience rather than a specific research site, I also selected one participant, Joseph, who had never lived in Korea. Joseph’s father’s family immigrated to the United States when he was eight, and his mother moved to the United States for graduate school, where they met. Joseph grew up in a Korean-American immigrant family, moved internationally during junior high, and repatriated to the United States to enroll in university. Although both his parents were not raised in Korea through high school graduation, and neither hold Korean citizenship, Joseph was selected so that the sum total of participant experiences would reflect the diversity within the Korean TCK phenomenon.

Data Collection Methods

Interview series. After identifying participants, I conducted a series of three unstructured individual interviews (Seidman, 2006) of approximately 60 minutes each with each participant (see Appendix B for Interview Protocol). The shortest interview lasted for 37 minutes and the longest for 200 minutes. The first interview emphasized establishing rapport, building trust, informing participants of the potential risks of participation, and establishing a timeline of their life experiences prior to college matriculation. The second interview further established rapport and built trust while focusing on the participant’s experience of higher education. During their final interview, participants reflected on the meaning and significance of their experience as a Korean TCK, especially related to their identity construction during college. This series of three
phenomenological biographical narrative interviews provided a means of data triangulation and invited story-telling (Chase, 2003) and rich description of participants’ meaningful life experiences, especially as they related to the Korean TCK phenomenon.

**Skype interviews.** I used Skype to conduct most of the interviews, connecting with participants virtually via computer (some used webcam while others used microphone only). While I initially resisted this idea, participants were highly responsive and several participants noted that they used Skype extensively to keep in touch with friends or loved ones who live far away. This method also gave me access to participants that I would not have been able to meet in person, thereby allowing me to select participants according to their life experience rather than focusing on the Korean TCK phenomenon as experienced within a given environment (e.g., in a specific institutional context).

Skype allowed me to connect with participants at no cost to them, at their convenience, and in the space of their choosing (most were at home, but one participant chose to go to a coffee shop for one interview). Using Skype gave me flexibility in scheduling interviews, without the pressure of a finite timeline at a given research site, and this allowed me sufficient time to thoroughly review each interview before conducting the next interview with that participant. I purchased a call recording software which recorded Skype video and audio calls automatically, and the webcam and microphones produced high-quality recordings which largely eliminated the frustration of poor recordings when using a voice recorder. Finally, by using Skype instead of the telephone, participants were required to physically remain at their computers, often...
connected by a microphone headset, and if they used their keyboard the sound was easily
discernible. Thus, the distractions common to telephone interviews (where the researcher
cannot tell whether interviewees are doing another task simultaneously) were minimized.

However, Skype interviews were not free of problems. First, my ability to
conduct interviews was largely dependent on having access to high-speed internet. After
moving internationally, I had several occasions where I was forced to cut the video feed
and conduct an audio interview because of limited bandwidth; on one occasion I actually
conducted the interview via instant message (IM) because the voice connection was
repeatedly cut off. While using audio calls was not a significant threat to the validity of
the project—some participants were limited to voice calls for all interviews because their
computers lacked webcams—the data collected via IM was relatively “thin” when
compared to transcripts of verbal conversations. In order to address this deficiency, I
allowed time for contextualizing and member checking this data during the subsequent
interviews in the series. Finally, conducting virtual interviews placed a greater
responsibility on me to develop rapport with participants. Although I had met and
interacted with five of the thirteen participants in different capacities prior to conducting
interviews, I still made extra effort to build rapport during each interview. Finally, I
visited Seoul and invited all participants who were living in Korea to meet in person; four
participants accepted this invitation.

I was convinced of the value and quality of Skype interviews after conducting the
third interview with one participant in person. This was the only interview I conducted
in-person (with the exception of follow-up interviews, which were all conducted in
person), and I felt incredibly limited during the interview—this participant had been introduced to me through another participant, and this third interview was our first time to meet in person; I was very focused on developing rapport and maintaining eye contact throughout the interview, and this inhibited my note-taking, especially compared to the relative freedom I felt taking notes during her previous interviews (voice calls over Skype). Furthermore, because we met in a public space, I sensed that she felt some urgency to answer questions quickly rather than feeling free to think deeply prior to responding, as she had in previous interviews. Finally, because I used an external voice recorder (which I had used with success for my pilot study, where I conducted all interviews in person), the sound quality was inferior to what I received when recording via Skype, and the recording was almost useless. This interview experience confirmed to me the usefulness of Skype to conduct interviews, especially with this group of participants who—whether because of their age or by virtue of the fact that they are connected virtually to friends around the world—were very comfortable with the technology.

One participant was not comfortable connecting via Skype, phone, or in person and agreed to participate only if we used IM to conduct interviews. While she was highly responsive to interview questions and the tone of her interviews was positive, her interview data was remarkably “thin” in comparison to other transcripts and therefore her voice does not come through as clearly as others in the representation of data.
Data Analysis

This study was both implicitly and explicitly comparative in nature. Data from Korean-heritage TCKs raised in diverse host cultures were analyzed by a Western-heritage TCK who was raised in Korea. Through constant comparative analysis, I also compared participant experiences to one another—specifically focusing on language, citizenship, presence of a Korean community, and educational background—in order to understand how these experiences informed their identity construction.

Analysis Methods

Preliminary analysis. With the permission of the participant, each interview was recorded using a video (for Skype interviews) or audio recorder (for in-person interviews), and I began preliminary analysis of interview data immediately, by completing a self-reflection form (Appendix E) within 24 hours of conducting the interview. Prior to conducting the subsequent interview with that participant, I reviewed the recording of the previous interview, filling out my field notes and highlighting passages which did not need to be included in the transcription (e.g., passages relevant to rapport-building but irrelevant to the research study). After completing the full interview series with a participant, I uploaded their audio recordings and instructions for transcription to an online transcription service, Rev.com.

After conducting all of the interviews and receiving completed transcripts, I returned to the data collected first\(^6\) and listened to each interview series in one sitting.

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\(^6\) I conducted interviews over a span of several months (between April and December 2013) and had also moved internationally in the middle of this period. I felt the need to re-familiarize myself with the data collected at first before immersing myself in coding and in-depth analysis.
while reading the transcripts. During this listening, I made notes on the transcripts in three colors (highlighting particularly meaningful passages, using a blue marker for initial one-word ideas or phrases which came directly from the text, bracketing my own analysis of the text, and using pencil to mark errors in transcription). After completing this preliminary analysis for each participant’s interview series, I began in-depth analysis and line-by-line coding of all interview data.

**In-depth analysis.** I approached data analysis inductively, initially focusing on categorizing and later focusing on connecting the data to one another. In order to allow codes, categories, and themes to emerge from the data, I used a constant comparative approach to “fracture” the interview data and coded each interview transcript line-by-line. I sorted, collapsed, and organized these codes into categories, and allowed the conceptual framework and over-arching themes to emerge from the data simultaneously so as to re-assemble the fractured data into a coherent “whole” using the emergent framework. Finally, I constructed narrative profiles in order to reconnect fractured data, display emergent themes, provide a platform for participants to be heard in their own voices, and reconcile “statements and events within a context into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 98). During analysis, I paid special attention to comparing participants’ experiences across educational experiences and cultural context (i.e., the type of school attended and the culture in which they lived at the time of their experience). The categorizing and connecting of data into a framework is the subject of

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7 Again, I treated each interview series as a “whole” and analyzed interview series in order of who was interviewed first (e.g., I coded Charlie’s interview series first, followed by Autumn, and so on).
Part Two, “Data Representation,” and the connection and representation of data through narrative profiles is interwoven throughout this section.

Coding. While coding, I noted specific codes on the interview transcript, then logged the quote associated with that code on a separate sheet of paper bearing that code as a title. These papers became an index for all data that were coded in the same way, with each participant’s quote labeled with their name, the interview (A, B, or C in the series), and the page number of the transcript on which that quote appeared (e.g., “Charlie A1”). After completing coding for each participant’s interview series, I used notecards to create an “index” for that participant, listing the codes that emerged from their interview data along with retrieval information (e.g. “A1”).

Categorizing. In total 174 codes emerged from the data. After coding all data, I classified codes according to Maxwell’s (2005) description as to whether the codes were “organizational” (38 codes), “substantive” (92 codes), or “theoretical” (5 codes). I sorted these codes and many of them collapsed into “thematic categories” (47 categories), but some codes were not described by these thematic categories. Table 3.2 displays examples of how I coded data based on this categorizing scheme (“theoretical”

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8 Maxwell (2005) suggested the following scheme as a way of assisting inexperienced researchers to analyze their own coding process. Organizational codes are actually categories which “function primarily as ‘bins’ for sorting the data for further analysis” (p. 97) and are often established before data collection begins. Substantive codes are emic, “primarily descriptive… stay close to the data, and don’t inherently imply a more abstract theory” (p. 97). In contrast, theoretical codes organize data “into a more general or abstract framework” and are usually etic.

9 An additional 39 codes emerged which described unique cultural features that participants referenced or discussed during data collection. During initial analysis, I collapsed these 39 codes into one “organizational code” (cultural features) and seven thematic categories. Two of these 39 cultural feature codes are presented as examples of the coding scheme in Table 4.5.

10 These categories were products of my own analysis, and they often overlapped with organizational codes, but not always.
codes functioned as a connecting strategy to understand and describe relationships between data; since they were not a part of the categorizing process, I did not include them in this table).

**Connecting.** After fracturing the data through coding and categorizing, three over-arching themes emerged which captured all of the individual codes and categories: *cultural context, negotiating the politics of belonging,* and *identity,* the collected data are represented according to these themes in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, respectively.

**Data Representation**

**Conceptual Framework**

One purpose of this research project was to allow a conceptual framework to emerge from the data, so as to avoid unilateral application of culturally-constructed theories or frameworks which did not “fit” the experiences of Korean TCKs. Therefore, I invested significant time and energy during data analysis in developing the conceptual framework so that it could be an effective platform for the collected data. The emergent framework (presented in Chapter Four) both describes the mobility of Korean TCKs between their home and host cultures and articulates cultural globalization (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008) as the theoretical lens through which I approached this research. Furthermore, participants’ educational experiences (primary, secondary, and higher) could be embedded within the framework (as organizational categories or “bins” within which to understand data) or set aside in order to examine data as it aligned with emergent

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11 That is, provide an elevated space from which the lived experiences of Korean TCKs are made visible to the reader, without distracting from the reader’s understanding of, or ability to make meaning from, these experiences.
Table 3.2

*Example of Categorizing Scheme for Coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational code</th>
<th>Substantive code</th>
<th>Thematic Category</th>
<th>Example of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Korean cultural features | Education | • *hagwon* (학원, after-school academy, “cram school”)  
• Chinese characters in Korean school |
| Korean cultural features | Family | stereotype of Korean mother |
| English | English as access | "The ‘in [crowd] were the smart ones. My English was too good for them to challenge me so I had to be accepted [into their group] on that basis” (Maria) |
| Grouping of ethnic Koreans abroad | Embrace and/or resist grouping | • “I mostly hung out with Korean friends when I was in college… We stuck together… very closely” (Jeong-sook)  
• In college racial grouping is “noticeable… I don’t hang out with Koreans too much” (Charlie) |
| Fit in | | • “I tried to suppress my American side, fit into Korean society, but it wasn’t possible” (Drew)  
• “I saw what other Korean students did… and I tried to be one of them” (Seo-hyeon)  
• “I observed [peers] and tried to mimic what they were doing… a lot of observation and repeating what they were doing” (Alice) |
| Belonging | | • “accept me as me” (Yoon-jeong)  
• “take me for who I am” (Madeleine) |
themes. The structure of the framework facilitated comparative analysis between participants across their experiences.

**Trustworthiness**

**Contextualization.** The first section of data representation discusses Korea as a unique home culture for participants. In this section I describe two types of collected data: first, phenomena or aspects of Korean culture that participants shared with me during interviews (e.g., relationship with parents). The second type of data is cultural features that participants referenced but did not explain or describe (e.g., *hagwon* [학원]) because they correctly assumed my experience living in Korea and speaking Korean would help me understand this data.

Because a generally-educated reader may lack this context, my role is that of an interpreter: my responsibility as a researcher is to “paint a picture” of Korea as a home culture so that the reader, too, can understand the data and determine the applicability of the results to other contexts. I triangulated interview data across participants and used books and peer-reviewed journal articles about South Korea to establish the cultural context in which these data have meaning. Finally, I invited peer readers\(^\text{12}\) to give feedback on the contextualization of the data represented. Part Two is organized thematically and other data sources are interwoven with interview data in order to appropriately contextualize the represented data so that the reader can understand not

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\(^{12}\) Peer readers included: a professor (Caucasian, U.S. citizen) holding graduate degrees in higher education and Asian studies with 25 years lived experience in Korea; a doctoral candidate (Caucasian, U.S. citizen) with 5 years lived experience in Korea and the Korean prefecture of China; a professor (ethnic Korean, U.S. citizen) who lived in Korea until adulthood, emigrated to the United States, and has since worked in China and Korea for 25 years; and two generally educated readers (Caucasian, U.S. citizen) unfamiliar with Korea.
only what participants said about their experience but also understand the context—and therefore begin to understand the meaning—of these experiences.

**Delimitation.** Chapters Five, Six, and Seven will represent the key themes which emerged from the data (*cultural context, negotiating the politics of belonging*, and *identity*). While these themes accommodate all of the data that were collected, I intentionally delimited the represented data to allow for in-depth analysis of how Korean TCK experiences are distinct. During data analysis, several key distinctions emerged from the data: Korean TCK experiences tend to be unique in home culture, language, and education (these findings were largely consistent with the literature about Korean TCKs; see Chapter Two). Thus, the bulk of the data represented in Part II highlight these distinctions. In contrast, the narrative profiles (see below) present participant experiences in a broader context, demonstrating how Korean TCKs’ experiences are subtly distinct yet also largely reflective of the essentially human experience of interacting with society and constructing identity.

**Alternative Strategies for Data Representation**

**Narrative profiles.** By the time I had completed the data collection phase, I was uncomfortable restricting data representation to a traditional, theme-based approach where participants’ stories were fractured and the reader would not interact with data as narrative but rather as “snippets” of a narrative. I decided to not only use a traditional analysis approach, but also select some participants’ narratives for presentation through profiles (modeled after Seidman’s 2006 description of profiles).
Justification. Profiles provide a way to highlight themes which emerged from the data within their original context. Seidman (2006) suggested that profiles are “a way to find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant’s experience, [a way] to share the coherence the participant has expressed, and [a way] to link the individual’s experience to the social and organizational context within which he or she operates” (p. 120, emphasis added). As a researcher I wrestled with the ethics of collecting narrative data and then fracturing it in order to represent it to the reader; this process of analysis required me to filter data through my own experience and elevated data which reflected my own sensitivities. Furthermore, this process “sanitized” the data and divorced them from their context, making it difficult for the reader to hear the participants’ voices in context. While I made efforts to address the threats that accompanied this approach (see “Trustworthiness,” below), narrative profiles offered another way to “do justice” to the data—participants’ stories—by presenting them in their original story form.

Narrative profiles invite the reader into participants’ stories, and into the process of constructing meaning around the phenomenon of investigation, by “inviting readers to both bear witness and begin to understand the factors influencing” (Seidman, 2006, p. 125) the conflicts in the narrative (i.e., identity conflict and resolution). Seidman further suggested that

a profile in the worlds of the participant is the research product… most consistent with the process of interviewing. It allows [researchers] to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time. (p. 119, emphasis added)
Thus, these profiles are the most accurate representation of narrative data for the reader, and they preserve and elevate the voices of participants rather than my own; they invite readers to see both how life experiences are unique for Korean TCKs and the ways participants’ narratives were largely reflective of any individual embarking on the journey of identity construction.

**Selection and construction.**

**Criteria.** I modeled my selection of data for representation through narrative profiles after Seidman’s (2006) recommendation that the participant’s interview series demonstrate “a beginning, a middle, and an end” (p. 119) with “some sense of conflict and resolution” (p. 119). To these criteria I added that data should be characterized by thick, rich description, and conflict should be three-dimensional and in some way be related to identity. Finally, I wanted the profiles as a whole to reflect diverse experiences, especially related to education. After completing in-depth analysis, I made a preliminary list of seven participants whose interview data might meet these criteria, and eventually selected four of these as meeting the criteria for representation as narrative profiles.

During the process of profile construction, I contacted each of the four participants whose data met the selection criteria to request their permission to present their data in this way.

**Construction.** I began the process of constructing narrative profiles by printing a new hard copy of the interview transcripts from each of the seven participants whose data might meet the selection criteria, and I read each interview series in its entirety in one sitting. I marked the “beginning, middle, and end” and “conflict and resolution,” then went back through the transcript, highlighting passages that contributed to the beginning,
middle, and end as well as identity conflict and resolution.\textsuperscript{13} I then created a new document and typed only the highlighted passages into this document, separating each “chunk” of data into a paragraph and preserving the order in which participants spoke. When necessary, I added my own words in brackets (see “Trustworthiness,” below, for a discussion of how I treated my own words within narrative profiles).

I gave each of these draft profiles to different peer readers (native English speakers unfamiliar with my research), asking for feedback regarding what information was either absent, unnecessarily repetitive, or out of order.\textsuperscript{14} I then revisited the profile myself, printing another copy of the profile data and numbering passages according to the order in which participants spoke the words, then cutting the paper so that each paragraph was its own small piece of paper. Taking peer reader’s feedback into account, I moved data that seemed to “fit” better in a different location and removed data that seemed irrelevant to the conflict and resolution highlighted by that participant’s profile, then re-typed these “chunks” of data into a new document.

\textit{Member checking.} I sent this document to the participant for member-checking. I informed them of the theme(s) which their profile would highlight and asked whether there was any information they would like to include which was not included, as well as what information they would prefer not to include in the profile. Finally, I revised the profiles based on the feedback of the participant.

\textsuperscript{13} At this point, three of the potential narrative profiles were eliminated because the data were not sufficiently thick as to sustain a profile or because the identity conflict was not three-dimensional and could be summarized in a single paragraph.

\textsuperscript{14} The use of peer readers was essential because of my familiarity with the entirety of collected data—it was impossible for me to determine what information might be missing from these profiles.
Trustworthiness. While the construction and presentation of narrative profiles is itself a “validity check” for me as the researcher, I also had to address the threats to the validity of the profiles themselves. Seidman (2006) suggested that “the story [represented through a profile] is both the participant’s and the interviewer’s. It is in the participant’s words, but it is crafted by the interviewer from what the participant has said” (p. 120).

As I was constructing these profiles I was sensitized to the power I wielded in the process of choosing participants’ words: that is, while profiles are irrefutably told in the voice of the participant, my choices while constructing the profile (i.e., which of their words to use, how to frame the selected data by explicitly stating themes and drawing attention to conflicts, whether and how to correct errors in speech, and even how to punctuate the narrative) exercised a tremendous amount of power over the stories that emerged. I troubled this imbalance of power by inviting participants into the profile construction process, and I addressed the threat to the validity of using narrative profiles by aiming for transparency in discussing profile methods so that the reader can determine the extent to which my voice and participants’ voices intermingle in this format.

Researcher’s voice. I chose to “frame” each profile with a brief introductory sentence introducing the emergent themes which were illustrated by that participant’s data. I kept notes of potential themes throughout the data collection, analysis, and profile construction process, and was sensitive to these themes while constructing narrative profiles (i.e., I made an effort to highlight those themes which were consistent with the identity conflict and resolution story arc in the selected participants’ profiles). I often
added words or phrases of my own—always setting them apart in brackets—in order to clarify the meaning of a participant’s statement or summarize events which happened between segments of the profile. However, sometimes these bracketed words were variations on words the participants themselves had used (e.g., “belonging” was used by a participant, but because of a change of tense in the construction of the profile, I replaced it with “belong” and notated this revision by placing the revised word within brackets).

In the interests of minimizing distractions from the primary identity conflict and resolution narrative, I allowed myself the freedom to delete words which seemed to “bloat” the narrative without adding significant meaning (e.g., “like,” “uh,” “um,” and occasionally other words or phrases that were repetitive). Finally, because all of the interviews which became profiles were conducted with the spoken word, decisions about capitalization and punctuation reflect my own analysis of the interview data (with one exception that is marked as such). I used ellipses to represent a pause in the narrative, and deleted words were not reflected in the narrative profile. In this way, the format of profile presentation retains a “story” feel, as opposed to the reader feeling that he or she is reading an interview transcript.

Participant voices. Profiles are represented in italics in order to distinguish them from the presentation of research findings, and I invited participants into the process of

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15 While I understand that even the process of representing spoken words in written form and the removal of these “filler” words fundamentally changes the data, I allowed myself the freedom to do so in order to represent the data in a way that would be accessible and engaging to the reader and do justice to the data when presented in written form. Inviting participants into the process of data representation through member checking addressed the potential threats to the trustworthiness of this process.

16 In other sections of data representation, ellipses within quotes represent words which were deleted from the quote, and pauses were represented by the word “pause,” in brackets. I chose to make this distinction in order to privilege the participants voices over my own in the narrative profiles, where using the word “pause” would have inhibited the continuity of the narrative.
constructing these profiles through member-checking. Madeleine was fully satisfied with the profile and did not request any changes; Drew and Sophia both observed that their profiles represented spoken rather than written word patterns, but did not request that this be changed. Joseph requested a single clarification be added to the narrative. Sophia was the most involved in the process of profile construction and interacted with me about several segments of her profile. Ultimately, I am confident that the product we produced satisfied both of us.

The purpose of the profiles—to capture the voice of participants and present the phenomenon of investigation in context—was the reigning principle dictating which data I chose to include. I desired to amplify the voices of participants, but the reader must understand that these voices are only discernible via the conduit of the profile construction process, and thus profiles reflect my sensitivities as well as the participants’ voices.

**Vignettes.** Vignettes were presented in the context of data representation in Part Two, and each illustrates a single phenomenon or theme. At a minimum length of 200 words, they are distinguished from regular block quotes by the use of italics. Similar to the procedure for constructing profiles, all vignettes are presented in the words of the participant, but I allowed myself the freedom to eliminate words without signifying that I had done so. I also bracketed all words which I added or edited, and punctuation represents my own analysis and voice (see “Trustworthiness,” above, for a full discussion.

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17 Joseph requested that I add a sentence to his profile in order to clarify that his father accompanied his mother to the United States because she was in poor health; he did not want readers to incorrectly assume that his father was working in China while his mother was in the United States alone.
Finally, I conducted the same process of member-checking with vignettes that I had with profiles, but I did not involve third-party readers.

Poetry. Cahnmann (2003) suggested that alternative forms of data representation augment traditional research paradigms, and that poetry invites “a much larger readership than that of a typical educational study, with more immediate and lasting impact” (p. 34). Furman and colleagues’ (2007) suggested that artistic representations of phenomena, especially lived experience, may be especially well-suited to identity research and provide “a vehicle through which to communicate powerful and multiple ‘truths’ about the human experience” (p. 302). The third theme that emerged from the data was that of identity, and within identity the sub-themes of dissonance, process, and resolution.

Because this theme is largely reflective of the human experience—and was not limited to the experiences of participants, TCKs, or the Korean context—I chose to represent this data in a form which would not only invite a broad audience, but also allow the reader to understand how their own experience might resonate with those of the participants.

I represented these data by constructing a poem in participants’ own voices; my intent was that this poem reflect the sum total of participants’ voices without any single voice dominating the narrative. Data were interwoven with one another, and I noted the addition of my own words in brackets. All formatting, spacing, and punctuation within this poem represent my own voice. I sent the first draft of this poem to all participants individually, along with a brief note about how it was constructed and what it represented. I invited their feedback as to whether they felt this poem resonated with their overall experience or reflected any portion of it. Their feedback was
overwhelmingly positive, but I made some slight revisions based on the feedback of certain participants and returned later drafts to them to ensure that the finished product accurately captured the voices of participants as a whole.

**Ethical Issues, Limitations, and Significance**

**Ethical Issues**

**Confidentiality and pseudonyms.** The issue of confidentiality recurred throughout this study, and I addressed this through the use of pseudonyms and informed consent. I used participants’ pseudonyms for all of my internal notes, as well as memoranda and other documents, so that participants’ real names were not associated with their data. I chose pseudonyms to reflect participants’ real names—if they introduced themselves to me using an English name, I assigned them an English pseudonym; if they introduced themselves to me using a Korean name, I assigned them a Korean pseudonym.18

I informed participants verbally and in writing (Appendix C) of who had access to their data as well as how I intended to use it. I employed the services of a transcription service and this service signed an agreement of confidentiality on behalf of their employees (Appendix D). Furthermore, all electronic data (written documents, audio, and video) were stored on a password-protected hard drive and password-protected cloud backup service. Hard copies of data, including my field notes, were stored in my home and never left my immediate possession during the international move I made halfway through data collection.

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18 Drew and Autumn were the two exceptions to this, and they both requested their pseudonyms.
**Power dynamic.** Throughout this study, I held significant power over participants in that I made decisions, especially during data analysis and representation, about what aspects of their stories were important and which participants’ voices were featured. I troubled this imbalance of power by allowing participants to withdraw from the study at any time. Member checking also empowered participants to validate—or invalidate—the re-telling of their own experiences, and I deferred to their preferences in determining which data to include.19 In one instance, I empowered the participant to dictate the terms of the interview, using instant message at her request rather than a Skype call or in-person meeting. While this resulted in thin data, it empowered the participant to share her experiences without fear or discomfort.

**Risks and benefits.** Participants assumed some risk in accepting my invitation to participate in this research—specifically, I invited them to share and reflect upon their life experiences; these experiences were not only sensitive and intensely personal, but occasionally painful. Participants risked their privacy by sharing this information with me (although all data were protected through use of pseudonyms and I referred to educational institutions by category rather than their proper name), but their self-reflection could potentially have been traumatic for them, especially in their reflections of intense and/or uncomfortable experiences which informed their identity construction. Despite these risks, participants overwhelmingly reflected eagerness to participate in this

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19 In two instances, participants asked me to change the information presented (both were narrative profiles), and both instances were motivated by participants’ desire to protect their parents. One example of this was Madeleine’s preference to name the region rather than the country in which she was raised because of the sensitive nature of her parents’ work there; Joseph asked that his profile clarify that his father left Shanghai in order to accompany his mother to the United States for health reasons rather than ignore his absence and allow the reader to guess that his father had chosen to work rather than accompany his mother.
study, and all but two participants refused to accept the gift certificate I offered in appreciation of their time, saying they would prefer a copy of the published results. Several participants took time to express to me how valuable they thought the study was and how much they appreciated my conducting it.\textsuperscript{20}

**Language Issues**

I gave the choice to each participant to conduct their interviews in English or Korean, whichever was more comfortable for them. Each participant chose to use English, although all participants except Joseph used Korean words and phrases periodically during their interviews. Because all data were collected in English I did not require the services of a translator, but this did not eliminate language issues in this research.

Occasionally participants used English words to represent Korean ideas, vocabulary, or phenomena;\textsuperscript{21} or participants used Korean words to discuss or reference phenomena which did not exist in English. Some participants used Korean words or phrases to express something they did not know how to express in English or felt more comfortable expressing in Korean. For Jeong-sook and Seo-hyeon, I observed some occasions where they did not know how to express their idea in English,\textsuperscript{22} but other

\textsuperscript{20} In personal communication, one participant described the interviews as a “meaningful journey for me,” saying, “there really aren’t many people I can talk to about this [without feeling] like a fascinating subject to be studied. You are the first person to tell me it’s ok, you’re not alone; it’s normal for people in similar circumstances to go through the conflicts that I have gone through.”

\textsuperscript{21} One example was *hagwon* [학원]: most participants simply used the Korean word, but Joseph referred to this as “academy” (a word many English speakers use to refer to this phenomenon). Another example was the use of the English word “senior” to represent the idea of the Korean word *sunbae* [선배]; see Chapter Five for a full discussion of this phenomenon.

\textsuperscript{22} Jeong-sook used a dictionary to look up a word in English twice during our interviews, even after giving me the Korean word; Seo-hyeon would say a word in English, then say the same idea in Korean and ask me if they were the same meaning.
participants *chose* to use Korean because it more accurately reflected the idea or feeling they desired to communicate.

The challenge to me was not only to discern the meaning of participants’ vocabulary—and their intent—but also to accurately interpret their speech for an English-speaking reader unfamiliar with the nuances of meaning that speakers of both languages would understand or deduce from context.

I addressed these language issues by representing phonetic transliterations of Korean words in italics, but also by including the Korean words in brackets and including a brief translation or positioning the vocabulary within its context. In this way, readers who understand both languages may determine the trustworthiness of my interpretation of the data, and readers unfamiliar with Korean culture may interpret the vocabulary or phenomena within its context. Finally, although I am classified as an “advanced level” student in Korean, I am not a native speaker; thus, I included native Korean speakers as peer readers in order to identify potential weaknesses in my interpretation of Korean words (peer readers did not suggest any changes).

**Significance and Contributions**

This study introduces the voices of Asian TCKs (Tanu, 2008) and represents a picture of Korean TCKs into the research literature written in English. Its implications can be applied not only at the institutional level within the field of higher education, but also in classrooms and with individual students (see Chapter Nine for a full discussion of these implications). Within the United States, its findings also contribute to Northeast Asian and Korean studies, and these findings have a myriad of implications for primary,
secondary, and higher education within Korea as well as policy implications for business, government, and non-profit organizations that send Korean families abroad. The findings and implications of this study may also be applicable outside the United States and Korea in any context where families are internationally mobile. Finally, this study contributes to the research literature in comparative and international education in that it is both explicitly and implicitly comparative (as a researcher I am implicitly comparing participants’ experiences with my own and explicitly with one anothers’), offers insights on policy and student life in international schools, and firmly grounded in the context of cultural globalization (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008).

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced and justified the qualitative design of this study. I discussed my own relationship to the phenomenon of investigation (TCK identity construction), my relationship to the participants, and the ways that this subjectivity and positionality informed the design of this research study. In “Data Collection,” I discussed the criteria I developed to select participants, the methods I used to identify them, and I justified the use of a virtual means of data collection for the biographical narrative interview series to answer the research questions. I discussed the ways that grounded theory informed my approach to data analysis and gave examples of data coding and categorization in “Data Analysis.” In “Data Representation” I discussed the validity of using traditional and alternative methods of presenting the data, including thematic analysis, narrative profiles, vignettes, and poetry. Finally, I discussed the ethical issues

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23 Primary and secondary schools designed to educate the children of expatriates.
and limitations of this research study, paying special attention to the ways that language and my own positionality informed the research process.
PART II

REPRESENTING THE DRAMA OF KOREAN TCK IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

I need someone...

... that will be an advocate for me

... [that will] stand up for me—
for the child of my past and the children that follow in my footsteps
that spent countless days crying and screaming,
wishing that they could have just been normal—

... [that will bring] that feeling of peace [that you get when you realize]
someone understands,
there are people who are going through what I am going through.

We are the minority, overshadowed by the majority.
Each one of us has walked a different path:
Parents with different ideas and different degrees of flexibility...
Different locations...
Different values...
Different degree[s] of bilingualism...
Different degree[s] of biculturalism...
Different degree[s] of third cultures...

[These are our stories.]¹

The purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenon of identity construction as experienced by Korean Third Culture Kids (TCKs) during higher education by answering the research question, “How does Korean Third Culture Kids’

¹ I constructed this poem using the text of personal communication I received from one participant after completing the interview series. See Chapter Three for a full discussion of the poetry construction process and rationale.
lived experience inform their identity construction?” This question was answered with the following supporting questions:

1. How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ identity construction informed by their college experience?

2. How is the lived experience of Korean Third Culture Kids distinct because of Korean home culture?

3. How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ identity construction distinct because of Korean home culture?

Data were collected through a series of three unstructured interviews during which I invited participants to share and reflect upon their life experience. I analyzed data using a constant comparative approach: “fracturing” data into codes and categories, then connecting data to one another by allowing themes to emerge from the categories and by constructing narrative profiles and vignettes in the words of participants.

Part II highlights the ways in which participant experiences were distinct—as a subset of TCKs—because of their Korean home culture. Chapter Four introduces the participants and the emergent conceptual framework, which provides a structure for data representation in the three succeeding chapters. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present the data according to the themes which emerged from data analysis—cultural context, negotiating the politics of belonging, and identity—with profiles and vignettes interwoven into the narrative. Chapters Five and Six answer the second supporting research question (“How is the lived experience of Korean Third Culture Kids distinct because of Korean home culture?”) by describing the Korean cultural context, and
Chapter Seven answers the third supporting research question by describing identity construction in Korean TCKs.

Vignettes and narrative profiles—told in the voices of participants and constructed directly from the interview data—are woven into the narrative of data representation. Vignettes and profiles are presented in italics to denote that the data reflect that participant’s own words. Vignettes highlight a specific aspect of a participant’s experience (e.g., competition in education), while the more extensive profiles contextualize the phenomenon of identity construction within the entirety of that participant’s lived experience.2

Narrative profiles are presented as “interludes” between larger thematic sections within the narrative, while vignettes are interwoven into the narrative to illustrate specific phenomena or highlight a specific aspect of participants’ experiences. The experiences and themes presented as vignettes were selected because they reflected or explained the experiences of other participants, even though the context of participants’ life experiences were distinct from one another. However, one vignette and one profile were selected as “counter-narratives” in order to reflect the diversity within the Korean TCK experience, and these are explicitly presented as “counter-narratives.”

In Chapter Five, I contextualize the experience of Korean TCKs by establishing Korea as a distinct home culture. After introducing hierarchy as a recurring theme, I discuss the educational landscape and its marriage to the construct of family in the

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2 See Chapter Three for a full description of how profiles and vignettes were selected and constructed.
Korean context. Drew’s narrative profile concludes this chapter because of his immersion into a purely Korean context following his repatriation.

Chapter Six presents the ways that participants negotiated and contested “fitting in” in their host and home cultures. Participants described ethnicity as a mediator and language as a currency with which they could negotiate their ability to fit in to different categories of Koreans at home and abroad. Sophia’s narrative profile is presented as a transition in the middle of this chapter because of her experience with both Korean and international schools in Korea and higher education in the United States. Joseph’s counter-narrative profile concludes this chapter, highlighting his navigation of the “categories” of Korean students, both as a Korean-American living abroad outside Korea and a Korean-American TCK returning to the United States for higher education.

Finally, Chapter Seven presents dissonance, process, and resolution as “positions” held by participants in their ongoing process of identity construction. Each position is represented in a poem constructed directly from interview data and told in the voices of participants (therefore presented in italics) with my own words added in brackets. The poetic form both allows the voices of all participants to be heard as a whole without any single voice dominating the others and invites the reader to “feel” participants’ identity conflict. Finally, these poems reflect the data’s suggestion that the process of identity construction is not distinct for Korean TCKs—even while the context is—by displaying the unity of the identity construction process across the diversity of the human experience. Madeleine’s narrative profile concludes this chapter because of the way she

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3 See Chapter Three for a full discussion of how poems were constructed and why I chose to use them in data representation.
described simultaneously holding multiple positions of dissonance, process, and resolution in her own identity construction.
CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PARTICIPANTS

This chapter introduces the conceptual framework as a platform for the collected data and introduces the participants to the reader. In the first section, the conceptual framework provides vocabulary and an organizational structure for representing data in later chapters. In the next section, participant life experiences (e.g., international moves, type of education, citizenship) are presented in both table and narrative form so that the reader can see an overview of participants’ experiences, both individually (in narrative form) and as a group (in tables). This chapter gives a reference point to which the reader can return if necessary when reading later chapters.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework emerged from my analysis of the data and is represented in Figure 4.1 by three overlapping ovals, where ovals represent cultural globalization, home culture, and host culture. The center oval represents cultural globalization as described by Phillips and Schweisfurth (2008), where English is privileged as an international language, categories previously understood as distinct begin to overlap, and fluctuating identities emerge in the wake of cross-cultural mobility. The leftmost oval, home culture, provides a space to understand the unique context that Korea offers its TCKs. Finally, the host culture domain describes the culture(s) in which TCKs and their family live outside of Korea.
Figure 4.1. Conceptual framework.
The Venn diagram structure of this framework—where each domain overlaps with the others but also has areas which do not overlap with others—provides spaces within which to organize, represent, and make sense of participant experiences. This structure distinguishes aspects of both home and host culture that are informed by cultural globalization from those cultural phenomena or features which exist alongside of or are distinct from globalization.\(^1\) Data may fit within either the *home culture, host culture,* or *cultural globalization* domains, or within the areas created by the overlap of two or three of these domains.

The framework displayed in Figure 4.1 provides an organizational structure to compare educational contexts, as well, where each domain of the conceptual framework—and the institutional types within each—serves as a distinct space within which to make sense of participant experiences as students.

Figure 4.2 presents K-12 institutions by type. Korean schools in Korea sit within the “home culture” domain, while international schools in Korea sit within the overlap of “home culture” and “cultural globalization.” International schools abroad\(^2\) exist within the “cultural globalization” domain because these are spaces which are slightly informed by the host culture, but more heavily shaped by the culture of the curriculum and the language of instruction. I positioned private school abroad within the overlap of the

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\(^1\) While such a distinction is arguable—globalization is sufficiently pervasive and ubiquitous that it is a challenge to identify spaces and places where its influence is not evident—drawing some kind of fluid distinction here provides the best structure through which to make sense of the collected data.

\(^2\) I defined international schools as foreign-curriculum schools which are intended to educate the children of expatriates, although most international schools also permit enrollment to citizens of the host country in certain circumstances.
Figure 4.2. K-12 institutions by type, organized according to the conceptual framework.
“host culture” and “cultural globalization” domains to distinguish them from international schools; that is, while international schools have the primary purpose of educating expatriate children, private schools may primarily educate local children. Finally, I positioned Korean schools abroad within the overlap of all three domains; this included Korean-curriculum primary and secondary international schools and Korean heritage language (HL) schools designed to supplement the students’ education in the host culture (many participants referred to HL school as “Korean Saturday school,” where they learned Korean language, culture, and/or history).

Figure 4.3 presents different types of higher education institutions according to their position within the domains of the framework. I positioned Korean universities within the “home culture” domain, but international English-medium instruction (EMI) degree programs and international colleges within Korean universities within the overlap of the “home culture” and “cultural globalization” domains. Universities abroad exist within the “host culture” domain, and an international campus of a non-Korean university sits within the “cultural globalization” domain only. Finally, the phenomenon of study abroad³ sits within the overlap of all three domains.

These domains were fundamental to the design and data analysis of this study: I purposefully selected participants such that each of these institutional types were represented by at least one participant, and during in-depth data analysis I compared participant experiences (in primary/secondary and higher education) across the different educational types displayed in Figures 4.2 and 4.3.

