Is Being *Korean Cosmopolitan* Possible? Exploring the Self-Identity and Worldview of Korean International Students at American Colleges

Ji-Su Park

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Prerequisite for Honors in Sociology

April 2013

© 2013 Ji-Su Park
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Believe it or not, I have memorized the 16-digit number that I need to log into my library account while I still need to look for my school ID for the 8-digit number that I need to enter a dining hall. Yes, I wrote this thesis. Writing a senior thesis has been a journey, and this journey was possible because I had wonderful people who believed in me.

My sincere thanks go to all the precious moments that these wonderful people shared with me. These moments include: having a warm cup of coffee every morning prepared by Joseph at Collins Café, eating fresh tangerines, a sweet almond meringue, chocolates and homemade cookies that my lovely friends brought to make sure I was awake, learning how to DJ from a friend as my study break, opening my mailbox and finding a poem and a card with kind words of encouragement, chatting with a friend who called me to check up on me and tell me, “You can do it.” You all know who you are.

Special thanks go to Professor Bryan S. Turner who taught my first sociology course ever at Wellesley and inspired me to major in sociology. Special thanks go as well to Professor Sun-Hee Lee for her mentoring and advice on every aspect of life.

Very special thanks go to my thesis advisor, Professor Joe Swingle, for his constant support, endless patience and guidance. I am so thankful that I was able to take my SOC 190 and 290 with you, Professor Swingle.

My wholehearted thanks go to my family. This year has been tough on my mom and dad but they never failed to comfort me. Thanks to my grandpa who always told me that he loves me and always reminded me that I must “go pursue my dream.” I love you and I will miss you so much, grandpa.

사랑해요, 할아버지. 편히 쉴세요.

All these precious moments and wonderful people taught me how to appreciate life. Every moment I take for granted is a moment that many others cannot or could not have. I learned that I must always strive to live a meaningful, transparent and virtuous life for those who simply do not or did not have a chance to live. My life is a gift from God.

Thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Social Distance: Boundary Work</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Balancing Act: Koreanness and Multiculturalism</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Conclusion</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Interview Schedule</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. - Hugo of St. Victor, cited in Edward Said, Orientalism

Every college has numerous cultural or ethnic organizations run by students. Even though Wellesley College is a small liberal arts college of 2,300 students, there are 14 active constituted cultural organizations on campus: cultural organizations are by far the largest category of student organizations at Wellesley (Wellesley College 2012).

Spending four years at Wellesley, I have constantly noticed some tensions among the cultural organizations. For example, when the Asian/Asian American organizations put up special yellow-paper signs that contained specific statistics (e.g. number of non-white students allowed on campus in the 1950s) and anti-discrimination phrases (e.g. “Yes, I’m originally from the United States of America”; “No, I’m not good at math”) throughout the campus as a program for the Asian/Asian American Awareness Month during my sophomore year, some white American students put up several white-paper signs with phrases such as, “I am white and I do have a culture and I am proud of that.”

While the incident described above brought my attention to interethic conflicts, another incident directed my attention to another type of conflict: this time, conflicts among the coethnics. One of the most active, most powerful, and most funded on-campus cultural organizations is the Korean Students Association (KSA). Because I am a Korean student who is not a member of the KSA, several KSA members shared their opinions about the organization with me. The members often talked about the fragmentations
among the Koreans in the organization, such as a social boundary between the second generation Korean Americans and the Korean international students.

Reflecting upon these observations of social boundaries, I began to wonder the extent to which the interethnic conflicts and intraethnic conflicts in American colleges play a role in the identity construction process of students and in the shaping of their worldview. Why and how do students establish social boundaries against the members of other ethnic groups, and also against the members of their own ethnicity? How does boundary work affect students’ self-identity?

In particular, as an international student at an American college myself, I became interested in how international students, who are non-immigrant global travelers, construct social boundaries. International students who attend American academic institutions frequently cross national borders; they frequently stay in both the U.S. and their home country. However, they do not meet the standards of the American identity or even their “home” or ethnic identity due to their global mobility.

For example, compare Korean international students to Korean Americans. Korean Americans have a national American identity, a racial Asian identity, and an ethnic Korean identity; Korean international students, by contrast, only have an ethnic Korean identity. But even their ethnic Korean identity tends to flicker because as global temporary migrants they do not reside in Korea throughout their lives. Without a single stable identity or clear identity markers, how do Korean international students interact with others in a multiethnic environment? Is Korean international students’ mobility leading to a non-nationalist, flexible, hybrid and multicultural identity? Or do Korean
international students struggle to maintain a Korean, nationalistic identity? There is a well-known saying in Korea that “the most Korean is the most global.” Can Korean international students achieve both characteristics?

This study pays attention to the Korean international students attending American undergraduate institutions. Today, after China and India, Korea sends the third most international students to the U.S. (Lee, Park, and Kim 2009). In the 2011-2012 academic year, a total of 72,295 South Korean students were studying in the United States; 52.9% of these students were undergraduates (Institute of International Education 2012).

Korean international students can be thought of as cosmopolitan elites in the global flow because they are currently in the process of attaining a degree from an American institution. Moreover, since they already come from a relatively higher socio-economic family background that can support their expensive stay abroad, it seems plausible to think that Korean international students will have a higher chance of taking leadership positions in Korean society when they return to Korea. As a young generation born in the late 1980s and early 1990s that will lead South Korea within the next twenty years or so, these students represent Korea’s imminent future.

Furthermore, because South Korea is currently going through a demographic transition from a homogeneous society to a multicultural society, it is important to study whether these future leaders of South Korea are developing a more nationalistic worldview or a more multicultural worldview during their time in college. After its economic growth during the industrialization and modernization processes, South Korea became a labor-importing nation (Kim 2009). In the early to mid-2000s, the number of
foreign migrants in South Korea rapidly increased, and an increasingly large presence of labor migrants and multiethnic or multicultural families was established by transnational marriages (Kim 2009). According to the Korea Immigration Service, more than 1.3 million foreigners resided in South Korea in 2011, and this number is increasing every year (Korea Immigration Service 2011). Against this background, Korean international students’ development of a nationalistic or multicultural identity and perspective is not only limited to an individual level but also deserves a societal attention.

My qualitative study aims to unravel how Korean international students gain or lose Korean values during their stay in the U.S. Several hypotheses underlie this study. The first hypothesis is that Korean international students’ American experience will (re)confirm the significance of Korea as a home nation of predictability, familiarity, and comfort. Homesickness will motivate Korean international students to hang out with Koreans and lead them to construct interethnic social boundaries. Or, Korean international students’ American experience will contribute to the development of their multicultural worldview and a more inclusive definition of home. Exposure to diversity in the U.S. will engender more tolerant attitudes towards foreigners and to diversity in general. The second hypothesis is that becoming more Korean and becoming more multicultural are independent identity processes that do not interfere one another. According to this hypothesis, becoming a Korean cosmopolitan is a possible project.

This study hopes that through the defining process of Koreanness and multiculturalism, academic content themes on the content, intensity and consequences of globalization movement will emerge. Through surveys and in-depth one-to-one
interviews conducted with Korean international college students in American colleges, the following chapters will identify the elements of tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism and the boundary work activities that shape self-identities.

The thesis consists of six chapters including this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 examines previous studies on the topics of self, identity, postmodernity and global migration, and introduces the frameworks and theories that are the foundations of the current study.

Chapter 3 explains the research design and the methodology and describes how I obtained my survey data and interview data. Chapter 4 then describes how Korean international students deal with social distances between themselves and various groups of people including non-Koreans and also Koreans. I pay attention to the interethnic boundary work and intraethnic boundary work in which Korean international students participate every day. Additionally, I investigate how the students maintain, adjust, and/or negotiate their Koreanness as they participate in boundary work.

Chapter 5 examines whether Korean international students see Koreanness as the opposite of multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism and how they seek to balance those competing orientations. Analyzing students’ post-graduation plans, the chapter reveals that Korean international students occupy an unstable “middle position.” As a consequence, they are constantly thinking and rethinking their “home” identity. The chapter also examines how Korean international students feel about transferring or translating their American multicultural experience into Korea.
Finally, Chapter 6 will conclude the thesis, restating that although Korean international students find it extremely challenging to become “Korean cosmopolitans,” many still believe that it is a possible project. Becoming a Korean cosmopolitan means having the benefit of being able to navigate the continuum of Koreanness/nationalism and cosmopolitanism/multiculturalism.
2.1. Identities and Identity Work

The concept of self has long attracted social scientists. Charles Cooley (1902)’s concept of the looking-glass self describes a person’s self as an identity shaped by the person’s interpersonal interactions in a society. A self is social since the world is composed of social encounters. An individual develops a sense of self through his or her relations to and perceptions of others (Cooley 1902). In the same way we discover our own appearances through our reflections in a mirror, we learn about our own personalities by observing the reactions and attitudes of others. In other words, an individual and a society coexist as the products of each other: they are “each to each a looking-glass [and reflect] the other that [passes]” (Cooley 1902). Thus, a self-identity is inevitably social. David A. Snow and Leon Anderson (1987) define identity as an interface that links the individual and society in their study of identity work among the homeless. Identity work is the range of social activities that individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities (Snow and Anderson 1987). Figuring out a sense of self-worth or personal significance through the identity work is people’s most basic drive (Snow and Anderson 1987).