³ I understood study abroad to be a short-term period of study at an institution other than the one where the student is enrolled in a degree program.
Figure 4.3. Higher education institutions by type, organized according to the conceptual framework.
Description of Research Participants  

This section introduces each participant’s demographic information and key life experiences; data are first presented in narrative form and then using tables. All names are pseudonyms, and participants are presented in the order in which they were interviewed. In selecting participants, I paid special attention to the type of education that participants received—especially the country in which they attended university and the type of primary and secondary education they received—so that the participant pool would reflect the diversity within the Korean TCK experience, particularly relative to education. I interviewed thirteen participants: three male and ten female.

Narrative Description of Participants

Charlie. Charlie was born in the United States while his father was enrolled as a graduate student. His family returned to Korea when Charlie was 5 years old, and he attended Korean kindergarten and elementary school (first and second grades). Charlie was sent to California for third grade (at age 9), where he and his brother lived with an uncle. (In fifth grade he returned to Korea for a semester, then returned to California and lived with a guardian later in the school year; he completed 6th grade in the United States.) Charlie returned to Korea for 7th grade (age 12), where he attended an international school, graduating in 2012. He enrolled at a private university in the United States; at the time of data collection (April-May 2013), he was a first-year student.

Autumn. Autumn was born in Korea and moved to the United States (Florida) with her mother and brother in fourth grade (age 10). She attended a private school for

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4 See Chapter Three for a full rationale of how pseudonyms were chosen.
three years before returning to Korea and enrolling in an international school for seventh grade. She graduated from an international school in Korea in 2006, then enrolled at an arts college in the United States, where she received an associate’s degree. At the time of data collection (April-June 2013), she was living and working in Korea.

**Joseph.** Joseph was born in California to a Korean-American family (Joseph’s mother was born and raised in Korea; during his father’s childhood, the family immigrated to the United States. Joseph’s parents met during graduate school in the U.S.). When Joseph was 13, his family moved to Shanghai (People’s Republic of China, PRC) for his father’s job. During their six years there, Joseph attended a British international school (seventh through ninth grades) and a U.S.-curriculum international school (tenth through twelfth grades), from which he graduated in 2009. He enrolled at a private university in the northeastern United States, then transferred to a state university on the east coast for his second year. At the time of data collection (May-July 2013), Joseph was a fourth-year student; he completed his undergraduate degree in the spring of 2014.

**Yoon-jeong.** Yoon-jeong was born in Korea and moved to the United States for her parents’ education when she was two years old. She lived in Georgia and Florida, attending public schools and Korean HL school, until returning to Korea at age eleven. Upon their return to Korea, she attended an international school and graduated in 2012. My interviews with Yoon-jeong (May-July 2013) spanned the conclusion of her first year of college and her return to Korea for a summer internship.
Alice. Alice lived with her family in Korea—attending Korean schools—until moving to Taiwan (Republic of China, ROC) when she was 12 years old. In Taiwan, she enrolled in a small international school for 7th and 8th grades, then transferred to a larger international school for ninth through twelfth grades. After graduating high school in 2005, Alice enrolled in a private university in the Northeastern United States and then an Ivy league university for graduate school. After completing her master’s degree she returned to Korea and worked as an admissions counselor at a university in Seoul. At the time of data collection (May-November 2013), Alice was enrolled in a doctoral program at an elite SKY-E university in Korea.5

Jeong-sook. Jeong-sook’s family moved from Korea to Indonesia for her father’s work when Jeong-sook was 10 years old. In Indonesia, her family lived in a neighborhood with many Korean neighbors, attended a Korean church, and Jeong-sook attended a Korean-curriculum international school. After one semester, she transferred to an international boarding school that had both Western-curriculum and Korean-curriculum branches and a sizable number of Korean students. Jeong-sook graduated from the EMI branch in 2005 and enrolled in a state university in the United States where other students from her high school were attending. At this university she was involved in a Korean dance and drumming club on campus; after graduating she received a master’s degree from an Ivy-league university. At the time of data collection (May-June 2013) she was in Seoul, preparing to move abroad to work at an international school.

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5 See Chapter Five for a discussion of the meaning of SKY-E institutions in Korea.
Sophia. Sophia was born in the United States and lived there until age 10 while her parents furthered their education. Her family returned to Korea and she enrolled in a private Korean school, then transferred to a public Korean school after one semester. After completing Korean elementary school (5th and 6th grades) she attended Korean middle school (three years). Her scores on the high school entrance exam were sufficient that she could enroll in the elite Foreign Language High School (FLHS, 외국어고등학교), but Sophia’s parents enrolled her in an EMI international school beginning in 10th grade. She graduated from this international school in 2008 and enrolled in a state university on the west coast of the United States that had a substantial Korean population and two student organizations for Korean students. After graduating she worked in the U.S. (for a Korean company) and subsequently moved to Korea, where she taught English. During the period of data collection (May-October 2013) she was applying for jobs in Korea but ultimately enrolled in a graduate program at an elite SKY-E university.6

Rose. Rose’s family moved to New Zealand (NZ) when she was three years old, using a private business investment to receive long-term visas which allowed them to remain in NZ for the duration of their children’s education. Rose attended private EMI kindergarten and elementary schools in New Zealand and attended Korean HL school on weekends once she was in the upper elementary school grades; her family attended Korean church in NZ. When Rose was in 9th grade, her family returned to Korea for her father’s business and she attended an EMI international school for two years. Rose’s family did not want their children to attend university in Korea, so Rose’s mother

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6 See Chapter Five for a discussion of the meaning of SKY-E institutions in Korea.
returned to NZ with the children. Upon their return, Rose attended a private school with a large number of Korean students; after graduating in 2003 she attended a public university in NZ for one year before transferring to, and later graduating from, an EMI degree program at a Korean university. During her university experience she spent semesters abroad in Europe and the United States. At the time of data collection (June-July 2013) Rose was working in Korea.

**Seo-hyeon.** Seo-hyeon’s family moved to Hong Kong (HK) for her father’s work when she was 3 years old, and they lived there for eleven years. During their time in HK, Seo-hyeon attended EMI international school and Korean HL school on weekends. When they returned to Korea, Seo-hyeon attended Korean middle school and Foreign Language High School (FLHS), where she studied Chinese. After graduating from FLHS in 2004, she spent one year studying to improve her score on the college entrance exam but ultimately gained admission to a university in Seoul that had an EMI degree program by demonstrating her English ability. During her undergraduate experience she studied abroad in the United Kingdom for one semester. At the time of data collection (July-December 2013) Seo-hyeon was living and working in Seoul.

**Ko-eun.** Ko-eun’s family moved to New York City so that her father could attend graduate school; she lived there from age 3 until age 9 and attended public schools and briefly attended Korean HL school on the weekends. When they returned to Korea, Ko-eun’s parents attempted to enroll her in Korean public school, but ultimately Ko-eun attended an EMI international school in Korea and graduated in 2011. Ko-eun enrolled in a public university in the United Kingdom (UK) and, after her first year, studied abroad.
in Korea for one summer. During data collection (July-November 2013) she began her third and final year of undergraduate study. She completed her bachelor’s degree in the summer of 2014 and enrolled in graduate school in the UK.

**Madeleine.** Madeleine’s parents moved to the Middle East as missionaries when Madeleine was a baby; she attended a private EMI kindergarten and an EMI international school for missionary children when she began elementary school. When Madeleine was in fourth grade her family spent a two-year sabbatical in the United Kingdom (UK), where she attended public school. Upon their return to the Middle East she attended the same EMI international school; when her parents returned to Korea, she enrolled at an international boarding school in Germany for 10th through 12th grades, graduating in 2008. Madeleine enrolled in an international college within an elite SKY-E university\(^7\) in Korea and studied abroad in the United States for one semester. After graduating in 2012 she studied Arabic in Egypt, and at the time of data collection (October 2013) she was completing an internship in Seoul.

**Drew.** Drew was born in Korea and his parents moved to the United States when he was an infant in order to begin their graduate studies; his grandmother took him to the United States after his mother transferred to the same university where his father was enrolled. Drew attended public schools in the U.S. until his family returned to Korea when he was 12 years old. He attended Korean middle and high school, graduated in 2002, and subsequently enrolled in a university in Seoul. During his three-year

\(^7\) See Chapter Five for a discussion of the meaning of SKY-E institutions in Korea.
mandatory military service commitment Drew served as an officer in the air force; at the
time of data collection (October 2013) he was working in Seoul.

Maria. Maria’s family moved to Hong Kong (HK) when she was twelve years old and lived there for three years; during this time she attended an EMI international school. Maria’s family did not live in an area with many Korean families (although she did have Korean peers at school), and she studied with an English tutor for the first few months after arriving in HK. Upon her family’s return to Korea Maria re-enrolled in Korean public school and attended an elite SKY-E\textsuperscript{8} university. She studied abroad in Japan during her university experience and completed her bachelor’s degree in 1988.\textsuperscript{9} At the time of data collection (October-November 2013) she was living in Hong Kong, where her husband worked in international business.

Tables

The forthcoming tables describe the participants interviewed for this research. Table 4.1 presents participants’ demographic data, including citizenship, ages at the time of their cross-cultural moves and repatriation, and the host culture(s) in which they lived after leaving the home culture (Korea). The final column presents the number of years that each participant lived abroad (outside Korea) prior to graduating high school.

Table 4.2 describes participants’ experiences prior to higher education, including their host culture(s), reason(s) for moving abroad, language(s) spoken at home, and the presence of a Korean community within the host culture.

\textsuperscript{8} See Chapter Five for a discussion of the meaning of SKY-E institutions in Korea.

\textsuperscript{9} I selected Maria as a research participant to provide a retrospective account of Korean TCK identity.
Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Host culture(s)</th>
<th>Age at time of move abroad</th>
<th>Age at repatriation</th>
<th>Years abroad during childhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Florida, California (USA)</td>
<td>birth; 9</td>
<td>5; 12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Florida (USA)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Shanghai (People’s Republic of China)</td>
<td>birth; 13</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>USA: 13 Shanghai: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon-jeong</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Georgia, Florida (USA)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Taiwan (Republic of China)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeong-sook</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>USA (received dual citizenship with ROK as adult)</td>
<td>Utah (USA)</td>
<td>birth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>3; 15</td>
<td>13; 19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seo-hyeon</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko-eun</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>New York City (USA)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeleine</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Middle East, England, Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Middle East: 12 England: 2 Germany: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Louisiana (USA)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2

*Participant Childhood Cross-Cultural Moves*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Host culture(s)</th>
<th>Reason for moving abroad</th>
<th>Language(s) at home</th>
<th>Korean community abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Florida, California (USA)</td>
<td>parents’ education</td>
<td>Korean with parents; English with brother</td>
<td>extended family; Korean host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Florida (USA)</td>
<td>children’s education; mother attended university</td>
<td>Korean with parents; English with brother</td>
<td>no mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Shanghai (PRC)</td>
<td>father’s work</td>
<td>English; some Korean between parents</td>
<td>classmates at international schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon-jeong</td>
<td>Georgia, Florida (USA)</td>
<td>parents' education</td>
<td>Korean at home in USA; allowed English at home in Korea</td>
<td>Korean HL school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Taiwan (ROC)</td>
<td>father's work</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>no mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeong-sook</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>father's work</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>classmates, neighbors, and church; Korean international school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Utah (USA)</td>
<td>parents' education</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>no mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>investment immigration for purpose of children’s education</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>parents’ friends; fellow students; Korean HL school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seo-hyeon</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>father's work</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Korean HL school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko-eun</td>
<td>New York City (USA)</td>
<td>father's education</td>
<td>Korean with parents; English with brother</td>
<td>Korean HL school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeleine</td>
<td>Middle East, England, Germany</td>
<td>parents' work (missionaries)</td>
<td>Korean with parents; English with sister</td>
<td>no mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>Louisiana (USA)</td>
<td>parents' education</td>
<td>Korean, some English</td>
<td>no mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>father's work</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>distanced herself from Korean neighborhood and students outside school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 describes the type of primary and secondary institutions each participant attended. These data are limited to the schools participants attended after leaving their home culture but before enrolling in university, and columns are ordered by the types of institutions and their alignment with the conceptual framework (as presented in Figure 4.2). Enrollment is denoted by an “X,” and those cells containing numbers represent the year the participant graduated from high school.

Finally, Table 4.4 describes participants’ higher education enrollment (organized by institutional type according to the conceptual framework as described in Figure 4.3). Institutional names were removed to disguise the identity of participants. This table also includes a column denoting whether participants studied abroad (defined as a short-term period of study at an institution other than the institution where the student was enrolled in a degree program).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented narrative summaries of each participant’s lived experience and presented demographic and educational data about participants in tables; readers may refer to this chapter in order to contextualize the data presented in the forthcoming chapters.
Table 4.3

*Participant K-12 Education by Type (after initial move abroad)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Korean school</th>
<th>Intl school in Korea</th>
<th>Korean school abroad</th>
<th>Korean HL school</th>
<th>Intl school abroad</th>
<th>Private school abroad</th>
<th>Public school abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (2012)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td></td>
<td>X (2006)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X (2009)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon-jeong</td>
<td></td>
<td>X (2012)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X (2005)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeong-sook</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X (2005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (2005)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seo-hyeon</td>
<td>X (2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko-eun</td>
<td>X (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeleine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X (2008)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>X (2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>X (1984)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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### Table 4.4

*Participant Higher Education Enrollment by Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Univ in Korea</th>
<th>Intl program</th>
<th>Intl campus</th>
<th>Univ in USA</th>
<th>Univ abroad</th>
<th>Study abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>private univ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>arts college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>private &amp; state univ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon-jeong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>arts college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td></td>
<td>SKY-E univ (graduate)</td>
<td></td>
<td>private univ</td>
<td>Ivy league univ (graduate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeong-sook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>state univ</td>
<td>Ivy league univ (graduate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td></td>
<td>SKY-E univ (graduate)</td>
<td></td>
<td>state university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td></td>
<td>univ in Seoul</td>
<td></td>
<td>public univ</td>
<td>CA; Spain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seo-hyeon</td>
<td></td>
<td>univ in Seoul</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko-eun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>public univ</td>
<td>Seoul (summer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeleine</td>
<td></td>
<td>SKY-E univ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td></td>
<td>univ in Seoul</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td></td>
<td>SKY-E univ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Japan (summer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

KOREA AS A DISTINCT HOME CULTURAL CONTEXT

When you come back to Korea, [the] expectations of your parents become a societal expectation. The expectations of your parents are, in the end, the expectations of your grandparents, your relatives, your community...

It’s very universal and very “one”: there’s no variety, no diversity. It becomes a mob mentality that I have to follow if I live in the society.

[When I enrolled at an elite SKY-E university], that met my parents’ [and society’s] expectations of going to a “good” university. (Madeleine)

This chapter will examine key aspects of Korean culture so that the reader will understand how Korea provides a distinct “home culture” to its TCKs, addressing the second supporting research question, “How is the lived experience of Korean Third Culture Kids distinct because of Korean home culture?” Education and family emerged from the data as key cultural features informing participants’ lived experience, and these themes specifically highlight the ways in which Korean TCK experiences are distinct.

Within the dominant narrative of Korean “home culture,” participant experiences provide a counter-narrative, highlighting the distinctions of being a TCK from Korea and being a TCK in Korea.

Nine of the thirteen participants in this study re-entered Korea prior to graduating high school, and one returned to Korea for university (Madeleine1); thus, their families made decisions for their children within the Korean education system after having spent

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1 On two separate occasions during her elementary school years, Madeleine attended Korean school for a period of 1-2 months while visiting her extended family in Korea.
time abroad. (Two participants, Jeong-sook and Alice, completed high school and university outside Korea and later returned for work; Alice later enrolled in a graduate degree program in Korea. One participant, Joseph, never lived in Korea.) Families who return to Korea after spending time abroad make decisions about how to educate their children within Korea’s education system while navigating the re-entry process. These decisions, while informed by family and financial situations, are also made within—and through the lens of—the Korean home cultural context, particularly because parents are Korean; thus, an understanding of Korean culture is essential to make sense of participant experiences and identity.

The Korean people trace their recorded history through four millennia in Northeast Asia, and have occupied the Korean peninsula and portions of modern-day China at different periods of their history. After several thousand years of warring factions and kingdom rule, with submission to China as a trend through this time, the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) established a largely peaceful period during which the development of the Korean alphabet increased literacy and Neo-Confucian ideals shaped much of law and society.²

² In 1905 Japan occupied the peninsula and later annexed Korea as its colony in 1910; this colonial period continued to the conclusion of World War II in 1945, when the Korean peninsula was occupied by Soviet and United States military forces in the north and south, respectively. Tensions escalated, and the Korean War (1950-1953) ended in an armistice, permanently dividing the peninsula while it remains legally at war. South Korea experienced rule by military personnel for several decades until the first elections were held in 1988 and the first peaceful transition of power occurred in 1993. Since the 1970s, South Korea has experienced staggering development, emerging as a world-class economy in the 21st century.
Confucian influence persists to the present day in the hierarchical structure of society and relationships, and this hierarchy is essential to contextualizing participant experiences, especially as they relate to family and education.

Hierarchy and inequality were deeply ingrained in Korean society until just the past few decades, and for many Koreans these remain not just ‘facts of life’ but ideals of how to organize a proper society… ‘Knowing one’s place’, an idea that [Westerners] abhor, nonetheless was something honorable, dignified, a locus where human beings could realize themselves. (Cumings, 2005, p. 12-13)

This hierarchy provides an organizational structure for every relationship in Korean society, played out in the workplace, education, and family. Hierarchy is also embedded within the Korean language, where speech patterns change in order to demonstrate a power dynamic in the relationship between the speaker and listener, the speaker and the subject, and/or show deference to the situation.

**Education**

My parents are the typical Korean parents who assume [if] you get all A+ [that] you’re going to a good school. My [parents] understand the importance of education and what it means to go from being dirt poor to be[ing] in a decent position—that’s where the emphasis on education comes from. (Charlie)

Korean education reflects the hierarchy that provides structure to the surrounding society. Students and families navigate the hierarchy of society through education, and

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3 If Western readers are to understand the experiences of Korean TCKs, we must set aside the negative connotations normally associated with hierarchy.
within this system competition is fierce at best and deadly at worst.\textsuperscript{4} This section will discuss the structure and function of Korea’s education system as a context within which to highlight participants’ experiences.

Korean primary, secondary, and higher education institutions operate under the authority of the national Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST). Curriculum is rigidly structured beginning in primary school; middle school students take a standardized exam to determine which type of high school they can attend.\textsuperscript{5} High school culminates in a national, standardized exam, and students’ performance on this exam determines to which universities they are eligible to apply.

**Historical Foundations**

This hierarchy and structure is a modern reiteration of the centuries-old social stratification system during the dynastic periods, where education was the key to social mobility—Cumings (2005) described education during this period as “the primary route to bettering a family’s station in life” (p. 59)—but only for an elite few. Historically, “the majority of peasant families could not spare a son from the fields to study for the [civil service] exams anyway, so upward mobility was sharply limited” (p. 52).\textsuperscript{6} However, the influence of Western missionaries in the late 1800s and the annexation of the Korean

\textsuperscript{4} Suicide is the number one cause of death for Koreans between the ages of 10 and 30 (New York Times, April 2, 2014).

\textsuperscript{5} High schools are also organized in a hierarchy which includes non-university bound students attending vocational and trade schools, university-bound students attending more competitive high schools, and, recently, the emergence of Special Purpose High Schools (SPHS), discussed later in this section.

\textsuperscript{6} See Chapter One of Cuming’s (2005) text *Korea’s Place in the Sun* for a full discussion of Korea’s class system—which Cumings likens to the rigidity of India’s caste system—bloodlines and succession, and education.
peninsula by Japan (1910-1945)\textsuperscript{7} initiated a more egalitarian approach to education leading up to the Korean War (1950-1953). This approach was reinforced through education policy during the 1970s and 1980s,\textsuperscript{8} making education generally accessible for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic areas. By the 1980s, both supplemental “shadow education” (Byun, Schofer, & K.K. Kim, 2012) and Special Purpose High Schools (SPHS [특목고]) (D.H. Kim & J.H. Kim, 2013) emerged as a means of giving students a competitive edge for higher education (see “Competition,” later in this section, for a full discussion of each).

**Higher Education**

Universities in Korea are organized into a hierarchy according to their perceived status, as demonstrated in Figure 5.1 (adapted\textsuperscript{9} with permission from Borden’s [2000] illustration of the hierarchy dominating the landscape of Korean higher education). The pyramid structure illustrates the hierarchy and exclusivity embedded within the higher education system and the relationships of these institutions to one another. Seoul National University sits at the apex of the pyramid, followed by Yonsei and Korea Universities (Ewha Womans University is occasionally included). This conglomeration

\textsuperscript{7} Yonsei and Ewha Universities, two of the four most prestigious elite universities (see description of “Higher education,” below) trace their roots to institutions founded by Western missionaries in 1915 and 1886, respectively. Seoul National University evolved from institutions established during the late Joseon dynasty (late 1890s) and operated as Keijo Imperial University during the Japanese occupation.


\textsuperscript{9} Borden’s original figure did not include Ewha Womans University or the Korean abbreviations of the universities’ names.
Figure 5.1. Korea’s higher education pyramid. Adapted from “Korea’s Higher Education Pyramid,” by J. Borden, 2000, *Confucius Meets Piaget: An Educational Perspective on Korean Children and their Parents*, p. 60. Copyright 2000 by Seoul Foreign School.
is often referred to as the “SKY” (or “SKY-E”) Universities, or simply “elite universities.” The next level in the pyramid includes other universities in Seoul, followed by “the rest” below.  

The values embedded within this hierarchy are illustrated by Drew’s (public school abroad; Korean school in Korea; Korean university) description of the message he understood from his parents:

My parents would, usually inadvertently, emphasize how important it is to get into a first-class university in Korea, not only for career but also in terms of competing with the world. The way they talked about Yonsei or Korea University, or even [my] math tutor who went to Hongdae—if he would make a mistake, my mother would say things like, “You see, this is just how it is if you go to Hongdae.” Somehow I was convinced that no other school than Seoul National deserved to be called a school.

(emphasis added)

Drew’s experience illustrates the perceived value his parents associated with Seoul National—not only as quality education, but as a way of establishing their son’s career and Korea’s competitiveness in the context of globalization.

In fact, Korean families often transfer this hierarchical perspective to institutions outside Korea as well. When Madeleine (international school abroad; public school abroad; international program in Korean university) was applying to universities in the

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10 Though the hierarchy continues (e.g., 4-year institutions are more prestigious than 2-year institutions), in daily life and conversation, the key players are SKY(E) institutions and the key setting is Seoul.

11 홍대: Hong-Ik University in Seoul
United States, her parents told her, “‘You can go to American college if you get a full ride at a good university that we consider good.’” Without probing, Madeleine clarified this for me: “Korean parents’ standard of ‘good’ is Ivy League… Harvard, Princeton, Yale.”

This hierarchical ranking system extends beyond parents to teachers. Seo-hyeon’s (international school abroad; Korean school in Korea; international program in Korean university) teachers reflected similar values:

When I went to the foreign language high school[12] [FLHS] my teachers knew that I couldn’t catch up with my other peers. [At FLHS] they only focus on the top three schools in Korea… they don’t regard [other schools as] good schools. My teachers thought that I might not be able to go to those three schools with my grades.

Maria (international school abroad, Korean school in Korea) reflected upon her experience as a female graduate of a SKY-E University in the late 1980s, saying, although we had a difficult time [as women] and had to work not just double but triple to prove that [we] deserve[d] what [we] got, still it was easier for us—coming from [our elite] university, you didn’t have to queue in line. If you were a graduate of a certain university, of a certain department, with a certain GPA, and with a certain contact, you didn’t even have to make an appointment; you got the job.

Twelve of the thirteen participants either referenced or discussed the value of SKY universities (Jeong-sook did not). However, only Drew and Seo-hyeon reflected on SKY

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[12] See “Special Purpose Schools,” later in this section, for a full discussion of this type of school.
universities in detail and at great length; Drew and Seo-hyeon were also the only two participants who graduated from Korean high schools but did not attend an elite university.

**Competition**

In the wake of increasing enrollment and egalitarian education policies, shadow education and Special Purpose High Schools (SPHS) emerged as mechanisms for students to gain a competitive edge within Korean education.

**Shadow education.** Although schools and universities are the centerpiece of the education structure, “shadow education” supplements most Korean students’ classroom experience. This phenomenon most commonly refers to *hagwon* (학원, sometimes called “academy” or “cram school” in English), but also includes private tutoring, sequenced curriculum for independent self-study, and structured study programs delivered via television or online.

The national Statistics Korea office (통계청) reported that in 2013, 68.8% of Korean students in elementary, middle, or high school participated in some form of shadow education, at an average monthly expense of approximately $317 per participating student.\(^{13}\) (The average monthly household income for the same year was $3800.\(^{14}\)) These statistics actually represent a downward trend in student participation...

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\(^{13}\) A national average rate of KRW239,000 or USD218 (reported for the same year) is slightly misleading as it includes the 31% of elementary, middle, and high school students who did not participate in shadow education.

\(^{14}\) The original data was given in South Korean Won (KRW) as KRW239,000 private education expense per student, per month; KRW347,000 per participating student per month; and KRW4,162,000 average monthly household income (all statistics were for the year 2013). I calculated these data in US dollars using the average rate of KRW1,095 per dollar in 2013.
Participants discussed shadow education in a variety of ways. In addition to the general phenomena of test preparation and subject-specific study via *hagwon* (referenced by all participants), Sophia attended a *hagwon* to prepare her for job interviews in Korea after returning from the United States. Jeong-sook attended a *hagwon* to facilitate her admission to university in the United States. Seo-hyeon took a gap year after graduating high school during which she attended *hagwon* to study English in order to bypass the college entrance exam; Rose attended the same *hagwon* to prepare for the TOEFL test. Ko-eun, Sophia, and Seo-hyeon described using a Korean self-study curriculum, either with a tutor or on their own, to learn Korean while they lived abroad.

**Special purpose high schools.** In their analysis of foreign language high schools (FLHS) as engines of social capital, D.H. Kim and J.H. Kim (2013) observed that “the neo-liberal turn toward the end of the 1990s coincided with the crystallization of class cleavages” of the previous decades, and the emerging “affluent middle class… demanded an elite secondary school system” so that their children could “inherit the class status and success they themselves had achieved” (p. 34). Special purpose high schools (SPHS), of which foreign language high schools (FLHS) are one type, satisfied the desires of these middle class families. Kim and Kim further suggested that while there is little noticeable difference in the curriculum of SPHS and other high schools, SPHS can be selective in
choosing which students to enroll, and they largely feed graduates into the elite universities.

Vignette: Competition in Education

One participant in this study, Seo-hyeon, attended and graduated from a FLHS.15 Her experience, represented in her own words in the following vignette,16 provides a clear picture of how FLHS and hagwon provide structures for students to compete within Korean education. Moreover, it is notable that Seo-hyeon’s experience living in Hong Kong from age 2 to 13—especially her attendance at an international school where she was taught in English—functioned as the springboard, and FLHS and shadow education as conduits, for her enrollment at what she described as a “decent” university.

*Foreign language high school is where the elite come... all the brains go to that school, [and] I naturally fell behind in my grades. [For] the three years [of high school] I was below average. The good thing about foreign language high school is even if you are the worst student within the FLHS, it [would] be around the top eight students in normal high school. I got accepted to the foreign language high school because I used a lot of certificates from English contest[s I had done in middle school. But when I got to high school I chose] the Chinese major because I really loved [living in] Hong Kong.*

*When I went to the foreign language high school my teachers knew that I couldn’t catch up with my other peers... they thought that I might not be able to go to [the top] three schools with my grades. [So] they invited me to join the TOEFL17 group [because] if your English is really good—if you have a really high TOEFL score—then you will have an interview, and you’ll get accepted [to university based on your English interview]. I wanted to go to that TOEFL class because my English was still “year*
eight level” since I was too busy catching up with everything else [after coming back to Korea]. But my mom was kind of pessimistic about [the TOEFL class]—I think she trusted me too much. She thought if I study hard and manage my time well, I might be able to go to a decent university [by getting a good score on the] college exam. I was a “goody, goody” student: my mom told me not to [so] I didn’t attend the [TOEFL class]. I took the college exam, but my grades weren’t good enough to go to a good school. Me and my mom, we just naturally said, ‘why don’t we take a gap year?’ I didn’t want to fall behind my high schools peers—because they all went to [the elite] school[s], I wanted to go to at least the top five or six schools. [So] I studied English for one year, and then ultimately I went to university using my English.

It would have been better if I just stayed in Hong Kong or go[ne] to [the TOEFL class], but I did go to one of the top six or seven [universities]... I went to a decent school where they specialize in languages. For me it was okay, [but]... yeah, it wasn’t beautiful.

International Schools

Historically, international schools existed completely apart from the Korean education system for the purpose of educating expatriate residents, and international school graduates were not eligible to attend Korean universities (diplomas from international schools were not recognized). However, recent policy changes—reflective of a trend toward global competitiveness and the meaning and perceived value of English within Korea—have dramatically altered the landscape of international schools such that these institutions now overlap with the Korean education system.

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18 Seo-hyeon attended an English-medium instruction international school in Hong Kong through 8th grade.

19 The first international school using English as the language of instruction was Seoul Foreign School, established in 1912.

20 Rather than an “overlap,” Song (2013) suggested that policies “effectively brought the international school curriculum into the fold of South Korea’s national education system” (p. 146). See Song’s essay for a full discussion of recent policy changes and analysis of their outcomes within international schools and within Korean education. I chose to describe international education as “overlapping” with Korean education, even in the wake of recent policy changes, because participants who attended international school in Korea largely came under the previous policy due to age (Sophia, Rose) or met the requirement of the previous policy (Charlie, Yoon-jeong, Ko-eun), with one exception (Autumn).
**Policy changes.** Institutions typically referred to as “international schools” in English operate under the legal title of “foreigners’ schools” [외국인학교] in Korean.\(^{21}\) Though the term “foreigners’ schools” reflects the original purpose of educating expatriate children, Korean children have historically been eligible to attend these institutions if they either hold a foreign passport or have spent five years outside Korea.\(^{22}\) However, the 2009 Presidential Decree on Foreign Schools both reduced this requirement from five years to three years\(^{23}\) and recognized the diplomas of South Korean graduates from international schools,\(^{24}\) thus permitting graduates from international schools to not only apply for universities abroad but also within Korea. Of the thirteen participants in this study, six attended an international school within Korea, and five graduated from international school in Korea (see Table 4.3 for specific information about the types of schools participants attended).

**Privilege.** Overall, participants described feeling privileged to escape the Korean education system because of their time abroad, but especially if they enrolled in international school upon their return. Ko-eun (public school abroad, HL school, international school in Korea) said, “I know for a fact if my parents didn’t move to the

\(^{21}\) Although *all* of these schools are legally categorized as “foreign schools” [외국인학교], many of these institutions use “international school” [국제학교] in the institutional name. See Song (2013) for a full discussion of the distinctions within the category of “foreign school” [외국인학교].

\(^{22}\) The participants in this research project largely came under this original policy. Refer to Table 4.1 to see the length of time each participant lived abroad, and Table 4.3 to see each participant’s graduation year.

\(^{23}\) The relatively recent phenomenon of sending elementary or middle-school students abroad, especially to English speaking countries, for extended periods of study abroad (often several years, or as long as the family’s financial resources allow) has also boomed within the context of globalization. Song (2013) suggested that the 2009 policy changes accommodate this trend. These students are often referred to as “early study abroad students” [조기유학생] or “study abroad orphans” in English.

\(^{24}\) This recognition is contingent on the international school curriculum including “Korean language and social studies for no less than 120 hours per annum” (Song, 2013, p. 145).
States and I didn’t receive an American education, I would be in Korea attending Korean schools. I wouldn’t be here [in the UK] now, so ‘blessed’ is definitely the word I would [use to] describe my experience.” Sophia (public school abroad, Korean school in Korea, international school in Korea) reflected on international school as

a good experience [for me]. I was glad because the Korean entrance exams for college is crazy, only once a year. [One of my friends in Korean] middle school—we were kind of rivals grade-wise—I happened to run into her after I got into [university], and she ended up going to a two-year nursing school. From that, I know that if I had stayed in a Korean school I probably would have ended up in a two-year college.

[International school] definitely was a good choice for me.

Although Jeong-sook did not attend an international school in Korea (she lived in Indonesia until graduating from an international high school), she echoed Sophia’s sentiment. Jeong-sook described being “thankful” to escape the competition of the Korean education system; she also described Korean students as “bul-ssang hae-yo” [불쌍해요; often translated as “pitiful”] despite U.S. President Obama’s compliments about their performance on international tests.

**Function of Education**

While education can serve multiple functions within a given system—and stratification and social mobility within an established hierarchy seems to be one function
of schooling which is consistent with participants’ narratives—other key functions include the establishment of relationship networks and socialization into cultural norms.25

**Social mobility.** Participant experiences reflected education’s function as a mechanism for social mobility (“Historical Foundations,” above). Charlie’s (public school abroad, Korean school in Korea, international school in Korea) parents emphasized to him the value of education for a better life. Because both of his parents had experienced severe hardship, Charlie described them as

understand[ing] what it means to have a hard time… My father’s generation understand[s] the importance of education and what it means to go from being dirt poor to being in a decent position… that’s where the emphasis on education comes from.

**Relationship networks.** In addition to social mobility, Korean university students (and, to a lesser extent, high school students) focus on developing relationship networks26 [gwangyae, 관계]27 as a part of their educational experience. Because university students do not have to invest time or energy preparing for the college entrance exam, these relationship networks may even take priority over academics during their university years. This section will discuss the phenomenon of relationship networks and the significance of these networks to individuals in Korean society.

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25 Although children generally assimilate cultural norms and values within the family context during early childhood, Cumings (2005) suggested that, historically, schools rather than parents provided discipline, and “education meant socialization into Confucian norms and virtues” (p. 60). (See “Filial Piety,” below, for a complete discussion of Confucian family relationships in a Korean context.)

26 There is not a single translation of this term in English that is widely agreed upon, but “acquaintances,” “friendship ties,” and “social networks” are all used interchangeably in this discussion.

27 This Korean word comes from the Chinese word guanxi, and carries similar connotations and social expectations.
**Hierarchy in relationships.** The relationship of class- and school-mates to one another carries a unique meaning and function, and these relationships also reflect the hierarchy embedded in Korean culture. *Sunbae* [선배] and *hoobae* [후배] are the words used for the elder (and/or more experienced) and younger (and/or less experienced) parties in the relationship, respectively.\(^{28}\) As an extension of the Confucian paradigm of relationships, *sunbae* and *hoobae* have mutual roles and responsibilities: *sunbae* oversee and take responsibility for *hoobae*, (e.g., *sunbae* traditionally pay for meals together), and in return *hoobae* show respect to (e.g., bow when greeting and use a form of speech that demonstrates respect for the *sunbae*’s higher status)—and often do the bidding of—*sunbae*. The foundation for this relationship hierarchy is established in elementary school, where students from older grades are often given responsibility for those from younger grades, but it persists even into professional relationships in the workplace (Madeleine and Maria discussed such relationship dynamics in jobs they held after completing university).

Both participants who attended university in Korea and those who attended university abroad described relationship dynamics with *sunbae*. While she did not refer to them as either “seniors” or *sunbae*, Alice (international school abroad, university in the USA) did experience this relationship dynamic during graduate school in the United States, where she “made friends [who] were straight from Korea; they were older than me but they would listen to me and take care of me in a way.”

\(^{28}\) Many participants used the Korean word, *sunbae* [선배] during their interviews, but others used an English word, *senior*, to discuss the same relationship. I have reflected that distinction in this section by using whichever word participants used.
In contrast, Jeong-sook (Korean school abroad, international school abroad, university in the USA) discussed the influence of “seniors” at length. She decided to attend the University of Wisconsin because she was encouraged to do so by other Korean students who had attended her high school in Indonesia. Once there, she joined a Korean dance and drumming club where “the seniors taught us [the traditional dances and drumming] and then after we learned, we taught the juniors—sunbae taught us and then we taught hoobae. It was a family to me.” Jeong-sook also described herself as somewhat disadvantaged compared to her Korean peers in other degree programs because only a couple of people in my grade and only a couple of seniors majored in psychology. If your friends or a lot of the seniors took the same major, they could tell you what this course is about. If they have homework, they could share it, [let you keep it] as a reference, but I didn’t have anything like that.

In contrast to the positive tone of Alice and Jeong-sook’s experiences with older Korean students abroad, Ko-eun (public school abroad, international school in Korea, university in the UK) discussed her resistance to the relationship hierarchy that other Korean students in the UK expected from her:

I’m [not] quite in[to] the respect thing. If someone is a year older than me, I don’t see a point in saying yo [职场, a polite speech ending] to them because they are only a year older than me. All these older Korean students expect me to show them respect when I barely know them. It is
embarrassing because if I ran into a Korean [student while walking with my European friends], I’ll bow because I know they are older—[that’s] how I say, “Hi”—[but then] I have to explain to [my European friends] the whole age, respect thing [in Korean culture].

Participants who attended universities in Korea also had diverse experiences with sunbae. Drew (public school abroad, Korean school in Korea, Korean university) remembered his “seniors” offering him dating advice during his first year at university. Maria described her involvement with the English student newspaper as “a second family” and remembered that she continued to use the newspaper’s facilities even after completing her tenure on the paper’s staff: “they wouldn’t dare to chuck me out—I was ex-staff and I was a senior.”

In contrast, Madeleine (international school abroad, public school abroad, international program at university in Korea) reflected on her relationships with sunbae through a lens of culture shock and resentment:

The hierarchy and level of respect that is required for someone who is just a year above you was totally new to me [when I came to university]…. I found it ridiculous how some sunbae get mad at you for not bowing and something in me was like, “that person has done nothing for me, they don’t know my name, they just know that I’m in [the international college] and they want me to bow to them… What do they have [that] deserve[s]?

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29 This is the only instance where a participant used the English word “senior” in such a way that it could have meant either a university student preparing to graduate or an English representation of the Korean word sunbae.
my bow?” [In the international college] we’re all from different backgrounds and we all speak English [so we don’t use] jon-daet-mal (尊敬말, formal polite speech)—you don’t say yo (요, a polite speech ending)

—[so] it was less, but it was still there.

These quotes reflect the level to which the relational hierarchy is demonstrated not only in language but also embodied and enacted physically within the sunbae/hoobae relationship.30 Participant’s experiences and responses to the sunbae/hoobae phenomenon seem to be unrelated to whether they attended university in Korea or abroad; rather, a comparative analysis of the data suggests that their experiences are informed by their own background (especially whether, and to what extent, they experienced a Korean educational environment prior to university) and how they identify themselves in relationship to the surrounding Korean community.31

**Significance of relationship networks.** Relationship networks are not only hierarchical, but also have a central function in society. Charlie summarized the importance of social networks simply, saying, “in Korea, the only way to actually get a good job is through friends, acquaintances. The only way you can have good acquaintances is if either your parents are extremely rich, or you go to a good school—top three, SKY.” D.H. Kim and J.H. Kim’s (2013) comparative analysis of social capital within foreign language (FLHS) and general (GHS) high schools focused on friendship

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30 These dynamics apply equally to other relationships where one party is of a higher standing than the other.

31 See Chapter Six for a full discussion of “categories” of Koreans in the context of globalization.
ties as a primary indicator of social capital, demonstrating how these relationships help students and graduates navigate society. Borden’s (2000) description echoes the importance of developing social networks through education, saying, “which college one attends can and does have lifelong effects on future employment possibilities, social group, prestige, and even future marriage partner… education represents more than learning. It is without doubt a highly prized social pedigree” (p. 61, emphasis added).

Conformity. Perhaps one of the most striking “norms” in Korean culture is that of conformity or fitting in, especially compared to the Western value of individuality. While participants’ social experiences of “fitting in” are prominently highlighted in Chapter Six, this section will examine the historical foundations of conformity in Korean education and the way participants described their academic transitions in light of this cultural norm.

Foundations. Chinese characters offer an interesting perspective on conformity within Korean education. Until the development of the Korean alphabet in 1443, the Korean people used Chinese characters for all reading and writing, and thus, a knowledge of Chinese characters was the foundation for formal education. Every Chinese character is unique, and many characters require ten or more strokes to be written in the correct

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32 They found that high school friendship ties help students to “organize their social and academic life at university,” and that FLHS students were “more likely to form ties with their peers than those attending GHS” (p. 33). Given the fact that FLHS seem to function as “feeder schools” for elite universities, the relationship networks FLHS students established during high school would likely be sufficiently prestigious as to sustain them for the remainder of their adult lives, reducing or eliminating their need to expand these networks during their university years.

33 The Korean language, while fundamentally unique from Chinese, takes about 70% of its vocabulary from Chinese characters, similar to the influence of Latin and Greek roots on English vocabulary.
Characters and stroke order must be memorized, with “little room for creativity; there is but one right way to write a particular character” (Borden, 2000, p. 51). Borden interpreted this memorization through the Confucian hierarchy, as well, noting that “to write them [Chinese characters] otherwise would reflect poorly on ancestors and great scholars who came before” (p. 51). It is important to note that this memorization equips students for induction into the respected ranks of scholars and must be understood in a positive light. Academic success, then, required substantial memorization, and that emphasis persists to the present-day in academics and daily life.

**Academic transition.** The emphasis on memorization and conformity within Korean education was particularly difficult for participants who attended Korean institutions after spending time abroad. Sophia (public school abroad, Korean school in Korea), Seo-hyeon (international school abroad, Korean school in Korea), and Drew (public school abroad, Korean school in Korea) described difficulty in their academic transitions, especially going from an English to Korean language of instruction. Maria (international school abroad, Korean school in Korea) reflected that her years in Hong Kong permanently handicapped her in math since the Korean curriculum was too advanced in comparison.

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34 For example, thirty-eight distinct strokes are required to write the two Chinese characters for (South) Korea [한국, 韓國]. (The characters in brackets show the name for Korea, *Hanguk*, using the Korean alphabet followed by the traditional Chinese characters still used in Korea despite widespread adoption of simplified Chinese characters in mainland China.)

35 See Chapter One of Cumings’ (2005) text *Korea’s Place in the Sun* for a full discussion of the scholar class and their role in traditional Korean society.

36 Because of the prevalence of homonyms in Korean vocabulary, Chinese characters are often used—particularly in Korean print media and news broadcasts—to clarify the meaning of Korean words.
In a higher education context, Madeleine and Alice both discussed their feelings of dissonance as they transitioned from Western-style education to a Korean system. Madeleine (international school abroad) described feeling disappointed by the emphasis on lecture and memorization within her undergraduate course content at a Korean university and frustrated by the pressure she felt to “edit my paper to match with what the professor thinks, not my opinion.” Alice (international school abroad) enrolled in a doctoral program at a SKY-E university after completing undergraduate and graduate degrees at universities in the United States. She described gratitude but also uncertainty in exercising the critical thinking skills she had developed through her Western education, observing that

Korean culture [is] starting to value more critical thinking and speaking out… It’s been helpful for me to have learned those skills from the American systems. [But] it is different, so I don’t know how much I should act in that way—I’m trying to watch myself and not overdo it.

In sum, Borden (2000) suggested that “to conform, to harmonize, and to accept the status quo spells success in the Korean educational system” (p. 54), while “to buck the system might put [a student] at an educational disadvantage” (p. 55).

At its core, Korean education functions as a mechanism to socialize children into societal and cultural norms. Within this context teachers and schools are responsible for disciplining students, while the primary duty of parents is to facilitate their children’s

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37 While all participants described some kind of academic transition (e.g., Joseph, Rose, Ko-Eun, and Madeleine moving between American and European school systems), this section will highlight the ways that participants who enter or re-enter Korean education after a period of time abroad experience the cultural norm of “conformity” in academics. The social aspects of this experience will be discussed in Chapter Six.
educational success and thus bring honor to the family. The marriage of educational success with family honor gives unique potency and meaning to education within a Korean context, and Korean education cannot be understood without an accompanying knowledge of the family.

**Family**

*I accept my parents as people that eventually I will have to support.*  
(Drew)

*In Korea, parents bear the burden of their children until they die, and vice versa.*  
(Maria)

It is impossible to understand the unique potency of Korea’s “education fever” [교요, kyoyoogyeol]—made accessible to English readers in Michael Seth’s (2002) book of the same name—without a firm grasp of Confucian relationships and their application to the family structure. Cumings (2005) described this relationship structure as “hierarchy within a web of duties and obligations” (p. 57) where hyo [효], often translated into English as “filial piety,” functions as “the core of all virtues” (Koryo dynasty “Rescript on Filial Piety,” as cited in Cumings, p. 57).

**Parent-Child Relationship**

“The proper relationship between father and son was the most important of the filial relations, the basic paradigm ‘for all hierarchical relationships in a moral society’… the son obeyed the father, the father provided for and educated the son” (Cumings, 2005, p. 57). Madeleine suggested that this Confucian paradigm also informed her relationship with her parents.
Respect for authority, hierarchy, [a] culture of respect—that’s embedded in the [Korean] family; it defines the roles that a father and mother should play. For my parents—who are very conservative, very traditional Koreans, have grown up in Korea—they bring that to the home when we’re abroad.

Traditionally, the parent-child relationship served as the centerpiece from which the child learned how to function within society, both within the child’s relationship with parents and through the education it was the father’s duty to provide. This section will present the ways that participant experiences mirrored this marriage of family relationships to education.

**Narrative: Education as family honor.** Alice (international school abroad, university in United States) remembered that during her family’s initial move to Taiwan, her “parents were very focused on making sure that I get a good education.” Her description of her university years also reflected traditional Korean values of honoring her family through education—“my parents were supporting me for college so it was… my responsibility to do well.” Madeleine’s (international school abroad, international program within Korean university) experience also reflected this traditional emphasis on education within the parent-child relationship:

- My parents are very Korean in the sense [that] they have always valued my education… They had a choice of where to spent their two sabbatical years, [and] they chose England because they thought that my sister and I would not have a hard time with education [there because it was in
English]. Sending me to [international boarding school in Germany also showed their priorities]—they trusted that [the school] would provide me with a good education and prepare me for college.

Madeleine presented her decision about where to attend university through a lens of family honor as well, since the international relations major satisfied her interests while the fact that she enrolled at a SKY-E university satisfied her parents.

I was fortunate that I got into that program, because then that meets my parents’ expectations of going to a “good” university… It’s important to your parents and your relatives, and just when people ask you, to be able to say, “Oh, I go to [a SKY-E] university.” People look at you differently if you’re from a certain university—they value you differently.

However, not all participants described their experience of this “hierarchy within a web of duties and obligations” (Cumings, 2005, p. 57) in a positive light. Charlie (public school abroad, international school in Korea, university abroad) and Drew (public school abroad, Korean school in Korea, Korean university in Korea) described feeling pressure from the Confucian norm of academic success as a way to honor their family. Charlie remembered that

in high school, [my mom] left me alone simply because I got good grades on my own. I felt like I was in this little box and they wouldn’t let me do anything outside of it. For example, I have the tendency to have a bad start and then work my way back up. Whenever I did that, my parents are like, “Oh, you’ll be fine, you’ll bring it back, right?” It sounds like they’re
supporting me but it implies [that] they are automatically assuming I’m going to get a hundred [on upcoming tests]. What if I don’t get a hundred?

They want me to succeed, which I understand. My dad keeps on telling me [that] my GPA is not important, as long as you study it should be fine… which implies, “If you study you’re going to get a good grade so scores don’t matter.”

They switch[ed] their mindset to “We’ll try to stay in the back and let you do your own thing, but if you screw up, we’re going to intervene.” I have freedom to do whatever I want as long as I get good results. [If] I drop below whatever their expectations are, then, “We are going to come in and tell you what to do.” They never specifically said it, but I can feel it.

In comparison, Drew described feeling pressure from his parents in more general terms; he remembered that

I always had this sense that I could never adequately please my parents. I heard a saying that parents f*** up their children for the right reasons. That applies here because I know that my parents have purely good motives, [but] somehow the way that rubs off on me is that I could never please them… My parents are so damn well-educated that they suffocate me—they never let me make my own mistakes in my life…. I know that my parents are proud of me, they love me for who I am. [But] their ways of expressing it were usually very critical.
Conflict: International education informed by Western values. While all participants described some sense of dissonance with traditional Korean values, two participants (Alice and Madeleine) explicitly attributed some of the tension in their family relationships to the values they learned from their years in a Western educational context. Alice (international school abroad, university abroad) said,

I’ve been educated to think in the American values, but my parents have grown up in the Korean context and their parents are Korean—they have a set of expectations and values that they think are appropriate. They are not really strict, and they are really flexible compared to other Korean parents that I’ve seen, … but there are times when I would see things from a very American perspective and be really critical about something—I would seek fairness and justice, something like that. But in the Korean context you also have to respect the older people and you have to know your boundaries. That conflicted with my values; I understood it and knew it in my head, but the actions that I was taking—the way that I was thinking about life—it was very much influenced by the schooling I had, the education I had during my middle and high school years. Our value systems would be different. A little bit of it has to do with the generational gap, but the cultural value aspect was also very influential. During college I just thought it was generational, but now that I break it down and think about it, I think it might have had to do with the environments that I was raised in and the environments that they were raised in.
Madeleine (international school abroad, public school abroad, international program at Korean university) echoed Alice’s experience, suggesting that the Confucian family hierarchy “clashes with some of the values that we’re learning in international schools or from American or British or Western teachers…. [In a Korean family] there’s a very high standard for you educationally and you’re expected to perform a certain way at home.”

**Counter-narrative: “Do what motivates you.”** Some participants’ experiences provide a counter-narrative to the dominant Confucian parent-child relationship narrative. Joseph (public school abroad [USA], international school abroad, university in USA) described his parents as valuing education “but insist[ing] on just doing our best and not stressing the grades… pursuing what I’m passionate about as long as I keep my best to it.” Alice (international school abroad, university in USA) couched her experience of this counter-narrative within her discussion of generational and cultural conflict (see above), describing her parents as “flexible compared to other Korean parents that I’ve seen. My parents would always tell me to do whatever motivates you or whatever you want to do.”

**Vignette: “For me, I wanted to please my parents”**

Yoon-jeong’s university admission experience, told in the following vignette, illustrates the tension between the dominant (education as family honor) and counter-narratives (“Do what motivates you”). Despite the fact that her parents rejected the

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38 Joseph’s entire lived experience overlaps with other participants but also provides a counter-narrative because his parents immigrated to the United States.

39 See Chapter Three for a full description of how vignettes were constructed for data representation.
dominant narrative, she experienced tension because of her own culturally-informed ideas of honoring her parents.

By junior year [of high school] I was sure that I was going to go to a good college and experience college life in the States, [but then] it hit me that I didn’t have a lot of options because AP/IB wasn’t provided for us in [our international school]. I started to panic, I just felt like I lost hope. Because my parents come from a really good college background—they went to Seoul National University, both of them, that’s where they met—I had the prejudice of, “Oh, I have to reach my parents’ expectations of college.” On the other hand, my parents are like, “You can do whatever you want. We don’t care if you go to a horrible college or you don’t know what to do. That’s really up to you.” Now that I think about it, that was such a blessing for me. [But] at that time, during the application process, that was a big stress for me because the idea of free will stresses you out more—they’re giving me the freedom to do whatever I want... what am I supposed to do? I had the expectation for myself that I should go to a reasonable college that my parents can be proud of. Usually in America, they go to college to pursue what they want to do, right? For me, I wanted to please my parents.

I figure[d] out that America was too much of a distance for me because all of my family members are [in Korea]—as an only child who hasn’t lived away from their parents, it was a pretty big step and I wasn’t willing to take that step yet. [So] I looked into Hong Kong and Singapore [but nothing stood out]. Then it was January, [then] February [and] I still didn’t know where I wanted to go. My dad started looking through pamphlets [from a college fair I’d attended in the fall] and he goes, “I know this place. [It]’s very famous. You took photos for yearbook and you take photos in your free time—they accept photography portfolios—why don’t you apply here just for the heck of it? They have a campus in Hong Kong, too.” I applied and got accepted with [a] scholarship... [but] even then I wasn’t happy because I wasn’t sure about the college itself—I was like, “Does this [school] really fit my parents’ expectations?”

“Korean Mom” Figure

All participants, with the exception of Jeong-sook, referenced the typical (Charlie said “stereotypical”) relationship between a Korean mother and her child (some used this reference to discuss whether their mother aligned with the stereotype [Charlie, Seo-
hyeon] or did not [Joseph, Maria]). Cumings' (2005) description of the Korean mother is useful in framing this phenomenon for Western readers; he suggested that Korean mothers

often look upon their child… not merely as a biological outcome but a being to be shaped and reared as a human creation, like a work of art. The premise of the maternal sculptor, however, must be her ‘knowing what’s best for the child,’ her unquestioned authority. … The figure of the disciplinarian Korean mother, hovering about her child and attending to his needs so long as he keeps his nose in the books, is a character as familiar to Korean society today as it was [during the Joseon dynasty]. (p. 13, emphasis added; p. 60)

**Vignette: “She had expectations on me”**

Seo-hyeon’s experience (international school abroad, Korean school in Korea, FLHS in Korea, international program within Korean university), presented here as a vignette, illustrates the unique role her mother played in Seo-hyeon’s educational upbringing.

*Korean moms—like my mother—she was kind of obsessed with grades: they have to deal about their students’ education. [So in Hong Kong,] I went to [Korean] school on Saturdays, even though I was an international school student. I didn’t really think a lot [about it]—if my mom tells me to do so, then, okay. My mom was kind of strict, so I just did whatever she told me to do.

I came back to Korea [before completing eighth grade in Hong Kong, but] my mom wanted me to go to school at the right period [according to the

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40 See Chapter Three for a full description of how vignettes were constructed for data representation.
Korean school year). The problem was, my Korean wasn’t that good—my Korean was only for conversation. I naturally fell behind [the] other Korean students; my mom got furious when she first saw my grades. I got a 70 in my first exam, but then the hard core [hagwon] training began, and in the second exam I raised it up to 82—it was kind of [a] sensational thing. The middle school [said] the grades don’t really move up that much, but the hard-core training—thanks to my mom—it happened.

They get together, the Korean mothers, and they chat about their child[ren]’s grades. The funny thing is, I always got compared with [another] student, [a] friend who was one year older than me. She lived in Hong Kong for five years, and then she came back [to Korea] when she was in grade six. She always got good grades, she was the best. [My mom] heard [about this girl] from my friend’s mom, and my mom was expecting something similar from me. [Now] my mom kind of regret[s] what she has done before, when I tell her what a hard time I had back then... but then, at the time... she was young as well. She had expectations on me. [This friend] went to foreign language high school, so naturally I thought I had to go there as well. She was my “senior”: when she was in second year, I was in first.

I actually wanted to go to [the] TOEFL class because I knew that my English could improve [and then I could go to university through an English interview instead of the college entrance exam]. That’s] one thing my mom and I regret, [because my entrance exam] grades weren’t good enough to go to a good school. Me and my mom, we just naturally said, “Why don’t we take a gap year?” I didn’t want to fall behind my high school peers—I wanted to go to at least the top five or six schools within Korea—so my mom [thought] I would have to change my route. For one year I [attended a hagwon for English and interviewing techniques] and ultimately I went to university using my English. [In university] I wanted to become the top student, [so during the first semester] I focused on my studies and actually received a scholarship—[I was] one of the top three students within my major. My mom was so pleased!

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41 The Korean academic calendar begins in March and ends in February.

42 This phenomenon is sufficiently pervasive as to warrant its own vocabulary (엄친딸 [eom-chin-ddal, mother’s friend’s daughter] and 엄친아 [eom-chin-ah: mother’s friend’s son]). Both words imply that the speaker’s mother holds up her friend’s child as a model of virtue and academic achievement that her own child (the speaker) should emulate.

43 The word “expectations” in English is often equated with gidae [기대] in Korean, which can also represent the idea of having “high hopes” in English.

44 Test of English as a Foreign Language
Interlude: Narrative Profile (Drew)

Drew’s narrative highlights the ways that repatriation and English informed his experience of identity conflict and Catholic Bible Life Movement and military service informed his resolution of this conflict. I chose to present Drew’s profile at this point in the narrative because of his immersion into a Korean context and Korean education—secondary and higher education and military service—after he returned to Korea.

I like to consider myself unique. I’m afraid studies might [actually] show that I’m, after all, just a common TCK. But I’m not entirely afraid of that... one explanation is better than none.

When I was one, my father went to the University of Iowa and my mother to LSU; when I was two, my grandparents took me to Louisiana (my father had transferred to LSU [by then]). [I went to] preschool like every other child; I grew up learning [English]. [I was 12] when we moved back to Korea from the States. We had thirty-one boxes of all the stuff we were moving, and we lost a small one which contained all the schoolwork I had done during my elementary school years. Of thirty-one [boxes], that’s the one that had to get lost... So, pretty much my life—my 11 years in the States—has mostly been a dream... except for the memories I have in my head I’ve got almost nothing to prove I was there.

Before I started middle school [in Korea], [I] sat down at the kitchen table with my parents and the three of us discussed [my schooling]. My father said, “Yes, it might have been easier for you if we sent to you to a better school [in] Seoul or to an international school where you won’t have so much trouble adjusting, but we’re sending you to a normal [Korean] school because even though that may call for some difficulties in the beginning, we’re giving you a challenge. Once you overcome that challenge, you’ll become a stronger person.” (I know now that another reason that they had to put me through that challenge was not only because they thought that was the best way, [but] because they didn’t have money to send me to an international school.)

From the first day [of school in Korea] my mother told my homeroom teacher about my situation—that my Korean may be a little rusty and I may have a difficult time fitting in because of the differences in culture—word went around and everyone in class was very lenient towards me. I
was their hero for being so good in English, [and] special because I had different experiences from them, [but] this is the worst part: I was never completely one of them. I had many friends but they considered me someone to look up to or envy.

All throughout middle school, my grades were really not that high because I refused to adjust... I was stubborn—I didn’t want to let go of my U.S. background. I just kept making excuses that “the reason I’m not doing so well here is because it hasn’t been that long since I’ve returned from the States and I’m just barely getting used to the language here.” Three years had passed and I know I was smarter than that but I just refused to adjust. Luckily you had to take an exam to go to high school. [My] first pre-exam results were barely good enough to make it into one of the worst high schools; anywhere below that would be a two-year technology high school. That’s when I started paying more attention in class and getting better grades. My records from [first and second year] weren’t that great. By the end of the year my grades were at the top of the class but because of first and second year, I ended up going to the second best high school in [the city]. That was the first time I actually experienced a “win” in my life. The thing is, [that] neighborhood [doesn’t have] a very high academic standard. My goal was Seoul National but I had no one around me to share that passion. Everyone [else] was just, “If I make it into a school in Seoul I’ll consider myself lucky.” I distanced myself from all of my colleagues. I voluntarily became the loner; I was afraid that if I became one of them, I’ll actually become one of them.

I pressed myself a little too hard about having to make it to Seoul National [so] that I burned down in my last year of high school. I spent most of my time stressing out and not really doing much work. My parents emphasize[d] how important it is to get into a first-class university in Korea, not only for career but also in terms of competing with the world. The way they talked about Yonsei or Korea University, I was convinced that no other school than Seoul National deserved to be called a school; Seoul National was the only option for me. [But] I was stuck in a second-best high school where nobody—nobody!—shared any academic passions, let alone Seoul National, with me. [So] I isolated myself. I isolated myself from [my] peer group.

All throughout middle and high school, I suppressed my American side. I only listened to Korean pop, I tried to pronounce English words as close to colleagues as I can in the Korean pronunciation. Sometime in high school, I realized that when I’m watching American movies, I have to read the subtitles; that was a wake-up call, [but still] didn’t necessarily trigger any effort in me. I got lucky because after I graduated high school, I went
to the record store to buy a few Korean pop cassette tapes. When I spotted the new Backstreet Boys album, “Black and Blue,” I got curious so I bought it. I didn’t really listen to it for weeks because I was busy with the K-pop. One day I decided to [listen and thought] their songs were really good. I started listening to the Backstreet Boys a lot; that automatically took care of my hearing [in English]. I started to sing along; that took care of my pronunciation. When I memorized the lyrics, that took care of the [language] structure, and I wanted to understand so I would do a lot of research, which took care of grammar, even though the lyrics may not always be grammatically correct.

Still I was in a pretty lonely place because I had no one to completely share who I am. I still had to suppress the American side of me because I went to [a university in Seoul in the] physics major. Most of the people around me were completely Korean; I was once again in an environment where people either envied me or looked up to me. I wasn’t really happy with my university. I kept a passive attitude throughout the entire six years that I was there. First year, I tried to fit in, made many friends, did things around school. That was when the World Cup was held here, [and when a relationship with a girl I liked] didn’t really go well, I retreated to the World Cup volunteer work for two months. The president had sent letters to all of our professors to excuse us from class and not let that become a problem in our grades, because [we were] participating in a “national matter.” I used that as an excuse to hide away from my school life; I distanced myself.

I don’t really have much to [say] about [university], because I distanced myself from most of my school friends. I still have [some] friends from school. I would show up every once in a while, in the attempt to get myself back into school life. I would do pretty well: professors like[d] me, graduate students like[d] me. [But] not long after, I’d start losing interest again. I’d start leaving, disappearing, getting a lot of “F”s because of the attendance rate.

[During my third year of university] I began the Catholic Bible Life Movement. [This] was very crucial—I learned that we can accept people as they are, through love. I started to try to open a new channel of communication with my parents. I realized that, though my struggles trying to fit in to the Korean society, my parents didn’t completely understand who I was, because they didn’t have to go through the same thing. Soon my parents were more worried that I was putting too much into the [Catholic] Bible Life [Movement], rather than schoolwork. I attempt[ed] to let them see that this was very important to me, [but] still, they were concerned about my grades and my future. I had to go through
that time to find myself, and it was very helpful. It’s not a sign of weakness, but actually of strength, to be able to admit that you are not in control of your life, to let go of things that you cannot control and let a supernatural being take the driver’s seat. That’s actually a sign of power.

The Catholic Bible Life Movement and the Air Force [changed] me from this fearful coward to a more courageous person. [After graduating from university, I went to the Korean Air Force training as an officer.] After the four month training period was over, I came back to Seoul and met one of my friends who was from South Carolina. We were having a beer and she tells me, “You now look people straight in the eye when you talk,” which means that during the training I had gained more confidence in myself—I overcame a lot of the fear that used to control me. Being good in English was a big advantage [during my three years in the Air Force] because I was usually called when we had business with the U.S. Air Force. I tried to make the most of that time, to step up and take on as many challenges as I can.

Ever since the Air Force, I’m happy about being myself, accepting myself as I am, more comfortable about being myself. I realized this [when] I would admit to people who had just come from abroad that I haven’t been to the States in quite a while, so I would lack context when they talk. [Before my time in the Air Force], when I was with my foreign friends, I felt left out because I have been away from the States for so long. If I was engaging in conversation with a group of American[s] and I didn’t really get what they were saying, I would just smile, nod along, and pretend to understand because I felt ashamed that I didn’t get what they were saying. Since I’ve had my share of foreign friends and Korean friends and good friends that I’ve met [through the military], I [am] no longer afraid to admit that I’ve been in Korea for nineteen consecutive years [and] thus lack the context that you may share with the people who had just moved from the States. I [became] comfortable being a Korean who has lived in Korea for the past nineteen years, who grew up eleven years in the States and is neither part of a complete Korean culture nor an American culture.

I’m getting more confident about my identity. Until a few years ago, if somebody asked me if there’s one place that you would go right now, I would definitely say, without hesitation, “I want to go back to the States, because I feel like I’m missing out being here.” [But] now I’m comfortable being in Seoul. I still do want to go to the States and travel, but not because I feel that I’m losing myself here; it’s because [that]’s actually also my home, so I don’t want to disconnect myself completely from that.
For several years I tried to suppress my American side, to fit in to the Korean society, which wasn’t always possible. Eventually, they found out that I was from—that I’d lived in the States. From then on, I was categorized as a different person. I sensed tension, or intimidation, or... [that I was] “someone special”, not one of them. [I became] like an icon, a model, an idol to them, which is sometimes good because you’re sort of like a rock star, but at the same time, you’re very insecure and lonely because nobody actually believes that you are one of them. [But] I know I’m just one of them—I’m not better off—though my English [might be] one of the best.

When I’m speaking English, I tend to make expressions that Americans make, or speak in a tone that Americans speak in, which eventually takes over my whole mental state, and at that moment, I’m American. But when I’m surrounded by Koreans, I act Korean and I speak like a Korean. I make gestures like a Korean. The American side of me is more confident than my Korean side because my Korean side is constantly feeling that I’m out of place, that I’m not living up to my full potential, whereas in my American side I feel very confident about myself and sure. Whenever I look at photos of myself, I look more at ease, confident, and laid back when I’m surrounded by foreigners than when I’m surrounded by Koreans—it’s because of the two sides of me. For several years I hung out more with foreign friends and acted completely like my American side. That felt really good for a pretty long time until I found the balance between being a Korean and American at the same time. Now I’m proud of who I am—I can’t say I’m American... I can’t say I’m Korean... I’m a TCK and I’m proud of that.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I contextualized the Korean TCK experience by examining some distinct features of Korean culture. I paid special attention to the role and function of education in Korea, and to the ways that family dynamics are informed by Confucian values, because these areas reflected the ways that the Korean TCK experience was distinct. Within this contextualization, I included vignettes and a narrative profile to represent themes and phenomena which emerged from participants’ stories (i.e.,
competition in education, the interrelationship of family honor and educational performance, and the traditional role of a mother in the education of children).
CHAPTER 6

NEGOTIATING THE POLITICS OF BELONGING:
ETHNICITY, CATEGORIES, AND LANGUAGE

[Living abroad] there are times that I [say], “I’m Korean,” [but] when I see other Korean students I [think], “I don’t want to be friends with you”—I feel awkward hanging out with students [who don’t have] an international background. I am Korean, and I am proud to be Korean, but [sometimes] I don’t feel Korean—I feel left out. I have trouble trying to identify myself [between these] categories. (Ko-eun)

This chapter discusses how participants’ life experiences were mediated by their Korean ethnicity, and how categories emerged within Korean students in higher educational contexts at home and abroad. The theme of language as a currency with which participants negotiated their ability to fit in also emerged from these data.

The first section, “Ethnicity: Majority, Minority, and ‘Fitting In’ at Home and Abroad,” presents the ways participants described themselves negotiating “fitting in”—or “feeling different” and being “left out”—in their home and host cultures. Sophia’s narrative profile serves as an interlude, situated between discussion of ethnicity and “categories.” The second section, “Categories: Structures of ‘Fitting In,’” introduces the ways that participants categorized Korean students in the context of higher education. Specifically, this section displays the ways participants identified themselves within—or resisted—these categories, the ways that these categories were constructed by life
experience in general and by citizenship in the context of the United States, and how language fluency indicated how to categorize an individual.

Participants’ descriptions of language as a *currency* for fitting in—where participants referenced the power of language and language fluency to include or exclude, to distinguish between categories, and to negotiate their ability to “fit in” to different groups—are inter-woven throughout this chapter.

The bulk of the data which aligned with the emergent theme *negotiating the politics of belonging* was consistent with established patterns of the TCK experience (i.e., a desire to “fit in” with peers during childhood and adolescence; finding “connection” through relationships, especially with those who share an internationally mobile childhood; and the experience of dissonance upon return to one’s home culture). However, this chapter explicitly focuses on the *distinctions* of participants’ experiences because Korea is their home culture.

Thus, the first section of this chapter describes how participants’ lived experiences were *mediated* by their ethnicity—that is, how they described “fitting in” to their home and host cultures. The cultural norm of conformity in Korean culture, combined with the mono phenotypic majority population in Korea, heightened this sense of dissonance, and their experience of their home culture was mediated by their Korean ethnicity. The second section examines how participants described various categories of Koreans within their home and host cultures, *and especially how they distinguished themselves from these categories*. The conceptual framework serves as a platform to organize the presentation of data in each section, and vignettes and narrative profiles (presented in italics because
they represent individual participants’ own voices) are interwoven throughout the narrative of this chapter.

I placed two profiles and four narrative vignettes within the narrative of this chapter. Immediately following the discussion of ethnicity, Sophia’s narrative profile contextualizes the themes of minority, dissonance, “invisible majority,” and language as currency within a single participant’s experience (she attended both Korean and international schools after her return to Korea). Her experience also introduces the “categories” of Korean students in the context of higher education and immediately precedes the discussion of these categories. Finally, Joseph’s profile concludes this chapter and offers a counter-narrative to the experiences of other participants, especially in his experience as—and resistance to categorization as—Korean-American.

**Ethnicity: Majority, Minority, and “Fitting In” at Home and Abroad**

*When I see Koreans’ achievements I feel proud: we’re of the same race—I’m a part of this.* (Charlie)

*[In Korea, many people] expect me to speak Korean and speak it well, to know the Korean culture and abide by it. [Many people in Korea think] if you’re [ethnically] Korean, then you should act Korean: [they] expect me to become Korean [rather than accepting] me for who I am.* (Sophia)

Participants described their experiences being *mediated by ethnicity*, both in their host culture(s) and upon their return to Korea. This section discusses participant experiences prior to higher education, and the conceptual framework organizes this discussion according to the domains of host and home culture, and according to

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1 See Chapter Three for a full rationale and description of how vignettes and profiles were selected and constructed.
educational type within each domain (refer to Figure 4.2 for a full description of how the types of K12 institutions align with the conceptual framework).

In the “host culture” domain, participants described their experiences being informed by the fact that they appeared Korean—that is, they were a minority relative to the host culture, and their Korean ethnicity mediated their experiences at school. Within public and private (both in the “host culture” domain of the conceptual framework) and/or Western-curriculum international school contexts (in the overlap of the “host culture” and “cultural globalization” domains), participants functioned as minorities. This experience of minority is illustrated through Yoon-jeong’s vignette, “Am I that different?”

Upon return to the “home culture” domain, participants’ Korean ethnicity meant they appeared physically similar to those in the home culture, and they could blend in physically as part of the majority population. Despite their ability to fit in to the majority based on their physical appearance, participants described a sense of dissonance: they functioned as an invisible minority because their experience living abroad prevented them from fully belonging in the home culture, and this sense of dissonance was exaggerated for those who attended Korean schools (in the “home culture” domain of the conceptual framework).

International schools in Korea (in the overlap of the “cultural globalization” and “home culture” domains of the conceptual framework) provided the only educational context where participants were truly in the majority: sharing both ethnicity and international experience with the majority of their peers. However, in this context,

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2 Korea is a largely homogenous, monoethnic and mono phenotypic society; because all participants had ethnic Korean parents, they could “blend in” physically as part of the majority population.
categories emerged based on ethnicity. This theme of *majority* and the emergent categories, indicated by language, are illustrated in Yoon-jeong’s vignette, “I wasn’t the minority anymore.”

This discussion of ethnicity concludes with a *counter*-narrative vignette, “Majority as ‘Home,’” in which Rose describes her experience of repatriation, which was slightly distinct from what other participants described. Rose forged her sense of identity through her Korean ethnicity and through identification with the majority upon her return to Korea. While this vignette does not illustrate an experience described by other participants—and is therefore presented as a counter-narrative—it does represent how Rose’s process of identity construction was informed by ethnicity.

**Minority: “Fitting In” in the Host Culture**

Family choices about *affinity and/or affiliation with a Korean community abroad*—including *where to live* (i.e., whether to have Korean neighbors [Jeong-sook] or not [Maria], live in the host culture with a Korean family [Charlie], live in an expatriate community [Joseph], live isolated [Rose] or embed within the host culture [Madeleine])—and *where to attend school* (i.e., Korean international school [Jeong-sook], HL school [Yoon-jeong, Ko-eun, Rose], EMI international school [Joseph, Alice, Jeong-sook, Rose, Seo-hyeon, Madeleine, Maria], private school [Autumn, Rose], or public school [Charlie, Yoon-jeong, Sophia, Ko-eun, Drew]), *inform* participant experiences, and these experiences are *mediated* by ethnicity. That is, participants’ experiences while living abroad were mediated by the presence of a Korean expatriate community—and the extent to which participants and their families affiliated with it—and the type of school they
Moreover, family decisions about what type of school in which to enroll their children during their time abroad were often *motivated by language* and informed by plans for higher education. Students enrolled in international, private, or public schools in order to learn English or enrolled in Korean heritage language (HL) or “Saturday” school in order to maintain Korean language ability.4

**Korean community abroad.** The existence of a Korean expatriate population and family choices about the extent to which they would affiliate and/or identify with this population informed participant experiences and, ultimately, the way they identified themselves—whether as part of this community or not, and/or as more Korean or more international. Charlie (public school abroad) remembered living in “a predominantly Korean/Mexican neighborhood,” and Jeong-sook (Korean school abroad, international school abroad) remembered feeling “stressed” upon first arriving in Indonesia but mitigated her stress through proximity to a Korean community (“all my neighbors were Korean, thankfully”).

In contrast, Maria (international school abroad) did not live in a Korean community while her family was in Hong Kong, and she attributed her English fluency to this choice. Many of her fellow Korean TCKs failed to develop the English fluency she

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3 Autumn did not describe her Korean ethnicity as informing her private school experiences in the United States, and since Rose’s experiences are presented in a counter-narrative vignette at the close of this section, “Private school” is not presented in the forthcoming section, despite its inclusion in Figure 4.2.

4 Jeong-sook was the only participant who had access to a Korean school abroad (within the overlap of “home culture,” “host culture,” and “cultural globalization”); she attended for one semester before her parents transferred her to an international boarding school because “they wanted us to learn English.” Even when probed, she said little about her experience at the Korean school abroad, focusing instead on the two international schools she attended in Indonesia.
developed largely because their families embedded themselves in an expatriate Korean community:

Few Koreans chose to live away from others. I noticed quite early [that] most of the older Korean students who should have moved on to [a] better school [after three years at our international school] could not get into those schools precisely because their English was just not good enough.

In sum, participants were sensitive to differences in the Korean TCK experience based on individual and family affiliation with a Korean expatriate population, whether the family was “more Korean” or “more international”; this distinction was especially salient within the context of Western-curriculum international schools.

**International school.** Kwon’s (2006) Fourth Culture model⁵ suggested that the Western-curriculum international school functions as an additional host culture for Korean TCKs—one heavily informed by the home culture of the curriculum and thus distinct from both the home and host cultures of non-Western TCKs.⁶ Within the international school context (“cultural globalization domain”), participant experiences were mediated by their ethnicity in three key ways: the presence of other Korean students and the degree to which participants affiliated or identified with them, language and English-medium instruction (EMI), and choices about higher education.

**Korean students.** Language emerged as an indicator of the distinctions between ethnic Korean students attending international schools abroad. Jeong-sook described

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⁵ See Chapter Two for a full review of Kwon’s research paper.

⁶ In the context of Western-curriculum international schools, non-Western students’ construction of their own culture (a “fourth culture” instead of a “third culture”) is informed by their parents’ home (first) culture, the host (second) culture in which they live, and the international school (third) culture.
other Korean students at her international boarding school as different from herself because “they started speaking English very young so they were very fluent and very… [pause] not Koreans. They [seemed] very American to me.”

Joseph echoed Jeong-sook’s distinctions between groups of Korean students and described how the categories were different between the two international schools he attended in Shanghai.

[During junior high at the British school,] Koreans [would be] hanging out with Koreans… They spoke a lot of Korean when they could, during their free time. A lot of them came from Korea and culturally, they [were] more Korean—more Korean-Korean… I didn’t really mingle at all with Korean students—I actually rejected my Korean side, just embraced the Western side, the American side more and found more pride in that.

[Then in high school at the American international school] there [was] a huge Korean group, some of the most popular kids in the school… I’m talking about Korean[s] from Korea [but] they were very internationalized Koreans—they felt like they didn’t really belong anymore: they weren’t really Korean-Korean, but obviously, they weren’t Chinese. They weren’t American either, so they felt like they were their own group; I identified with that. I actually ended up straying away from the Western crowd and spending time with them.

Joseph resisted, and then embraced, categorization through ethnicity at different times: at his first school he resisted the “more Korean Koreans,” then identified with the
“internationalized Koreans” at his second school. In contrast, Maria *simultaneously* embraced and resisted fitting in with Korean students abroad. She described her two distinctive circle[s] of friends: Koreans, [who] didn’t really mingle too much with other kids, and my other mixed friends, i.e. Indian, Filipino, Chinese. I actually hung around with other kids more than Korean friends for after-school activities [but with Korean students], we would speak at school and sit close during classes… It was almost like [a Korean] gang—either you were one of “us” or you are with “them”—and I was kind of in-between, either but neither.

Thus, Jeong-sook, Joseph, and Maria all described distinctions between Korean students at international schools outside Korea—whether “more Korean” or “more international”—and they used language as an indicator of this distinction.

*English-medium instruction.* In addition to the presence of Korean students and degree of participants’ affiliation with them, participants’ Korean ethnicity also informed the ways in which they experienced English-medium instruction (EMI) at their international schools abroad. Obviously, EMI international schools require students to learn English, but participants experienced this in different ways: either learning English *instead of* or *in addition to* the host language (in non-English speaking host cultures).