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) focuses on the construction of the self in everyday interactions and describes the self as a dramaturgical or theatrical *performance* on stage in front of an audience. Goffman (1959) defines performance as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which
serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (p.15). On the front stage, an individual, as a performer of his or her self, strives to maintain certain standards or appearances such as manners and decorum while performing in front of his or her audience (Goffman 1959:107). An individual acts according to the formal societal rules and roles that are expected of him or her: the individual puts on a front or a face in order to make a good showing in public (Goffman 1959).

Using a contradictory expression, Goffman (1959) argues that the individual’s mask is his or her true self, and the true self is in fact the ideal self he or she wants to be: performance often presents an idealized view of the situation. For a perfect performance, the individual rehearses the performance and checks for offending expressions in the back region or on the back stage, where the individual is hidden from the audience (Goffman 1959). Goffman (1959) argues that the individual’s masks from both the front stage and the back stage become a “collective representation” of the individual (p.27).

Richard Alba (2005)’s concept of boundary work is useful in understanding the process of identity work and formation of self. During an interaction with others, personal meanings attributed to the self by an individual are brought into play on the performance stage, and the individual categorizes and distinguishes others as outside or inside the individual’s own boundary according to those meanings (Alba 2005). Symbolic boundaries are the conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize and separate objects, people, practices, time, and space, as well as to generate feelings of similarity and group membership (Alba 2005; Lamont and Molnar 2002). There is a
segmentation between "us" and "them." Alba (2005) argues that boundaries constructed by individuals can be blurred over time when individuals are more exposed to diversity.

2.2. Postmodernity and the Self

Research from across sociological paradigms suggests that the rise of a modern society changed identities of peoples. From the French Revolution until the beginning of the World War I, agrarian, pre-modern societies were transformed. The characteristics of modernization incorporated the concepts of industrialization, urbanization, democracy, nation-state, capitalism, secularization and rise of scientific knowledge and critical thinking. During the pre-modern era, identities of individuals were more bounded and less fluid: they were mostly prescribed by place of birth and socioeconomic positions of the individuals’ families. But after the social and economic changes in Western societies that marked the transition to modernity led to changes in the nature of an individual’s identity. What was once understood as a predestined concept started becoming a more flexible and mobile concept.

In Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, Anthony Giddens (1991) argues that we are now living in high modernity. High modernity is a “‘runaway world’: not only is the pace of social change much faster than in any prior system, so also is its scope, and the profoundness with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour” (Giddens 1991:16). Giddens pays attention to how globalization, which is one of the most powerful forces of high modernity, influences the self.
In today’s increasingly globalizing world, social activity takes place across time and space. Today, people can communicate with anyone in the world and watch the world news in real-time. Within the system of global capitalistic economy, everyone in the world is affected by one country’s financial crisis or nuclear accidents. Thus, leaders of multiple states around the world gather to discuss the international problems. Giddens (1991) argues that high modernity produces a situation in which humankind becomes a “we” and faces problems and opportunities where there are no “others” (p.27).

With mobility and constant flux, high modernity undermines the certainty of knowledge: it is open to revision. A self is not an exception; it is constantly being revised as well. Thus, high modernity leads itself to a social constructionist approach of the self that views identity as “dynamic, situational, multilayered and multidirectional” (Pyke and Dang 2003:148). Social identity is a continual negotiation and delineation of social boundaries. As individuals move across various social contexts in high modernity, the boundaries of social differences that shape identities shift, and multiple layers of identities are constructed (Pyke and Dang 2003).

In high modernity, self-identity is a reflexive project that requires continuous reflection and recreation in a constantly changing global society (Giddens 1991). An individual living in high modernity might go through a psychological crisis as time, space, and identity are constantly being disembodied (Giddens 1991). In such global environment, Giddens (1991) argues, a self constantly seeks to achieve ontological security throughout his or her life (Giddens 1991). Ontological security refers to having a sturdy foundation that an individual shares with other people. It provides social stability.
as an individual recognizes or acquires a common identity that links him or her to other social actors. Without ontological security, an individual experiences anxiety or threat of not being connected to other social actors, which affects his or her self-esteem.

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) calls what Giddens (1991) understands as high modernity a postmodernity or a liquid modernity. To Bauman (2000), what Giddens (1991) sees as an extension of modernity is in fact a new concept that needs to be distinguished from modernity itself. Modernity, according to Bauman (2000), represents a directed movement towards universalization, rationalization, homogenization, monotony, predictability, and manageability of risks. On the other hand, postmodernity, according to Bauman (2000), is a completely different concept characterized by global capitalism, increasing pluralism, variety, uncertainty and ambivalence. Postmodernity is undetermined and undetermining.

In postmodernity, some individuals move across various places and cross boundaries, and their “taken-for-granted identities are thrust into consciousness” (Easthope 2009:72). Movement has become fundamental to postmodern identity, and people construct their identities in terms of moving between societies, cultures and environments: “[both] movement and stability are necessary for understanding one’s life” (Easthope 2009:76). In the postmodern society, the identities are not prescribed: they are mobile. Bauman (2000) argues that in postmodernity, individuals do not have a stable position to aim for in the process of their identity construction.
2.3. Global Migration: Permanent vs. Temporary

In today’s globalizing world of increasing mobility of peoples and ideas, the notion of nation as home is constantly being challenged. Many scholars recognize that some migrants remain significantly influenced by their ties to their home country or by their social networks that stretch across national borders (Levitt 2004). “Place” affects identity since people find “anchorage” in places, and the familiarity with a place leads to feelings of belonging as it plays a role in shaping collective identities or group identities (Easthope 2009:71-72). For example, the “homeland” provides a common reference point for groups of people and shapes national and/or ethnic identities (Easthope 2009:72).

Many studies on global migration and mobility have focused on the first generation or second generation permanent immigrants (Easthope 2009). The post-1965 wave of immigration in the U.S. dominated by non-white immigrants has expanded the inquiry into the experiences of the first and second generation (Pyke and Dang 2003). Unlike the earlier waves of European immigrants who gradually merged into the white majority and the white mainstream culture, non-white immigrants have been racialized as the “other” and excluded from the white mainstream (Pyke and Dang 2003). Evidently, the straight-line assimilation theory based on the adaptation process of European immigrants and their children has not been widely applicable to non-white immigrants. This has led to the rise of new models and theories that consider the “multiplicity of identities and acculturative pathways” (Pyke and Dang 2003:148).

Scholars have not paid as much attention to the non-immigrant temporary migrants who reside in foreign countries for a considerable amount of time yet still have
the possibility of returning to their home countries in the future. Aihwa Ong (1999) is a noteworthy exception: she focuses on global non-immigrant temporary migrants and discusses the concept of flexible citizenship. Ong (1999) argues that the weakening role of the nation-state in today’s globalizing social environment contributes to the rise of global migrants with this flexible citizenship. Ong (1999) writes: “Flexible citizenship refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political economic conditions” (Ong 1999:3). Seeing flexible citizenship as a source of power that mobile subjects possess, Ong criticizes those who attempt to analyze migrations and transnational flows without fully acknowledging the power of mobile subjects (Ong 1999).

In *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Ong (1999) examines the “strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation” (p.112). For Ong, the Hong Kong business elites at the center of her research are the global temporary migrants who have adopted a flexible citizenship for their own benefit in the globalized economy. These temporary global migrants are cosmopolitan elites to whom global mobility is a normalized and expected cultural capital in postmodernity.

Cosmopolitan elites like Ong’s Hong Kong business elites possess social capital and cultural capital that are not widely available. Because social capital and cultural capital are distributed unequally, individuals have different measures and frameworks for
their self-worth and self-identity (Snow and Anderson 1987). Postmodernity intensifies this unequal distribution of social and cultural capital through globalization, which involves a systematic ordering of cultural differences and facilitates their commodification, marketing, and consumption among the relatively affluent classes of the global economy (Thompson and Tambyah 1999).

2.4. Current Study

My study is a response to Ong’s notion of flexible citizenship in the context of a postmodern and globalizing society. I argue that high modernity’s tendency to fragment is stronger than its tendency to unite. High modernity is not characterized by a single world but rather a complex fragmentation of cultures, societies, peoples, and identities. Adopting the framework set up by Ong (1999) in her study of a relatively older global temporary migrant group of Chinese businessmen, this study examines a group of younger temporary migrants, namely, Korean international students attending American colleges. It is not an exaggeration to say that the young international students attending American colleges form a group of cosmopolitan elites. Moving to the U.S. for American college education is often much more expensive than the education offered at most other countries. To these young cosmopolitan elites who, or whose families, can afford global mobility, postmodernity is an opportunity for the accumulation of cultural capital on an international scale. These students directly experience cultural diversity on foreign soil and accumulate cultural capital in the process.