For Joseph, enrollment at an EMI international school facilitated a smooth academic transition but precluded his immersion into the host culture and language. In contrast, Jeong-sook learned English instead of the host language.
Even [though] I lived there for ten years, I couldn’t speak fluent Indonesian. I only spoke [enough] to [get] my points across—communication to a very minimum level, [but] it was really difficult for me to learn both English and Indonesian at the same time, and it was very stressful.

All of Madeleine’s formal education was in English, which meant that she learned Korean at home, a local language in the community, and English at school. For Alice, too, immersion into an EMI international school in seventh grade meant learning Chinese (the host language) and English simultaneously.

[When we moved to Taiwan] I had to learn English [for classes at the international school, and] I had to learn Chinese, too. The kids were speaking in Chinese [to each other] so I felt a little bit left out. I started picking up on things and they knew that I would understand a little better than before—sometimes they would speak to me in Chinese. The first time that I went there, reading a page from a textbook took me an hour because I had to look up all these vocabulary words—we had this dictionary that I would look through and underline, and [I would] have little note pads that [had] all the vocabulary words that I had to memorize.

**Higher education enrollment.** Finally, the four participants who graduated from international schools abroad (Joseph, Alice, Jeong-sook, and Madeleine) described how this experience informed their plans for higher education. Joseph transferred from a British- to an American-curriculum international school based on his intent to attend
university in the United States. Jeong-sook remembered the Korean students at her international school transferring between the Korean- or Western-curriculum branches of the school based on where they intended to enroll for university.

Those of us who were planning to go to a Korean university transferred back to the Korean international school [for the last year of high school] because the term was different.\(^7\) All of us who remained at the international school—the American [curriculum school]—we applied to American universities.

Jeong-sook herself chose her university based on where her Korean “seniors”\(^8\) had enrolled. Alice chose to attend university in the United States instead of Korea, not only because “a lot of [peers] were planning to go to some college in the United States, so [I was kind of] going with the flow,” but also because she planned to major in psychology after enjoying an International Baccalaureate (IB) psychology course in high school.

Madeleine also intended to follow her international school classmates to universities in the United States, but ultimately enrolled at an EMI international college within an elite Korean university for financial reasons.

So, attending an international school while living abroad means that a Korean TCK will learn English—perhaps at the expense of fluency in a host language or in Korean—and, if they remain enrolled through high school graduation, will likely be academically prepared to attend university in the United States. Their experience as a

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\(^7\) The Korean school year begins in March and concludes in December, with final closing ceremonies in February.

\(^8\) *Sunbae* [선배]: see “Hierarchy in Relationships” in Chapter Five for a full discussion of the meaning and function of the *sunbae/hoobae* relationship.
student in this context is heavily informed by their Korean ethnicity, as aligned with—or
distinct from—any other Korean students, and this social experience informs their own
development of language fluency in English and Korean.

Public school. When enrolling in public schools abroad, participants’
experiences were informed by minority ethnicity relative to the majority of other
students; they described “feeling different” and described others interacting with them on
the basis of their ethnicity. Six participants⁹ attended a public school abroad (Charlie,
Yoon-jeong, Sophia, Ko-eun, Madeleine, and Drew) in the “host culture” domain. All of
these participants attended public school in the United States, except Madeleine, who
attended a public school in the UK; this section will present the ways participants’ public
school experiences were mediated by their ethnicity.

Sophia remembered that other students “always thought I was either Chinese or
Japanese—once they figured out I was Korean, they tacked ‘Korean’ at the back
—‘Chinese, Japanese, Korean’—[and] they would squint their eyes up and down.”
Charlie described his discomfort when he was paired with another Korean student on his
first day to return to school in the United States.

After fourth grade [in Korea, I had forgotten most of my] English. [On the
first day of school back in the States] they pair me up with this Korean
kid, except he doesn’t speak Korean—[he’s] Korean-American [and]
speaks English. I speak Korean [to him] and he looks at me like he

⁹ For the purposes of this section, Joseph’s elementary school experience in California was not included
since it preceded his family’s move to China and his perception of himself as a TCK.
doesn’t understand so I panic a little. I still don’t know how I got through but [eventually I remembered my English and] I could speak somewhat.

Ko-eun also described classmates treating her differently because she was Asian—focusing on aspects of her physical appearance that were different and even physically hitting her.

During preschool [we lived in the Bronx, and] the kids would touch my hair because [it was] really straight and different from them, and they would touch my skin. Then I went to [a different] school for kindergarten, [and] the Caucasian students, they didn’t really like me. I figured that out when a student hit me—he physically hit me. He told the teacher that the reason he didn’t like me was because I was Asian.

Despite this difficulty, Ko-eun’s classmates later “acknowledged” her on the basis of her academic achievement rather than her ethnicity when she was selected for an advanced class.

[I was in class with the same students] until fourth grade, when I got put into [a class for] students who achieved better scores. [That was when] a lot of these kids acknowledged me because even though I was Asian and English [was] my second language, being in that class was really a [big deal]. My peers started acknowledging that I was okay—“she is different, but she’s still good.” [From that point] a lot of [my classmates] wanted to partner up with me as well—it was a lot different from before.
Yoon-jeong described feeling different during elementary school in the United States because of her physical appearance, but described her school as a “melting pot.” Her experience is presented in her own words in the following vignette.\(^\text{10}\)

*I was one out of six Asians in my whole elementary school—I remember it so clearly, going through the yearbook and counting how many Koreans there were, and there was only two. [So] most of my elementary school friends were from different ethnicities. I was friends with everybody—all the American kids, African-American kids, Mexican kids, everyone. It was just one big melting pot.*

*[When we started having] after school programs, I started noticing, “this is how people start creating their group of friends.” I was really jealous because I didn’t know how to be a girl scout; I don’t think I’ve ever seen an Asian girl scout in my neighborhood.*

*[One day after school] this girl came up to me and we were talking about facial features, identifying how different we looked. She was like, “I have a nose that sticks out but her face is really flat.” I didn’t understand, I was [afraid] they were making fun of me [and started wondering], “Am I that different?”*

*I learned to accept [these differences] later, “Well, they are American and I’m Korean, so obviously we look different,” but I also questioned why... Why do I have to be different—we are in the same school, we do everything the same, but why do I have be different just because of the way I look? Because I was the minority, I only thought of, ‘Maybe if I do this I can be in their group... Maybe if I can run faster they will chose me in their team... The only way I could fit in [was] by showing what I could do instead of [them] judging me by my appearance.*

This tone of “minority” was not limited to primary or secondary education, but also colored Rose and Ko-eun’s experiences at public universities abroad. Rose

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\(^{10}\) See Chapter Three for a full description of how vignettes were constructed for data representation.
described her practicum experience (while she was studying early childhood education at a public university in New Zealand) as being informed by minority and ethnicity.

One of the [practicum supervisor] teachers [said that] since I’m Asian and that kid [is] Asian [we] probably speak the same language. I was like, “Sorry, I’m not Chinese.” [In the classroom] she would put me with Asian kids and have this little group for me.

Ko-eun’s Korean ethnicity meant she was a minority within the student body of her university in the UK, but she also described feeling that her classmates were “look[ing] down on me.” She attributed this to her “American accent—they don’t really like American accents” and to her degree program—because she studied British literature although she was neither British nor Caucasian. Yet even remarks which other students intended to be compliments (one student told her, “Your English is really good for an Asian”) reinforced her “minority” position by distinguishing her not only from her classmates but also from other international and/or other Korean students.

Overall, participants’ experiences abroad were informed by their position as minority relative to the host culture, and/or to students at international schools in the host culture. Family decisions about where to live, where and what type of school to attend, who to associate with at school—and therefore which language to gain fluency in—all informed participant experiences, and all of these experiences were mediated by their ethnicity. These choices not only informed participants’ experiences abroad, but also shaped their re-entry to the home culture by providing a context through which participants negotiated their ability to “fit in” and constructed their identity.
**Invisible Minority: “Fitting In” in Korea**

While conflict upon re-entering the home culture is one of the hallmarks of the TCK experience, the forthcoming section will pay special attention to the ways participants’ repatriation experiences were *distinct*. The experiences of participants who returned to Korea were distinct because of the cultural norm of “conformity” in Korean culture, and participants experienced this within the contexts of society and education; these feelings of dissonance were especially heightened if participants lacked fluency in Korean language.

Ethnicity mediated the experiences of participants who re-entered Korea not only in society but also within international and Korean school contexts. Within Korean school contexts, participants functioned as an *invisible minority*: despite sharing Korean ethnicity with their peers, their experience abroad—and especially their English fluency—prevented them from fully belonging in this context. In contrast, international schools in Korea offered the only contexts where participants were in the *majority*—sharing not only ethnicity but also lived experience abroad with the majority of those around them. Despite this *majority*, however, distinct categories persisted within the international school context. In both Korean and international school contexts, language fluency functioned as the currency with which participants negotiated their ability to “fit in” through these categories.

**The “common standard”: “You need to do this the Korean way.”** All participants\textsuperscript{11} described some type of dissonance or conflict upon returning to Korea, and

\textsuperscript{11}I separated Joseph’s data from this analysis since he never lived in Korea.
this is highly consistent with the TCK experience. Pollock and van Reken (2009) described this phenomenon as the “hidden immigrant” experience, where TCKs who return to their home culture “look alike” but “think different” relative to the home culture. Ko-eun illustrated this feeling of dissonance when she described how

[my brother and I] came to realize that even though we were Korean—because we were raised up in the States, even though my parents were Korean—we kind of had an American way of thinking: we just thought differently compared to how Korean kids thought… It was really difficult to make Korean friends—Koreans friends who had never grown up anywhere else but [Korea]. I just couldn’t communicate with them; I just thought differently, and we just couldn’t meet in the middle.

Although the above quote from Ko-eun would resonate with the experience of nearly any TCK returning to their home culture, this feeling of dissonance seems to be especially intense for returning Korean TCKs because of the cultural norm of “conformity” in Korean culture and the way that ethnicity mediates the experience of TCKs upon their return to Korea. That is, returning TCKs are expected to understand Korean language, share Korean values, and know and abide by cultural norms—and conformity is a cultural norm—because they are Korean.

Sophia described at length how her Korean ethnicity mediated her experience in Korea.

It’s mainly because I look Korean: [people] expect me to speak Korean and they expect me to speak it well—[even if] they speak English pretty
well, they’ll still want me to speak Korean; even if I try to speak to them in English, they’ll talk to me in Korean. They also expect me to know the Korean culture and abide by it: they don’t want to give me any leeway for, “This person is more American than she is Korean.” They don’t have a grasp on that kind of idea, they don’t understand it, they just think, “If you’re Korean, well then of course you’re Korean—you should act Korean.” The world is changing, globaliz[ing, but] there are still some Koreans that even if you explain [your experience] to them, they’re like, “But you’re Korean, so you need to do this the Korean way, and you’re going to live in Korea for the rest of [your] life so you need to get used to it.” (emphasis added)

Thus, upon her return to Korea, Sophia’s Korean ethnicity meant she faced expectations to conform, despite the fact that her foreign citizenship, international experience, and fluency English precluded her from doing so.

Sophia’s experience further illustrates the distinction between “fitting in” (altering or suppressing some aspect of oneself in order to fit in) and “belonging” (being accepted without the expectation of change) that emerged during data analysis. She contrasts the expectation to change herself with the idea that she could be embraced for who she is:

Koreans who grow up in Korea [have] certain expectations about Koreans.

**Korean culture is [about] “fitting in.”** Koreans want to change you to become more like them; [when I’m with Koreans] they expect me to
become Korean [rather than] expect[ing] me to be me for who I am.

(emphasis added)

For Sophia, accommodating the societal expectation to “fit in” came at the expense of being “me for who I am.” Madeleine’s experience upon return to Korea reflected a similar pressure to conform, which she described as a “common standard.”

When you come back to Korea [the] expectations of your parents become a societal expectation; I call it “common standard.” [The] expectations of your parents are the expectations of your grandparents, the expectations of your relatives, the expectations of your community—it becomes a societal expectation and it’s very universal and very [pause] “one.” There’s no variety. Success is defined in a very “Korean” way. You get that from your peers who are used to that from elementary school, where their parents [told them], “There are the top three universities and you’re going to get into one of them.” That’s it. There’s no variety. [Then] when you go to college [in Korea] and you realize your professors have the same expectations for you, your peers are going through the same process of living up [to] those expectations, it becomes a “mob mentality” that I have to follow if I live in the society. I felt [like I went] from two people putting that pressure on me to this whole country expecting the same thing from me. (emphasis added)

The expectation to “fit in” encompasses a way of life—established on a foundation of educational success as a mechanism for family honor (see Chapter Five)—
and the basis of these expectations is Korean ethnicity. Given the rigid structure of the Korean education system, this expectation to “fit in” is especially difficult for returning TCKs who enroll in Korean schools (Baek, 2000; Borden, 2000; B. R. Kim, 2009; J. H. J. Kim, 2004; G. S. Kim, 2008; S. W. Kim, 2008; Kwon, 2006; E. J. Lee, 2002; S. G. Lee, 2009; H. N. Ryu, 2011), particularly if they lack Korean language fluency (Baek, 2000; Borden, 2000; E. J. Kim, 2010). Participants who attended Korean schools echoed these trends in the literature, yet they also described their English fluency as informative to their experience in Korean schools.

In fact, the rigidity and homogeneity of the education system is such that some families are discouraged from enrolling their returning TCKs; Ko-eun described her TCK experience and English fluency as a barrier to her parents’ attempt to register her for Korean school.

The school rejected [my brother and I], in a way. Back then there weren’t a lot of Korean students who lived in the States and came back to Korea, so basically we would’ve been the only students able to talk in English. [The school told my parents], “I’m sorry, but it’s going to be really difficult for your kids to adjust with all the other students, [and] the teachers are going to have a difficult time with their students.” (After this interaction, Ko-eun’s parents enrolled her in an EMI international school.)

**Korean school: “If I wanted to survive, the best thing to do was to fit in.”**

Participant experiences in Korean school reflected the theme of “fitting in,” and yet the overwhelming tone was one of struggle—exerting effort—ultimately resulting in them
either changing themselves in order to fit in, or resisting this change and not being able to fit in. The struggle to fit in was both institutional and social, and language functioned as a currency with which participants purchased the ability to fit in.

However, English ability both facilitated and prevented participants from “fitting in” in Korean schools. Seven participants attended Korean school within the “home culture” domain after having lived abroad. Three of these (Charlie, Ko-eun, and Madeleine) enrolled in Korean school for brief periods of time, while four (Sophia, Seo-hyeon, Drew, and Maria) enrolled long-term; Seo-hyeon, Drew, and Maria graduated from Korean schools.

Seo-hyeon described her initial attempt to fit into Korean middle school, saying she “saw what other Korean students did in that situation and I tried to be one of them. [Eventually] I got used to ‘being Korean.’” Sophia remembered that in her first Korean school, “nobody wanted to be the outsider because then you didn’t have any friends; I quickly learned that if I wanted to survive in Korea, the best thing for me to do was to fit in” (emphasis added), where “fitting in” was not only a social dynamic among her classmates but a phenomenon that mirrored a Korean cultural norm.

“Monkey in a zoo.” Maria and Sophia, despite their experiences being separated by several decades and occurring in different regions of Korea, described feeling like a “monkey in a zoo” and “a zoo animal,” respectively, in their attempts to fit into Korean schools after living abroad. Because her mother visited her middle school to explain her experience abroad, Sophia remembered that “everybody knew that I was from the States.
When I went to the bathroom, girls that I didn’t know—[girls that] weren’t in my class—
[were saying], ‘She’s the one from the States.’ I felt like a zoo animal.”

Maria remembered,

I was THE only TCK in [the] whole of Pusan\textsuperscript{12} and that kind of made me
[a] ‘monkey in a zoo’… [On the first day I was] sitting in [my] designated
spot and turn[ed] to look towards [the] corridor—it [was] full of other
students trying to take a glimpse of me. What I couldn’t get used to was
always having that nagging feeling of “monkey in a zoo”—I was a novelty
for anyone. The “in” crowd wasn’t quite sure how to take me because
back then, the “in” ones were the smart ones. My English was too good
for them to challenge me, so I had to be accepted on that bas[is], but my
other subjects were rubbish so they just didn’t know what to do.

\textit{Language as currency}. Within the Korean school context, Korean language
fluency functioned as a “currency” with which participants could negotiate their ability to
“fit in.” Sophia reflected on her transition as she gained fluency in Korean:

When I was in elementary school and halfway through middle school, I
had an accent when I spoke Korean—I couldn’t differentiate \textit{ae} \([\textit{æ}]\) and
\textit{eh} \([\textit{ɛ}]\), but after completing sixth grade [in Korean elementary school],
my Korean was improving; I was comfortable enough to talk with kids
without having to say I was American.

\textsuperscript{12} A port city on the southeast coast of the Korean peninsula.
While Korean fluency can be understood as the currency which held value in Korean education contexts (i.e., with which participants could purchase the ability to “fit in” with peers). English fluency also functioned as currency, but as one which was simultaneously valued and devalued. Participants described English fluency in two extremes: English earned them positive attention and/or admiration from their peers, yet it permanently prevented them from belonging. This section discusses how participants described English as both empowering them and distancing them from their peers.

**English as a unique ability.** Charlie and Madeleine described their English ability as gaining them the attention of their peers during their short-term enrollment in Korean schools. Charlie remembered that on his first day, “Everybody swarms my desk, [asking], ‘Can you write in English?’ I [had] just learned how to write cursive so I showed them—everybody is amazed.” Madeleine’s classmates were “fascinated… that I could [speak] English better than the English teacher,” but she immediately followed this memory by lamenting her inability to fit in with peers in Korean school.

[Those students] really made me feel different, [but] I was trying to fit in—\(\text{but}\) I studied really hard just so that I wouldn’t be known as the stupid kid that doesn’t speak Korean, doesn’t know her Chinese characters. I was really nice; I think that was tied with my insecurity—\(\text{I was just trying to fit in every where I went.}\)

**English as “showing off.”** While English ability gave Madeleine and Charlie some positive attention from their peers at Korean school, the value of English seemed to diminish over time (or almost immediately for some participants). Seo-hyeon
remembered that she was “bullied” because her English was so good, and Sophia, Ko-eun, and Madeleine had peers who criticized them for “showing off” by speaking English. Sophia responded to this criticism by altering her English pronunciation. 

People started saying, “You’re showing off.” They’re like, “She’s from America, she thinks she’s all high and mighty and better than us. She has this English pronunciation and she’s trying to show off during English class.” [So] I started talking in broken English: In front of Koreans, I would speak the way they do—in the Korean way—instead of saying it in English. I started speaking English in a Korean way. (emphasis added)

*English makes you a “rock star.”* Just like Sophia, Drew also altered his speech in order to fit in with his Korean peers. However, his experience portrays English fluency as a double-edged sword which earned him praise but also fundamentally and irreversibly distanced him from his peers.

Word went around [that I had come from the States] and everyone in class was very lenient towards me. I was, one, their hero for being so good in English; two, special because I had different experiences from them; three—and this is the worst part—*I was never completely one of them.* I had many friends but they still considered me someone to look up to or envy. As a result, I suppressed my American side—I listened to Korean pop [and] tried to pronounce English words as close to colleagues as I can in the Korean pronunciation…

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13 This use of italics reflects Drew’s emphasis of this statement through tone of voice.
Once your peer group finds out that you’re fluent in English, you become an icon, a model, an idol to them. [This] is sometimes good because you’re sort of like a rock star, but at the same time, you’re very insecure and lonely because nobody actually believes that you are one of them. (boldface emphasis added)

Participants who attended Korean schools described their experiences as being mediated by their ethnicity in that they were expected to behave like other students because their appearance reflected the Korean majority. However, this “fitting in” was difficult for most participants due to the rigidity of the Korean education system—not only academically but also socially. Language emerged as a key indicator of “fitting in” in a Korean school context, where Korean fluency functioned as a currency with which participants could purchase their ability to fit in. (Other participants did not enroll in Korean school precisely because of their lack of Korean ability.) English fluency, however, emerged as initially valued in peer relationships but also devalued as participants attempted to fit in long-term. Overall, the narratives of participants who attended Korean schools demonstrated a subtle tone of conflict, struggle, and dissonance as they negotiated “fitting in” after living abroad.

In contrast to the tone of conflict that surrounded participants’ descriptions of Korean school, participants remembered international school contexts with a positive tone. Participants paid special attention to the fact that these were the only environments in which they experienced “majority,” mirroring their peers in both ethnicity and
international experience; yet even in this environment, social politics were mediated by ethnicity and negotiated through language.

**Majority: “Fitting In” in International Schools in Korea**

International schools in Korea provide a unique environment where returning TCKs are truly a *majority*—they share both Korean ethnicity and international experience with most of their peers. However, even in this context, categories emerged along the lines of ethnicity, and a power dynamic—enforced by language—emerged among these categories. Five participants (Charlie, Autumn, Yoon-jeong, Sophia, and Ko-eun) attended international school after returning to Korea (in the overlap of the “cultural globalization” and “home culture” domains).

Ko-eun remembered that other students in her class “all had similar [international] backgrounds, so I didn’t feel left out at all.” Charlie reflected the idea of being in the majority at his international school in Korea because his peers shared ethnicity and experience living abroad:

[On my first day] I introduce myself and [thought] it looked like a Korean school, but the teacher was white so it couldn’t have been a normal Korean school. In the days to come I realized most of them were pretty much like me… I thought my case was unusual, but I didn’t think my case was too special; I realized there were other kids who had more interesting life experiences [in countries besides Korea and the United States].
Autumn echoed this shared experience with her international school classmates, then contrasted this with her attempt to renew relationships with friends she had before moving to the United States.

[At the international school] we had more in common because [my classmates] traveled, went to different schools, grew up seeing different people. It made me feel more comfortable that they had similar experiences. [But when I tried to hang out with friends from before I’d moved to the States] we didn’t have anything in common… we hung out a bit [when I first came back] but that stopped after a year. I hung out more with friends from [international school]—they understood me… they welcomed me in, everyone knew everyone, [and] even though I was the new girl, they didn’t leave me alone to eat. I’m still best friends with them—we talk all the time!

Charlie and Sophia both discussed their envy for international school classmates who had bicultural\textsuperscript{14} homes—Sophia because “they had a justified reason to feel like they were in the middle ground” and Charlie because “their household itself was a mix of two cultures.” Charlie and Ko-eun both mentioned encountering bi-cultural students (who they described as “mixed” or “Amer-Asian,”\textsuperscript{15} respectively) for the first time at their international schools in Korea, and this new category (“biculural”) also emerged from

\textsuperscript{14} See Chapter One for a discussion of how TCK, bicultural, and other CCK phenomena align with one another.

\textsuperscript{15} Colloquially used to describe children of one “American” and one “Asian” parent, as opposed to “Asian-American” which can refer either to a TCK or immigrant of Asian heritage, usually one who holds citizenship in the host country.
Sophia and Yoon-jeong’s experiences (presented in the forthcoming vignette) at international schools in Korea. Sophia observed that some of the Korean girls at her international school were kind of snobby: they didn’t want to hang around with the kids [whose dads were U.S.] military and their mom[s] were Korean—essentially [the kids] that were half and half. I don’t know what was exactly the big deal between those two groups, but they just didn’t hang out with each other.

**Vignette: “I wasn’t the minority anymore”**

The following vignette\textsuperscript{16} illustrates how Yoon-jeong discovered and negotiated the intricate social structure of her international school in Korea, and how this experience was informed by ethnicity and language: categories and groups of students emerged within ethnically Korean students, and Yoon-jeong and other students navigated these categories using both English and Korean language.

*My first day [at international school in Korea] was a shocking experience because I wasn’t the minority anymore—I was like everyone else, [and] I didn’t know how to value myself anymore.*

*In the States, even though I don’t have the same appearance, [other students] will still accept me because I shared the same culture as them. But when I moved back to Korea and went to [international school] I didn’t know who to reach out to, because these people have the same appearance as I do, [but I wondered], “Do they share the same culture as I do?” I realized that even though they have the same ethnicity as me, they have completely different cultures.*

*The first rule in [our international school] is “we always speak English in the building.” I expected everybody to speak English, but when the teacher left the room, these girls [were] speaking Korean, but it was so*

\textsuperscript{16} See Chapter Three for a full description of how vignettes were constructed for data representation.
fast I could not understand [it]. I was like, “I [know] it is my language, but I don’t understand what they are saying!” You can imagine how lost I felt because I thought I knew my own language—I went to Korean [HL] school—but [this] was definitely not what I’ve been practicing. [So] for my first few weeks I reached out to the kids who were more comfortable speaking English, [one girl was] Jane. It was more comfortable speaking to her because [we could] use English and she wasn’t Korean. [Because of hanging out with Jane] I got a lot of dirty looks because [other Korean students thought], “[Yoon-jeong] is Korean but she doesn’t want to hang out with Koreans, what’s wrong with her?”

In a class full of Koreans, it was completely different [than what I was used to in the States]—there was a huge gap between the people who speak English and the people who chose not to speak English. That [distinction] was something that bothered me, but [I thought], “Well, if they don’t want to be friends with me, it is their choice.”

As the year went by, I started to understand [Korean] more. Through that I got close to everyone in my class, including the people who chose to speak Korean before. From there on I started to accept that even though I’m more towards the American side, I still have to accept my Korean side while I’m here at [international school]. [Our school] is so special because everyone is so close-knit, they know each other and they want to help each other out.

Yoon-jeong’s vignette illustrates the ways that categories of “Korean” students emerged within the bounded context of the international school in Korea—where Korean students who have lived abroad are in the majority—and the way that students used both Korean and English to include and exclude within these categories.

**Counter-Narrative: Majority**

Rose described her own identity construction as intricately entwined with her experience of fitting in through minority and majority. In the following vignette, Rose’s voice counters the dominant narrative of other participants’ experiences by illustrating her

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17 See Chapter Three for a full description of how vignettes were constructed for data representation.
evolution from feeling that she “fit in well” as a minority in the host culture, through resentment of her ethnicity, into identity conflict, and ultimately achieving a measure of resolution through her experience of majority upon her return to Korea.

This vignette should not suggest that Rose failed to feel some dissonance upon repatriating to Korea; rather, I constructed it because aspects of her experience countered the dominant narrative across all participants of “not fitting in” in either host or home cultures. Rose was the only participant who defined home in terms of ethnicity, and this vignette illustrates the unique interrelationship between minority, majority, fitting in, and identity in her experience.

Counter-Narrative Vignette: Majority as “home”

[In elementary school in New Zealand] I fit in well—I had a lot of friends. I was in the popular group. There were so many different cultures at school, [and] they were all my friends, so I got to experience a lot of cultures at a young age.

[I knew other Korean students from church and Saturday school, but] I didn’t really hang out with Koreans because my mindset was more Kiwi; I only hung out with Kiwi kids, Caucasian kids. I just hated being Asian and having black hair... I [was] teased because of my Korean name—that’s why I changed my name to Rose. My first crush[es] were Kiwis and so I would think, “He would never like me because I’m Asian.” I was so very self-conscious. [But still] I was happy—I had a nice group of friends in New Zealand and we were really close. They threw me a farewell party [when my family returned to Korea].

Before I moved to Korea, I really didn’t like being Asian, [but] that changed [after getting to Korea] because I was [in] the majority and I felt a sense of belonging. I thought, “Oh yeah... being an Asian is cool”—I had respect for being Korean. I [saw that] a lot of kids had Asian blood and there wasn’t any racism. That’s when it all changed [for me]: my time in [international school in Korea was] the most important time—the period that changed my identity, I would say.
[After returning to NZ for high school, I changed to an all-girls’ school where] the girls just [hung] out with their ethnicity—I started to hang out with Korean girls, [even though I was in New Zealand] and that was a change for me [from when I’d lived there before].

Home to me currently is where I feel accepted—Korea. I look, obviously, Korean, so I’m in the majority... that gives me stability, and [I feel like I] belong in the society—I’m not the odd one out—that makes me feel at home. Just going to the shops and being treated as an equal, not having to experience any disadvantages of being a minority.

This discussion of minority and majority represented the ways that participants described their Korean ethnicity mediating their lived experiences while living abroad and upon their return to Korea. Their experiences abroad (in the “host culture” domain of the conceptual framework) reflected minority, particularly if they enrolled in Western-curriculum international schools or public schools. Their experiences upon return to Korea (in the “home culture” domain) reflected majority based upon ethnicity, yet participants described feeling dissonance because they lacked shared experience with those in the home culture (which I termed invisible minority).

In contrast, participants who attended international schools in Korea upon their return (within the overlap of the “home culture” and “cultural globalization” domains of the conceptual framework) experienced majority on the basis of shared ethnicity and shared international experience with their peers. Despite their majority in this context, participants attending international schools in Korea described the emergence of categories along the lines of ethnicity, and participants used language as currency with which they negotiated their ability to fit in to these categories. This section closed with a presentation of Rose’s counter-narrative vignette (which was not reflective of the other
participants’ narratives), representing how shared ethnicity upon her return to Korea was formative to her identity construction.

**Interlude: Narrative Profile (Sophia)**

Sophia’s narrative profile serves as an interlude, contextualizing the themes of this chapter—ethnicity as *mediator*, language as *currency*, and *categories* of Korean as structures of fitting in. This profile highlights the ways that *language*, *education*, and *citizenship* informed both Sophia’s experience of identity conflict and her resolution of this conflict. This profile is a condensed re-telling of her story constructed directly from interview transcripts and told in her own words. (Punctuation and capitalization reflect my analysis, and bracketed text was added for clarity as part of the profile construction process; see Chapter Three for a full discussion of how profiles were selected and constructed.)

*I grew up thinking I was American because of the curriculum. Once my teachers found out I was born in the States, they just told me, “You’re American.” I would pledge allegiance, I would sing the Star-Spangled Banner and study about the state. I was no different from the other kids—I spoke English just fine, without an accent. After I finished fifth grade, my parents were like, “We’re moving to Korea.” I was like, “Great, I don’t want to.” I prayed, “God please let my parents change their mind.” They didn’t.*

*We came to Korea, [and] I went to a nearby [Korean] private school. Once we got to the cafeteria, [the other kids] figured out I couldn’t use chopsticks, [and] some mean kids took away my spoon. They were like, “You can’t eat anything unless you eat it with chopsticks.” I’m not a huge fan of the [cabbage] they use for kimchi, [which] made it hard for me because everybody here [in Korea] eats [that kind of cabbage] kimchi, and I don’t like it. I spent a whole semester eating everything on my plate, which was probably good for me—it was a quick way to learn how to use chopsticks, but it wasn’t the most pleasant way. The only thing that wasn’t hard was math because it involved numbers; for all the other classes, I*
struggled following along. I went from being in the top of my class [and even skipping a grade in the States] to the very bottom. Students started calling me stupid because I either couldn’t understand what they were saying or I couldn’t reply fast enough. When I was forming the answers in my head, that conversation was already over. I started getting really quiet. The teacher made me write a journal every day [and] he would fix all my mistakes; that really improved my Korean.

After that semester I went to a public school [for sixth grade]. My Korean was improving by then, [and] by the end of the year, I was comfortable enough to talk without having to say I was American. [Even so, until] halfway through middle school, I had an accent when I spoke Korean—I couldn’t differentiate between “ae” [אות] and “ei” [เอก]. Now I don’t have that problem; it’s convenient because I don’t have to hash out my whole life story. It felt uncomfortable when [other students] were like, “You must be so good at English... I wish I could be you,” because being in Korea, there was nothing good about being me because I’ve gone through such a rough time because I was different. I learned that if I wanted to survive in Korea, the best thing for me to do was fit in. When I found out that I was going to a different middle school, I decided I wasn’t going to tell anybody that I was from the States. But the first day of school my mom [told] my teacher that I was from the States and might have a hard time, and the teacher [told] my whole class. For the entire three years that I was there, everybody knew that I was from the States. I felt like a zoo animal.

During middle school I was really lonely because I had nobody to speak with in English; I gradually learned that the people that I’m going to get along with in Korea are the people that are fascinated by people from the States. When I first went to Korean schools, the kids wanted me to say things in English because they found my pronunciation fascinating. [But] the novelty wears off. Later, people started saying, “You’re showing off. [You’re] from America, [thinking you’re] high and mighty and better than us, trying to show off during English class.” I started talking in broken English. In front of Koreans I would speak English the way they do—in the Korean way—instead of saying it in [proper English pronunciation], to avoid [them thinking] I was trying to show off.

[At the end of middle school I took the high school entrance exam, and] I got into one of the top schools in Pyongtaek! I never enrolled because my parents [sent me] to [international school]. [International school] was this whole new culture shock. I was really quiet because in Korea kids don’t like other kids that stand out; it took me a while to switch gears into being this outgoing person again, being American again. [Still], I didn’t
feel as American as I did when I was in the States because I had spent
three and a half years trying to be Korean. [The other students at the
international school] did know some Korean, so if I forgot a word in
English, I could just say it in Korean and everybody knew what I was
talking about. I started to feel really at home [there], and I started making
more friends. At the same time, I had this envy for kids who had an
American parent and a Korean parent, because it felt like they had a
justified reason to feel like they were both American and Korean. [But]
for me, Americans look at me and they said, “You’re Korean.” Koreans
look at me and they told me that I was American. In Korea, nobody called
me Korean—they told me I was American [and] called me foreigner in
Korean. There was always this wall between me and the Korean kids
because there was a culture that they had that I didn’t understand, and
they didn’t understand me. To them, I was this weird kid because I would
do things that [were] different.

In high school I went through this phase where I felt like I didn’t fit
anywhere: I felt like, “I’m never going to be Korean and I’m never going
to be American, I’m just floating in the middle.” I wonder[ed] why
everybody had a place they belonged but I didn’t. My parents would not
allow me to get a [Korean citizen’s] ID card because they didn’t want me
to lose my American citizenship. I’m really glad that I didn’t, but at the
time it was kind of sad because that was just another indication that I
wasn’t ever going to be fully Korean—I had an Alien Registration Card
[instead]. It was disheartening that I was this “alien” and people were
like, “Oh, I envy you because you speak both languages fluently.” The
fact is that I will never be 100% fluent in either language.

When I was checking in through immigration at the airport [on my way to
university in the States], most of the people that had arrived were
Koreans, so they were standing in line at the foreigner’s end. I had a US
passport, so I was standing in the US citizens’ line. The [immigration
official] was looking through my passport and noticed that I hadn’t been
in the US for four or five years, and he asked me what I was doing there. I
was like, “I’m going to [university].” Right after he stamped my passport,
he told me, “Welcome home.” [It was nice because] when people look at
me, they usually see me for my Asian appearance. It was nice hearing,
“Welcome home.”

[When I started university] I was already used to taking classes in English
because I had been taking classes at [international school in Korea]; it
was harder to adjust outside of school. If I went to a store and somebody
treated me like I was Asian—if they approached me thinking that I would
have difficulty speaking English—then for some random reason I can’t understand myself, I would start talking in broken English. They would help me get to places, [but] I felt guilty because I had no reason to speak in broken English... I could speak English perfectly fine, and it would probably have been easier on them [if I had].

I shared a [suite] with six other girls, and one of those girls was Korean—what are the odds?! She had spent some time abroad during elementary school, went to middle and high school in Korea, and then came to [the States] for her last two years of high school. She categorized herself as Korean—when she talked to me, she spoke in Korean. On the same floor, there were two other Korean guys. One of them was similar to me—he had grown up in the US and went to an international school in Korea. The other guy went to elementary school in Korea and went to high school in Canada. At [another] freshmen dorm, there were so many Koreans on the same floor that they called that entire floor “Koreatown.” For the first month or so, everybody would gather there, just play games, go out to eat, stuff like that. It was funny because [in Korea], Koreans didn’t consider me as Korean (they considered me American), but here all the Koreans considered me Korean. They considered me one of them, they naturally accepted me, they expected me to hang out with them. I hung out with the Koreans [in Koreatown] for the first month or so. Once I got into my [digital arts major in my first year], I figured that I would make more American friends because we would have more things in common. [But in the major], the people were very different—other than art, we didn’t have anything in common. [So] I pretty much started hanging out with the [three] Koreans that were in my dorm. The three of them spent more time together because they were all taking science classes; I was taking classes alone. It was hard to make friends with Americans because they made their group of friends [through] people who came from the same high school... So I ended up just hanging out with the Koreans in my dorm and just making do.

Once I [switched] into the [3-D] animation program, I [was] in the lab making a short film seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to past midnight. I made some new friends there, working on that [short film] capstone. I found some people that had a similar personality as me, and they were all Americans; that was kind of what I had been craving. [Once] I got into that capstone, I didn’t think I was Korean. Because I was surrounded by Americans and I was always speaking English I just fit in as an American; I never questioned it, nobody questioned it.
[After graduation I worked my first job for a Korean company in the States, but I got laid off and had to return to Korea because I just couldn’t afford to stay in the States without a job. Once I got back to Korea, I missed the fact that people didn’t think that [my background] was strange. When I was in America, nobody questioned where I was from; I was just American. Once I got to Korea, I was different again—I had to fit in all over again. When I was in the US, people didn’t expect me to speak Korean, [but here]—I think it’s because I look Korean—they expect me to speak Korean and speak it well, they expect me to know Korean culture and abide by it. They don’t understand, “This person is more American than she is Korean”… They just think that if you’re Korean, of course you’re Korean; you should act Korean. Koreans who grow up in Korea [have] certain expectations about Koreans. People in America accept that everybody should be different, but Korean culture is more uniform, [more about] “fitting in”… it’s about “everybody” rather than “an individual.” [Even in Korean language], people refer to “our teacher,” not “my teacher”; “our family,” not “my family.” So Americans feel more comfortable around Americans because when they’re with Americans, they’re respected for who they are. But when they’re with Koreans, Koreans want to change you to become more like them; [when I’m with Koreans] it’s like they expect me to become Korean [rather than] expect[ing] me to be me for who I am. People like [that] make me want to go back to the States.

For the rest of my life, I don’t think I’ll ever feel completely at home; I’ll always be missing something. In the States it was nice to live near a Korean supermarket, [but] soy sauce alone is not going to fix all of my problems. There’s always going to be parts of each society that you’re going to miss when you’re without them. But I tend to lean more towards the United States and the reason is very specific and very important to me: I think it’s largely because of the education that I received in the United States… I can feel completely like myself when I’m in the United States. I hardly struggle with whether I’m American or Korean—I’m just myself and I’m happy with who I am. If I have a craving for Korean culture I can watch a Korean movie or hang out with a Korean friend, but when I’m in Korea it’s hard[er] to get American exposure. When I’m in America some people won’t agree with me, but they still respect you for those ideas and see that as part of who you are. In Korea they have a hard time with that; they have this need for you to become like them. There have been so many times where I’ve wished that I looked like a foreigner when I was in Korea, because then I [could] get away with speaking English, with not understanding Korean culture, and Koreans would accept that because they’d [say], “it’s because she’s a foreigner.” I am a foreigner! I am half
American. [In American elementary school] I was accepted as American and learned to consider myself as American. [But when] I came [to Korea, I] realized I’m never going to be 100% American and I’m never going to be 100% Korean; but, while looking like a Korean has never caused any difficulties for me being in the States, it has caused difficulties for me being in Korea.

The first time I went to Korean school I wanted to fit in so much. Now that I’m going to graduate school [in Korea], I don’t feel like I have to become like them—I feel a lot more stable and comfortable with my identity. [Before I left the States] I had applied for this government job, and during the interview, [I was asked] whether I felt I was American or Korean and whether I would be able to work for the US government without having my Korean identity intervene (this was before I had dual citizenship), so I told them, “I don’t have any problem being American, it’s just that some people don’t look at me as American.” [The interviewer] told me that since I have a US passport and grew up in the States, I’m as American as anybody else, and whoever tries to tell me that I’m not is making uneducated opinions about me. She said it with such confidence and authority that that was the end of the question. That was a huge moment for me because I realized that this wasn’t something that I had to struggle with for the rest of my life. I’m American, and nobody can say otherwise because I simply am, and that’s just a fact. It gave me that courage and permission that I hadn’t been able to give myself, [especially] because it was an American government employee.

I’ve come to appreciate what kind of meaning this [international experience] holds, because this is a global era, a global world, and you have to have a global mind. At first I didn’t understand how powerful this could be. While you’re still [in] school, the only time that a bilingual ability is [an advantage] is when you’re taking an English exam and you don’t have to study for it. At th[at] time, the cost is high because of the students around you, [so] you don’t see that [ability] as a big benefit. In college, it starts to neutralize. You start to think, “Oh, it doesn’t hurt anymore. It’s not a big deal—everybody’s different, from a different place.” Once you’re out of college, you can put it on your résumé and it starts to become this impressive thing. Adults have a completely different view than what kids did growing up—[adults] don’t have to envy you—you start to understand how powerful it is. [Even during college] I was always in this internal struggle about who I was and where I belong[ed]... then it kind of just came together: I knew that I’m never going to be fully Korean and I’m never going to be fully American, but I’m myself. I like myself and I like the way I am.
Categories of “Korean”: Structures of “Fitting In”

Even in America people would ask me if I’m Korean-American; I would say, “No, I’m Korean.” They would be surprised by my English ability. Even in America, [where] people value diversity, they still don’t know where to put me. (Alice)

[Although I’m Korean-American], it’s difficult for me to connect with a lot of Korean-Americans [because they have only lived in the U.S. or Korea]. If you’re only staying in the cultures that are like yours, then you don’t really expand your global mindset as if you lived somewhere else. (Joseph)

Participants spent a lot of time distinguishing themselves from other Koreans—both within Korea and abroad—because their life experiences as TCKs distinguished them from the “categories of ‘Korean’” they described. This discussion describes participant negotiations of “fitting in” to—or resisting affiliation with—these categories, especially during higher education. Participants consistently used their TCK experience and their English fluency to distinguish themselves from “Korean Koreans” (across all domains of the framework) and from “Korean Americans” (in the United States).

As participants discussed or referenced the categories that are described in this section, they positioned themselves—usually as distinct—relative to the categories they described. Participants paid special attention to ethnic Korean students enrolled in universities in the United States; in this context, the categories which emerged were not only informed by life experience, but also by citizenship. Therefore, this discussion reflects participants’ emphasis on the United States as a distinct host culture, and I include a vignette from Sophia, “Categories of Koreans in U.S. Higher Education,” to illustrate these categories.
The categories which emerged from the data overlap, but are not rigidly aligned with, the existing labels of *kyopo* [고포], “Korean-American,” and 1.5 and 2.0 Generations as outlined in Chapter One, but the subtle nuances of distinction and the tensions between categories were pervasive across participant narratives, and this is an original contribution of this research. As these categories emerged during the process of data analysis, I organized them according to *intent to return*, which Pollock and Van Reken (2009) suggested is not only a defining feature of the TCK experience, but also the single most important distinction between the TCK and other types of childhood cross-cultural experiences (e.g., immigrant or refugee experiences; see Chapter One for a full discussion of the distinctions of the TCK experience). This intent to return to the home culture is a part of the context in which an expatriate family makes decisions about education, language, community, and citizenship, and it fundamentally informs the lived experience of TCKs—that is, *it is their family’s intent to return to Korea which distinguished participants in this study from Korean immigrants in other countries.*

The domains of the conceptual framework (“home culture,” “cultural globalization,” and “host culture”; refer to Figure 4.1 for a representation of this framework) provide an organizational structure to discuss and make sense of the categories that emerged from the data. In this discussion, different types of higher education institutions align with various domains of the framework (refer back to Figure 4.3 for a full description of this alignment). I begin this discussion by presenting the

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18 Joseph was a notable exception to this, since his parents had lived in the United States as U.S. citizens for many years before moving to Shanghai when Joseph was a teenager.
categories of Koreans in higher education and presenting how participants aligned with these categories based on where they attended university.

As shown in Figure 6.1, Korean universities within Korea (Drew, Maria) exist within the “home culture” domain, while international programs within Korean universities (Rose, Seo-hyeon, Madeleine) exist within the overlap of the “home culture” and “cultural globalization” domains. An international campus of a non-Korean university (Yoon-jeong) exists within the “cultural globalization” domain only. Within the “host culture” domain, I distinguished between universities abroad (Rose, Ko-eun) and universities in the United States (Charlie, Autumn, Joseph, Alice, Jeong-sook, Sophia), paying special attention to the unique landscape of higher education in the United States because of the ethnic Korean immigrant community.¹⁹ (As such, I distinguished Korean TCKs by citizenship and lived experience.) Finally, participants studying abroad in Korea while enrolled in degree programs at institutions outside Korea (Ko-eun) enter the “home culture” domain for the period of their study abroad commitment, while the experiences of participants studying abroad outside Korea (Rose, Seo-hyeon, Madeleine, Maria) best fit within the overlap of the “cultural globalization” and “host culture” domains.²⁰

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¹⁹ This distinction emerged during data collection and analysis, and is included here as a reflection of participants’ distinctions.

²⁰ I drew this distinction for two reasons. First, regardless of citizenship, ethnic Korean students studying abroad in Korea are assumed to be part of the home culture (see the discussion of ethnicity earlier in this chapter); thus, this experience best fits within the “home culture” domain. Secondly, Korean students who study abroad outside Korea often lack sufficient time to be immersed into the host culture outside the university; therefore, this experience best fits within the overlap of “cultural globalization” and “host culture” domains.
Figure 6.1. Categories of Korean students organized by higher education enrollment.
Home Culture

In a Korean context, participants used their TCK experience to distinguish themselves from Korean students who had not been abroad, from “early study abroad” students, and from “Korean Koreans” who studied abroad as adults; they consistently used their English fluency as an indicator of this distinction.

Five participants (Rose [private school abroad, international school in Korea, international school abroad, university abroad], Seo-hyeon [international school abroad, Korean school in Korea], Madeleine [international school abroad], Drew [public school abroad, Korean school in Korea], and Maria [international school abroad, Korean school in Korea]) attended university in Korea as undergraduates; all of them distinguished themselves (“Korean TCKs”) from “Korean-Korean” students.21

Korean university in Korea. Drew (public school abroad, Korean school in Korea) and Maria (international school abroad, Korean school in Korea) attended universities fully within the home culture domain. Drew distinguished himself from his peers because of his experience as a TCK, saying,

I still had to suppress the American side of me because I went to [a university in Seoul and enrolled in the] physics major—most of the people around me were completely Korean. [As I had been in high school,22] I was once again placed in an environment where people either envied me or looked up to me.

21 Sophia (public school abroad, Korean school in Korea, international school in Korea) and Alice (international school abroad) were both enrolled in graduate programs at elite SKY-E universities in Korea at the time of data collection.

22 See Drew’s full experience in his “Narrative Profile,” presented in Chapter Five.
While Drew lacked affirmation of his international upbringing during university and his relationships with peers reflected distance, Maria described connecting with other TCKs through one of the dong-a-ri [동아리, student clubs] at her university—an English student newspaper. In this environment, TCKs distinguished themselves from “locals,” but English fluency—rather than life experience abroad—became the basis upon which students could fit in to this group.

I joined [the club and] found it to be almost half TCKs, half locals. Now [that] I think about it, it is one of the most snobbish groups of people that you can ever come across in the campus—we were all very full of ourselves. We all were pretty much bilingual… We separated ourselves into two groups: locals and expats. Locals, the ones who never went overseas, and expats, the ones who went overseas and came back. Even the locals were of very privileged homes, had the best educations… The expats are high-ranking banking officers or diplomatic corps’ children or [high-ranking military officers’ children]. All the kids were very much of extremely privileged backgrounds.

Maria’s university experience occurred during the 1980s, long before any of the other participants’, yet the categories emerging in the wake of international mobility were similar to those described by participants attending university in the 21st century. In Maria’s experience, “TCKs” were distinct from “Korean Koreans,” and the third category—“locals”—was qualified so as to only include those whose English fluency was sufficient to grant them access to the elite club. At other times in her interviews, Maria
described this group of students as a “family,” and these relationships (with other TCKs and other English speakers) meant that she did not attempt to fit in with students in the general university population.

**International program within a Korean university.** Within the international (English-medium instruction, EMI) programs of Korean universities, participants (Korean TCKs) distinguished themselves not only from “Korean Korean” students, but also from students who had studied abroad\(^{23}\) for extended periods of time during elementary or secondary school.\(^{24}\) In these contexts, participants described English fluency as a way to distinguish between categories, but also as a **common ground** which unified diverse groups of students.

Rose (private school abroad, international school in Korea, international school abroad, university abroad), Seo-hyeon (international school abroad, Korean school in Korea, Foreign Language High School [외교]), and Madeleine (international school abroad) attended university in Korea and enrolled in degree programs which best fit within the overlap of the “home culture” and “cultural globalization” domains of the conceptual framework.

**English divides.** Rose identified multiple groups within her international relations major and described their divisions based on language fluency:

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\(^{23}\) These students are often called “early study abroad” [조기 유학생], because they are sent abroad for an extended period of time (from months to several years), usually to an English-speaking country.

\(^{24}\) The fact that these students are often unaccompanied by their parents has led to the use of the term “study abroad orphan” in English. If these students are accompanied by their mother, the term “goose father” has emerged to describe the fathers who usually remain in Korea for work, perhaps visiting their family once or twice each year (described by Steven Borowiec in a December 2013 article in the *Christian Science Monitor*).
There were only a handful of kids that were kyopo [교 포25], that had actually lived abroad for more than 10 years. Most of them were just yoo-hak-saeng [유학생], study abroad students: they just studied abroad for maybe three or four years. There were a few students who were local Koreans. So we would divide into two groups: people that knew how to speak English and lived abroad for a while, [and people whose English wasn’t as good]. The Korean kids—the Korean-Koreans—found it really hard to keep up with us, because everything was in English. Eventually, they started to disappear one by one… A lot of kids took a break to study English, and then the others transferred [to a different program at the same university].

English unifies. In contrast to Rose’s description of how English divided the categories of students in her international program, Madeleine described English as a “common denominator.” In the context of an international college within an elite SKY-E university, English language ability was a source of commonality.

A third of the students [in our international college] are from Korean high schools—they’ve grown up in Korea and maybe they’ve travelled abroad but that’s the extent of their foreign experience. [Another] third have grown up almost all their lives abroad like me, that’s in another category.

Then you have Korean students who have gone to foreign language high

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25 See Chapter One for a definition of kyopo [교 포] and discussion of why I chose not to use the term for this research project.
schools. That means that their English is very good, but they’ve lived in Korea most of their lives, maybe spent a couple of years in America when they were young. All these people have good English as a common denominator.

Thus, in an international (EMI) program within a Korean university (described by Rose), English fluency served to divide between categories of students; yet in the international college within a SKY-E university (described by Madeleine), English fluency became a “common denominator” between categories.

**Study abroad in Korea.** During her undergraduate experience, Ko-eun (public university in the UK) spent one summer in Korea, where she enrolled in an EMI course in Korean literature at a SKY-E university (“home culture” domain). She reflected on this experience by distinguishing herself from the other Korean students in this course based upon her English ability.

[I wanted to take that class] because I didn’t really know a lot about my own [Korean] literature… but the students that took the course were Korean students who needed to make their English grade up because they didn’t do so well in their English literature [courses in the States]. I was really surprised at the amount of Korean students the program had, and a lot of them couldn’t speak English… Some of [them were] from really,
really good universities from the States [but] they couldn’t read in class. I was really annoyed by the Korean students who couldn’t speak English.

Although Ko-eun shared common experience with these students (i.e., Korean citizenship, and enrollment in a degree program at a university outside Korea), she used language to distinguish herself—a TCK who had no problems with English coursework—from the “Koreans students who couldn’t speak English.”

**Cultural Globalization**

Yoon-jeong (public school abroad, HL school, international school in Korea, international campus of university abroad) mirrored the theme of Korean TCKs as distinct by distinguishing herself from other Korean students studying at her institution. She enrolled in a degree program at an international campus of a non-Korean university (“cultural globalization” domain), and described the student body at her Hong Kong campus as a “melting pot.” Yet within this amalgam, the Korean [students] directly go to their own Korean background; they search for people that are similar to them. In the end, they only hang out with each other… they have their closed group, it’s hard to get in. Even though I know them and I talk to them, there’s a fine line between helping them out as a colleague and helping them out as a best friend.

**Host Culture (Outside the United States)**

Ko-eun’s experience at a public university in the UK (“host culture” domain) mirrored Yoon-jeong’s experience in Hong Kong (“cultural globalization” domain) in that they distinguished—and distanced—themselves from “Korean Korean” students who
were studying at their universities. Ko-eun identified some dissonance between herself (a “Korean TCK”) and these students, and struggled to categorize herself with them.

When I meet other Korean students who are studying abroad, a lot of them always stick to themselves and that just frustrates me a lot. It’s really good to have Korean friends because when you miss home you can just hang out with them, talk to them in Korean and [eat] Korean food… but for them it’s literally every single day only Korean students. They only talk in Korean. I get lost where I have to identify myself because I am completely Korean but at times like that I just don’t feel Korean—I feel kind of left out.

While Ko-eun used her English ability to distinguish herself from “Korean Korean” students returning to Korea for short-term study (see “Study abroad in Korea,” above), in the UK, she references her discomfort with these students “only talk[ing] in Korean,” saying “at times like that I just don’t feel Korean.” This attention to language as an indicator of distinctions between categories reflects Ko-eun’s sense of dissonance as she attempts to negotiate her own identity through these categories.

Participants consistently resisted alignment with “Korean Korean” students who were studying outside Korea (across the domains of “cultural globalization” and “host culture,” but also in Ko-eun’s experience studying abroad for a summer at a SKY-E university in Seoul). However, institutions hosting these students cannot immediately

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27 This sense of dissonance was also previously presented as Ko-eun experienced sunbae/hoobae relationships with these Korean students (see discussion of “Hierarchy in relationships” in Chapter Five).
distinguish between Korean TCKs and “Korean Korean” students studying abroad, especially if the TCK holds Korean citizenship.

**Host Culture: The United States**

In the United States, categories were constructed not only to distinguish between different life experiences (i.e., whether the subject was a TCK or CCK) and language fluency, but also by citizenship. This section will introduce the categories which emerged from the data to describe Korean students in the United States, examine how participants positioned themselves within these categories, and use participant experiences to illustrate the ways in which citizenship and the presence of a Korean subculture (composed of expatriate Koreans and ethnic Korean immigrants of many generations) informs the construction of these categories in the United States.

In this setting, categories included “Korean-Korean” students who enroll as international students, “Korean TCKs” holding Korean citizenship (Autumn, Alice, Jeong-sook), “Korean TCKs”/“Korean-Americans” holding dual or U.S. citizenship (Charlie, Sophia), or “Korean-American immigrant” of any generation (Joseph). Six

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28 Whether these distinctions based on life experience and citizenship also apply to other host cultures with ethnic Korean minority populations who hold citizenship in the host country (e.g., China, Canada, Australia) is an area for future research.

29 See Chapter One for a full discussion of the category distinctions by generation within Korean immigrants populations (e.g., 1.0, 1.5, and 2.0 Generations).

30 Charlie described himself both as “Korean American” and as a “TCK” at different times during his interview series.

31 At the time of her university enrollment, Sophia held only U.S. citizenship; she received dual citizenship after completing her undergraduate degree.

32 See Chapter One for a full discussion of how 1.0, 1.5, and 2.0 Generation are defined and applied to Korean-American immigrant populations.

33 It is possible that ethnic Korean students enrolled in universities in the United States might also have immigrated to, and therefore hold citizenship in, other countries; none of the participants of this study fell into this category.
participants (Charlie, Autumn, Joseph, Alice, Jeong-sook, and Sophia) enrolled in undergraduate degree programs in the United States (“host culture” domain); two participants (Rose and Madeleine) studied abroad in the United States during their undergraduate experience (in the overlap of the “cultural globalization” and “host culture” domains).

**Vignette: Categories of Koreans in U.S. Higher Education**

The following vignette, constructed in Sophia’s voice and describing her experience navigating the Korean population at her university, illustrates the categories (presented in boldface type) which emerged within the host culture of the United States.

*Because there were so many Koreans [at my university] I was able to observe the different types of Koreans there. There were Koreans that were “fresh off the boat,” FOBs,*

I guess they call it. You could tell because they would be wearing Korean clothes, and you could also tell mainly by their accent [when they spoke English]. *The “Korean-Koreans” you can know right away because they want to speak in Korean. Once they know you’re Korean, they won’t speak to you in English—they want to talk in Korean: they’ll reply in Korean, even if you say something in English. They automatically expect you to want to go back to Korea and miss Korea: kimchi, Korean food, fast internet, the bus systems… Then there were Koreans that had grown up in the States all their life. Koreans that grew up in America, half of them didn’t understand Korean, and they had no intention of speaking with me in Korean. Because they grew up in America, considering themselves as American, they don’t want [a] “Korean” reputation put on themselves.*

*Hanging out with a Korean-Korean and hanging out with a Korean-American is different because you think [the Korean-American is] Korean, but they’re not Korean. They don’t act Korean, and they think themselves*

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34 See Chapter Three for a full description of how vignettes were constructed for data representation.

35 A colloquial term for Koreans who are not yet accustomed to the United States. This can be used for both Koreans who intend to return to Korea and immigrants who have recently left Korea.

36 From Sophia’s description, it seems this category is best aligned with “ethnic Korean immigrants” of the 2.0 or subsequent generation, or 1.5 Generation immigrants more comfortable speaking English.
American, when clearly they look Korean... and it was interesting because [the Korean-Korean and Korean-American groups] didn’t seem to mix very often. At [my university], there were two student groups that were separate for each group. There was KSA, Korean Students of America—it was mainly Koreans that grew up in the States. Then there was KSU—those were the Koreans that mainly spoke Korean; they grew up in Korea. I don’t think [the two groups] hung out together unless they were in the same dorm and got to know each other that way.

Although these categories can be further divided (see Chapter One for how these categories overlap or align with other vocabulary), language is a consistent indicator to distinguish between each.

**Study abroad.** Two participants studied abroad in the United States, and both distinguished themselves from “Korean Korean” students studying abroad. Madeleine also distinguished herself from Korean-American students not based upon language, but on cultural context and life experience.

Rose (private school abroad, international school in Korea, international school abroad, university abroad, international program within Korean university) distinguished herself from the other study-abroad students based on language ability, saying that she spent time with “Koreans that were doing an English course [in the States who] weren’t really good [at] English—they were just total Koreans—but it was fun.”

In contrast, Madeleine (international school abroad, international program within Korean university) expected to align with students in the United States based on her preference for speaking English, but found instead that

I didn’t fit in with the FOBs, I didn’t fit in with the American students. I was surprised—I thought that because language is not a barrier I would fit
in. [But] I didn’t fit in with the American students. I didn’t fit in with the Korean-Americans.

Madeleine expected to fit in in the United States in a way that she did not fit in at her international college within a SKY-E university Korea (although she was conversational in Korean, she “felt limited in the language”). Her limited Korean ability informed her expectation that she would “fit in” in the United States based on her English ability. However, she found that even though the country had changed [from Korea to the United States] and [English] was a language that I feel totally comfortable expressing myself [in], I still came across the same problem [of fitting in that I had in Korea].

Madeleine concluded that, while language fluency was important, she was ultimately unable to fit in because she lacked the cultural context that Korean-American and other U.S. students shared.37

**Citizenship.** Participant experiences as TCKs often mirrored each other despite distinctions in citizenship, and these experiences trouble the practice of rigid categorization of individuals based on their nationality.

**Non-U.S. Citizenship.** Three participants (Autumn, Jeong-sook, and Alice) enrolled in degree programs in universities in the United States while holding Korean

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37 Madeleine had never lived in the United States prior to her study abroad experience, and while many of her peers in high school (a Western curriculum international boarding school in Germany) were U.S. citizens, they were also TCKs.
passports, and Autumn and Alice described experiences where their English fluency conflicted with others’ expectations based on their foreign citizenship. Autumn’s enrollment experience troubled rigid distinctions of categories according to citizenship.

I had to go to [an] international meeting—because I wasn’t a US citizen—they made me take [an] ESL test…. and I passed! [laughter] I didn’t feel out of place [in the States, so] it was really weird being in that international meeting: people next to me were speaking their languages, and I felt like I didn’t belong. Even in the [ESL] interview, the lady said that my English was great, and that it was weird interviewing me [laughter].

While Autumn was classified as an international student based on her citizenship, her language ability (developed over three years studying at a private school in the United States and six years at an international school in Korea) far exceeded the requirements for international students.

Alice’s experiences mirror Autumn’s (above) in troubling the usefulness of rigid categorization of students based on citizenship. Alice described others’ confusion when they attempted to categorize her—their expectations of her based upon her Korean citizenship and ethnicity conflicted with her fluency in English.

People would be asking me if I’m Korean-American. I would say, “No, I’m Korean.”… Some people would be asking me if I was straight from Korea, if I came straight from Korea. They would be surprised by my

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38 Three participants held U.S. citizenship and ten held Korean citizenship (see Table 4.1 for a full presentation of participant demographics).
English ability. Even in America [where] people value diversity they still
don’t know where to put me.

**U.S. Citizenship.** In contrast, three participants held U.S. citizenship by birth
(Charlie [public school abroad, international school in Korea], Joseph [international
school abroad], and Sophia [public school abroad, Korean school in Korea, international
school in Korea]). While Charlie, Joseph, and Sophia all referred to themselves as
“Korean-American” and “TCK” at different times, Sophia and Joseph also made efforts
to distinguish themselves from these categories.

Sophia opened her first interview by distinguishing herself from other Korean
TCKs because she was born in the United States.

My experience might be a little different from most of the [Korean TCKs]
that I’ve come across, because… I was born in the United States, and most
[other Korean TCKs who’ve lived in the States] were born in Korea and
went… to America at a certain age… I grew up thinking I was American.

Yet, she also distinguished herself from Korean-American students (although she spent
time with them) on the basis of her TCK experience—that is, because her family returned
to Korea. Ultimately, Sophia distinguished herself from each of the categories which
emerged in the United States context and from “Korean Koreans” in Korea.

Joseph’s experience is distinct from Charlie’s and Sophia’s in that Joseph’s family
did not intend to return to his parents’ home culture of Korea (his family aligned with the

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39 Charlie and Sophia were born to Korean parents who were studying in the United States. Joseph’s father
immigrated to the United States during childhood, and his mother attended graduate school in the United
States; Joseph never lived in Korea. Sophia received dual citizenship (Republic of Korea and United
States) after completing her undergraduate degree.
category of “Korean American”). However, Joseph also distinguished himself from other Korean-Americans because of his experience in China, and from other Korean TCKs in China because he was Korean-American. This distinction is the focus of his counter-narrative profile presented immediately following this section.

This discussion of categories of Korean students in higher education emerged from participants’ descriptions of these categories and the way they positioned themselves within—or resisted—them. I used the conceptual framework as a platform to present these categories, and the designations were informed by lived experience (e.g., participants distinguished themselves from “Korean Koreans”) and, in the United States, by citizenship and the presence of a Korean immigrant community (e.g., participants distinguished themselves from “Korean-Americans”). Language fluency emerged as an indicator of “fitting in”—or not—to a given category, and participant experiences as TCKs often mirrored each other despite distinctions in citizenship. These data suggest that Korean TCKs’ experiences are more aligned with one another’s than they are with “Korean-Koreans’” experiences—and Korean TCK experiences may also be more aligned with each other than they are with Korean-American experiences—despite differences in citizenship. Joseph’s forthcoming counter-narrative profile represents this conflict between “Korean-American,” “Korean-Korean,” and “Korean TCK.”

Interlude: Counter-Narrative Profile (Joseph)

Joseph’s counter-narrative profile concludes this chapter by highlighting the ways that resistance to categorization as Korean or Korean-American and international education informed his experience of identity conflict, and the ways that relationships...
with family and faith informed his resolution of this conflict. This profile is presented as a counter-narrative because Joseph’s lived experience diverged from that of other participants in that he was raised in a Korean-American family, never lived in Korea, and considered the United States to be his home culture (although Korea was the original home culture of his parents). This profile is a condensed re-telling of Joseph’s story constructed directly from interview transcripts and told in his own words. (Punctuation reflects my own analysis and bracketed words are my own, added for clarity; see Chapter Three for a full discussion of how profiles were selected and constructed.)

[I grew up in] the bubble of Southern California. [After] my first year of middle school my dad got an offer to [move to] Shanghai [for his job]. I finished seventh grade with the notion that I’d be back for eighth grade, but it was towards the end [of seventh grade] when my dad just walked inside my room and told me that wasn’t going to happen. When I heard, I remember just crying. I didn’t know what to expect at all, but after one night of feeling really sad and confused, I accepted it and I was okay. Everything just sped by, and the next thing I knew, I was on a plane.

When we first arrived [in Shanghai, it] definitely wasn’t what I expected. I had this image of China in the Imperial Age or something, [but it was] very industrial, very urban, and very gray. I think people could tell that we were foreigners before they even heard us speaking English, based on the way we dress[ed] and carried ourselves. [I felt] very privileged to be an American and felt real poverty for the first time—the clash of urban with shoddy jobs and homes, and all kinds of people from all kinds of economic backgrounds. Another aspect of our cultural immersion [was that] we had to learn how to get around pretty quickly. At that time, I embraced [that sense of privilege]; the US dollar had so much power. The way I perceive money and its value changed; I was more willing to spend because I knew that it wasn’t as much as it looked. The first place we moved was a[n] expat neighborhood and at some point later on we had a chauffeur as well, for my mom’s health, but [that] was also a very clear sign of expat wealth.

I think the schools were the most defining parts of me living in Shanghai, besides church. I started out at a British international school; I went there for three years and then transferred to an American international school.
My first year [at the British international school was] eighth grade—as a teenager it’s a confusing time—and not only that, but that was my first year in China. I was one of the only Americans in my grade. We [had] a lot of Europeans and Asians from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and a lot from Korea as well. Also, [I had to adjust to] the terminology, like corridor instead of hallway, rubbish bin instead of trash can, [and] the British spelling.

I was already seeing the effect of globalization. A lot of [my peers] were familiar with American media, movies, musicians, pop culture, and a lot of them spoke very good English, so even though we’re all from [different] countries and backgrounds, we were still able to talk about some of these similar things. Of course, all of them being expats we’re all able to form our own community and mingle pretty quickly. There were groups that formed around activities or hobbies, as well as cultural groups: Koreans hanging out with Koreans, and a lot of Cantonese and Taiwanese hanging out with one another. Being more Americanized and embracing that side of me, I hang out with a lot of the Europeans or the Westernized Asians. I tried to be as friendly as possible with everybody, but [the Korean students] really just hung out with themselves and I hang out with my group. They spoke a lot of Korean during their free time, while my group speaks a lot of English. A lot of them came from Korea so culturally, they are more Korean—more Korean-Korean. That showed in the hairstyle, the dress, and some of them went to academy.⁴⁰

I actually rejected my Korean side, just embraced the Western and American side more, just found pride in that. By being among people from different nations and cultures, I was able to reflect on my own upbringing, my citizenship, and my cultural background. I suddenly have that pride in being American. I preferred being identified as an American even though a lot of people there actually identified me foremost as a Korean just based on my appearance. The funny thing is, it was almost better for me to be called [Korean] than American at the time, because a lot of my friends mocked George W. Bush and American foreign policy. I realized for the first time being there, the American image [and] the impressions my peers had were not good.

[When] I finished 10th grade I was pretty sure that I was going to come back to the US, and [after] talking about that with my parents I realized that it would be advantageous to go to an American school. After transferring to the American school [it was] more American and no

⁴⁰ Hagwon (학원) (see Chapter Five’s discussion of “shadow education” for more information) is often called “academy” in English.
uniforms. The groups were more based around the different groups of friends who did things [together], like “going out and clubbing.” When I ended up not joining my friends [in clubbing], I just naturally distance[d] myself from them. There were still a lot of diversities; less Europeans but a lot more Asians, a lot of Taiwanese and Koreans; there’s a huge Korean group there. They’re actually overall pretty popular, too: we had a Korean who was the student body president and some of the best athletes and best students were the Koreans from Korea. When I [had] started at the British school, I saw this as an opportunity to break [my] former image as this quiet, shy, nerdy, Asian kid. I craved social acceptance and [wanted] to be cool. I immediately asserted myself, tried to be outgoing, tried to dress differently. It backfired on me—[I was] just trying too hard and [ended up] being a jerk in the process. [So] when I transferred to the American school I thought, “I’m not going to do this again.” [Instead], I was low-key; because of that, I had a difficult time making friends.

Over time I was able to connect with a small group. A lot of them were Koreans and Asians (I ended up straying away from hanging out with the European/Western crowd). They were very internationalized Koreans which I liked about them. Not only do they speak good English, [so] I was able to communicate with them, but culturally they were more open. They felt that they occupied a kind of limbo as well: they would go back to Korea to visit family and friends during the summer, and they felt like they didn’t really belong anymore. They weren’t really Korean-Korean, but obviously they weren’t Chinese. They weren’t American either, so they felt like they were their own group. I identified with that as well.

[My family attended] the only international church in the city for foreign passport holders. It was in a very expat-oriented neighborhood [and was] a very diverse church: Americans, Europeans, Africans, Latinos, Asians... you name it, they’re there. That’s something that I miss, that diversity. I did struggle at first to like church or accept it, even though I went every week with my family. I was under the impression that there was a Christian clique—I felt distanced. [But] by the end of [our] time in Shanghai, my family and I had connected with people at church and made some lifelong friendships. My youth leader [was especially] welcoming to me [and] a pretty important person during my time there. He acted as a mentor, especially when my mom got sick and [she and my dad] had to return to the States [for her health]. During those times I was there with my siblings—I just didn’t have anyone to share my concerns with, [but my youth leader] was there for me. I think it was helpful that he was American as well—I was able to identify with him culturally.
When you have this community of people from different places who are only staying in Shanghai for a few years because of their jobs—when you have this group of people that are wanderers on this journey, traveling through this place that is life on earth—to come together as a community and share those experiences, it’s really powerful. [I began to question], “What’s the cause of cultural and racial boundaries?” That was [significant] in shaping my faith as something that could be understood in every culture and apply to everyone. [Also I realized] that culture or race wasn’t the end in itself, but [that] faith could be [a] great unifier. After coming back [to the States], I really missed that.

By traveling around China and Korea (where my mom’s family lives) I came to appreciate the diversity [of] different cultures, as well [as] the similarities and things that unite all of us. But at the same time I began to question, “Who am I? What is culture?” I like interacting and seeing different cultures and different people, but I didn’t want to bind myself with the definition [of culture]. I wanted to be this fluid-like amorphous person—but then that led to an identity crisis because I’m in a self-imposed limbo.

I ended up at [a private university in the northeast]. My main social circle was a Christian fellowship, the Asian-American Christian Fellowship [AACF], with all kinds of Asians: Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos. AACF ground[ed] me and provided friendship and support through mentors. [I’m grateful for their influence, but I also] felt some cultural distance to [the point] where I was really questioning what happened: I [had been] so comfortable hanging out with the Westerners and Europeans in my first years of high school, and really all through elementary and middle school, [but] at some point it just became more difficult for me. I guess because I’ve been away from the U.S. so long, I missed out on a lot of the inside cultural stuff, the American stuff.

AACF raised a big inner cultural conflict [that] reached its peak [at college] even though I still have it here and there. I really questioned who I was and my identity. That went beyond what I was interested in: I questioned everything from God to philosophy to who I was. Because I have to know before I act, there were times where I didn’t know how to express myself, so I just kind of kept quiet because I wasn’t sure if I should be expressing myself more like the American or the Western[er] or the Asian. I felt really confused in expressing myself [and] who I was spending time with. I questioned AACF, “Why do we have this Christian fellowship with only Asians?” I even checked out [another Christian student group] because [it was] more ethnically diverse—with that diversity, less Asians and more American and Western culturally.
In my second semester freshman year, I struggled with depression and was socially isolated. It helped, I think, expressing these things with people that knew me well, like my parents—people [who] had seen me grow and known me for a long time—they could give me the most accurate feedback.

Even though I had my friends and peers, we all come from such different backgrounds [that] I still felt isolated: people couldn’t really understand some of these cultural or identity struggles. I struggled as a Korean-American because there’s part of me that’s very American—Western—but then I’ve also had this Asian exposure and cultural upbringing... I [felt] kind of distant from a lot of the Korean-Americans or Asian-Americans that had grown up [in the States]. It’s difficult for me to connect with a lot of [Korean-American] people in terms of experiences, because a lot of Korean-Americans—if they’ve traveled abroad, they’ve gone to Korea, if they’ve lived abroad, they’ve lived in Korea. If you’re only staying in the cultures that are like yours, then you don’t really expand your global mindset as if you lived somewhere else. [Also] my Korean heritage is different because my dad’s side is so Americanized, my mom’s side is so Korean—all of them are in South Korea, for the most part—my parents are very open-minded. There’s a more prominent mix of Korean and American culture in my family [compared to] other Korean-American[s] where the Korean is more dominant and Korea is the homeland even though they’re American citizens. I don’t think I ever thought like that.

That [identity struggle] was a big reason why I ended up transferring schools—to be at home with family, express to someone [what I was struggling with], and come to terms with [the fact] that I have to live without fully understanding and knowing everything. God helped me through that. Whoever I am, I know that God is the one who gives identity, and identity fluctuates over time and experiences, [but] core identity is in Christ.

When I [transferred to a public university in the Mid-Atlantic], I needed to expand socially beyond my family, so I started at my church—church was the genesis for my social life [after I transferred, and it was also where I] publicly confirmed my faith, connected with a lot of people, formed some of my closest friendships, and grew tremendously as a person; [I’m still involved and] actively serving today. [On campus.] I was commuting [to classes], and even at school I would meet up for lunch with people from church because those were the only people I really knew. And because I’ve been living abroad, I didn’t have my license, so that limited how much time I could spend on campus.
I was somewhat involved with another Asian-American focused Christian ministry on campus, but I never got plugged in [because] I had some of the same questions: I saw all these Asians, [but] I felt like this should be more diverse. I had to do some thinking [because] if I really didn’t care about culture then I [should have been able to] spend time with these people even if they are all Asian-Americans. I [still] think about that—still question and challenge the ethnic/cultural situation. My feeling of distance has diminished over time to the point where I regularly spend time with them, [but even so,] it has been difficult to move beyond the community that I spend time with—mostly Korean-American community and church community—just because that’s where I started.

I’ve had plenty of non-Asian-American [friends] across the board through my studies. First [majoring in] history, now film studies—majors that a lot of Korean-Americans, Asian-Americans don’t pursue, to the point where I’m the only Asian-American in my class[es]—I feel privileged: just going to class where I’m the only Asian-American, I can break those cultural racial stereotypes or norms.

I’m certainly not Korean-Korean, but neither do I really feel Korean-American. I feel very in flux, my identity very fluid. I feel more like a global citizen—I don’t feel bound to one place. Still at times [I feel] a distance because I lived those teenage years abroad; it doesn’t even have to do with being Korean-American, just being American. That’s been difficult, feeling different because of [those] experiences.

It’s difficult for me to connect with a lot of [Korean-Americans] in terms of experiences [because of] living abroad in a place that’s not Korea. [Living in China and attending international schools,] I spent time with Europeans and Asians, [and] international Koreans who didn’t identify themselves as Korean-Koreans. Hanging out with a different crowd made me look through the eyes of my friends who are not Americans and not Korean-Americans... I reflected on myself as Korean-American, or reflected on America and on Korea. I began to look at myself from an outsider or foreign perspective. That melded with who I am now, whether I’m looking at myself or other people, which leaves feelings of distance: not feeling like I fit in with people here [or] elsewhere.

If I felt I would be more satisfied settling on my American identity, or maybe on my Korean identity, seeing the world [made me] realize those identities [and cultures] are so in flux. I realized that at the heart of that [conflict] was the nature of truth, because then culture became relative or identity became relative. [Even if I settled on only one identity] I would always be in flux and unstable and unsure of myself, “acting” my way
through life. The reassurance is that I have the Bible as Truth, \[my\] identity in Christ. I have some security, some Truth: not everything is in flux and thus relative and confusing, \[and the churches and campus ministries I’ve been part of\] showed a lot of love to me \[and grounded me\]. Even now I still doubt, \[but\] I have that Truth in Christ and the gospel, of God being the Creator and loving the world, and Jesus Christ and the work on the cross. I could always turn to that and mirror anything I’m thinking with those Truths.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter represented the ways that participants “fit in”—or resisted “fitting in”—at home and abroad. Participants described ethnicity *mediating* their life experiences and identified *categories* within Korean populations, and they described language fluency as a *currency* with which they negotiated the ability to fit in.

The first thematic section of this chapter described the ways that participants’ Korean ethnicity mediated their experiences prior to higher education. Participants experienced *minority* while living abroad, then identified as part of the *majority*—based on ethnicity—upon their return to Korea. However, their experience abroad meant that they lacked shared experience with most people in Korea, and they functioned as an *invisible minority*. Participants who attended international schools after returning to Korea shared both ethnicity and lived experience abroad with the *majority* of their peers; however, in this context, categories emerged based upon ethnicity, and participants negotiated these categories through language.