In the context of an individual’s search for ontological security in high modernity (Giddens 1991), this study argues that Korean international students’ search for a secure
and stable sense of self involves two conflicting processes: (1) a search for a Korean ethnic identity and (2) a search for a multicultural and cosmopolitan worldview. The U.S. experiences of these young cosmopolitan elites as they participate in the boundary work with members of various ethnicities influence their self-identities by changing their perceptions of nationalism and multiculturalism.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data Collection Procedures

My qualitative research uses both survey and interview data. Survey respondents and interviewees were located through the published emails and Facebook groups of Korean international students, international students, and Asian students at various American colleges. Contacted colleges include Wellesley College, Boston University, Boston College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cornell University, Harvard University, University of Illinois, University of California, University of Oregon, Washington University in St. Louis, Northwestern University, Bates College, Williams College and more. All participants were contacted and recruited online through the representatives of the Korean students associations and organizations at each institution. All participants were assured that any identifying material in the survey and the interview transcripts would be removed or disguised.

i. Survey data

Survey data were gathered between December 2012 and February 2013. An online survey of 77 questions in English was distributed via SurveyMonkey to 135 Korean international students studying at American undergraduate institutions. 81 students responded to at least some of the survey questions; 55 participants finished the

---

1 Wellesley College, Boston University, Boston College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, Cornell University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of California Los Angeles, University of California Berkeley, University of Oregon, Washington University in St. Louis, Northwestern University, Bates College, Williams College, Parsons The New School for Design, Bowdoin College, Dickinson College, Carleton College, Davidson College, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Stanford University, Grinnell College and Haverford College.
entire survey (67.9% completion rate). Consequently, each question has a different number of student participants who answered. For this reason, the study provides an exact number of the responses every time a specific number, rate, or ratio is used.

The study is concerned with the ways in which temporary global migrants construct their self-identities and worldviews. As a group of temporary global migrants, Korean international students represent the international travelers who stay away from Korea for a considerable amount of time yet still plan to return to Korea sometime in the future. The survey participants responded that the reasons for their stay in the U.S. involved one or more of the following: (a) they wanted to explore somewhere beyond Korea, (b) they wanted to obtain a bachelor’s degree in the U.S., (c) their parents expected them to study in the U.S. since they studied in the U.S. as well, and (d) they were interested in the American culture. Of the 81 students who answered the survey question regarding the length of their stay in the U.S., 64.2% have been living or studying in the U.S. for more than 4 years, while only 6.2% have spent less than a year in the U.S. (Figure 3-1).

The current study does not examine those who were born and grew up in the U.S., known as the second generation, or those who immigrated to the U.S. prior to the age of 15 and became U.S. citizens, known as the 1.5 generation (Pyke and Dang 2003). The findings of this study do not capture the identity processes that occur among those more permanent immigrants who lack Korean citizenship.
FIGURE 3-1. Survey participants' length of stay in the U.S.

The Korean international student participants in this study come from middle class or upper-middle class families. 87.5% of the students reported parents who had completed a 4-year college degree or more, and 93.8% answered that their fathers hold a 4-year college degree or above. In fact, 22.7% of the students answered that they decided to study in the U.S. because their parents, who studied at American colleges or universities in the past, expected them to study in the U.S. as well. Moreover, American colleges do not offer much need-based financial aid to international students. The survey data strongly suggest that Korean international students at American colleges come from a socioeconomiclly advantaged family capable of financially supporting the students’ American college education and living costs.

The survey began with a set of questions concerning the students’ backgrounds such as their hometown, places they have grown up, motivations to study abroad, years
they have spent in the U.S. and more. Then the survey provided a series of statements related to immigration and immigrants in Korean society, multicultural education at their American institutions, and their daily interactions with non-Koreans and Koreans. Lastly, the survey asked the students about their post-graduation plans and the likelihood of residing outside Korea.

**ii. Interview data**

In-depth interviews with Korean international students were conducted between November 2012 and January 2013 with 10 male and 10 female Korean international undergraduate students attending American colleges. A profile of the interview participants is presented in Table 3-1. Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis. All interviewees hold a Korean citizenship, and four of them are dual citizens with U.S. citizenship. These four dual-citizen students grew up in Korea and/or spent more time in Korea than in the U.S., and two of them have become U.S. citizens only recently. On average, the interview participants have studied in the U.S. for approximately 5 years (male = 5.4 years; female = 4.75 years).

Although the study sought to observe gender differences in exploring the research questions above, the study only found two subtle gender differences. First, students’ responses to questions asking if students would be willing to be in a romantic relationship with non-Koreans or Korean Americans revealed that male students were more willing to date non-Koreans or Korean Americans than female students were. Second, male students enthusiastically shared their opinions on obligatory Korean army service while female students did not. All participants were undergraduates with 4 freshmen, 7
sophomores, 4 juniors, and 5 seniors. Since the study’s samples do not include anyone over the mid-twenties, my analyses do not speak to the identity processes occurring in later stages of adulthood.

TABLE 3-1. Demographic profiles of interview participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Class Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Length of time in the U.S. (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yonggyun</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seokhyun</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dongwoo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyunjun</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>Dual</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seungchul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Mathematics, Economics</td>
<td>Dual</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soohyun</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Computer Science, Mathematical Methods in Social Sciences</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woowan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>International Relations-Economics</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eunice</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>History, Economics</td>
<td>Dual</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinsil</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Dual</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yebin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyeri</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Psychology, Economics</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eunjung</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jisun</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Physics, Engineering</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students were interviewed face-to-face in person, on Skype, or over the phone. The interview schedule had a total of 31 questions divided into 5 sections: (1) introduction/background; (2) on-campus interaction; (3) transnationalism; (4) Koreanness/nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism/multiculturalism; and (5) self-evaluation and future plans. A series of opening questions gathered information about hometown, places they have lived, and the circumstances that brought them to the U.S. (e.g. “Before you came to the U.S., where did you live and grow up?”; “How familiar are you with Korean culture or with American culture?”). In the second section, the interviews turned to the participants’ experiences of attending American colleges including on-campus activities and interactions with others (e.g. “How is hanging out with Korean friends different from hanging out with non-Korean friends?”; “Are you a member of Korean students association?”). The third section of the interview on transnationalism asked students how they keep in touch with family and friends in Korea and how they stay informed about cultural, social, or political news in Korea. The fourth section explored Korean international students’ national and cosmopolitan identities and worldview with questions that asked how they define “being Korean” and “being multicultural.” Students were also asked to rate themselves how Korean or multicultural they think they are. The fifth section asked students to evaluate their foreign experience by considering whether they became more Korean or more multicultural over the time they spent in the U.S. The interview ended with a question asking about students’ plans after graduation.

Throughout the interview, all students interjected a number of comparisons between their lives in the U.S. and their lives in Korea, which contributed to rich and
detailed data about their thoughts and opinions regarding the role of their American experience in their identity construction.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted from approximately thirty minutes to one hour. The interview schedule was constructed in English and Korean, and interview participants had a choice between the two. Of the 20 interviews, 17 were conducted in Korean and three were conducted in English. Transcribed interviews were coded into general thematic categories, which became the chapters of this study. The first thematic category found in the interviews is students’ social interactions, which were coded into two types: *inter*ethnic interaction and *intra*ethnic interaction. After identifying its type, each interaction was further coded as a bright-boundary activity or a boundary-blurring activity. The second thematic category is students’ definitions of Koreanness and multiculturalism, based on which students discussed fluidity of their identity. The third thematic category, which arises from the second category, is relationship between students’ identity and opinions, including their political opinions on immigration and foreigners in Korea and their future career plans.
CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL DISTANCE: BOUNDARY WORK

4.1. Introduction

Korean international students constantly attempt to overcome the physical distance between the United States and Korea by being involved in various transnational practices. Transnational practices can be either direct or indirect: direct forms include traveling back to Korea for school breaks, while indirect forms include regularly visiting Korean websites, watching Korean news online, talking to family and friends in Korea through social networking sites such as Facebook or over the phone, and more (Figure 4-1).

FIGURE 4-1. Student participants’ various ways of keeping in touch with friends and family in Korea.

Note: “Other” included a smart phone application, which is similar to an online messaging program.
But the distance in terms of miles between the U.S. and Korea is not the only distance that Korean international students experience during their stay in the U.S. Korean international students deal with an additional type of distance: social distance. As global temporary migrants, Korean international students are thoroughly involved in what Alba (2005) describes as boundary work. Boundary work is often characterized by bright-boundary activity, which is an individual’s self-attribution and attribution to others of selected characteristics with a purpose of constructing a social boundary that distinguishes others as outside of the individual’s or the individual’s associated group’s boundary (Alba 2005).