Sophia’s first-person narrative profile—placed between the discussion of “ethnicity” and “categories”—contextualized the mediating role of ethnicity, the use of

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41 Choices of punctuation and capitalization in vignettes and profiles reflect my own analysis; however, in this concluding paragraph of Joseph’s profile, the capitalization of “Truth” reflects a mutual decision between Joseph and myself made during the process of member checking.
language as a currency with which to negotiate “fitting in,” and introduced categories of Korean students that emerged in the context of higher education.

The second thematic section of this chapter presented the categories of ethnic Korean students as “structures of ‘fitting in.’” These categories were constructed on the basis of life experiences, and participants consistently described *language* as an indicator of how to categorize individuals (and themselves). This section represented the ways participants described Korean students within the context of higher education.

Participants paid special attention to the United States as a unique host culture because of citizenship policies (i.e., birthright citizenship) and the co-existence of Korean expatriates alongside multiple generations of ethnic Korean immigrants.

This chapter closed with a counter-narrative profile from Joseph, who was the only participant from a Korean-American family (with no intent to return to Korea). Joseph discussed his own identity construction as it was informed by—and how he ultimately resisted—the categories of “Korean,” “TCK,” and “Korean-American.”
CHAPTER 7

IDENTITY AS DISSONANCE, PROCESS, AND RESOLUTION

Physically I am Korean, but then on the inside I am ... [pause] I’m not Western—I’m not American—but then I’m not totally Korean either, so I can’t really say what I am... I can’t put a definition to it. (Jeong-sook)

My experiences become part of who I am [and] influence how I view myself. (Alice)

This chapter addresses the final supporting research question, “How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ identity construction distinct because of Korean home culture?” During data analysis, participant references to “who I am” and “identity” were coded as “identity,” but the ideas of “belonging” (being accepted for who I am without being expected to change) and “home” also emerged within this theme. That these data were not limited to participants’ experience of higher education, but rather spanned their formative years and—for older participants—their professional experiences following graduation reflects the ongoing nature of identity construction, especially as contexts changed through participants’ lived experience.

Identity Construction

Three sub-themes emerged within the overall theme of identity: dissonance, process, and resolution. I understood these three sub-themes not as “stages” but rather as “positions” that participants held—sometimes simultaneously—during their ongoing journey of identity construction. The structure of “stages” carries a value judgment that
later stages are “better” than earlier stages, and I resisted the idea that dissonance or process be understood as somehow inferior to resolution. (Some participants reflected resolution alongside dissonance or process.) Furthermore, the conception of these sub-themes as “positions” instead of “stages” frames identity construction as an ongoing process and identity as a fluid construct, allowing for re-construction upon a change in context or in order to assimilate new experiences. Finally, agency is central to the process of identity construction; that is, participants chose what aspects of their life experiences they would assimilate into their sense of who they were, and they also chose in what contexts those aspects of their identity would be expressed.¹

**Poetry in Data Representation**

The brevity of this section reflects the fact that the data captured by this theme did not suggest that Korean TCK identity construction is at all distinct from identity construction, whether in the general TCK population or any individual’s experience; rather, the distinction for Korean TCKs is the context in which they construct their identity. Thus, rather than conclude this chapter by representing data which were coded in the identity theme, I constructed a poem using these data (presented below).

The poem is presented in italics to represent that it was constructed in participants’ voices, with my own words in brackets (see Chapter Three for a full description of how this poem was constructed). This poem illustrates the positions of dissonance, process, and resolution within the process of identity construction while allowing the reader to hear participants’ voices as an ensemble rather than individual

¹ See Chapter Eight for a full discussion of the emergent conceptual framework and implications for identity construction.
solos. Finally, I conclude this chapter by presenting Madeleine’s narrative profile in order to demonstrate the ways that she simultaneously held positions of dissonance, process, and resolution in her discussions of identity.

**[dissonance]**

*While I may look Korean, I am not completely Korean.*

*I don’t feel like I belong anywhere—*
*I’m American, but I’m Korean…*
*I’m Korean, but I’m a foreigner.*
*I have a foot in both [Korea and the U.S.] but it’s not like I have both feet planted…*
*It’s like I have my tippy toes in both of them.*

*I thought I knew who I was, but then I came back to Korea—*[where] it is not acceptable for me to act [like] anything other than a Korean—

*Koreans want me to be Korean,*
*yet to my face they call me a 외국인… 년 미주인이잖아.*
*The ridicule oozes from that word and the way it was thrown into my face.*
*I feel* lost… left out… marginalized and segregated by the people of my biological race.

*No one understands, no one knows [this] ongoing struggle:*
*that I will always be stuck in a perpetual state of “no-man’s land”—*
*[that I will] always be at the mercy of fate to find those of like mind—*[and only] rarely those of similar background.*

*[Sometimes] I sort of wish I [were] Caucasian;*
*then I would have no reason to feel guilty*
*or [to] hope I [don’t] appear as if i were showing off*
*[by using English].*

*[I wonder—How can I be such] a completely different person in a different language?*

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2 *waeguk-in,* “foreigner” [literally translated, “outside country person”]

3 This was taken from a written form of personal communication with a participant, and she intentionally misspelled the word 미국인 [*mee-guk-in,* “American person”] as 미주인 [*mee-kook-in*] to reflect the way that peers teased her by “mak[ing] a jab at the pronunciation of foreigners.”
I sometimes am forced to use one language as expression when really what I'm feeling is in the other language. I should be able to use whichever, whenever I feel like I want to use that particular language.

[process]

[My experiences have] become a part of who I am, [and they] influence how I view myself.

I am who I am because of what I went through, but also because of who my parents are.

[Military service made me] more sure of myself—proud of who I am, comfortable and confident.

My identity is fluid, [so] for the rest of my life, I’ll never be completely at home; I’ll always be missing something.

[But to me, “home” is]...
... always going to be Korea, even if my parents move away
... [always going to be America,]
... because I feel completely like myself when I’m there
... where my family is, [regardless of] the location
... the place that I live, [but]
... my ultimate home is [where] I feel more secure—with my family

... where I can be myself—not [just] the “Korean” me
... [where you can] “be yourself and not care”
... where I feel accepted

... being on the move
... being in the majority
... being with other travelers
... being surrounded by TCKs

... temporary, [because in this life I’ll always be] wandering, [but it’s also] permanent—
... but [that]s not here; it’s Heaven,
... [which will be] the end of [this] rootless wandering.
I’m proud of being Korean, proud of my country; [maybe I can even say] Korea is home. [But sometimes] I still feel lost and confused: I have trouble trying to identify myself through [all these] categories...

[So I have decided]:

It makes sense, this experience—being a TCK—[it] helped me find my identity. I’m Korean... but I’m not limited to Korea—I can have a global reach. I can live or adapt wherever I go. I’ll always be “in between,” [but] I think it’s okay to be this kind of “in between.” I’ve chosen to be this... That’s who I am.

I’m myself—I’m me!

I’m an individual.

I’m a TCK.

Interlude: Narrative Profile (Madeleine)

Madeleine’s narrative profile concludes this chapter by contextualizing the positions of dissonance, process, and resolution within her journey of identity construction. Madeleine’s experience also highlights the ways that Western education and values and family ties informed her experience of identity conflict and embracing multiple identities informed her resolution of this conflict. This profile is a condensed re-telling of Madeleine’s story constructed directly from interview transcripts and told in her own words. Punctuation and capitalization reflect my analysis, and bracketed text was added for clarity as part of the profile construction process (see Chapter Three for a full discussion of how profiles were selected and constructed).

When I was one year old, my parents moved to [the Middle East]; that's where I spent most of my childhood. I went to English international kindergarten, and then first through fourth grade I attended a missionary
school—all our teachers were missionaries. From fifth to sixth grade, my
dad [took a sabbatical to] study [in England, where] I went to a huge
public school. We returned to [the Middle East during] seventh, eighth,
and ninth grade, [after which] my parents [returned] to Korea. My
Korean was conversational, but I didn't think I could keep [up] at a high
school level with Korean kids, so [for tenth through twelfth grades] I went
to an international boarding school for missionary kids [that was located]
in Germany.

I was shy [in elementary school]—all the teachers would comment, "A
delight to have in class, but she doesn't ask questions, so we don't know if
she understands the lessons or not." I didn't want to seem like I didn't
know, so I thought that asking questions was not a good thing. [The
Missionary Kid (MK) school] was very small, much like a family, and all
the teachers were there because they really wanted to be—they were on
their own support. I remember being really loved, really comfortable.
After school I would hang out with the other [students], other MKs. I
[also] had local friends from my neighborhood, [but I mostly] remember
hanging out with older university [students who would] come to our house
[weekly] for prayer meetings and worship together. Even though I [lived
in a Muslim country] I was in a very, very Christian environment:
Christian school, missionary teachers, worship at home, church at home;
because I was in a Muslim country my parents want[ed] a Christian
education [for] me.

I did go to Korean school for two months in third grade and four months
in sixth grade. I remember Korean kids being fascinated by the fact that I
could talk [in] English better than the English teacher. They really made
me feel different. Even then, I felt insecure: I was trying to fit in to Korean
school. I studied really hard so that I wouldn't be known as the stupid kid
that doesn't speak Korean, doesn't know her Chinese characters. I was
really nice to all my friends; I think that was tied [to] my insecurity—I was
just trying to fit in, looking for that sense of belonging wherever I went. I
didn't want to get attention; I just wanted to quietly camouflage into the
crowd.

[When we moved to England] I didn't have too much difficulty making
friends, but I did try a lot to fit in. I didn't want to stand out—I didn't want
to be the Korean kid that speaks with an American accent, [so] I practiced
really hard to have a British accent [and] tried to be attuned to the
cultural differences and vocab. I [felt] embarrassed that my parents didn't
know the culture: I didn't feel they were trying to fit in, but I was trying so
hard to fit in. Because I had the English, I was comfortable around my
friends and around the schools that I went to—I didn't feel left out. At
school, Pokemon cards were a big trend, and I was good at drawing. A couple of boys in my class asked me to draw Pokemon figures. I would draw really well, and they were like, "Wow, this is so good. Can I have it?" [I thought] "Wow, they like me!" It just so happens that they made photocopies and sold them. I was being manipulated, but at that point, I was so wanting to fit in that I didn't care—I was just glad they liked me. [Also], I was always a studious kid... that's what teachers like—and I would get good grades. That was part of my trying to fit in, to be accepted, 인정 받다— to have approval—that was a huge part of my identity growing up.

[After three years back in the Middle East], my grandpa was not doing very well health-wise, and my dad is the oldest son of the family; he felt it was time for him to [return to Korea]. Korean parents don't really ask their children's approval—there's not so much discussion as [much as], "This is what we're doing." [So my younger sister and I] were told [the move] was going to happen, [but] I was given the choice—I'm not sure how much of a choice it was, but anyway—they asked me if I wanted to stay [in the Middle East and] go to a [new] international school, or go to boarding school in Germany. My parents thought that education-wise, [the boarding school] would be better: it has been around for a long time, so they felt confident in its credentials [compared to the international school in the Middle East that hadn't opened yet]. My parents are very Korean in [that] they have always valued my education. [For example], they had a choice of where to spend their two sabbatical years, [and] they chose England [over Estonia] because they thought my sister and I would have an easier time with education. Sending me to [boarding school in Germany] was another step in [valuing my education in that] they trusted that [that school] would provide me with a good education and prepare me for college.

[At the international boarding school in Germany] there were many individuals from different countries—different MKs, different cultures—and they put them all together, and we're going to get crazy. They really let [us] be "whatever." Looking back, all of my education was great, but [that school] topped it all. Everyone said college [would be] fun, [but] college [didn't] compare to high school... All my peers [from that school] say the same. It was a unique experience because I was surrounded by TCKs—I was so at home.

[By the end of high school], Korea was a place I had [visited] on holidays, [but] not a place I related to. Korean college was out of the question for

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4 in-jeong bahd-da
me, and I told my parents that I was applying to American colleges. They [said], "You can go to American college if you get a full ride at a good university." Korean parents' standard of "good" is "Ivy League." I got accepted into two [of the six universities I applied to, and neither] offered me a full ride. I was like, "$50,000 per year just for tuition? Not even for [room and] board, and I'm not an American citizen"... International students' [costs were] above that. I knew my parents couldn't afford it, but I still [begged them]. Even so, they just said], "We're really sorry, but we can't afford it." There's nothing you can say to that... I honor my parents a lot; I respect them [and] the choices that they've made. It's not their fault [that] they [didn't] have the money. [So] when I graduated, the only option was Korean college.

[The Korean school year] starts in March, [but I was] part of the international college within the university, so we were allowed to take two classes [during the fall semester, as] "pre-freshmen" [before the rest of the student body enrolled in March]. [Our international college] is unique because [it was new]. We were trying to create our own identity [as a college, and] everything was experimental. We had a great common curriculum, [but] it didn't really live up to my hopes of [how challenging] a college class would be, maybe because [my international school in Germany] was pretty challenging.

[Within our college], a third of the students are from Korean high schools [and] they've grown up in Korea. [Another] third have grown up abroad. Then you have Korean students who have gone [to] foreign language high schools: their English is very good but they've lived in Korea for most [or all] of their lives. These [groups of] people have English as a common denominator. [Students] who have lived almost all their lives in Korea don't speak English when they're intermingling; it's pure Korean—the context and subjects of the conversation are very Korean. A lot of girls would start talking about 소개팅,\(^5\) about makeup, and [they'd be] very interested in the outer appearance, or they talk about how hard middle and high school is. [On the other hand], Korean-Americans or that group of people's conversations would be very American-based. I hadn't lived in America, [so while] I can somewhat relate to these people, [I'm] not quite part of them. [The] international students [would also] "click together": Chinese students together, Vietnamese students, Indonesians, Caucasians —[they] would all have their own group. I felt awkward [being] part of the Chinese group because they start speaking in Chinese and I don't know what's going on. Then I [also] had Korean-Korean friends outside of [the international college]. [They] don't necessarily have fluency in

\(^5\) So-gae-ting, a Korean practice similar to being set up on a blind date.
English at all, [and would] tease me [about] trying to show off my
English, [so] I can't use English with them. At that point my Korean
wasn't very good at all. I was conversational, [so] people said, "I can
understand you fine, you talk like a Korean, I would never know you grew
up abroad"... But I couldn't express myself as much as I wanted to—I felt
limited in the language. I noticed differences in each of these groups—
[not just] the language[s], [but also] the topics of conversations. And [I
didn't] quite know where I fit in.

The dynamics within these groups was causing [conflict in me]. During
my second semester I struggled with identity issues: "I don't know if I'm
supposed to be Korean, if I'm supposed to be American... I'm
international, but no one sees that." I was just trying to figure out where I
fit in. I struggled with the college transition, Korean college culture,
living back with my parents, as well as Korean culture in general. [The]
combination of those things [made me] very depressed. All my life I'd
been trying to fit in somewhere. I found that [sense of belonging] at [the
international schools in Germany and in the Middle East], but here I
didn't know where I belonged or where I fit because I couldn't find
intimate relationships. It's not something that's gone away even after
college. It's an ongoing struggle, [but] I can navigate better now in any of
those groups.

[Resolution] happened in small increment[s] of time, and gradually I
[became] less awkward around [different groups]. It's like a rebooting
system where [I] "log in" to [different user identities]: "log in" to my
Korean mode, [then] log off and when I'm with [other] people, "log in" to
my international mode. But [this resolution through logging in made me]
wonder if these people know me—really know me—because I act [different
ways] around each different group. I [even] become a different person in
a different language: When I'm mixing Korean and English, when I'm
purely speaking English, when I'm purely speaking Korean... [in all of
these] I'm a different person. I could not figure out who I was and I could
not figure out where I was most comfortable. [Eventually] I became more
able to express myself in the [Korean] language, [which] made me able to
relate more with the Korean people, whether my [university] or
[international college peers].

I didn't choose my groups, I chose my individuals; I chose to forgo
belonging to a group. I was always jumping back and forth and realized
that I have to be okay with that. I resolved [the conflict by saying] that it's
okay if you don't belong. I didn't want to completely change myself in

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6 It is a common practice for university students in Korea to live with their parents.
order to belong. I was [already] changing—trying to figure out the language, understand cultural cues, greet 선배들.7 [learn] how to treat Korean professors and how to behave in a Korean class—I was learning all that, but I didn't want to change my worldview just to be accepted. I [decided] "I'm going to understand you, but not become you." That's how [my identity conflict] gradually resolved. You can't resolve the tension, because it's always going to be there... You just kind of tune it down and learn to accept it.

[This resolution came through] being able to build that login ID and then log out. My fear was that I would stay logged in forever: that I would be required to become a high-heeled, mini-skirt-wearing, makeup-clogged-on Korean college student who goes on all of these blind dates and finds the perfect hot guy, the submissive Korean child who never argues with their parents. [I realized that] I'm not going to become that, but that does not mean that I'm not going to log in! I don't have to become that, but [I don't have to] turn away from it either. And my parents are Korean... What can I do about blood ties—I cannot forsake my parents, I cannot! [Korea is] part of me and I have to deal with that [by] trying not to criticize [but rather trying] to understand. I don't blame Korean culture [for my having to] face this [identity conflict]; it's because of who I am that I face this, not the country or the culture. [So I try to] understand it, [to] become more comfortable with the fact that I don't belong, [and be] okay with that.

The TCK experience from a Korean family is different: Korea is very homogenous and has certain cultural things—respect for authority and hierarchy—that [are] embedded in the family. My parents are very conservative, traditional Koreans [who] have grown up in Korea, and they bring that [tradition] into the home when we're abroad. That clashes with the values that [I'm] learning in the international schools from Western teachers. [My parents] require submissiveness, and whenever I was wanting to talk with them it was never, “Okay, you think like this and I think like this, can we just accept the difference and move on?” It was, “We think like this—what you think is wrong, what we think is right—and you need to stop arguing with us.” I really started clashing because I'm an individual, I want to speak my mind, but when I do speak my mind I'm told I'm wrong.

Having Korean parents abroad and actually facing the whole culture when you come back [to Korea] is different: when you come back, [the]

7 The plural form of sunbae [“seniors” or upperclassmen]; for more information, see Chapter Five’s discussion of relationship networks.
expectations of your parents become a societal expectation. The expectations of your parents are the expectations of your grandparents, your relatives, [and] your community. It becomes a societal expectation and it's very universal and very wide. There's no variety. It's not, "Whatever you consider doing that makes you happy." [No], that's a very Western ideal; but here, success is defined in a very Korean way. [When you return to Korea] and your peers who are used to [conformity starting in] elementary school—their parents [say], "You're going to get into one of the top three universities"—there's no diversity, no variety. When you go to college and your professors have the same expectations, it becomes a "mob mentality" that I have to follow if I live in the society. [It went] from two people putting that pressure on me to the whole country expecting the same thing from me.

All my extended family are Korean—they're rooted here. For me to relate, I have to get them, to get the culture. I'm not forsaking my family, [so] I don't have the choice of saying [to them], "I'm just going to be [myself], you accept me." NO! It's so important for me to log in! I don't want to say, "You reformat your whole computer [in order] to understand me because this is who I am." Blood ties cannot change, but I can change myself—I can [log in to] different identities! [This logging in isn't] trying to hide [who I am], but really making [my]self available to understand and reach out to that person... That's why I choose different identities.
PART III
UNDERSTANDING KOREAN TCK IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

In this section I discuss my analysis of the key findings and the significance of this research. In Chapter Eight, I analyze the key findings related to ethnicity and language under the over-arching distinction between “fitting in” and “belonging.” I close this chapter with a full presentation and discussion of the conceptual framework which emerged from this research. In Chapter Nine, I discuss the ways that this research contributes to research literature, paying special attention to the ways that this project’s findings inform policy, practice, and future research in Korean, U.S., and international contexts.

Chapter Eight’s discussion of “Fitting In versus Belonging” presents participant experiences of dissonance (embracing or resisting “fitting in” but failing to “belong”). While living abroad, participants made sense of their ethnicity by aligning with—or resisting—a Korean community abroad, but this emerged alongside co-constructions of ethnicity and nationality in the home culture and in the family. I follow this with an analysis of language as power, where English fluency distinguishes and privileges participants—yet this fluency is devalued if it comes at the expense of Korean fluency, and hybrid language emerges (especially among speakers of decontextualized English and/or Korean) as a means of asserting a non-marginalized identity. Finally, I present the conceptual framework, portraying identity construction as analogous to a theater.
production. Within this framework, I describe how language functions as “currency” and
ethnicity as a “mediator” in life experiences—and how each informs identity construction—
including the ways in which ethnicity and citizenship are co-constructed in the Korean
context.

In Chapter Nine, I discuss the threats to the trustworthiness of this research (i.e.,
identity, language, and researcher subjectivity and positionality) as well as the limitations
of this project and how I addressed them. The remainder of the chapter presents the
significance of this research and applies its findings to a Korean context, to higher
education in the United States, and to the internationally mobile family in the context of
cultural globalization. I conclude this chapter by proposing areas for future research,
paying special attention to the Korean context, the field of education, and comparative
and international research.

This study used a series of individual biographical narrative interviews to answer
the question, “How does Korean Third Culture Kids’ lived experience inform their
identity construction?” The following supporting questions helped to answer this
research question:

1. How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ identity construction informed by their college
   experience?

2. How is the lived experience of Korean Third Culture Kids distinct because of Korean
   home culture?

3. How is Korean Third Culture Kids’ identity construction distinct because of Korean
   home culture?
CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

In this chapter I discuss the key findings of this research—paying special attention to ethnicity and language—under the over-arching distinction between “fitting in” and “belonging.” Participants described making sense of their ethnicity by aligning with—or resisting—Korean communities abroad, yet they experienced dissonance upon their return to Korea and in their families. I analyze this conflict through the lens of ethnicity using Fishman’s (1985) ethnic being, ethnic doing, and ethnic knowing (as cited in Jeon, 2005), where participants were expected to conform to expectations to “be Korean” (“fit in”) but did not experience “belonging” in this context.

I also analyze language as currency, where value depends not only on the speaker’s ability but also on the listener’s willingness to accept it—and this willingness is mediated by ethnicity and lived experience. In the home culture context, English fluency—while privileged—is devalued if it comes at the expense of Korean fluency. In bilingual contexts, Korean language emerged as a political tool of inclusion and exclusion. Finally, decontextualized language mirrors the distinction between “fitting in” and “belonging” as speakers of decontextualized languages (whether English or Korean) use language to negotiate “fitting in,” but cannot “belong” on the basis of language because their lived experience in the language is removed from the cultural context which is privileged (e.g., the United States for English or South Korea for Korean language).
For speakers of decontextualized language, then, hybrid language emerges as a means of asserting a non-marginalized identity.

Finally, I present the emergent conceptual framework, which describes identity construction in the context of international mobility. Using the analogy of theater, I analyze identity construction as the drama/plot of a play, where language provides the script and ethnicity serves as a mediator (the actor) for lived experience. In this section I also analyze education as a part of the setting and citizenship as the stage/platform on which the drama of identity construction occurs.

“Fitting In” versus “Belonging”

“Home is where your heart is”—well, my heart is in different places, but it’s also in different people. Home is where you belong, where you can be yourself and not care. Home is where your family is, but it isn’t. My friends from high school are all over the place, [but] I feel most ‘belonging’ when I am with them. I didn’t want to completely change myself in order to belong [in Korea]. [So I told myself], “It’s okay if you don’t belong [with Korean peers] because you’ve got friends, they’re [just] all over the world and that’s okay.” I don’t want to [say] Korean culture [is the reason] I faced all this [identity conflict]—it’s because of who I am that I face all this. [I’m trying] to understand the fact that I don’t belong, [and] just be okay with that. (Madeleine)

Despite their attempts to “fit in,” participants experienced dissonance in the host and home cultures and within their families, and these experiences were mediated by ethnicity. Fishman’s (1985, as cited in Jeon, 2005) constructions of ethnicity—as ethnic being, ethnic doing, and ethnic knowing—provide vocabulary to describe this dissonance.

In host cultures, participants expressed and made sense of their ethnicity through identification with—or distance from—Korean communities abroad. Upon return to
Korea, *ethnic being* informed *ethnic doing*, as participants described societal expectations to “be Korean.” Finally, within their families, some participants described conflict, and Fishman’s constructions of ethnicity provide vocabulary to describe one aspect of this conflict.

During early stages of data analysis I became sensitized to subtle differences in participant narratives, which emerged as the codes “fitting in” and “belonging.” Data coded as “fitting in” included a tone of *striving* or *exerting effort*, usually in order to align with a group of people, and carried the implication that the speaker was attempting to conform themselves to some standard outside of themselves and would be accepted on the basis of that conformity. Although data coded as “belonging” also emerged in the context of relationships, the tone was not one which required change, but rather carried the idea that, in the context of a specific relationship or group, the speaker was accepted for who they were, without the expectation of change and without aligning with any external standard. “Belonging” often emerged within participants’ family relationships or relationships with peers who shared their TCK experiences. This section examines

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1 See Chapter Three for a full description of how data were analyzed and specific examples of data which were coded as “fit in” and “belonging.”

2 During the final stages of data analysis, I read Brene Brown’s (2010) book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, where she described a similar concept of “belonging” emerging alongside the idea of “love” in her own grounded theory research examining empathy.

3 Groups of CCKs or TCKs provide potential contexts of belonging, but participants described social groupings in these environments (i.e., international schools or universities in Korea, and groups of Korean-American students in the United States) as linguistically political and mediated by ethnicity. (See Chapter Six for a full representation of relevant data and see “Dual Language Identity Politics,” in this chapter, for a discussion of language in this context.)
how participant experiences of “belonging” and “fitting in” can be understood in terms of ethnicity.4

Ethnicity as Being, Doing, and Knowing

Ethnicity may be understood simply as “peopleness” (Fishman, 1985, p. 70; as cited in Jeon, 2005, p. 36) or “a group of people with a distinctive culture” (p. 35). Koreans see themselves as a distinct people5—perhaps best reflected in the phrase 우리 민족 [oori minjok, “our people” or “our ethnic group”]6—and trace this “peopleness” through millennia of recorded history. This worldview7 both informs the meanings of citizenship and national identity and mediates interactions between Korean people—in Korea, abroad, and within the family. Fishman’s proposed dimensions of ethnicity (ethnic being as Korean bloodline, ethnic doing as Korean behavior, and ethnic knowing as seeing oneself as Korean—or not8) are useful to understand the ways that participants

4 Chapter Six presents the data which emerged within the “fit in” theme—which included a complementary category of data coded as “left out”; data coded as “belonging” emerged alongside that coded “home” and “identity,” and it is represented in Chapter Seven.

5 The claims of the Korean people to exist as a distinct people for millennia are not strongly supported by DNA evidence (Cumings, 2005) and have been questioned by some scholars (J. K. Kim, 2014), but for the purposes of this study I am concerned with the constructed reality of this worldview (i.e., how Koreans see themselves) rather than whether it aligns with an external, objective reality.


7 According to Kwast (2009), at the “worldview” level of culture people answer questions about reality, such as “Who are we?” and “Where did we come from?”

8 Fishman suggested that ethnic being is rooted in paternity (“coming ‘with the blood if not through it’”, as cited in Jeon, 2005, p. 36), ethnic doing involves patrimony (as “collectivity-defining behaviors”, p. 36), and ethnic knowing involves the ways in which individuals make sense of their ethnicity, including the extent to which they align with it and/or define themselves through it.
distinguished between “fitting in” and “belonging” with ethnic Koreans abroad, upon their return to Korea, and in their families.

**Host Culture: Korean Communities Abroad**

Koreans living outside Korea make sense of their ethnicity (Fishman’s ethnic knowing) by aligning themselves with—or distinguishing themselves from—other Koreans, and participants often described language as an indicator of this distinction. These distinctions were evident in participants’ discomfort in aligning themselves with “Korean Koreans” (whether Korean TCKs at international schools who were “more Korean Korean” [Joseph, Maria], Korean students studying abroad [Ko-eun, Madeleine, Rose, Seo-hyeon, Sophia], or FOBs [Sophia, Yoon-jeong]), but also in the distinctions between Korean students studying abroad and Korean-Americans (Sophia’s university had separate student organizations for each group), and distinctions within Korean-Americans (e.g., 1.5 and 2.0 Generation based on “soil right” or “birth right” and often marked by different levels of English fluency [Sophia]).

Overall, participants struggled to identify themselves within any of the pre-established “categories” (i.e., *kyopo* [교포], 1.5 or 2.0 Generation, FOB, early study abroad students [조기 유학생, *jo-gee yu-hak-saeng*], or “Korean-Korean”) because their life experiences and English fluency kept them from aligning with any of these. In this way, the TCK experience—especially as distinguished from the many iterations of the CCK experience—reflects the “hybridization of formerly distinct categories” that Phillips and Schweisfurth (2008, p. 51) described as an aspect of cultural globalization.
Home Culture: National Identity and Citizenship in Korea

Korean constructions of themselves as a distinct people (우리 민족 [oori minjok, “our people” or “our ethnic group”]) are not only informed by interactions with outsiders but also inextricably co-constructed with national identity and citizenship in South Korea—best reflected in the phrase 우리 나라 [oori nara, “our nation”]. Jeon (2005) described this co-construction of nationality and ethnicity in terms of “blood right”:

as an ethnic nation, …Korea is an extension of an ethnic group in so far as it is founded on “blood right.” [In contrast], in a civic nation founded on “soil right,” like the United States, people are united around common laws and rights, regardless of their ethnic origin. (p. 39)

This marriage of ethnicity with nationhood—aptly described “ethnizenship” in Chang’s (2012) analysis of class and citizenship conflict in South Korea—may be best understood in contrast to constructions of national identity and citizenship in the United States. In the United States, citizenship means “belonging” based on birth or soil right. In Korea, citizenship means “inclusion,” and this inclusion is often on the basis

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9 In her autobiography of her life as a Korean TCK in second half of the 20th century, K. Connie Kang (1995) described her homeland’s historical tendency toward xenophobia in the words of a traditional Korean proverb: “Because of its location at a crossroad of regional power politics, Korea had long been… a shrimp in a sea of whales—Russia, China, and Japan. When the whales fought, it was inevitably the shrimp that got hurt” (location 229 of 3793).

10 I would add that the United States extends this “soil right” to include a “birth right.”

11 The way I distinguished between “belonging” and “fitting in” during coding fundamentally informed the ways I made sense of participant experiences. That is, “belonging” represented inclusion and acceptance without expectation to change, while “fitting in” implied some kind of change or accommodation in order to be included.

12 Sophia recalled her elementary school teachers in the United States reinforcing that she was “an American” because of her birth in the United States, and a similar reinforcement when she interviewed for a U.S. government job as an adult; Charlie introduced himself as having been born in the United States and being a U.S. citizen.
of blood ties\textsuperscript{13}—ethnicity\textsuperscript{14}—and expectations of conformity as a cultural norm are mediated not by citizenship, nationality, or life experience, but by Korean heritage. Ethnic Koreans are expected to conform to Korean cultural norms (and this conformity is a cultural norm\textsuperscript{15}) and possess fluency in Korean language. That is, when ethnic Koreans enter Korea, they encounter expectations of society, institutions, and family. Participants described some of these expectations: that they will eat with chopsticks and like kimchi (Sophia), that they will want to live in Korea forever (Sophia), that they will strive for success as “defined in a very Korean way” (Madeleine), that they will marry and have children according to Korean expectations and on a typical timeline (Drew, Maria), that they will “know Korean culture and abide by it” and “speak Korean and speak it well” (Sophia). These expectations are rooted in participants’ Korean ethnicity, without regard for their international upbringing or foreign citizenship.

Fishman provides vocabulary with which to make sense of the dissonance experienced by returning Korean TCKs: the home cultural context constructs “Korean-ness” as blood ties (ethnic being) inextricably bound to behavior (e.g.,

\textsuperscript{13} Ethnic Koreans of any nationality may receive a visa to live in Korea, or may apply for South Korean citizenship. Recent changes in citizenship laws (beginning in 2010) also now allow ethnic Korean children to hold dual citizenship (Sophia was the only participant who pursued dual citizenship under this new law), provided that they do not exercise the rights of their non-Korean citizenship while in Korea (i.e., they must enter Korea using their Korean passport and live in Korea as a Korean citizen, including paying Korean taxes, fulfilling the military service commitment, and applying for jobs or university admission using their Korean passport).

\textsuperscript{14} The relatively recent phenomenon of so-called “multicultural families” (where one spouse is Korean and one is non-Korean) is actively troubling this co-construction of ethnicity and citizenship. Marriages where one spouse was non-Korean made up 8% of new marriages in Korea in 2013, a decline of 8.3% from the previous year according to Statistics Korea (2014), and Korea has responded by establishing multicultural schools for the children of these families (Choi, 2010). Chang (2012) suggested that Korea’s historic class conflict has evolved into conflicts about citizenship in light of the emergence of a population of non-Korean (and Overseas Korean) individuals who are eligible for citizenship.

\textsuperscript{15} See Chapter Five for full discussion on conformity and Chapter Six for a full representation of participant experiences of “fitting in.”
“fitting in” and “collectivism” as a cultural norm; ethnic doing), **regardless of whether** the individual constructs their ethnicity in this way (ethnic knowing). While ethnic Koreans who return to Korea (or go for the first time) may have a measure of choice about their citizenship—and therefore choose whether to fulfill the expectations of what it means to be a Korean citizen—*they cannot choose their ethnicity*, and yet their entire experience in Korea is mediated by the expectation that they “fit in” because of this ethnicity—*an expectation to “be Korean.”*

**Family**

In addition to the dissonance TCKs experience when attempting to fit in to Korean home culture, **differing constructions of ethnicity may contribute to tension in a TCK’s relationship with their parents**, particularly if children have been educated in Western-curriculum schools. Although the code of “belonging” often emerged from participant descriptions of what home meant to them,16 all participants (save one—Joseph) described their relationships with their parents as being informed by expectations of “Korean-ness” (e.g., responsibility for children’s education and expectations of academic performance, responsibility to transmit Korean heritage and/or language to children [Yoon-jeong, Sophia, Ko-eun], expectation of hierarchy in the parent-child relationship [Madeleine, Drew], expectation that children will embrace a Korean identity and position within the extended family [Madeleine, Maria]).

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16 In *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brene Brown (2010) observed that in her grounded theory research on shame the idea of “belonging” often emerges in concert with the idea of “love.”
While not every participant described conflict between their own and their parents’ constructions of ethnicity, every participant—with the exception of Joseph—did reference some kind of expectation to “be Korean” informing the parent-child relationship. Alice and Madeleine described a conflict between the Western cultural values they learned in international schools and the traditional Confucian values they were expected to embrace at home. Yoon-jeong struggled to accept her parents’ approval of her college decisions—though they consistently encouraged her to “do whatever you want”—because she doubted whether any school she attended would be good enough for them (both her parents attended Seoul National University).

In Fishman’s terms, parents may perceive their children as being Korean because of their paternity, and this perception informs the parents’ expectations of Korean doing. Participants’ constructions of ethnicity acknowledged being Korean because their parents were Korean, but they embraced or rejected different aspects of Korean doing (Fishman’s “collectivity-defining behaviors”, as cited in Jeon, 2005, p. 36) and did not necessarily attach the same meaning (Fishman’s ethnic knowing) to their Korean ethnicity that their parents did.

If the TCK’s perceptions of their ethnicity are not aligned with their parents’, he or she will not simply experience dissonance (as they do in the home cultural context); rather, the expectation of “belonging” in the home (the expectation to be accepted for who you are without being required to change or conform) means that in its absence,

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17 Joseph’s parents were Korean-American, though both of them were born in Korea, and Joseph never lived in Korea.

18 See Chapter Five for a full discussion of hierarchy in Korean higher education and the interrelationship of family honor and educational success.
children’s responses may escalate above dissonance—it may be deeply painful, or even undermine an individual’s identity construction. This begs the question, “What happens if parents are unable or unwilling to foster a sense of belonging within the family, but instead expect their children to fit in—to conform to a construction of ethnicity as Korean-ness?” In response, TCKs may construct a sense of belonging through relationships with others who share their TCK experience.19

In conclusion, constructions of ethnicity—우리 민족 [oori min-jok] and accompanying perceptions of “Korean-ness”—mediate interactions among Korean people in the host culture, in the home culture, and in the family. These constructions of ethnicity may be explained with Fishman’s ethnic being, ethnic doing, and ethnic knowing (as cited in Jeon, 2005), and these align with distinctions between “fitting in” and “belonging” that emerged during data analysis. Participants’ interactions with Korean communities abroad, in the home culture, and in their families were characterized by an expectation to “fit in”—conform to a cultural norm (ethnic doing)—based on their Korean heritage (ethnic being). However, TCKs’ own constructions of ethnicity (ethnic knowing) did not always align with these expectations, producing a sense of conflict, particularly upon their return to Korea.

Participants experienced dissonance when their constructions of ethnicity competed with differing constructions in the home culture—arguably more so than for TCKs returning to home cultures which do not emphasize conformity in the same way

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19 In fact, this is exactly the pattern I observed with the participants of this study. I did not pay special attention to this trend during data representation since it is perfectly aligned with the TCK experience (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999) and I intended to focus on the distinctions of the Korean TCK experience.
that Korea does, and especially because expectations were placed on the basis of
*ethnicity*, which TCKs were powerless to change. A sense of “belonging” may help the
TCK to mitigate this conflict, and this theme emerged from the data alongside the idea of
“home.” However, participants generally described these conflicting constructions of
ethnicity as informing family relationships as well.

**Dual Language Identity Politics**

> Once your [Korean] peer group finds out that you’re fluent in English, you become an icon, a model, an idol to them. [This] is sometimes good because you’re sort of like a rock star; but at the same time, you’re very insecure and lonely because nobody actually believes that you are one of them. (Drew)

> [When I started attending international school in Korea I was] in a class full of Koreans, [and] it was completely different [than what I was used to in public school in the States]—there was a huge gap between the people who speak English and the people who chose not to speak English. That [distinction] was something that bothered me, but [I thought], “Well, if they don’t want to be friends with me, it is their choice.” (Yoon-jeong)

Participant narratives reflected counter-intuitive linguistic contradictions, where
English was privileged abroad and at home, but simultaneously *devalued* in Korea if it
came at the expense of Korean fluency. In bilingual contexts, Korean was used as a
political tool for negotiating—or disallowing—belonging. And finally, the language used
in these bilingual contexts was either decontextualized (whether English or Korean) or a
hybrid of Korean and English. These languages were a valid currency only with Korean
CCKs, but this decontextualized Korean emerged as a way of expressing “Korean-ness”
in these environments.
I analyzed language fluency as *currency*, where currency carries *power*—i.e., the power to include or exclude listeners, to fit in, or to belong. However, this language (currency) must not only be *accepted* but also *valued* by the listener—and the *currency’s value changes based on the ethnicity and lived experience of the speaker*. As a political tool, language empowers the user: bilingual speakers can negotiate “fitting in” to diverse groups and can use their own language ability as a platform to invite others to fit in. However, if their language fluency is decontextualized—that is, if they lack shared lived experience with those they are speaking to—this language may ultimately prevent their “belonging” to this group.

**English Fluency**

One of the symptoms of Korea’s “education fever” is a preoccupation, bordering on obsession, with learning English, reflecting the emergence of English as a global language for business and development and aligning with the cultural globalization lens as described by Phillips and Schweisfurth (2008). Yet participants described their English fluency as a *two-edged sword*: a *privilege that also distinguished and separated* them from their Korean peers.

**Privilege.** Participants’ experiences upon their return to Korea reflected the idea that English was a privilege (Drew described being a “hero,” “icon,” and “rock star” to his Korean school peers “for being good at English”; Charlie remembered being popular with Korean school classmates because of his ability to speak English and write in cursive; Sophia was bribed to help other students—and coerced into helping the English teacher—in her Korean middle school; Seo-hyeon earned spending money by tutoring...
other students who wanted to learn English, in contrast with peers who were spending money on English tutors). Seo-hyeon described her TCK experiences as meaningful precisely because she was able to learn English “naturally,” as opposed to most of her Korean peers who learned English as an academic subject.

**Distinction.** Yet, the privilege of English fluency also distinguished returning TCKs from their peers. In terms of educational opportunity, English fluency meant that returning TCKs did not have to—or were not able to—attend or re-enter Korean schools. The platform of international schools, both abroad and in Korea, fundamentally altered the life trajectory of most participants since international schools generally prepare graduates for higher education in the United States or Europe (Madeleine was the only participant to pursue higher education in Korea after graduating from a non-Korean high school). Indeed, this change in trajectory was precisely the reason that Autumn and Rose’s families moved abroad, and the reason their families chose English-speaking countries as host cultures.

**Separation.** While participants’ English fluency privileged and distinguished them, it also separated them from their Korean peers upon their return to Korea. Seo-hyeon described being “bullied” for her English ability, while peers criticized Sophia, Ko-eun, and Madeleine for “showing off” by speaking English. In response to this criticism, Sophia “started talking in broken English… speaking English in a Korean way,” while Drew “tried to pronounce English words [with a] Korean pronunciation.”

In their April 2014 newspaper column “Eye on English,” published in *The Korea Herald*, Lee and Lee suggested that Korean pronunciation of English words “is a cause of
shame for many [Koreans] who never studied overseas.” And yet, participants who entered Korean schools after their years abroad intentionally mimicked this incorrect pronunciation as a survival mechanism—in an attempt to use language to “fit in.” Although “an aura of power [surrounds] English speakers in South Korea” (S. K. Kim, 2014, p. 13), participants’ Korean ethnicity meant that they were expected to have Korean fluency. If—or when—they lacked Korean fluency, their English fluency became a stigma; that is, if English fluency came at the expense of Korean fluency, it was devalued.

Korean Fluency in Bilingual Contexts

Bilingual contexts emerged as spaces within which language was used as a political tool for negotiating—or disallowing—belonging. Students within these contexts were often capable of using two languages (i.e., Korean and English) but self-imposed the use of Korean—or a hybrid or decontextualized form thereof—in order to 1) restrict “belonging” on the grounds of language ability and lived experience, and 2) assert a “Korean” identity. In this case, participants’ ability to negotiate “fitting in” was dependent not only on their language fluency, but also on the willingness—not the ability—of the listener to accept their “currency,” and this willingness was mediated by ethnicity and by lived experience.

Groups of Korean students in bilingual contexts often self-imposed the use of Korean despite their bilingual ability, and even if they were more fluent in English. This pattern begs the question, “Why would students choose to use Korean within contexts where English is expected or mandated, where not everyone is able to speak or
understand Korean, and where some of these speakers are more fluent in English than Korean?” Stephanie K. Kim observed a pattern of self-imposed Korean speech among students at Underwood International College (UIC) within Yonsei University during her 2014 ethnographic study. Consistent with my participants’ descriptions of their own hybrid language when speaking with siblings or peers who shared their international experiences and dual languages, Kim observed pervasive use of a “hybrid of Korean and English” (p. 10) by the ethnically Korean UIC students.21

Kim (2014) suggested that this hybrid language phenomenon aligned ethnically Korean students with a “Korean” identity while simultaneously distancing them from UIC and from UIC students who could not speak Korean (i.e., foreign students).

The ethnically Korean students within UIC want desperately to fit in within Yonsei University at large, but because traditional [Yonsei] students reject them on the basis of their perceived linguistic differences [i.e., their English fluency and limited “academic” Korean], they mitigate that difference by self-enforcing the Korean language amongst themselves as a way to legitimize their place within the university… Their linguistic

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20 The first international college of its kind to be established within a Korean university in 2006. All UIC courses are taught in English and faculty are required to be either foreign nationals or Korean citizens who received all of their higher education outside Korea.

21 Korean students—graduates of Korean high schools or graduates of schools outside Korea—make up about 75% of UIC students (Kim, 2014). Many of these students are “early study abroad” [조기 유학생, jogee yu-haksaeng] students; some are Korean TCKs who accompanied their families abroad. The remainder of the UIC student body is made up of international students (defined as students who hold a non-Korean passport and whose parents also hold non-Korean passports).

22 See Chapter Five for a discussion of hierarchy and conformity in education and the unique status of elite universities (of which Yonsei is one) in Korea.
differences cause them to feel like misfits within their own university, and
they make up for this through their emphasized use of Korean in spite of
their fluent English. (p. 16, emphasis added)

Kim’s analysis—that bilingual students spoke Korean in order to assert a “Korean”
identity—may apply not only to UIC students at Yonsei University, but to any space
where the majority is ethnically Korean, even if most individuals actually speak English
more fluently than they speak Korean.

Kim’s (2014) analysis of self-imposed hybrid Korean amongst Korean UIC
students may explain similar social patterns between ethnic Korean students in
international schools in Korea (described by Yoon-jeong) and distinctions and divisions
within ethnic Korean students abroad (described by Sophia). Yoon-jeong was unable to
“fit in” with other Korean students when she first attended international school in Korea
because she was unable to understand classmates’ conversations in Korean. After one
year, her Korean ability improved and she negotiated her way into this group of
ethnically Korean students, but she noted persistent distinctions between those students
who “spoke English and those who chose to speak Korean.”

Similarly, Sophia’s description of language patterns among Korean-American
(immigrant) students at her university in the United States mirrored this privileging of
Korean. Although every person in the group was capable of speaking English—and most
were more more fluent in English than in Korean—students switched between English
and Korean. (It is likely that their code-switching mirrored Kim’s (2014) observations of
ethnically Korean students at UIC who switched to English when their Korean ability

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was lacking.) When non-Korean students were present, this group of Korean-American students did not switch to using English exclusively, and Sophia described her own discomfort with the way that her peers wielded their Korean language as a tool to exclude non-Korean speakers.23

In bilingual contexts, then, participants described bilingual students using language as an expression of power—a means of inclusion or exclusion. These bilingual students were able—but not willing—to accept English as a currency with which others could purchase inclusion into their social group, and this language dichotomy reinforced social groupings based on language fluency. Although language fluency functioned as currency by allowing participants to purchase access to different groups, the value of this currency was limited—not only by the ability and willingness of other students to accept the speaker’s currency, but also by context.

Decontextualized Language

While participants used their language fluency to negotiate “fitting in” to different groups, a counter-narrative emerged: for some, this language ability was valuable only to a point. That is, even if TCKs negotiated “fitting in” using language fluency, the lack of context—the lack of shared lived experience with the listeners—ultimately prevented them from “belonging.”

Decontextualized Korean and English. Many participants described how their efforts to develop fluency in Korean helped them to negotiate “fitting in” upon their

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23 Similarly, a UIC professor told Stephanie Kim (2014) that he required students to use English before and after class and during breaks “because if they switch into Korean, it excludes all the [foreign] students, and it actually creates divisions between the students” (p. 9).
return to a Korean context. However, Madeleine also described the limitations she encountered when attempting to “fit in” with fellow students at her international college in Korea.

Korean students, those from foreign [language] high schools or who lived their lives in Korea, when they’re intermingling they don’t speak in English, it’s pure Korean. That means the context of the conversation, the subjects of the conversation—are very Korean. A lot of girls would talk about sogaeting,24 and [I’m like], “What the heck is going on?” Some historical background or some jokes or their high school experience—how hard middle school is, how hard high school is—I can’t relate to that.

(emphasis added)

Despite her ability to speak and understand Korean, Madeleine was unable to “belong” with her peers because she lacked a shared context—i.e., shared lived experience in Korea.

Madeleine and Drew both described a sense of dissonance when their English fluency—and for Madeleine, her preference for English over Korean—was not sufficient on its own for them to “belong.” In both cases, this dissonance emerged not because they lacked English ability, but because they lacked a shared context and shared lived experience with the listeners. Drew described friendships with English-speaking expatriates who had recently moved to Korea, saying he felt “left out because I have been away from the States for so long.” However, he eventually resolved this tension:

24 소개팅, a practice similar to blind dating common amongst college students and young adults in Korea.
Now that I’m back from the Air Force I’m more sure about myself and proud of who I am. I [am] no longer afraid to admit that I’ve been in Korea for nineteen consecutive years [and] thus lack the context that you may share with the people who just moved here from the States.

(emphasis added)

Ultimately, Drew mitigated the dissonance of using decontextualized English by embracing his lived experience (specifically, his experience living in Korea and as a military officer) as affirming his sense of self—the self he constructed both in English and in Korean.25

Troubling notions of “decontextualized” language. The vocabulary of “decontextualized” language reflects how some language(s) are fundamentally privileged over others in the context of globalization. That is, the term “decontextualized English” privileges the American (or occasionally British) setting as the appropriate context for—and the standard for—English. This privilege is mirrored in this discussion of decontextualized Korean, where Korean language as spoken in the Republic of Korea—and as it reflects lived experience in this context—is privileged over that spoken in other regions of the country, or amongst Korean people in other parts of the world.26

Many participants of this study learned their Korean speaking ability from their parents while their parents were expatriates—that is, for participants who lived abroad

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25 See Drew’s narrative profile (Chapter Five) for a representation of how both English and Korean informed his identity construction; see also “Trustworthiness and Limitations” in Chapter Nine for a full discussion of how I resolved tensions of language and identity.

26 Korean is the official language of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), is an official language (alongside Mandarin Chinese) in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of northeast China, and is spoken by Overseas Korean individuals and families worldwide (see Chapter One for a definition of Overseas Korean).
while they were learning to speak, their Korean was “decontextualized” from the outset. (For Madeleine, both her English and Korean were “decontextualized” in that she learned both languages from expatriates; when reflecting on her inability to “fit in” in the United States, she “realized that my American friends [in elementary and high school] were not very American, in sense of ‘typical’ American, [because they were] TCKs.”) This “decontextualization” was heightened if they did not return to Korea or if they attended international school upon their return, as these decisions further removed them from potential shared lived experience with speakers of “contextualized” Korean.

The dissonance TCKs experience between their language ability and their lack of context troubles the very notion of decontextualized language, particularly if individuals ultimately lack natural or native-level fluency in any language. Discussions of “decontextualized” language privilege specific languages and lived experience within the cultural context of that privileged language. In light of this dissonance and marginalization, hybrid language emerges—from shared language, shared lived experience, and shared ethnicity—as a way to express a non-marginalized identity and trouble the privilege given to “contextualized” language.

In sum, choices of language express identity—that is, language indicates who is included, who is excluded, and who the speaker is in relation to those around them (whether they share a language, or a version of a language; and in Korean, the relative

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27 This issue of language fluency recurs through literature on 1.5 Generation Korean-American immigrants and is particularly salient to Korean TCKs who attend international schools abroad either 1) beginning in middle or high school or 2) where they identify with a Korean expatriate community at the expense of developing native-level fluency in English or Korean.
status of the speaker to the listener\textsuperscript{28}). For TCKs, developing language fluency—for participants, fluency in both English and Korean—gave them the right to be heard and the ability to “purchase” inclusion in diverse settings; as such, they could also use language as a means of including others.

Bilingual individuals may express a measure of agency in choosing which language to use, and in which context; for TCKs, this ability both empowers and gives the individual the ability to empower others by accommodating their linguistic preferences. That is, \textit{if an individual is capable of understanding and expressing themselves in multiple languages, they can choose which language to accept}—or which language to use as currency to “purchase” inclusion—\textit{and therefore, which group to align with}.

Finally, despite the fact that language fluency functioned as a \textit{currency} with which TCKs negotiated “fitting in” to different groups, \textit{if the individual’s language was decontextualized, it facilitated “fitting in” but ultimately meant they failed to “belong.”} However, TCK experiences trouble the notion of “decontextualized” language because it privileges not only \textit{language} but also culturally-bound \textit{lived experience} in that language. Hybrid language emerged from the tension of overlapping “decontextualized” English and Korean \textit{as a way to express a non-marginalized identity}.

\textsuperscript{28} See Chapter Five for a description of the power dynamic embedded within Korean language.
Conceptual Framework

Identity as Theater

For any given production of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the choice of venue and medium inform the tone of the production and the audience experience; for example, the 2000 film adaptation starring Ethan Hawke was remarkably distinct from Kenneth Branaugh’s 1996 film adaptation, and both would be different from a live production in an indoor or outdoor theater. The choice of setting—including time period, set design, and costume—becomes a part of the context in which the drama unfolds, and may shape the script. Each of these decisions also inform casting, as the actors become the medium through which the plot is shared with the audience. All of these decisions contribute to the context within which the plot unfolds, and each may inform that context—or the plot itself—in distinct ways.

Using this theater analogy, we can understand life experiences as the context informing identity construction. “Citizenship” is analogous to the choice of venue: it functions as a part of the context, serving as a stage—a platform—on which individual experiences occur. It also shapes what kind of opportunities are made available to individuals (e.g., eligibility for different types of schools, access to funding for higher education), and a difference in citizenship can be understood as analogous to watching a production of the same play, but in a different venue. While it may not directly shape identity construction—the plot of the play—citizenship provides the context in which other experiences occur.
“Education” is analogous to the “setting” for a theater production. It is a part of the context within which life experiences occur, but the setting (e.g., the type of school(s) an individual attends) also informs these experiences—and in many cases it may actually determine the script ("language"). Within this analogy, the cast (actors and actresses) may be understood as “ethnicity”—the lens through which a character is portrayed, the mediator for both the character’s experience of the plot and the audience’s interactions with the plot.

Identity Construction within International Mobility

The conceptual framework represented in Figure 8.1 illustrates not only the context in which identity is constructed but also the ways in which language and ethnicity inform this process; citizenship and education are treated as a part of the context. The rounded rectangle representing identity spans all of the domains of the framework as well as the overlap of these domains. The rectangle’s broken border illustrates the fact that life experiences shape—and may be assimilated into—individual identity. Secondly, language overlaps with, but is distinct from, identity, and the use of an arrow represents the idea that language facilitates mobility across the domains of the framework (“home culture,” “host culture,” “cultural globalization,” and the areas of overlap among these three). Finally, ethnicity is represented by a rounded rectangle which completely encompasses both language and identity.

Language and ethnicity. Language and identity exist within ethnicity in this diagram because ethnicity serves as a mediator—a “lens” or “screen”—through which
Figure 8.1 Korean TCK identity construction in the context of international mobility.
individuals interact with their environment and others interact with the individual. Even if an individual chooses to ignore, minimize, or deny their ethnicity, other people and the context as a whole will interact with that individual through their ethnicity, and even language fluency is interpreted through ethnicity. Finally, the border for the rounded rectangle representing ethnicity is solid because ethnicity does not evolve in the way that language and identity might over time.

While Guiora and colleagues (1975) suggested that “to speak a second language authentically is to take on a new identity” (p. 456, as cited in Dewaele and van Oudenhoven, 2009), I understood participants’ multiple languages not to be distinct identities in themselves, but aspects of an individual’s identity—consistent with Madeleine’s analogy of “user identities” into which she “logged in” and “logged out”; as such, individuals could choose which aspects of their identity to express in different contexts. I understood that some aspects of identity might be more heavily informed by ethnicity, while other aspects might be less informed by ethnicity. (For example, Madeleine contrasted her “TCK identity” (where she spent time with TCKs from diverse home cultures) with her “Korean college student” identity (where she was expected to fulfill certain expectations and/or align with an external image of what a Korean college student should be).

Agency. Finally, I understood the process of identity construction to be both fluid and volitional. That is, identity construction is not a one-time process—it must be revisited when moving between contexts or to assimilate new experiences—and individuals

29 I discuss the limitations of this perspective, especially as applied to language and identity as the phenomenon of investigation for this study, in “Trustworthiness and Limitations” in Chapter Nine.
exercise a degree of choice in the process. That is, participants chose what aspects of their life experiences they would assimilate into their sense of who they were, and they also chose in what contexts those aspects of their identity would be expressed. Thus, the fluid nature of identity and the exercise of agency in identity construction describe how individuals navigate their context and construct their identity within it.

**Education**

It is important to note that neither education nor citizenship are explicitly highlighted in this representation of the conceptual framework. Without a doubt, participants’ educational experiences shaped their identity construction; however, it is best to understand education as a context—a feature of either their host or home culture context, or the context of cultural globalization—within which identity construction occurs. Thus, participants’ diverse educational experiences may be understood to be embedded within the appropriate domain (“home culture,” “host culture,” “cultural globalization,” or some overlap of these) for the purposes of this representation of the conceptual framework. Family choices about primary and secondary education directly shaped children’s language fluency—and thus their ability to negotiate different contexts beyond education; however, over the long-term, primary and secondary education may best be understood as pieces of the context which informs participants’ childhood experiences.

The ongoing lived experience of participants who were interviewed while they were undergraduate or graduate students was unfolding within the context of institutions of higher education, and because identity construction during higher education was the
phenomenon of investigation for this study, it was an area of focus during data collection and analysis. However, I observed that, for participants who were sufficiently removed from the educational environment, their higher education experience seemed no more informative to their identity construction than were their other life experiences (e.g., professional experience [Autumn, Alice, Sophia, Rose, Seo-hyeon, Madeleine, Drew, and Maria], internship [Yoon-jeong], or military service [Drew]). Not only was higher education not any more informative to identity construction than any other experience, but it seemed less so than primary and secondary education experiences, particularly in the way that these early experiences often informed language fluency and life trajectory (i.e., whether they would attend university in Korea or elsewhere).

Citizenship

Citizenship does not seem to play as direct a role in identity construction as do language or ethnicity (taking the respective roles of “facilitator” and “mediator”), or even education (“setting”). Citizenship may best be understood as a “platform” from which choices are made—and other choices are made unavailable; it is these choices and their contexts which inform identity construction. While citizenship may be a starting point to understand identity, it may best be understood as the “stage” upon which the drama of identity construction unfolds rather than an actor in the play.

The construction of citizenship as a part of the context of identity construction—rather than a primary influence—aligns seamlessly with Phillips and Schweisfurth’s (2008) description of cultural globalization. In particular, rigid categories of classification—in this case, citizenship—collapse into one another and/or must be
redefined in the wake of transmigration and international mobility. That is, the TCK phenomenon not only troubles rigid 20th century categorization based on nationality but also questions the ability of multiple citizenships to adequately represent the allegiances of individuals raised in the context of international mobility.

**Deconstructing citizenship.** In contrast to a rigid construction of identity as nation-state citizenship, participant narratives suggest that citizenship may best be understood as *a place to begin* constructing identity. These narratives trouble the notion that identity is inextricably tied to one’s citizenship (while participants included citizenship in their descriptions of themselves, none of them suggested that citizenship adequately reflected the diversity of their experiences), and yet participants’ narratives also demonstrated the subtle ways in which their citizenship *informed* their experiences. As such, citizenship cannot simply be rejected as irrelevant, but must be understood as *one aspect* of the TCK’s identity, and one which functions as a *platform* —opening certain opportunities but making others unavailable.

**Dual citizenship.** Finally, participant narratives (especially those of participants who experienced more than two cultures during childhood) question the idea that dual citizenships sufficiently address the limitations of nation-state citizenship. While holding dual citizenship was one way for her to honor both the Korean and U.S. influences on her upbringing, even Sophia questioned the ability of either citizenship—or both—to reflect her true self. Furthermore, Joseph and Madeleine explicitly deconstructed the notion that nation-state citizenship could identify them, and Joseph
suggested that “global citizen” better described him; Madeleine and Maria’s experiences also better reflected this supra-national citizenship construct.

If dual citizenship could adequately reflect the experience of individuals—especially those whose life experience reflects two cultures—this would be sufficient. However, a growing number of TCKs—especially non-Western TCKs educated in Western-curriculum international schools—actually navigate three or more cultural contexts in their daily lives, and no current construction of citizenship exists that is sufficiently flexible as to reflect the diversity of their experiences and establish a platform on which they can construct their identity.

**Chapter Summary**

This discussion highlighted the distinction between “fitting in” and “belonging” that emerged during data analysis, paying special attention to the ways this distinction overlapped with differing constructions of *ethnicity* and with *language politics* in a Korean context. Finally, I presented the conceptual framework that emerged from this research and discussed the ways that it describes identity construction in the context of international mobility.

In “Fitting In versus Belonging” I analyzed how Korean TCKs made sense of their own ethnicity by identifying with—or resisting—Korean communities abroad, and how they experienced dissonance upon return to Korean culture and in their families. I understood this conflict in terms of ethnicity using Fishman’s (1985) ethnic *being, doing,* and *knowing* (as cited in Jeon, 2005). I suggested that dissonance emerged when participants encountered expectations to “fit in”—to conform with external constructions
of “Korean” (ethnic being constructed as equivalent to ethnic doing)—that conflicted with their sense of themselves (ethnic knowing). I distinguished “fitting in” from “belonging” and suggested that the family offers a unique space where TCKs can experience “belonging.”

In “Dual Language Identity Politics,” I analyzed language as currency whose value depends on the person who tenders it and on the recipient, and this value is mediated by ethnicity and lived experience. In this research, English fluency emerged as a privilege that separated and distinguished TCKs from their Korean peers, yet it was devalued if it came at the expense of Korean fluency. I applied Stephanie K. Kim’s (2014) analysis of language patterns in an EMI international college in Korea to describe language (specifically, Korean fluency) as a political tool for inclusion—or exclusion—where speakers capable of using both English and Korean intentionally restrict themselves to Korean.

I also discussed decontextualized English and Korean alongside “fitting in” and “belonging.” While language fluency may provide currency with which TCKs can negotiate “fitting in,” if their language is decontextualized (i.e., if their lived experience in that language is not aligned with the privileged form and privileged cultural context of that language) they are unable to “belong.” In this context, then, hybrid language emerges as a means of asserting a non-marginalized identity with others who share language fluencies, ethnicity, and lived experience.

Finally, in “Conceptual Framework” I used the analogy of theater to frame identity construction as the plot of a play, unfolding on the stage of citizenship and
informed by the setting of education—which in turn shapes the script of language. I discussed the ways that language functions as a currency and ethnicity as a mediator for participant experiences in the context of international mobility. I paid special attention to education as a context (or “setting”) for identity construction, where higher education emerged as less informative to identity construction than primary or secondary education (especially given the way that early education directly shaped language fluency). I closed this section with a discussion of citizenship as a platform (or “stage”) for identity construction and questioned the usefulness of rigid notions of nation-state citizenship—or dual citizenship—to adequately represent individuals raised in the context of international mobility.
CHAPTER 9
SIGNIFICANCE

This chapter discusses the limitations of this research and its implications for policy and practice as well as future research, giving special attention to the Korean and U.S. contexts and application to the context of cultural globalization.

In “Trustworthiness and Limitations,” I discuss how the findings of this research might be flawed. Specifically, I discuss the limitations of understanding and describing the construct of *identity* as well as the ways that my own subjectivity and positionality informed—and limited—my approach to this research. However, I pay special attention to the role of English in this research. That is, I collected the bulk of the data in English, but the majority of participants were (at least) bilingual, which fundamentally limits the ability of the data to represent identity construction. I am reconciled to this tension because participants *chose* to be interviewed in English but recognize that, rather than a full representation of identity, this project represents participants identity construction *in English*.

In “Significance and Applicability” I establish this study’s contribution to the fields of higher education and Korean area studies in the United States and to education in the Korean context, but also expand this study’s significance to the context of globalization. That is, while participants were Korean TCKs, the emergent model of identity construction is applicable to other TCKs, and likely applies to individuals who
construct their identity while interacting significantly with multiple cultures (cross-cultural kids, CCKs). Moreover, the fact that the identity construction process was not unique to participants suggests that identity construction is a human—not a cultural—phenomenon.

In “Implications for Policy and Practice,” I discuss the practical applications of this research in a Korean, U.S., and international context. In a Korean context, this research calls for families to exercise agency by making informed decisions—particularly about education—when moving abroad and upon repatriation. I also suggest ways that sending organizations can support internationally mobile families prior to their departure from and through their return to Korea. I pay special attention to the Korean educational context, where returning TCKs offer tremendous benefit to peers, educators, institutions, and a nation aggressively pursuing internationalization; yet, rigid constructions of globalization in terms of ethnic identity and nationalism limit the support that TCKs can receive. Finally, I suggest that Korea actively reconstruct a vocabulary of ethnicity and national identity to acknowledge and accommodate the Korean TCK phenomenon.

Secondly, I present TCKs—and Korean TCKs as a subset of this population—as uniquely positioned to contribute to the ongoing conversation of internationalization through global competencies in U.S. higher education; however, these students often defy traditional means of categorization and may be difficult to identify. Thus, I call for institutions to understand TCKs within the context of their lived experience and suggest practical ways to support these students in the functional areas of enrollment management and student life. I close this section with a brief discussion of how this research
contributes to the literature on student development in higher education. The final policy implication of this research applies to language in international schools, where I suggest that educators who develop and implement policy remain sensitive to their unique school context and to the linguistic tensions underlying students’ use of decontextualized and hybrid language(s).

Finally, I suggest “Areas for Future Research” that emerged from this project. I recommend that future research embrace technology as a means of identifying research participants (and collecting data), particularly if potential participants are not concentrated in a specific location. I suggest that future research in a Korean context should contribute to the ongoing conversation of identity, ethnicity, and citizenship surrounding Overseas Koreans and multicultural families; this research could also be done by a Korean researcher. Lastly, I call for future research to examine language policy in international schools and to determine the applicability of the conceptual framework outside a Korean context.

Trustworthiness and Limitations

Identity

The purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenon of identity construction in Korean TCKs. I approached this project from a qualitative perspective, seeking to understand the process of identity construction rather than to measure the degree of affiliation with an established indicator of identity (a quantitative perspective), and collected data through in-depth individual interviews. During these interviews, participants presented me with their chosen face—a “persona” which may or may not
align with a reality of identity that exists outside of themselves. Furthermore, these data were time-bound; that is, I suggest that identity construction is fluid and changes over time. In light of these limitations, the results of this study may be understood as a “snapshot” of participants’ identity construction at the time data were collected.

**Researcher Subjectivity and Positionality**

As a researcher, my role in this project was to understand and interpret Korean TCK identity construction. I attempted to view this phenomenon from the perspective of participants as well as from an outsider’s perspective (my own), but also interpret and contextualize this phenomenon. Finally, I was responsible to communicate the findings to an English-reading audience, all the while using this research—and the lens I brought to it—as a platform for the voices of participants.

My relationship with each study participant often blurred the very concepts of identity, “self,” and “other” which I hoped to study. We shared both a common culture in our experiences with Korea, TCK experience, and for most participants, we also shared two languages: English and Korean. However, our experiences were inverted from one another: that is, participants’ stories reflected my own, but “inside out.” Despite the intricacy of this positionality, my own experience functioned as a platform from which I could elevate and amplify participants’ voices with an attention to subtle meanings, a background of similar experience, a respect for Korean culture and language, and yet sufficient distance to discern what is the essential nature of their experience and identity.

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1 Joseph spoke little Korean.
(See Chapter Three for a full discussion of how my own subjectivity and positionality informed the design, implementation, analysis, and representation of this research.)

**English**

**Data.** Despite the fact that I designed this project so as to collect data in both English and Korean—and thereby reflect the experiences of Korean TCKs who were more comfortable in Korean *and* those who were more comfortable in English—all participants used English during their interviews, except for a few words or phrases. When I specifically asked one participant to refer me to potential participants who preferred to speak Korean, she said that all of her Korean TCK friends preferred English. (In fact, one participant agreed to the interviews as a way to practice her English.)

It is possible that participants were simply more comfortable in English, but there are several other possible explanations for their use of English during data collection. With two exceptions (Joseph and Jeong-sook), participants lived in at least one host culture where English was spoken (the United States, the UK, New Zealand, Hong Kong prior to 1997). All participants had received at least some formal education in English, and this may contribute to their privileging English in their linguistic choices, reflective of a similar valuing of English as powerful in a Korean and international context. Whether consciously or not, participants could also have been responding to my own positionality as a Caucasian and a U.S. citizen. Finally, while some participants agreed to participate because of their own interest in the subject matter, for those who were living or working in Korean contexts at the time of data collection, I think they were eager to have a space in which it was acceptable for them to use English. Although conducting all
interviews in English may limit the applicability of these results to Korean TCKs who prefer other languages, it also minimizes potential threats to the validity of data analysis because I am not a native speaker of Korean.

**Identity and language.** The fact that participants predominantly used English during data collection introduces a more fundamental threat to the validity of this study; that is, if language is so fundamentally entwined with identity, and participants chose to be interviewed in English, how can this study claim to illuminate the ways in which these participants experienced identity construction? This tension was eluded to by participants themselves: Drew and Madeleine both described assuming different identities when switching between languages, consistent with Guiora and colleagues’ (1975) suggestion that “to speak a second language authentically is to take on a new identity” (p. 456, as cited in Dewaele and van Oudenhoven, 2009).

When Drew described himself speaking English, he said, “I tend to make the expressions that Americans make, or speak in a tone that Americans speak in, which eventually takes over my whole mental state, and at that moment, I’m American.” Yet when he described himself speaking Korean, he said “I act Korean, and I speak like a Korean. I make gestures like a Korean.” Whether consciously or subconsciously, Drew’s vocabulary implied that he sees himself as becoming American when he speaks English yet becoming like a Korean when speaking Korean. Madeleine described her use of language to navigate diverse groups of people as a “struggle” because, “I can become such a different person in… a different language,” based on whether she spoke English, Korean, a mix of the two languages, or another language (Madeleine also spoke Turkish
and Arabic). She reflected, “I could not figure out who I was and I could not figure out where I was most comfortable… It’s not something that’s gone away… I just know how to do it better.”

At best, then, this project is limited to explaining how participants experienced and described identity construction in English; for participants who use both Korean and English in their everyday lives, this explanation is but one perspective on their identity construction. I am reconciled to this limitation because I empowered participants to choose how they would represent themselves (allowing them to choose their preferred language during interviews, switching to Korean when they felt it necessary, and extensive member checking). While this study examines participants self-perceptions (regardless of the accuracy of the perceptions according to an external standard or measurement), this is consistent with a qualitative paradigm where validity rests with the individual’s experience of the phenomenon of investigation. The end result represents the ways that participants exercised agency in their own self-representation.

Significance and Applicability

Although specialized in scope, this study contributes to the fields of higher education in the United States, education and missiology in Korea, and the broader field of comparative and international education. In the United States, this study facilitates an understanding of Korean TCKs as students who may enroll as international students or as US citizens, and its implications may also apply to the Korean-American and other immigrant populations in the US. In Korea, this study facilitates understanding of the Korean TCK experience, especially if these individuals who return to Korea for primary,
secondary, or higher education. These findings make implications for Korean education policy and practice, institutions and organizations which send Koreans abroad and/or receive them from abroad, internationally mobile Korean families, and society as a whole.

Within the field of comparative and international education, this study promotes a deeper understanding of Korean TCKs who enroll in local or international schools through the lens of cultural globalization—with application to other international school students, particularly those of non-Western heritage. The implications of this study may be most applicable to policy for business, education, and missionary sending organizations in Korea, but they ought also to inform policy and process for receiving institutions in the United States and abroad, especially higher education.

Although this study was limited to TCKs whose home culture was Korea, it carries implications not only for other TCKs, but for rapidly growing numbers of Cross-Cultural Kids (CCKs)\(^2\)—and for a growing number of individuals, companies, and organizations that cross cultures. Thus, this study’s findings regarding identity construction may apply to other individuals, especially within the context of globalization, and this suggests that identity construction is not a process which is unique to each culture, but is a distinctly \textit{human} phenomenon.

\footnote{See Chapter One for a full discussion of CCKs and TCKs in a global and Korean context.}
Implications for Policy and Practice

These recommendations for policy and practice pay special attention to educational contexts in Korea, the United States, and the context of international education.

Korean Context

Into the Korean context—where conformity persists as a cultural norm, globalization is both embraced and reinvented as nationalistic, and constructions of national identity as synonymous with ethnicity are simultaneously reinforced and questioned—Korean TCKs emerge as interpreters. These individuals are equipped to interpret divergent perspectives and negotiate between competing cultural influences, yet these abilities may become latent—whether overshadowed by the dissonance TCKs experience upon their return, perceived or reinforced as liabilities, or actively stifled by expectations to “be Korean.” In this section I discuss the implications of this study for a Korean audience so that Korean families, sending organizations, educational institutions, and society as a whole is equipped to understand and maximize the potential of its TCKs.

Exercising agency in family decisions. Family decisions about education, lifestyle, and affiliation with a Korean expatriate community while living abroad

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3 Kim (2014) suggested that “globalization in South Korea is… best understood not as a force that challenges the power and sovereignty of the nation-state but as a state-managed process through which the Korean government sets policies in education, science, and technology to remain competitive as a nation-state… the Korean nationalist spirit gives momentum to the [globalization push]. In fact, the Korean approach to globalization finds *nationalism and globalization as interrelated phenomena*” (pp. 2-3, emphasis added). See also Sung and colleagues’ (2013) discussion of globalization as nationalism and its applications in curriculum for Korean global high schools.

4 See discussion of national identity and ethnicity in Chapter Eight.
fundamentally informed TCKs’ experiences, and parents should navigate these decisions intentionally—these are not simply questions of opportunity or educational quality, but of values, language, and identity.

Language as motivation for educational decisions. Language fluency largely motivated family decisions about participants’ education (e.g., enrollment in public or international school to learn English, or HL school to retain the ability to speak Korean), and I interpret this motivation through a lens of Confucian values (where parents are fulfilling their primary duty to educate their children) and cultural globalization. That is, parents may privilege English fluency—and therefore international education—in order to offer their children better opportunity. (Indeed, for Autumn and Rose, the children’s education was the purpose for their family’s international move.)

Yet international education—and the English fluency which often results from it—fundamentally informs the ways in which these students construct—or question—their identity as Koreans; at the least, the decision to educate a child in English informs the language(s) he or she will use to navigate the process of identity construction.

Parent-child relationship. Participants described tension in their relationships with parents as reflecting the conflict between cultural values of Western education and Confucian-informed Korean constructions of education and family relationships. However, I suggest a more fundamental conflict may occur if parents and TCKs construct their ethnic identity differently. That is, parents may not anticipate their children’s

5 See discussion of Fishman’s identity constructs as overlapping with “fitting in” and “belonging” in Chapter Eight.
adoption of non-Korean values, language, constructions of ethnicity, or identities in the wake of their international experience.

Parents’ success as parents may be judged (by extended family, teachers, society, or even themselves) based upon their ability to transmit a Korean identity to their children—\textit{as measured by their child’s ability to conform to the established pattern of “being Korean”} upon their return to Korea. This judgment may be particularly harsh if TCKs are uncomfortable speaking Korean; that is, their English fluency is devalued if it comes at the expense of Korean fluency, and the children—and parents—may be ridiculed, rejected, or perceived as a disgrace to their family and regarded as not truly “Korean.”

\textbf{Parents can mitigate the difficulty that repatriating TCKs experience by cultivating a sense of belonging within the nuclear family unit}; however, this requires parents to identify their own constructions of ethnicity—and reconcile themselves to the ways that their international experience may keep their children from sharing these ideas. While all participants expressed respect and love for their parents, the majority of participant narratives did not reflect this kind of “belonging” in their relationships with their parents; instead, twelve of thirteen participants described their family relationships as informed by divergent constructions of \textit{ethnicity}—“Korean-ness.” (Only Joseph reflected the fullest sense of belonging in his description of his family,\textsuperscript{8} and the

\textsuperscript{6} Six of the twelve participants who lived in Korea reflected this tension: they described resisting societal expectations of conformity while simultaneously choosing to conform in order to avoid their parents being criticized.

\textsuperscript{7} See Chapters Six and Eight for a full discussion of how participants experienced these expectations.

\textsuperscript{8} That Joseph’s family dynamic so drastically diverged from other participants was one reason I presented his profile as a \textit{counter}-narrative at the conclusion of Chapter Six.
affirmation he received in those relationships grounded his journey of identity construction.

Agency in decision-making. Thus, rather than language fluency—or culturally-informed notions of family duty or perceptions of English as valuable—motivating educational decisions, parents should navigate family decisions with a full understanding of the ways that their context might inform their child’s lived experience—including how these decisions inform their child’s ability to fit in when returning to Korea. Parents should determine the extent to which they desire their child’s education to reflect his or her international experience, with the understanding that choices about education are, in essence, decisions about identity. Borden (2000) echoed this assertion when he suggested that

Korean school creates Korean adults; international education creates either Western adults or bicultural adults who eventually are at ease in both the East and the West. Which route to take is a critical family decision affecting not only the child but also the family and the family’s future. It is a question of whether or not future generations will be Korean (p. 84, emphasis added)

—or rather, I suggest, a question of what kind of Korean they will be. Thus, parents of Korean TCKs must be equipped to navigate conversations of family identity—and related decisions about education, lifestyle, and ethnicity—intentionally, exercising agency in these decisions.
**Sending organizations.** Although the responsibility rests with internationally mobile Korean families to initiate conversations about their family identity and make decisions which reflect it, sending organizations in Korea (e.g., businesses, universities, mission organizations) have the unique opportunity—and the responsibility—to inform these conversations and support families in their decisions before and throughout their time abroad and upon their return to Korea. The health, well-being, and fulfillment of families sent abroad should be a primary concern for the organizations that send them (Stahlke & Loughlin, 2003), especially for expatriate employees, where the family either supports the employee—or motivates their return to the home culture. (In fact, B.R. Kim (2007) suggested that the primary reason for Korean missionary families to leave their assignment was not financial or work-related but for children’s education.)