On the other hand, there is boundary-blurring activity, which is performed by an individual who seeks to blur the bright boundary between himself or herself and others. Blurry boundaries involve zones of self-presentation and representation that “allow for [individuals’] ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary” (Alba 2005:22). Boundary-blurring activity does not demand assimilation or force individuals to choose between the mainstream culture and their ethnic culture. Alba (2005) argues that boundary-blurring activity allows individuals to “feel simultaneously as members of an ethnic minority and of the mainstream” (p.25). In addition, Alba talks about boundary-crossing activities, which are activities of an individual-level assimilation, and about boundary-shifting activities, or activities that relocate a boundary (Alba 2005).

Examining Korean international students’ social distances and process of boundary work, this chapter demonstrates that although all survey participants and interviewees answered that that they like becoming friends with students of different
national, ethnic, or racial backgrounds, such multicultural activity has limitations due to the conflicts arising from the ongoing boundary work. Korean international students primarily participate in boundary work with the two groups that they interact with on a daily basis. On one hand, they participate in *inter*ethnic boundary work with non-Koreans. On the other hand, they are actively involved in the *intra*ethnic boundary work among fellow Koreans. *Inter*ethnic boundary work is the racial boundary work that Alba (2005) focuses on; Alba does not discuss *intra*ethnic boundary work in detail. Although Alba acknowledges acculturative differences among the members of an ethnic group according to their lightness of skin, Alba’s discussion is limited to *inter*ethnic context. Therefore, an examination of *intra*ethnic boundary work using Alba’s boundary typology contributes to the boundary work literature.

The most salient non-Korean groups in the students’ *inter*ethnic boundary work are white Americans; the most salient Korean groups in the students’ *intra*ethnic boundary work include Koreans in Korea, Korean Americans, and even other Korean international students. Korean international students in the study did not talk about being involved in the boundary-crossing activities or boundary-shifting activities. Instead, students talked about bright-boundary activities and boundary-blurring activities in both *inter*ethnic and *intra*ethnic contexts. It can be assumed that Korean international students might feel uncomfortable or are unwilling to participate in certain boundary activities that require individuals to actually move over or relocate the boundary. Students might find boundary-shifting activities especially challenging or stressful since such activities demand a transformation of the students into the insiders of another group.
Whereas the *inter*ethnic boundary work takes place as a consequence of different racial origins, the *intra*ethnic boundary work is constructed upon *and (re)constructs* acculturative boundaries according to levels of assimilation rather than racial boundaries (Pyke and Dang 2003). The following sections of the chapter identify the bright-boundary activity and the boundary-blurring activity of Korean international students.

4.2. *Interethnic Boundary Work*

*i. Bright-boundary activity*

The most popular boundary activity in which Korean international students in the U.S. actively participate was establishing bright boundaries to separate non-Koreans from Koreans. 42.9% of the survey participants agreed that it is hard to find common interests to talk about with non-Korean friends, a difficulty that becomes a burden when students try to hang out with non-Korean friends. Indeed, when the Korean international students were asked to identify three closest friends in college, 62.5% of the students identified their closest friend as Korean or Korean American.

During the interviews, some students discussed the existence of certain cultural codes that restrict access to those who lack them. Ivy, a sophomore at a liberal arts college in Massachusetts who first came to the U.S. as a high school student, confessed that she still feels that she is “not that familiar with American culture.” Ivy said that she still does not really understand American television shows:

I [don’t] really understand *Family Guy* or… American shows. I *can’t* really understand them. And like, stand-up comedies, I have a hard time understanding those. [Americans] definitely have a different culture that is… far different from [Korea’s]. Not just humor, but what they’re implying… [like] their humor code? [Their code] is very different [from that of Korea’s.]

Ivy, a sophomore at a liberal arts college in Massachusetts who first came to the U.S. as a high school student, confessed that she still feels that she is “not that familiar with American culture.” Ivy said that she still does not really understand American television shows:
According to the survey data, 81.8% of the student participants believed that in general, non-Korean students do not have a good understanding of the Korean culture. More than 95% of the students believed that there are certain topics that only their Korean or Korean American friends would understand (Figure 4-2). These results show that most Korean international students recognize the fundamental cultural difference between Koreans and non-Koreans that increases social distance between two groups.

FIGURE 4-2. Survey participants’ response to the statement: “There are certain conversation topics that only my Korean/Korean American friends would understand.”

It is also interesting to note that Korean international students differentiated non-Korean friends and Korean American friends: Korean international students believed that hanging out with Korean American friends is more similar to hanging out with Korean international friends than hanging out with non-Korean friends (Figure 4-3). The construction of an ethnic boundary is obviously in play here. Despite their American
nationality, Korean Americans are ethnically Korean; thus, Korean international friends may feel closer to Korean Americans than to non-Koreans.

FIGURE 4-3. Survey participants’ response to the question: “Do you think hanging out with Korean international friends is different or similar from hanging out with non-Korean friends or Korean American friends?”

Student participants in the survey and the interviews singled out the concept of jeong, which is a complicated Korean word that is commonly translated as affection or sympathy, as a Korea-specific emotion and characteristic that is distinct from non-Korean cultures. When they were asked to define Korea, Koreanness or being Korean in three words, 55.4% of the students chose jeong as one of the adjectives or nouns. Interview participants expressed great difficulty translating the word jeong into English. Jay, an engineering student, said that he understands jeong as “a Korean element that connects all Koreans into one group [against the non-Koreans].” Jeong reflects Korea’s collectivistic
culture that emphasizes Korean social norms and duties, beliefs shared among Koreans, and Koreans’ readiness or eagerness to cooperate with Koreans (Lee et al. 2009).

Ethnic pride is clearly expressed through the value of *jeong* in Korean culture. Seungchul, a sophomore studying Math and Economics at a college in North Carolina, said that he feels that American society lacks *jeong* because its culture is too individualistic, while “Korean people [have *jeong*] and are more warmhearted [than Americans.]” Jisun, a sophomore at a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania that only has a total of four Korean international students according to her, said that she knows some Korean people who treat her nicely “just because [she is] Korean, a member of the Korean community.” Likewise, Eunice, a dual citizen who grew up in Seoul and Washington D.C., used the adjective *pugeun-han*, which is literally translated as “comfortably warm,” to describe what it means to be Korean:

Being Korean is being *pugeun-han*, comfortably warm. I can’t think of an English word that’s equivalent of *pugeun-han*. … When I hear the word “Korean,” I automatically think of treating each other in a “comfortably warm” manner – with *jeong*. In my opinion, this is because the homogeneous Korean people have suffered together throughout the nation’s history; in this way, [we] have become more tight.

Sophie, a senior majoring in Economics and Psychology, explained the concept of *jeong* in terms of the Korean family culture. Sophie thought that *jeong* is a Korean element that becomes most visible in families, which is not as visible in American culture that values privacy more than family:

The bond [among] Korean people is very strong. And I think [I’m implying it] also in terms of [family members]. I feel like a lot of American family members are very like, “You are you, I am me, we are two different individuals.” I feel like in Korea, your family members are very like, “We’re all like almost [one] same person, like a very, very close unit of family.” And [Koreans] too, I feel like – once they open up, Korean people tend to [share] a lot of personal stories and like, life troubles and dilemmas, whereas Americans are very like, “My private life, your private life, I’ll respect that.”
Hyeri, a Business Administration student, talked about how because non-Koreans do not have this strong *jeong* that connects Koreans, it is actually *more* comfortable for her to chat with non-Korean friends:

I think with non-Korean friends, I’m able to talk about a lot of things – the range of topics … more genres? Or more like, more fields to talk about – it’s unlimited; we can just talk about anything and the conversation can keep going.

Harry, a student at a liberal arts college in the Midwest, shared Hyeri’s perspective. In Harry’s view, American culture is superficial because it lacks *jeong*.

Harry argued that it is actually easier to “be friends on the surface” with Americans:

I think on the surface, it’s easier to be friends with [Americans]. First of all, in Korea, it’s a little culturally weird to seek to know more about people you don’t know. But in foreign countries, you can just say hi to a person next to you and talk with that person. In this aspect… yeah, I think it’s easier to be friends with non-Koreans.

In other words, students like Hyeri and Harry might feel that at times the close connection among Koreans can prevent them from sharing too much with their fellow Korean peers. *Jeong*, as a Korea-specific element, functions as a forced connection among Koreans that Koreans cannot reject.

To the Korean international students who are fully aware of the bright boundaries between Koreans and non-Koreans and actively maintain social distance between themselves and non-Koreans, Korea is a fixed anchorage to depend upon when they become tired of white mainstream culture. In the survey, an anonymous student at a small liberal arts college said: “For a [student at a] school like [mine] where the population comprises mostly of white people, I feel that maintaining the Korean identity and culture is important.” This student felt the need to guard her Koreanness because she believes that a fixed ethnic identity helps to provide a shelter from cultural conflicts or an identity
crisis she might confront at her predominantly white school. Eunice is an interviewee who shared the same view. To Eunice, Korea is a home that provides social support, deep friendships, and stable community relationships characterized by cultural understanding. Eunice said that she wants to have Korean friends as her “home base”:

I wish I had more Korean friends because although I have a lot of American friends now, I think it’ll be good to have Korean friends as my “home base” so I can go talk to them when I get into cultural conflicts or stuff like that with my American friends. Since I am living by myself away from Korea and family, I need some kind of [Korean] cultural understanding.

In order to maintain their Korean identity, Korean international students gravitate towards stable Korean environments such as a Korean students association (KSA), which offers the elements of Koreanness by sharing Korean language, Korean food, and Korean popular culture, and also by forming a network of young Koreans on campus. These social networks of coethnics are an important factor for international students’ identity work since these networks play a fundamental role in the management of culture shock and in the maintenance of students’ ethnic identity (Lee et al. 2009). Korean international students see KSAs as monocultural networks of Koreans that provide a safe haven where international students can relax from the sometimes-exhausting experience of living in a foreign culture (Lee et al. 2009). Against this background, joining a KSA is a bright-boundary activity. 39.7% of the students were currently involved with the KSA of their college.

Another significant element that accommodates the establishment of a bright boundary between Koreans and non-Koreans is the Korean language. Many student participants talked about the Korean language as their “mother tongue” that is “natural or
inborn to Koreans.” One of the survey questions asked whether students agree or disagree with the following statement: “Foreigners living in Korea should be able to communicate in Korean.” 88.6% of the students agreed with the statement, demonstrating how the Korean language sustains Korea as a nation-place.

Speaking Korean is an everyday ritual that Korean international students have developed over time in the U.S. Students hunt for psychological security by identifying the Korean culture as their unchanging foundation. The fear of losing this foundation or their “mother culture” encourages Korean international students to become close friends with other Koreans. One of the students who goes to a school that does not have a KSA said that if his school had a KSA, he would have joined it because he “[does not] want to forget how to speak Korean.” Sophie, a Switzerland-born third-culture individual who has lived in India, Korea, Germany, Poland, and Singapore because of her diplomat father, confessed:

I feel like, when I speak Korean [with Korean friends,] there is a certain sense of liberation although I’m comfortable with both languages [English and Korean] … the fact that [my Korean friends] understand Korean culture and language is very convenient, and I feel like I can express certain things more, and I feel more … a deeper connection.

Sophie’s multicultural experiences across the world in fact has made her more aware of her cultural foundation as Korean and she feels more comfortable or secure with Korean friends. In the survey, 49.2% of the students indicated that they feel more comfortable talking to Korean or Korean American friends than talking to non-Korean friends. Grace, a liberal arts college senior who went to high school in California, said:

It is more comfortable [for me] to speak Korean with Koreans ‘cause I can freely mix Korean and English together if there’s something that’s hard to express in English. To be honest, I can’t really use Korea-specific expressions with non-Koreans.
Similarly, Hyeri said that she recently decided to attend a Korean church after trying an American church and a Korean American church, because she “[found] it easier to understand the sermon in Korean.” Eunice said that she decided to stop attending an English service, in favor of attending a Korean service at her church because she wanted to “meet people who [can] communicate [with her] in Korean and pray in Korean”.

Woowon, a senior studying business administration who has spent six years in the U.S., said that he still tends to talk more in general when he is chatting in Korean with his Korean friends:

First of all, I talk more when I’m with Korean friends. I speak Korean when I’m with Korean people, so I talk more. … [I feel that] I become friends with non-Koreans through a [specific] social activity or sports, while I can just become friends with Koreans simply by chatting.

In other words, Woowon felt that he needed to invest extra effort in social activities, events, or occasions like sports or other extracurricular activities in order to become friends with non-Koreans. On the other hand, Woowon felt that a having a casual conversation is everything he needs to do to become friends with Koreans. To students like Woowon, becoming friends with non-Koreans demands extra work while becoming friends with Koreans is something natural that does not require much effort beyond a short informal conversation.

ii. Boundary-blurring activity

As stated earlier, 81.8% of Korean international students reported that they feel that there exists an essential cultural difference and social distance between Koreans and non-Koreans. However, most of these students still actively sought to blur the boundary between Koreans and non-Koreans, since as we saw earlier in this chapter, only 39.7% of
the students were involved with KSA. “Hybridity” is a useful term to be introduced here because it starts from a presumption that boundaries are blurred (Easthope 2009:68). Hybridity was originally used to describe people of mixed race but over time it has been adopted by theorists and scholars to describe the identities that are no longer fixed, bounded, or discrete (Easthope 2009). During the boundary-blurring process, the social profile of a boundary becomes less distinct; the clarity of the social distinction becomes clouded, and the “individuals’ location with respect to the boundary may appear indeterminate” (Alba 2005:23). Members of groups on either side of a boundary may simultaneously appear to be members of one group and members of the other group.

Korean international students in the U.S. have daily opportunities to participate in boundary-blurring activity since they are exposed to different cultures every day. 93.9% of the surveyed students said that they like to check out various non-Korean, multicultural events on campus, and many believed that the large number of foreign students at their schools has a positive impact on them. Grace said that by experiencing and examining new cultures, she learned how to appropriate and draw from two cultures simultaneously. When Grace was asked if she would like to make more Korean friends or more non-Korean friends, she answered:

When I think of my friends, I don’t “divide them up.” I mean, I don’t think of them in terms of “Koreans” versus “non-Koreans.” … And I don’t really feel the differences between my Korean friends and non-Korean friends.

In the survey, an anonymous student stated he does not see why he should join a KSA to spend time only with Koreans and Korean Americans when he is “Korean enough.” Seokhyun, a senior at a liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, talked about how
he sees some Korean international students at his school being involved in boundary-blurring activity:

I think there indeed is something like a “Korean identity” at my school, … but [Korean] kids here don’t really “show off” their Koreanness. They just hang out and get along with [non-Korean] kids here pretty well.

Like the students at Seokhyun’s school, the Korean international students at Jinsil’s college in the Midwest are involved in boundary-blurring activity. At Jinsil’s school, Korean international students collectively decided that they should actively participate in the boundary-blurring activity, and so they deliberately avoid hanging out in an all-Korean setting. To immerse themselves in what they consider as “real cultural diversity,” Jinsil and her Korean international friends have decided not to hang out in all-Korean settings:

I do think that we have a lot of Koreans at school compared to the size of the institution, but all Koreans here believe that they shouldn’t hang out in large packs of all Koreans. We all believe that we should hang out with Americans and other international students [from other countries], so we decided that we should make friends of different backgrounds and stuff.

Also, there is selective boundary-blurring activity. Jisun said that she feels that there exists a bright boundary between her and her American friends; however, she was still involved in a boundary-blurring activity with her non-Korean best friend, an international student from Turkey. Although Jisun saw clear differences and bright boundaries between herself and her American peers, she personally felt that a boundary was more about the experience of being a foreigner in a foreign land rather than different racial or ethnic appearances. Consequently, although Jisun established a bright boundary against Americans, she sought to blur the boundary between her and her Turkish friend who shared with her the same status of an international student living in the U.S.:
My best friend [in college] is actually non-Korean but she’s an international student from Turkey. Although she’s not Korean, we still have the same experience as international students that American [kids here] don’t have.

Even though some Korean international students exhibit boundary-blurring behavior, it is still confined by various power structures of American society ranging from the social prejudice and stereotypes to immigration law. For example, 16 out of the 20 interview participants identified interracial or interethnic dating as a boundary-blurring activity that faces serious challenges of social prejudice.

The survey asked the participants to indicate their opinions on three statements regarding romantic interracial or interethnic relationships, which 58.3% of the students identified as a multicultural behavior. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree, 6 = Strongly Disagree). For the statement “I don’t have a problem being in a romantic relationship with a Korean,” the overall average was 1.84, with 95% of the participants in agreement with the statement. For the statement “I don’t have a problem being in a romantic relationship with a Korean American,” the overall average was 2.00, with 90% of the participants in agreement with the statement. For the statement “I don’t have a problem being in a romantic relationship with a non-Korean,” the overall rating average was 2.34, with 80.6% of the participants in agreement; Korean international students were slightly more reluctant to date a non-Korean than dating a Korean or dating a Korean American.

Gender comparisons reveal that female students were more unwilling to date Korean Americans (2.08) or non-Koreans (2.55) than male students (1.86 and 1.95, respectively). As stated earlier in this section, while 81.8% of Korean international students recognized
the essential cultural difference that constructs a bright boundary between Koreans and non-Koreans, only 39.7% were involved with the KSA of their college and thus maintained the boundary. Besides, 80.6% of the students were willing to be in a romantic relationship with a non-Korean, and 43.5% said that they are or have been in a romantic relationship with a non-Korean. These results demonstrate that there are more Korean international students who are willing to participate in boundary-blurring activities than those who exclusively participate in bright-boundary activities.

When she was asked about what she thinks about Korean society’s views of people in an interracial or interethnic romantic relationship, Hyeri expressed discomfort:

[Regarding how Korean society views interracial dating,] I’ve only heard bad things … I have some friends who are involved in interracial relationships, and based on what I’ve heard from them and what I’ve seen – like, other people approaching them and the way they talk to my friends – wow, I can’t even express them here.

Ivy thought that the history of Korean War and American soldiers frequenting the red light districts in Korea have developed Koreans’ social prejudice against interracial dating. She specifically emphasized the fact that the social stigma against interracial dating in Korea affects Korean women more than Korean men:

History [and culture] play a huge role. … I think it’s because of, … during the Korean War, American soldiers stayed and we had yanggongju which really is not a good term but it is used by Koreans all the time when they’re talking about [Korean women] selling their bodies to non-Koreans. People don’t like [interracial dating] at all.

Paul, a junior who served in the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA), remembered when he used to patrol in Itaewon, a district of Seoul known as a foreigners-friendly neighborhood near the main U.S. Army base, with a Korean senior military personnel at night:
You know, when I was in the army, whenever I passed by Itaewon with a Korean senior personnel, he always commented on the girls with American guys. He said things like, “You see those girls walking around in this area at this hour? These girls are the bad girls.” Korean girls hanging out with American guys get a scarlet letter. I don’t know why but I think that’s just how the Korean society still views such concept.

Even Sophie who thought that her parents are “not that conservative at all” admitted that her mom would not be “very happy about [the idea of Sophie marrying a non-Korean guy].” Sophie said that although she feels that the Korean society is “slowly opening up more to interracial dating, [interracial dating] is still frowned upon when it comes to dating black people.”

Jisun talked about how her mother’s opinion mattered a lot when it came to the issue of interracial dating in college. When Jisun told her mother about her Indian boyfriend in college, her mother became “extremely worried and concerned” and advised Jisun “not to tell [her] Korean friends or other family members, even her brother, about [the relationship.]” But when Jisun started dating a German boyfriend later, her mother did not care about the relationship as much “because he [was] German, not Indian.”

Clearly, there is a racial hierarchy involved in the interethnic boundary work done by Korean international students.

In addition to the social stigma and stereotypes that hinder Korean international students’ boundary-blurring activity, the legal structures of the countries pose difficulties. Eunice was concerned with certain legal limitations or immigration restrictions that prevent her from participating in boundary-blurring activity, which she defined as “being able to live in multiple nations as the full citizens of multiple nations”: 

40
I’d be happy to become a dual citizen [and hold both the U.S. citizenship and the Korean citizenship,] because I think being a citizen in both countries is the best option for me [to become bicultural or multicultural.] But it is an option that is not offered… it is an option that is not possible at all.

Boundary-blurring activity is considered by most to be a multicultural activity, and it is controlled by or dependent upon numerous societal forces and structures. An individual’s desire to be multicultural alone cannot fully enable the individual to become multicultural.

4.3. Intraethnic Boundary Work

i. Koreans in Korea

Electronic communication (e.g. online messengers and smart-phone message applications) and online social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr) have enabled Korean international students in American colleges to indirectly access information and people in Korea. Nonetheless, some Korean international students still sense a growing social distance between themselves and Korean culture and society. In the survey, 14.7% of Korean international students reported that they see relating to Korean friends in Korea as a big anticipated problem they will face when they return to Korea. Because they are not physically in Korea, these Korean international students find it challenging to even attempt to participate in boundary-blurring activities with Koreans in Korea. Consequently, Korean international students are often left with a feeling of disconnect from Koreans in Korea and see a bright boundary.

Woowon expressed how he often feels different from the Korean students studying at Korean colleges. When he was asked about his familiarity with Korean culture, Woowon replied:
I am familiar with [Korean culture] but the weird thing is that it is different when I meet up with my Korean friends – like, my Korean friends who went to high school in Korea and also went to college in Korea. My Korean culture is different from theirs, I guess.

When Woowon returns to Korea during school breaks and meets up with his Korean friends from his Korean elementary school and middle school, he becomes conscious and cautious of what he says in front of them. Woowon does not share his daily life in America with his Korean friends in Korea because he is afraid that he might make them feel jealous:

My daily life can be something that [my Korean friends in Korea] wanna experience but can’t because they don’t get an opportunity to do so. I don’t want to offend them by bragging about it. So I become cautious of what I say.

Woowon was clearly aware of the cultural capital that he has as a Korean international student studying at an American university: a multicultural experience in the U.S. that is not available in Korea. Korean international students acknowledged the fact that young Korean college students attending Korean colleges have a distinct college culture that is different from American college culture. Eunice mentioned that unlike her multicultural experience, the experience of her Korean friends in Korea was “defined” and “homogeneous”: “[My Korean friends at Korean colleges] are experiencing and participating in a defined, homogeneous young adult culture that I am not experiencing [in the States].”

Moreover, Korean international students expressed how they feel that Korea is changing rapidly and how that rapid change makes them feel disconnected from Korea and the Korean way of life. Even though Korea on the surface seems to function as a fixed physical place, it is “not stable in the sense of being static”; rather, Korea is “constantly re-negotiated and understood in new ways by different people, or by the same
people at different times” (Easthope 2009:77). Students expressed their confusion at the fluid, undetermined nature of Koreanness and Korea as a result of the rapidly changing Korean society. Awareness of this fluidity seems to undermine students’ notion of Korean culture as an anchor:

Soo hyun: I don’t really know if I know much about Korea so I can’t really define Koreanness. … But if I have to say something about it, I must say that [Korea] changes so fast.

Woowon: Whenever I go back to Korea for my [school] breaks, I always notice that something has changed, like the buildings, stores, the public transportation system, like, even the public bus system has changed within a year! When I went back after graduating high school, I didn’t know how to commute in Korea. I mean, things like trends – the fashion trends, how young people hang out, … stuff like those change so fast.

ii. Korean Americans

In addition to the Koreans in Korea, Korean international students experience a social distance from the Korean American students, who are often the second-generation children of immigrant parents. In the survey, 54.8% of the students reported that they are currently not involved with the KSA at their institutions, and identified the main reason for their noninvolvement as the lack of “connection” or commonalities among the members of the KSA.

Kate, a freshman at a liberal arts college on the East Coast, talked about how she was surprised by the diversity within her school’s KSA:

In KSA, there [are] Korean Americans and international students who studied at [American] high schools like me, and there are people who just [came from] Korea, like … just came here [for college]. So there are certain differences.

Ivy, a sophomore at the same school that Kate attends, also talked about the diversity within KSA: “We have more variety [of Koreans] in KSA. … Some are really
international [but] our presidents are really Korean American.” Soohyun mentioned that although he himself hangs out with Korean Americans and Korean international students, he “will never try to mix the two groups, [Korean Americans and Korean international students,] or have them in one setting.” Yebin, a freshman studying Fine Arts in California who went to a private religious high school in the Midwest, was surprised by the number of KSAs at her university:

[My school] has so many KSAs and they’re all so big. As far as I know, there are four KSAs at my school. [Members in these organizations] get together once a week to eat together ‘causethere are small groups within KSAs – they’re like small families. And there’s a weekly outing, they also go skiing every winter, practice Korean traditional musical performance every year to perform at cultural festivals and stuff.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Ivy, when she was asked to define a typical Korean compared to a typical American during the interview, compared Korean international students to Korean American students instead of comparing Koreans to non-Koreans:

Korean international people are more concerned about what they write or how they’re portrayed. Korean American people … are more straightforward; it’s … sometimes, they’re a little bit [ruder,] like they [might] think some of the things are funny [but] Korean international people [might] think it’s offensive.

Harry, another interviewed student, did not even consider Korean Americans as Koreans: he saw them as “Americans with Korean parents who speak some very limited Korean.” Eunjung, an Anthropology major, even took a step further than Harry and described Korean Americans as “white Americans”:

First of all, the most obvious difference between the Koreans who lived here for a long, long time and the Korean international students is the way of thinking. I mean, Korean Americans think more like whites, and even when they’re talking, they speak English, don’t use Korean … their perspective is more white, and even the conversation topics themselves are different.
When Eunjung was asked if she would like to make more Korean friends, she answered:

Yes, of course. But not just Korean friends but more like Korean international friends, I guess. My friends in high school were all Korean international friends, so whatever I said, they understood me and we got along really well, but over here … [Korean American friends] come from a different background so I become really cautious and sometimes there’s a lot of trouble and stuff.

It is clear that Eunjung has built multiple categories of Koreans that she can refer to whenever she thinks about her Korean friends. To her, “Koreans” is not a single group of homogeneous individuals; rather, it is a group of multiple Korean identities that are all unique and different from each other. Consequently, Korean international students like Eunjung differentiate themselves from Korean Americans and label these coethnics as “American” or “white.”

When the students were asked whether they would be willing to date or be in a romantic relationship with a Korean American, many expressed uneasy feelings and concerns. Hyeri answered that she would be more willing to date a non-Korean than a Korean American:

I felt that Korean Americans are very different [from Koreans like me] in their ways of expressing their opinions. [For example,] I feel that even though they’re ethnically Korean as well, Korean Americans have a stronger belief in protecting the traditional Korean culture. When I talk with them, they have their certain [perspective on preserving their Koreanness] – I guess it’s ‘cause they were born here and grew up here as Koreans but having to accept American culture and competing with Americans. They are different from Korean international students like me, you know.

Hyunjun, a pharmacy student, shared a fascinating conversation he had with his Korean American friend. Hyunjun has been living in the U.S. for nine years and is a dual citizen at the moment. One day, Hyunjun’s Korean American friend asked him if he was a “FOB,” or “Fresh Off the Boat,” which is a negative term used to describe immigrants
or migrants who have arrived from a foreign country and have not yet assimilated into the host nation’s culture and are *too ethnic*. Hyunjun shared his story:

I was hanging out with a Korean American friend of mine one day and he asked me, “Are you a FOB?” So I asked him how he’d know who’s a FOB or not, and he said, “If you watch Korean TV, then you’re a FOB. I’m allergic to FOBs. If you’re a FOB, I can’t really get along with you.”

In their study on second-generation Korean American and Vietnamese American grown children, Pyke and Dang (2003) refer to this practice as *intraethnic “othering,”* a phrase for the specific distancing processes that occur among the coethnics of non-mainstream groups. As demonstrated by the conversation between Hyunjun and his friend, the *intraethnic* othering process involves the isolation of some coethnics and can generate division and resentment within the ethnic group (Pyke and Dang 2003). Korean Americans who are relatively more Americanized or “whitewashed” often apply the term “FOB” to those who display any of several ethnic identifiers such as speaking accented English, speaking Korean with friends, dressing in styles associated with the homeland or socializing with recently immigrated coethnics or ethnic traditionalists (Pyke and Dang 2003).

Hyunjun’s Korean American friend resisted ethnic television shows and did not want to be associated with Koreans who watch them. Obviously, Korean television watching demands a strong command of Korean language. Thus, a scale of how fluent in Korean an individual is becomes a measure to determine who is “one of us” within an ethnic group. By avoiding contact with Koreans whom he considers “FOB”s, Hyunjun’s friend maintains a social boundary. Such marked social boundaries between Korean Americans and recent migrants reveal a social geography of acculturation. Just as
multiple racial and/or ethnic groups create a social geography of race, identities within an ethnic group form a social geography of acculturation (Pyke and Dang 2003).

Yet it must be noted that the Korean international student participants in this study differentiate themselves from other relatively more recent Korean migrants. While Korean Americans see the relatively recent migrants as speaking Korean with peers and speaking accented English, many Korean international students too see themselves as different from those recent migrants. Longer-stay Korean international students consider themselves as the bicultural middles who are always located at a site of constant accommodation of identities. They are actors embracing in-betweenness (Easthope 2009).

As the bicultural middles, many longer-stay Korean international students are fluent in both Korean and English. As Korean-English bilingual individuals or even multilingual individuals, Korean international students in this study identified bilingualism or multilingualism as an important skill in becoming a multicultural individual. Jisun, who wants to speak fluent Korean and English, said that she is worried that she is in an “awkward middle position” and is forgetting both languages:

I do learn and study stuff in English so sometimes, although I’m more comfortable speaking Korean, I don’t know some words in Korean. But English still doesn’t really feel like my native language. So I’m just in that awkward middle position.

After talking about her “awkward middle position,” Jisun continued and said that to her Korean friends in Korea, she is “[seen as] an Americanized one,” but to her American friends in the States, she is “not one of them.” When Kate was asked if she
considers herself as a multicultural individual, Kate said: “I wouldn’t say I’m multicultural. I’m sort of in-between [the Korean culture and the American culture].”

Soohyun, who considered Korean Americans as Americans, confessed how his middle position and the lack of a secure group identity enable him to freely navigate different cultures:

I think it’s true that sometimes a conflict arises between Korean Americans and Korean international students [who recently came to the U.S.] since they think differently, you know. So I really feel like I’m in the middle, between these two groups. I understand both sides and I can hang out with both groups but [it’s hard.]

As Soohyun remarked, navigating the cultural middle is not always easy. This experience of in-betweenness leaves many Korean international students free of specific derogative terms such as “FOB” or “whitewashed.” Korean international students occupy a vague, ambiguous position in between the Korean culture and the American culture that does not have a label. While in-betweenness contributes to Korean international students’ ability to navigate the different identities, it also burdens the students by prohibiting a secure identity. Korean international students lack a foundational cultural base that they can claim as their own in the midst of numerous intercultural interactions and unavoidable conflicts that arise from such interactions. Clearly, some conflicts are reduced but they are not permanently eliminated.

Without a doubt, a lack of a stable identity is a double-edged sword for Korean international students. In the survey, one anonymous student confessed, “Sometimes, I feel that I do not have as strong identity as others.” Another anonymous student commented that being multicultural is an “extremely time-consuming and tiring process [that requires] so much effort,” and further mentioned that it might even be dangerous to
be multicultural around the age of 20 to 25 since a lack of stable identity might lead to a “lack of psychological stability.” These students’ words are in sync with Martha Nussbaum’s description of cosmopolitanism:

Becoming a citizen of the world is often a lonely business. It is [an] exile from the comfort of local truths, from the warm nestling feelings of patriotism, from the absorbing pride in oneself and one’s own. … Cosmopolitanism offers no such refuge (Nussbaum 1994).

**iii. Korean international students**

Korean international students also establish bright boundaries between themselves and other Korean international students. Reminiscing upon her days in high school, Eunice said that the reason why she did not have a single Korean friend in high school and still does not have “that many Korean friends” in college is because “Koreans always hang out only with Koreans [and she] always has to belong to that group no matter what.” Eunice did not want such kind of forced belongingness: “[In high school,] instead of hanging out with them everyday, I just interacted with them a little on a surface level. And it’s the same deal here [in college.]”

Jisun, whose school currently does not have a KSA, believed that since she is studying in a foreign country, she must hang out with non-Koreans. She argued that there could have been some uncomfortable consequences if her school *did* have a KSA:

[If there was a Korean students association at my school,] my friend circle will definitely become tiny and exclusive and cliquely. And I came to the U.S. to study and to make as many non-Korean friends as possible.

An anonymous student whose school lacks a KSA as well said that even if her school had a KSA, she would not join it because she feels that “it will be hard to get out
of such social group once [she’s] in it.” Indeed, many Korean international students believe that KSAs tend to be exclusive.

iv. Boundary-blurring activity

Some Korean international students perform the boundary-blurring activity among Koreans. However, it is interesting to point out that while most Korean international students in the study enthusiastically talked about how they sought to blur interethnic social boundaries, only two interviewees, Hyeri and Soohyun, enthusiastically talked about their boundary-blurring activities within intraethnic context. Hyeri talked about how she is involved in a KSA for Korean American students and also in a KSA for Korean international students:

So the KSA is Korean Students Association and it’s mostly for Korean Americans. KBC is Korean Business Club and it’s for Korean international students studying abroad in the U.S. … When I was a freshman, the very first person – actually, my elementary school classmate who came to [my university] as well – I’ve become friends with was Korean American, so I became pretty close to her and learned about KSA thanks to her, and then learned about KBC later.

Hyeri further mentioned that while she is involved in both student groups, she still recognizes the fact that the two organizations have “different colors.” Soohyun was also involved in two separate KSAs. He described how his school has two organizations of Korean students:

At [my school,] there is an official group called KASA and it’s mostly for Korean Americans. Then there’s an unofficial one called KANU, which is for Korean international students. I go to KASA meetings but I also hang out with KANU people.

When he was asked if he feels like he shares many things in common with the members of both student groups, Soohyun answered that “it is not a matter of being a
Korean American or a Korean international student.” Rather, to Soohyun, it is about whether the individual “gets along with [him] or not”:

It is a matter of an individual’s personality. For example, I can become friends with a Korean international student who grew up in Korea without any abroad experiences or who went to a foreign language high school\(^2\) in Korea. I can also become friends even with a [Korean American] kid who grew up in the States and does not speak Korean at all and prefers speaking English. It is all about whether the individual can get along with me or not – whether we click or not. I can become friends with anyone who clicks with me.

But despite the fact that he is involved in boundary-blurring activity, Soohyun said that boundary-blurring activity could only be possible on an individual level. He shared a story of his friend who attempted to merge the two KSAs at his school but eventually failed:

There was this one upperclassman who was an international student involved in KANU. He wanted to merge the two Korean groups on campus so he suggested the merge saying, “Hey, it doesn’t look good when we have two separate Korean groups on campus. Let’s merge them.” But it didn’t work out. I mean, it’s just impossible. And even if these two get merged, I think [most Korean Americans and Korean international students] will still hang out separately.

Soo hyun also said that he thinks that a merge of the two Korean groups is unnecessary since if an individual wants to hang out with both groups, then he or she can attend the events of both groups and socialize with people in both groups:

I did that and nobody asked me why I was hanging out with Korean Americans and Korean international students at the same time – or I haven’t run into such people not yet, at least. I think two separate groups [for Korean Americans and international students] are needed because these two groups are different from each other. But you as an individual can just hang out in both groups.

---

\(^2\) A foreign language high school is a prestigious type of private preparatory high school in South Korea, which often sends many Korean students to prestigious American colleges.
4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has looked at how Korean international students participate in both interethnic boundary work and intraethnic boundary work. A relatively more complicated boundary work for Korean international students is the boundary work among Koreans. An examination of their complex intraethnic boundary work warns against the tendency to perceive an ethnicity as a homogeneous monolithic identity. As this chapter has demonstrated, this simply is not true. Intraethnic boundary work shows how the definitions of Koreanness are more complex and ambiguous in today’s global society. Even though Korean international students assert the existence of essential differences or bright boundaries between non-Koreans and Koreans, they are also aware of the fact that “Koreans” cannot be one group since there are numerous sub-groups among those sharing Korean ethnicity.

Together, interethnic boundary work and intraethnic boundary work become the interaction processes through which Korean international students come to a realization that they do not have a solid, stable identity. In his study on boundary work, Alba (2005) emphasizes the role of demographic changes in contributing to more boundary crossing, blurring, or shifting activities. For example, the growth in mixed-race population or ethnic groups in a country can facilitate more boundary-blurring activities over time. This chapter has illustrated that Korean international students’ American college experiences in mixed-race population do not simply increase in the frequency of students’ boundary-blurring, multicultural activities. In fact, instead of encouraging more boundary-blurring activities, even intraethnic bright boundaries have been established in addition to the
interethnic bright boundaries. Even though Alba (2005) does not investigate intraethnic boundary work in detail, the results of this chapter demonstrate that there is a substantial amount of intraethnic social boundaries that deserves more attention.

Although Korean international students have some certain criteria of Koreanness that they apply to the interethnic boundary work, these criteria become ambiguous as they simultaneously establish bright boundaries among their coethnics. The following chapter will pay attention to how students’ in-betweenness shapes Korean international students’ multicultural attitudes, behaviors and future plans.
CHAPTER 5: BALANCING ACT: KOREANNESS AND MULTICULTURALISM

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 identified the types of daily boundary work of Korean international students, and discussed how both *inter*ethnic boundary work and *intra*ethnic boundary work play a role in identity construction. Based on the student participants’ applications of the unstable, un-finalized definitions of Koreanness in their *inter*ethnic boundary work and *intra*ethnic boundary work, Chapter 4 showed how Korean international students feel that they belong neither to the American culture nor to the Korean culture; they possess a fluid identity that does not completely belong either to a multiethnic society or to a ethnically homogeneous society.

The current chapter explores Korean international students’ perception of Koreanness and multiculturalism in more depth. All Korean international students agreed that a rich cultural experience in foreign countries is essential to developing a multicultural self. And they are aware that cosmopolitans, or the individuals who envision traveling and living anywhere, can *choose* an identity according to cultural location because they already have had sufficient economic, cultural and social capital to sustain a favored socioeconomic position within the global economy, such as being a student at an American college (Thompson and Tambyah 1999). To young cosmopolitans like Korean international students, globalization offers an option of temporary global migration, which is longer than a tour yet shorter than permanent immigration. Korean international students obtain cultural capital, build multicultural skills, and thus gain
power as the flexible bicultural middles or multicultural middles who can select cultural identities according to specific locations and situations. In this context, it is reasonable to argue that postmodernity facilitates the maintenance of class privilege and further strengthens class privilege.

Based principally on one-to-one interviews with twenty students, this chapter studies how students’ fluid identity floating somewhere between Koreanness and multiculturalism has changed and has affected their political attitudes and opinions over their time in the U.S. The following sections will illustrate how Korean international students define Koreanness and multiculturalism and how students’ fluid identity may play a role in shaping their political attitudes or opinions. Then the last section will look at students’ post-graduation plans and career aspirations as an attempt to see how fluid identity influences their life decisions. This chapter is an attempt to directly address and answer a central research question of this thesis: Can a Korean be Korean and multicultural at the same time? Or is a Korean identity inherently at odds with a multicultural one? Because a Korean identity is based on Korean national culture while a multicultural identity requires acceptance of more than one culture, these two identities may be at odds with one another; an affirmation of Korean identity may be an attack on multiculturalism.

5.2. Koreanness and Nationalism

i. What is Koreanness?

The Koreanness defined by student interviewees contains various elements: (1) the emotional ties among Koreans (jeong); (2) strong desires for a sense of communal
affiliation; (3) a rapidly changing society; (4) patriotism; (5) Korean popular culture, and more. Since Chapter 4 has already described the significance of the emotional ties (jeong), the desires for a communal affiliation and the role of a rapidly changing society in shaping a Korean identity, this section examines the significance of patriotism and Korean popular culture (K-pop culture) in defining Koreanness.

**Patriotism.** 10.7% of the 56 survey participants picked “patriotic” as one of the three words to describe being Korean. Yebin, a freshman at a school in California, used the word “patriotism” as one of her three words to describe Korea and Koreanness. Yebin believes that patriotism in Korea stems from Korea’s long history of foreign invasions and occupations:

> Why I thought of the word “patriotism”? I think all Koreans who grew up in Korea are like this: when somebody talks badly about Koreans, they get very mad. You know, [these Koreans] become very aggressive when they see Japanese people and stuff like that. And even when there’s a political discussion in class regarding the Japanese imperialism, they become so aggressive. I haven’t really seen these kinds of characteristics in other nationals.

A discussion of patriotism in Korea cannot be separated from a discussion of the Korean army. Because conscription or mandatory military service is legislated in South Korea, all Korean males between the ages of 18 and 35 must serve the South Korean army for approximately two years. In this study, numerous male students mentioned that the idea of the military duty or their experiences in the army influence the self-identities of Korean men. Male students discussed how they felt that the army was imposing or forcing Koreanness upon them. Yonggyun, a sophomore who is planning to return to Korea to serve in the army within the next two years, said that he heard older Korean male students talking about how the Korean army “changes the mentality of Korean men
by teaching them throughout two years that they ‘must fight for Korea’ as Koreans.”

Paul, who recently finished his service in the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA), said:

Korean army affects Korean men’s identity a lot. A lot, ‘cause basically, what you’re educated in the army are national security, national identity, ethnic identity and being Korean and things like that. You get brainwashed. You watch videos and there are special weekly sessions and stuff.

In fact, during the interview, Paul even requested me to write the statement “Korean men change a lot after serving in the army” in this study. Paul described how his Korean friend in college, who is an international student as well, has changed dramatically after he came back to school from the army:

I think you should write this part: Korean guys change a lot after serving in the army. I mean, even the work ethic changes. Some [Korean international] guys [at my school] who used to maintain like a 2.0 GPA get straight A+’s when they come back to school after serving in the army.

Seokhyun, who served in the Korean army after his first year in college, said that Korean army experience is a popular conversation topic among Korean men that “never fails to be brought up.” It is a conversation topic linked to patriotism and nationalism, and acts as a bond among the Korean male students:

When Korean guys who served in the army meet up in the States, they don’t talk about it at the very beginning; but then, time passes a little and somebody in the group brings it up, you know. Somebody in the group always starts asking, “Have you been to the army?” Then the conversation on the Korean military experience goes on forever.

Clearly, because all Korean male international students must go back to Korea to serve in the army for two years and come back to the U.S. for school, they are subject to the forced imposition of Koreanness in terms of patriotism and nationalism. This forced imposition of Koreanness may remain in Korean male students even after they return to
the U.S. for school since Korean male students frequently chat about their military experiences every time there is a gathering of Korean men in the U.S. Korean army experience is an extremely exclusive experience shared among Korean men that underlines Koreanness, nationalism, national unity and national security.

*Korean popular (K-pop) culture.* While most adjectives or nouns that interviewees used to describe Korea or Koreanness were the common words to describe a nation or a nationality in the traditional sense (e.g. emotional ties, patriotic, conservative, etc.), there was one noun that stood out from the list: Korean popular culture, which is commonly known as K-pop culture. Including television shows, soap operas, movies, popular music and more, K-pop culture is a hybridization of Western culture, mostly American, and Korean culture. Interestingly, this glocalized and hybridized culture is gaining global popularity and being exported to other regions of the world today. Though the K-pop culture is still more popular in Asian countries, the recent *Gangnam Style* sensation, in which a music video of a South Korean singer went viral and became the first YouTube video to reach a billion views, shows how the popularity of the K-pop culture is expanding beyond Asia.

During the interviews, several Korean international students talked about how they see K-pop culture as an element of Koreanness because it is what non-Koreans think of when