Prior to sending families abroad, organizations could provide some basic orientation and training for employees, but also for spouses and children. This forum is ideal to introduce TCK vocabulary and provide families with information about housing, education, and the presence of Korean communities in their host culture. Perhaps most importantly, these organizations should give as much support to families through their repatriation as they do in sending them overseas, particularly if the organization subsidizes the cost of international school attendance for children while families live abroad. These children will likely experience difficulty re-entering the Korean education system, especially if they were educated in English while living abroad. Companies

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9 The proposed applications for sending organizations are informed by Stahlke and Loughlin’s (2003) Relationship Model of governance, leadership, and management. This model was developed for non-profit organizations, but its key recommendation applies equally to for-profit businesses who send families abroad—that is, “for an organization to be healthy both staff and clients must be equally fulfilled” (p. 3).
could continue to subsidize the cost of international school tuition for returning families, at least for a period of time. These organizations are uniquely positioned to lead Korea through its reinvention as a multicultural society by initiating conversations and implementing policies which support the families who represent Korea abroad.

**Education.** Korea’s recent globalization initiatives (*segyehwa* [세계화]) are expressed in educational contexts, where Sung and colleagues’ (2013) analysis of documents describing recent curriculum revisions in South Korea suggested that curriculum “symbolically appropriates global education for the purpose of national competitiveness” with the intent “to uphold, rather than weaken, national identity” (p. 285). Stephanie K. Kim (2014) described globalization and nationalism as “interrelated phenomena… [leading to] an intensification of ethnic identity…to preserve a distinct form of ‘Korean’ in the face of rapid changes” (pp. 2-3). Korean TCKs who enter this context offer tremendous benefit to their peers, their teachers, their institutions, and the nation as a whole—yet constructions of internationalization and globalization in terms of ethnic identity and nationalism not only limit the support that TCKs receive, but also hinder others’ ability to benefit from their lived experience.

**Primary and secondary education.** Teachers and administrators in primary and secondary schools in Korea should be equipped to come alongside repatriating TCKs academically, linguistically, and socially. Educators should invite returning TCKs into
Korea’s ongoing conversation about multiculturalism and diversity,\textsuperscript{10} while allowing them to choose the extent to which they identify with—or distinguish themselves from—their peers. Returning TCKs may also need immediate support if they lack sufficient Korean fluency to navigate coursework or social networks.

**Higher education.** Universities can initiate ongoing conversation to foster understanding of Korean TCKs, not only at the level of institutional practice but also through peer-reviewed journals and research fora. This conversation would utilize a culturally-appropriate “top-down” approach to inform institutional and national policy and practice and equip educators in supporting internationally mobile and non mobile students. Ultimately this conversation would not only benefit TCKs and their families, but also educational institutions, organizations, and the nation as a whole.

Though Korean higher education does not have a student affairs profession, universities provide a context within which TCK students can make sense of their experiences and construct their own identity. Institutions that enroll substantial numbers of Korean TCKs and CCKs\textsuperscript{11} should consider developing professional positions to address the needs of this special population. These educators could intentionally: 1) equip TCKs with vocabulary to describe their experiences and negotiate their sense of ethnicity and belonging in Korea and/or abroad, 2) cultivate environments within which

\textsuperscript{10} The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology adopted a policy supporting education for children from multicultural families (i.e., families where one parent is not a Korean citizen or is not ethnically Korean) in 2006, with curriculum revisions the following year to facilitate multicultural education. This policy is intended to support students from multicultural families and “enhance multicultural understanding and acceptance in Korean society” (Jeong, 2014), but at present many of these initiatives are limited to designated “multicultural schools” rather than being implemented across the national curriculum.

\textsuperscript{11} The process of the university entrance exam and admission application makes it relatively simple for institutions to identify applicants from Korean families who have lived abroad.
students develop relationships with those who share their experiences—and foster understanding among students who do not share this experience, and 3) support students in maximizing the benefits of their experiences, especially if they choose to market themselves to Korean companies for employment.

Reconstructing vocabulary of ethnicity and belonging. The findings of this study suggest that a conversation about ethnicity—and multiple constructions thereof—is a prerequisite to both understanding and supporting Korean TCKs in family, educational, organizational, and societal contexts. That is, my analysis of participant narratives suggested that TCKs do not generally share the meanings of ethnicity (in Fishman’s terms) that they perceive are shared by other Koreans, whether at home or abroad—these differing meanings contribute to the identity dissonance they feel, especially upon their return to Korea.

The tension between different constructions of ethnicity—and the findings of this research distinguishing between “fitting in” and “belonging”—contributes to an ongoing conversation in Korea surrounding constructions of ethnicity, citizenship, and national identity, especially as large numbers of Overseas Koreans reside in Korea and multicultural families emerge within the population. Thus, this research calls for Korea to initiate a conversation about ethnicity and belonging. Specifically, I suggest

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12 The Korea Immigration Service (2014) reported that 233,269 foreign nationals of Korean heritage held a visa for Overseas Koreans in 2013 (given to individuals who can demonstrate Korean heritage—a parent or grandparent born in Korea); 67% of these held citizenship in the People’s Republic of China. This allows the individual to visit, live, and/or work in Korea and is renewable long-term.

13 Families where one spouse is non-Korean (the non-Korean spouse is usually female). Korea has established multicultural schools for the children of these families, which also provide Korean language and continuing education for the (often non-Korean) mothers.

adopting a common vocabulary with which to describe Korean CCK and TCK experiences—one which allows for distinctions, acknowledges each as “Korean,” and allows individuals to construct their own meanings of ethnicity.

In conclusion, rigid notions of “Korean-ness”—whether motivated by cultural norms and values, constructions of ethnicity, or worldview—may contribute to a TCK’s fractured or incomplete sense of self. In contrast, parents’ intentional cultivation of TCKs, especially if accompanied by support from sending organizations and education institutions with accommodating constructions of ethnicity, facilitates a unified sense of self which assimilates the diversity of their experience and uniquely equips them to meet the needs of a globalizing Korea.

**Higher Education in the United States**

Alongside a trend toward internationalization in higher education comes an increased emphasis on “global competencies” in curriculum, yet without consensus on how these competencies are defined. Into this void I propose that TCKs—from any home culture—often already possess “soft” global competencies and use them on a daily basis: they have the ability to navigate, decode, and interpret culturally sensitive situations, and (particularly for those educated in Western-curriculum contexts) often speak English fluently, thus side-stepping the academic transition issues that plague many international students.

Third culture kids are uniquely equipped to address the needs of educational institutions in the 21st century; yet they also have unique needs which require special attention during each stage of their interaction with the institution. In
particular, TCKs from home cultures other than the United States who have been educated in Western-curriculum schools offer a unique opportunity to U.S. institutions—*but only if these institutions are equipped to identify these students and to understand them within the context of their lived experience* rather than through rigid categories of nationality or constructions of ethnicity.

**Enrollment management.** There is no simple way to identify TCKs during the application process, particularly because they themselves often lack the vocabulary to describe their own experience and thus may fail to self-identify. If they do not hold U.S. citizenship (or if they do but their parents do not) they may not understand the process of application, financial aid, and enrollment, and they may be overwhelmed by attempting to navigate this process while living overseas. Specifically, recruiting a Korean TCK is as much about recruiting the parents as it is recruiting the student, and Korean parents will desire name recognition, especially since their child’s choice of institution reflects whether they have fulfilled their duty as parents.

**Recruitment.** In practice, I suggest that institutions attempting to diversify their student body and foster a climate of global engagement on campus should *intentionally recruit from international schools.*¹⁵ In order to recruit effectively, admissions staff should be sensitized to the ways in which TCK experiences might be expressed in application materials, and staff should be equipped recruit these students as they would an athlete or academic top-performer since their potential contribution to the university

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¹⁵ I am referring to international schools intended to enroll children of expatriates and students whose lived experiences align with TCK (in contrast to the newly-founded international schools in Korea which are designed to teach “Korean Korean” students using EMI curriculum).
community is equally invaluable. If the institution lacks name recognition, financial aid and social networks may be the best recruitment tool. Participants in this study who enrolled in universities in the United States were often introduced to the school through a connection at their international school, whether a teacher or alum, implying that recruitment may be most effective along established relationship networks.

Enrollment management staff should understand that TCKs will need significant support through the application and enrollment process, particularly if they are navigating this process from overseas. These potential students may be required to make a decision about enrollment without ever visiting the university, so the admissions staff are critical in equipping the TCK to make an informed decision. (They ought also to be familiar with student life opportunities which TCKs may be particularly interested in.) Ideally, potential students would be designated to a single admissions officer and be given multiple ways to contact that person, especially given the potential time differences.

**Categorization.** This study implies that TCKs graduating from international schools (particularly those with a U.S.-based curriculum) have been academically equipped to pursue higher education in the United States, yet those who do not hold U.S. citizenship may be at a disadvantage in terms of admission and financial aid. Based on their citizenship, these students are classified as “international,” and therefore must satisfy the same requirements as other international students (often including TOEFL testing and possibly extending to separate housing). Yet TCKs’ experiences align more closely with one another’s—regardless of citizenship—than with students who leave their home country as adults in order to enroll in a degree program in the United States. (This
was especially reflected in the way that participants—with the exception of Jeong-sook—distinguished themselves from “Korean Koreans” when they referred to them, and this self-distinction affirmed my decision not to consult research literature on study abroad [see Chapter Two].)

Therefore, through the process of enrollment, educators and staff should

**understand the TCK—particularly the Korean TCK—within the context of their life experience,** realizing that these students are neither the typical international student **nor the typical Korean-American student.** As such, the staff ought to be authorized to waive any English-proficiency tests that are institutionally required on the basis of citizenship, particularly if the TCK has graduated from an international school offering IB and/or AP courses or one that is accredited by a U.S. accreditation agency.

**Student life.** Participant narratives suggest that while Korean TCKs’ experiences on campus were in some ways mediated by their Korean ethnicity, each participant made their own decisions about the extent to which they would involve themselves—or not—in campus life, and the extent to which they would identify—or not—with other Korean students. **Korean TCKs defy categorization based on citizenship or ethnicity** and must be understood individually, within the context of their lived experience. For educators on university campuses, this underscores the importance of understanding these students as individuals rather than assuming that they will align with “other Korean

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16 While Jeong-sook is a TCK, she identified strongly with other Korean TCKs at her international schools in Indonesia (even following one of her “seniors” in her choice of university) and then identified with other Korean students—including “Korean Korean” students—through the Korean dance and drumming club at her university. She described this club as a “family.”

17 As opposed to “Korean-American” students or “Korean-Korean” students studying abroad in the U.S.; participants consistently distinguished themselves (as Korean TCKs) from these groups.
students.” For universities that have established organizations for cultural exchange or which specifically focus on a population of Asian or Korean students, administrators must recognize the subtle distinctions between “categories” of Korean—and Asian—students.

**Identity theories.** Much of the literature describing students in a higher education context focuses on student *development*; yet the model which emerged from this study conceptualizes identity *construction* as a process distinct from identity development, thereby making a unique contribution to the literature examining student identity in higher education.\(^{18}\) This model aligns with “social identity development” models (as presented by Evans et al, 2010) in its applicability, but it also equips student affairs practitioners to understand how TCK identity construction is distinct because of their international mobility.

The model for identity construction which emerged from this study is sufficiently flexible to describe TCKs from home cultures outside Korea, and may also apply to other CCKs;\(^{19}\) in a U.S. context this could include students who interact with multiple cultures on a daily basis. These individuals may fit “traditional” conceptions of CCKs (such as children of immigrant and refugee populations or children whose parents are from different cultures or subcultures) or children who cross *sub*cultures as part of their daily lives (such as ethnic minorities, or students in dual language or immersion schools).

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\(^{18}\) While *development* theories carry a value judgment (that “earlier” or “lower” stages of development are inferior to “later” or “higher” stages), the model which emerged from this study reimagines identity as an ongoing process where multiple positions (*conflict*, *process*, and *resolution*) can be held simultaneously. See Chapter Eight for a full discussion of this model.

\(^{19}\) This study’s findings about identity construction suggest that the *process* of identity construction is not necessarily unique for Korean TCKs, but that their home culture fundamentally informs the *context* in which they make sense of their identity.
In summary, this research suggests implications for both Korean and U.S. contexts and within the context of globalization. In Korea, I suggest that internationally mobile Korean parents exercise agency by navigating decisions about their children’s education—and about their experience abroad and return to the home culture—*based upon identity, and with a full understanding of their implications*. Furthermore, I call for a unified vocabulary with which to discuss internationally mobile Korean individuals and families and suggest practical ways for educational institutions and sending organizations to support Korean families during their time abroad, but especially upon their return. Finally, I suggest that TCKs—and specifically Korean TCKs—offer a unique opportunity to institutions of higher education and suggest that these institutions actively recruit, enroll, and support these individuals, beginning by understanding these TCKs in the context of their lived experience.

**Language Policy in International Schools**

This study carries particular implications for international education, particularly with regards to language policy in dual-language contexts. International schools’ language policy should be developed—and enforced—within the overlapping linguistic tensions that inform the educational context. That is, parents desire education in English (in EMI international schools), and for Korean parents, English-medium instruction may be the reason they enrolled their children at this school—or even the reason for their international move—reflective of the ways that English is privileged within the context of globalization (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008). Moreover, the majority of international school graduates (particularly those accredited by U.S. agencies or affiliated with the
International Baccalaureate program) pursue higher education in the United States or Europe, and must be equipped to perform academically in this context. These influences suggest that educational environments implement policy that will facilitate students’ mastery of English.

However, educators must also understand the tensions underlying dual language contexts and contributing to the emergence of hybrid language. While I analyzed language as a political tool (i.e., Korean was used to exclude non-Korean speakers in international educational within Korea) I also suggested that when students speak two decontextualized languages, they may use a hybrid language to assert a common identity—a sense of “belonging”—with others who share not only their “decontextualized” language but also their lived experience abroad, and possibly a shared ethnicity.\textsuperscript{20} This phenomenon may be directly tied to the makeup of the student body at a given institution (e.g., a Korean student at an international school will not speak Korean or a hybrid of Korean and English unless another Korean speaker is present). It is likely that a sufficient number of students from a given home culture may drastically influence the social landscape of the international school, at which point language not only becomes a political tool (e.g., using Korean as a “secret” language to establish inclusion/exclusion) but also limits the potential English fluency of these students.

International schools offer a unique context where TCKs can “belong” (and for Korean TCKs who attend international schools in Korea, this is the only setting where they experience “majority” on the basis of shared experience, shared language, and

\textsuperscript{20} See “Dual Language Identity Politics” in Chapter Eight for a full analysis of this phenomenon.
shared ethnicity\textsuperscript{21}). In these settings, educators and administrators must remain sensitive to the social, linguistic, and academic needs of \textit{all} students, and to the unique context of their own school, as they develop and implement language policy to maximize student success and support students in their lived experience abroad.

\textbf{Areas for Future Research}

The implications of this study suggest several areas for future research, in Korean and non-Korean contexts. This section presents this project’s implications for the use of technology in future research and the need for future research to be conducted in Korean. Finally, this research represents but one instance of “changing cultural identities” and “hybridization of formerly distinct categories” (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008, p. 51) that are emerging in the wake of international transmigration and mobility; as such, it suggests future research to determine the applicability of the conceptual framework within the context of cultural globalization.

\textbf{Technology and Social Media in Research Design}

While I intended to identify participants through official and traditional means (a survey distributed through alumni networks, initiated through international schools and entering respondents in a drawing for a gift card), I ultimately used Facebook to identify potential participants—both through snowball sampling and personal contacts but also through posting to “groups” in a semi-public forum visible to other group members. Given the flexibility of the qualitative research paradigm and the fact that this research

\textsuperscript{21} See Chapter Six for a full presentation of how participants experienced majority.
focused on the experiences of a small number of participants, this was an effective way to identify participants.22

I also chose to conduct interviews via Skype rather than in person, which allowed me access to participants I would not have otherwise been able to interview. The relative success of these decisions, while accompanied by their own limitations, suggests that future research might also embrace nontraditional platforms for identifying participants and collecting data. This is especially applicable to projects focusing on individuals’ experiences of a given phenomenon, particularly if participants are not concentrated in a given geographic area. In sum, this research suggests that the use of social media and technology is a valid and viable platform for data collection, particularly in research with highly mobile or geographically scattered individuals.

Identity Construction

Conceptual framework. Within comparative and international education’s globalization studies, the emergent conceptual framework should be evaluated to determine the extent to which it applies to TCKs from other home cultures, and to Korean CCKs (e.g., early study abroad students, 1.5 and 2.0 Generation Korean-American immigrants, and ethnic Korean populations in other countries) and non-Korean CCKs. These future studies should also determine whether language and ethnicity inform life experiences and identity construction in the ways suggested by this framework.

Researcher positionality. Future research on Korean TCK identity should include Korean TCKs from non-English-speaking host cultures, as well as Korean TCKs

22 See Chapter Three for a full discussion of data collection design and implementation.
who attended Korean-curriculum international schools rather than international schools with an American or European curriculum and English medium instruction. This distinction in participants would likely be reflected in data collection, as well, where participants might choose to be interviewed in Korean rather than in English.

Moreover, this research is the product of researcher who is Caucasian and a U.S. citizen; future research on identity construction in Korean TCKs could be conducted by Korean researchers. The positionality of a Korean researcher might facilitate data collection in Korean, access to a distinct subgroup within the population of Korean TCKs, and publication of results for a Korean audience; this type of research would also contribute to or undermine the usefulness of the emergent conceptual framework to describe Korean TCK identity construction.

“Categories” of Korean

Participant narratives suggested that the Korean TCK experience was distinct within the United States, especially because TCKs existed alongside—but their experiences were not aligned with—Korean study abroad students and Korean-American immigrants of several generations. Future research should examine the extent to which these categories may be reflected in other countries where an ethnic Korean community exists, whether expatriate (e.g. study abroad students) or immigrant.23

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) offers a unique context for future research given the co-existence of an ethnic Korean immigrant and recent expansion of a South

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23 Countries with such populations include, but are not limited to Japan, China (which hosts South Korean expatriates and ethnic Korean Chinese citizens, and established the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region, later changed to Prefecture, in 1952), and areas of the former Soviet Union which received koryo-in (고려인), ethnic Koreans who were forcibly relocated under Stalin’s regime).
Korean expatriate population. The ethnic Korean (*joseon-jok* [조선족]) minority in China is sufficiently large as to warrant the establishment of a self-governing prefecture (Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture 間邊朝鮮族自治州) with special accommodations for Korean individuals and families within the prefecture including access to Korean language primary, secondary, and higher education.\(^{24}\) Moreover, the proximity of the Yanbian prefecture to the Korean peninsula\(^{25}\) facilitates transmigration between Yanbian and both Koreas, in terms of individual mobility,\(^{26}\) business and trade,\(^{27}\) and cultural exchange.\(^{28}\) Future research could use cultural globalization as a lens to examine the ways that intercultural identities are constructed and categories of ethnicity emerge—or are contested—in the wake of this mobility, transmigration, and co-existence of ethnic Koreans from multiple nationalities.

**International Education**

**International schools abroad.** Participants also described categories of Korean students emerging within Western-curriculum international schools outside Korea; within

\(^{24}\) See Jeanyoung Lee’s (1999) dissertation for a full discussion of the historical context and evolution of policy related to the Korean minority in China.

\(^{25}\) Yanbian shares a land border with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, commonly called North Korea).

\(^{26}\) Ethnic Korean Chinese population in Yanbian has decreased dramatically over the past two decades as many Korean Chinese migrate to South Korea for employment, with a smaller but concurrent migration of individuals and families from South Korea to Yanbian.

\(^{27}\) This includes South Korean business expansion into China and Yanbian, but also business and economic investment in the Rason Special Economic Zone (라진선봉 경제특구), a free-trade zone in the DPRK that provides investment opportunity and access to shipping ports to foreign businesses from China and Russia.

\(^{28}\) Especially “Korean Wave” (한류 [hallyu]) exports of popular culture (television, music, etc.) from South Korea to Yanbian. (See J. Kim’s 2007 analysis of the “Korean Wave” for further discussion of the influence of South Korean popular culture worldwide. For more information on how this cultural export has influenced curriculum in U.S. higher education, see Megan Rogers’ November 2013 report in *Inside Higher Ed* describing increasing enrollment in Korean language and culture courses by non-heritage students.)
this context, non-Western students cultivated social groupings along ethnic lines. Future research should examine the extent to which the home cultural values and norms carry over into interactions within these groups, and how they inform the social landscape of the institution, and mixed methods research could examine the ratios at which these dynamics change the social landscape of the school. Moreover, longitudinal research could examine language policy in international schools, paying special attention to the ways that group dynamics and expression of identit(ies) are shaped by these policies.

**International schools in Korea.** In the Korean context, these “categories” of Korean students emerged in both international schools and international programs within Korean universities. In both of these contexts, future research should examine how a change in language policy (e.g., allowing both Korean and English) might inform the way that language is used (e.g., that Korean is self-imposed among ethnic Korean students) to assert and redefine ethnicity and/or include or exclude peers. Also, quantitative research could gather data on enrollment, academic success, and persistence to graduation—according to “categories” of Korean students—in the international EMI programs within Korean universities, as well as how the international EMI colleges compare with the international EMI degree programs.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the trustworthiness and limitations of this research project, and suggested implications for practice as well as areas for future research. I described the ways that using English as the language of data collection informed and limited this research project, and the ways that my own positionality informed this
research, examining specific areas of empathy, privilege, culture, and ethnicity. I suggested that this research contributes to the fields of higher education, Korean studies, and comparative and international education. As such, I presented some applications of this research to the Korean, U.S., and international contexts and suggested areas for future research in each of these domains.
CONCLUSION

This research answered the question, “How does the lived experience of Korean Third Culture Kids inform their identity construction?” I interviewed thirteen participants using a series of biographical narrative interviews and used a constant comparative approach to analyze the data. From this process, I suggest the following resolution to the research question.

Participants assimilated their lived experience into their sense of self, and constructed their identity in the wake of international mobility; as such, their identity construction was informed by their home and host cultures but also by their mobility, which I analyzed through the lens of cultural globalization. Moreover, participants exercised a level of agency about which aspects of their lived experience would be expressed—and this expression changed based upon their environment (i.e., they might behave differently in different contexts or with different people). I understood this to reflect multiple aspects of participants’ unified sense of self rather than competing or disjointed identities. Finally, identity construction emerged as a fluid and ongoing process (i.e., when context changed, participants described a process of identity re-construction), but they described this process becoming easier with experience and time.

I asked supporting questions to help answer the over-arching research question. First, I asked how the university experience informed identity construction. For participants who had completed higher education, this experience was no more
informative than any other lived experience—and seemed less informative when compared to their primary and secondary education experiences. Primary and secondary education fundamentally informed identity construction—not only in terms of curriculum and content, but also in terms of developing language fluency, particularly for participants educated in English.

Finally, I discovered that the process of identity construction was not unique to Korean TCKs, but the context in which identity construction occurred was fundamentally informed by Korean home culture. This answered the second and third supporting research questions, asking about the distinctions of participants’ lived experience and identity construction because of Korean home culture. I found that the marriage of family honor and educational achievement, the cultural norms of hierarchy and conformity, and competing constructions of ethnicity fundamentally shaped the lived experience of Korean TCKs abroad, in the home culture, and within their families.

“Korea and Me, We’re Cool”

I conclude this research by presenting a journal entry written by Madeleine and shared with her permission. (It is presented in italics because it represents Madeleine’s own voice; bracketed text represents information that I added or changed to protect her identity. I made minimal changes to this essay, and punctuation and capitalization reflect Madeleine’s own writing.)

In this written reflection, Madeleine describes her journey through life abroad, dissonance upon repatriation, and embracing Korean heritage as an aspect of her lived experience and identity.
Growing up abroad, I had a pretty awkward relationship with South Korea. It was a place that “claimed” me as its own, with its dark green passport marking me as its citizen and with my Asian eyes, flat nose and black hair, it was a place where I camouflaged flawlessly into the crowd. I was taught its language, its culture of respect, and its customs under Korean parents, but the feelings were never mutual since I could never claim South Korea as ‘my own.’ Our family would occasionally visit the ‘homeland’ every 3 years or so during the summer vacations, and the thrill of experiencing a “new” culture was always there but would quickly wear out within a couple of weeks. After 2 months, I would always be ready to go back “home” (which happened to be [the Middle East] and with whom I also had an unbalanced relationship since I claimed it to be mine, yet the feelings were not returned—it was also a place where I stood out like a lemon amongst pistachios, a fact that was daily pointed out to me wherever I went).

There were always so many things that I dislike about Korea and its culture—these were the things that I felt I could never be part of or acknowledge as part of ’me.’ This [combined] with the pressure and emphasis that my parents would place on me to embrace the culture and identity as my very own led to a greater resistance on my part, leaving me with a great identity crisis for the better part of my adolescent years. Not to mention that I was educated all my life in English under American teachers which meant that the way that I thought was ‘American’ (which is so very hard to describe in words). Also the Korean people I did grow up with were not really Koreans but third-culture kids (TCKs) like myself who were lost in between cultures and identities. So I continued to resist my Korean identity. In high school, I declared that I would not live in Korea—so Korean college was never an option that I saw for myself. My very worried parents felt differently, of course.

But now, I stand a graduate of a Korean university and a proud survivor of five years in the city of Seoul, and I feel this five year journey has given me a gift of maturity and an expansion in my heart for cultural understanding. What I struggled with during the transition wasn’t just the pressure to adjust (which happens to be one of the greatest skills I have), but it was the pressure to quickly reconcile the long lost time between South Korea and I, and become best friends—even worse, family. It had long claimed me as its own, and that’s what I struggled with—the fact that this was ‘my identity’ but that I knew nothing about it and the things that I was discovering were just puzzling.
The honest fact is, my reaction to Korea was totally different from my behavior towards other cultures. Towards other cultures, I was more open and willing to embrace or accept the things as they were. But towards Korea, I was especially critical and harsh because deep down I thought that once I accepted things as they were, I would become a stranger to even myself. Simply put, my mode was ‘rejection.’

But what happened? I survived, and came out a better person because I’ve gained cultural understanding. In the process of being judgmental, Korea has (ironically) taught me to be less judgmental towards culture. There are still things that I don’t understand (the rudeness of ajummas,\(^1\) the emphasis on physical beauty and perfection, etc.), but what would culture be without its quirks, big or small.

Am I “Korean”? Parts of me definitely are. Am I proud of my Korean identity? I definitely am. And I am not a single identity. I am a compilation, a mish-mosh, a consolidation, a junction, and fusion of several identities—and I’m glad Korean is one of them.

I’m glad that I gave Korea a chance to grow on me (through the bickering, stress and temper tantrums). I’m glad to this country for teaching me to be open to and accept culture for what it is. You can claim the right to diss or judge, only after you make an effort to understand and accept things for the way things are. There are things that I still struggle with, things that I may not like, but equally there are also things that I like, respect, and admire. I’ve found that ‘objectivity’ is the best approach—like for any other relationship, there are aspects that we like and dislike (or simply find odd) in our friends or family members. But to solely focus on the negative without even trying to look at the positive, is throwing away what could be a good and valuable relationship.

So I just want to say that now, South Korea and I, we’re cool.

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\(^1\) 아줌마, a title of address for a married woman, generally used for women between the ages of 30 to 50.
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APPENDIX A – DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

You are being asked to complete this survey because you may be eligible for participation in a research study that will examine how Korean third culture kids (TCKs) who pursue higher education construct their identity.

This survey is voluntary and confidential and will take less than ten (10) minutes to complete; it should be submitted online through surveymonkey.com. If you encounter problems or an error while completing or submitting the survey, contact Megan Beard (iveym@email.sc.edu). Once your survey is submitted, you will be entered into a drawing for a $50.00 (USD) gift certificate to amazon.com or a ₩50,000 (KRW) gift certificate to kyobobook.co.kr.

If your survey responses indicate that you meet the criteria to participate in the study, you may be contacted by the researcher (Megan Beard, a PhD candidate at the University of South Carolina) and invited to participate in a series of individual interviews to discuss your life experience.
Identifying Korean TCKs

Demographic Info

1. Name:  

2. Email Address:  

3. Gender  
   - Male  
   - Female  

4. In what year were you born?  
   (enter 4-digit birth year; for example, 1988)  

Citizenship

5. Of what country or countries is your mother a citizen?  
   - Republic of Korea (South Korea)  
   - Other (please specify)  

6. In which country or countries did your mother live before she completed high school?  

7. Of what country or countries is your father a citizen?  
   - Republic of Korea (South Korea)  
   - Other (please specify)  

8. In which country or countries did your father live before he completed high school?
**Identifying Korean TCKs**

**9. Of what country or countries are you a citizen?**
- [ ] USA
- [ ] Republic of Korea (South Korea)
- [ ] Other (please specify)

**10. In which country or countries did you live before completing high school?**

**Education**

**11. What type of education did you receive before attending university?**
*(Check all that apply)*
- [ ] Korean school in Korea
- [ ] Korean school outside Korea
- [ ] International school in Korea
- [ ] International school outside Korea
- [ ] Homeschool
- [ ] Other (please specify)

**12. Of which university are you a student or alum?**
- [ ] Liberty University
- [ ] Handong University
- [ ] Yonsei University Underwood International College
- [ ] Yonsei University
- [ ] Other (please specify)

**13. In what year did you/do you expect to graduate from university?**
*(enter 4-digit year; for example, 2013)*

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Page 2
You are being asked to participate in this study because your responses to the demographic survey suggest that you meet the criteria for participation. This study will examine how Korean third culture kids (TCKs) who pursue higher education construct their identity.

These individual interviews are completely voluntary and confidential; each interview will last approximately 60 minutes and you will be invited to participate in three separate interviews.

**Preliminary Meeting**

- Introductions (name, year, major, etc.)
- Describe research study
- Request permission to record interviews (already requested via recruitment email)
- Ensure confidentiality, use of pseudonyms, withdrawal at any time
- Introduce interview series protocol, possibility of focus group
- Provide participant a copy of the Consent Form (see Appendix C) for their review
**Interview 1: Procedures**

- Reconfirm permission to record interviews
- Repeat commitment to confidentiality, use of pseudonyms, withdrawal at any time
- Request signed Consent Form (see Appendix C)

**Interview 1: Open-Ended Questions**

Goal: Invite participant story-telling to establish a timeline of their life experience.

- *Tell me about your life and the experiences that have brought you to this point.*

**Interview 2: Procedures**

- Build rapport, establish trust by discussing participant experiences since last interview
- Remind participant of their right to withdraw from the study at any time
- Invite questions from participant related to research process, methods, etc.

**Interview 2: Open-Ended Questions**

Goal: Invite participant story-telling about their experience of higher education as a Korean TCK.

- *Tell me about your experiences during your university years.*

**Interview 3: Procedures**

- Build rapport, establish trust by discussing participant experiences since last interview
- Remind participant of their right to withdraw from the study at any time
- Assure continued communication via email for focus group scheduling and member checking
Interview 3: Open-Ended Questions

Goal: Invite participants to reflect on the meaning and significance of the Korean TCK experience, especially related to their construction of intercultural identity during college.

- How do you answer the question, “Who am I?”
  What experiences have shaped how you see yourself?

- What does “home” mean to you?
  What makes you feel “at home”?

- If you could describe your experience in one word or phrase, what would it be?

- What does it mean to you, to be a Korean TCK?
  How do you “make sense” of your experience as a Korean TCK?
APPENDIX C – RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Intercultural Identity Construction in Korean Third-Culture Kids During College
Megan I. Beard

Purpose of Research
You will have at least three (3) unstructured individual interviews with the researcher and may participate in a focus group with other research participants.

Duration of Participation
The data for this project will be collected during the 2012-2013 school year in the United States, or during the 2013 school year in the Republic of Korea.

Risks to the Individual
While your risks are not greater than what you might experience in every day life, the intensity of retrospective self-reflection involved in the individual interviews may cause you to experience fear, identity confusion, or psychological stress.

Confidentiality

Individual interviews. All individual interview data (audio recordings, transcripts, the researcher’s field notes, and manuscript drafts submitted for publication) will be kept on a password-protected hard drive that is accessible only to the researcher. Audio files, transcripts, and scanned copies of field notes will be saved using a pseudonym in place of your real name. Audio recordings of individual interviews will be sent to transcriptionists and two translators (if data are collected in Korean), with your name replaced by a pseudonym. Translators and transcriptionists will be required to sign confidentiality agreements. The researcher will not share your identity with other participants in the study or with those who read the results of the research. All information that you share during individual interviews will be disguised with a pseudonym before it is published in written documents (course papers, research publications, etc.).

Focus groups. The researcher will treat data collected during a focus group with the same level of confidentiality as data collected during individual interviews. If you participate in a focus group, you will be known to other participants by your screen name and/or email address. You may choose to adopt a pseudonym or use your real name during the focus group. While the researcher will treat the focus group data as equally confidential as individual interview data, the presence of other participants means that any information you share in the focus group cannot be guaranteed to be confidential.
Voluntary Nature of Participation

You do not have to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Acknowledgement

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND HEREBY CONSENT TO ALLOW MEGAN I. BEARD TO INCLUDE MY DATA IN HER DISSERTATION RESEARCH AND FUTURE RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS.

____________________________________________  ___________________
Participant’s Signature      Date

____________________________________________
Participant’s Name

____________________________________________  ___________________
Researcher’s Signature      Date
APPENDIX D – NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

The following is a copy of the non-disclosure agreement I received from the transcription service Rev.com, signed by a manager on behalf of Rev.com employees who served as transcriptionists.

CLIENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

This CLIENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT, effective as of the date last set forth below (this “Agreement”), between the undersigned actual or potential client (“Client”) and Rev.com, Inc. (“Rev.com”) is made to confirm the understanding and agreement of the parties hereto with respect to certain proprietary information being provided to Rev.com for the purpose of performing translation, transcription and other document-related services (the “Rev.com Services”). In consideration for the mutual agreements contained herein and the other provisions of this Agreement, the parties hereto agree as follows:

1. Scope of Confidential Information

1.1. “Confidential Information” means, subject to the exceptions set forth in Section 1.2 hereof, any documents or other data supplied by Client to Rev.com for the purpose of performing the Rev.com Services.

1.2. Confidential Information does not include information that: (i) was available to Rev.com prior to disclosure of such information by Client and free of any confidentiality obligation in favor of Client known to Rev.com at the time of disclosure; (ii) is made available to Rev.com from a third party not known by Rev.com at the time of such availability to be subject to a confidentiality obligation in favor of Client; (iii) is made available to third parties by Client without restriction on the disclosure of such information; (iv) is or becomes available to the public other than as a result of disclosure by Rev.com prohibited by this Agreement; or (v) is developed independently by Rev.com or Rev.com’s directors, officers, members, partners, employees, consultants, contractors, agents, representatives or affiliated entities (collectively, “Associated Persons”).

2. Use and Disclosure of Confidential Information

2.1. Rev.com will keep secret and will not disclose to anyone any of the Confidential Information, other than furnishing the Confidential Information to Associated Persons, provided that such Associated Persons are bound by agreements respecting confidential information. Rev.com will not use any of the Confidential Information for any purpose other than performing the Rev.com Services on Client’s behalf. Rev.com will use reasonable care and adequate measures to protect the security of the Confidential Information and to attempt to prevent any Confidential Information from being disclosed or otherwise made available to unauthorized persons or used in violation of the foregoing.

2.2. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary herein, Rev.com is free to make, and this Agreement does not restrict, disclosure of any Confidential Information in a judicial, legislative or administrative investigation or proceeding or to a government or other regulatory agency; provided that, if permitted by law, Rev.com provides to Client prior notice of the intended disclosure and permits Client to intervene therein to protect its interests in the Confidential Information, and cooperate and assist Client in seeking to obtain such protection.

3. Certain Rights and Limitations

3.1. All Confidential Information will remain the property of Client.

3.2. This Agreement imposes no obligations on either party to purchase, sell, license, transfer or otherwise transact in any products, services or technology.

4. Termination

4.1. Upon Client’s written request, Rev.com agrees to use good faith efforts to return promptly to Client any Confidential Information that is in writing and in the possession of Rev.com and to certify the return or destruction of all Confidential Information, provided that Rev.com may retain a summary description of Confidential Information for archival purposes.

4.2. The rights and obligations of the parties hereto contained in Sections 2 (Use and Disclosure of Confidential Information) (subject to Section 2.1), 3 (Certain Rights and Limitations), 4 (Termination), and 5 (Miscellaneous) will survive the return of any tangible embodiments of Confidential Information and any termination of this Agreement.

5. Miscellaneous

5.1. Client and Rev.com are independent contractors and will so represent themselves in all regards. Nothing in this Agreement will be construed to make either party the agent or legal representative of the other or to make the parties partners or joint venturers, and neither party may bind the other in any way. This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of California governing such agreements, without regard to conflicts-of-law principles. The sole and exclusive jurisdiction and venue for any litigation arising out of this Agreement shall be an appropriate federal or state court located in the State of California, and the parties agree not to raise, and waive, any objections or defenses based upon venue or forum non conveniens. This Agreement (together with any
agreement for the Rev.com Services) contains the complete and exclusive agreement of the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof and supersedes all prior agreements and understandings with respect thereto, whether written or oral, express or implied. If any provision of this Agreement is held invalid, illegal or unenforceable by a court of competent jurisdiction, such will not affect any other provision of this Agreement, which will remain in full force and effect. No amendment or alteration of the terms of this Agreement will be effective unless made in writing and executed by both parties hereto. A failure or delay in exercising any right in respect to this Agreement will not be presumed to operate as a waiver, and a single or partial exercise of any right will not be presumed to preclude any subsequent or further exercise of that right or the exercise of any other right. Any modification or waiver of any provision of this Agreement will not be effective unless made in writing. Any such waiver will be effective only in the specific instance and for the purpose given.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused this Agreement to be executed below by their duly authorized signatories.

CLIENT

Print Name: ___________________________

By: _____________________________

Name: _____________________________

Title: _____________________________

Date: _____________________________

Address for notices to Client:

____________________________________

____________________________________

REV.COM, INC.

____________________________________

By: _____________________________

Name: _____________________________

Title: _____________________________

Date: _____________________________

Address for notices to Rev.com Inc:

461 Bush St., 4th floor
San Francisco, CA 94108
APPENDIX E – INTERVIEW SUMMARY AND REFLECTION FORM

(Adapted by permission from Dr. Michelle Jay)

Person Interviewed: Date of Interview:

Interview Time: Today’s date:

Location of Interview:

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck you during this interview?

2. What was the most difficult aspect of the interview process?

3. How do you think the interview context (location/situation) enabled or constrained the interview process?

4. How did you do in building rapport with your participant?

5. Things that you learned about yourself as you conducted the interview:

6. Things you need to continue to work on for the next interview: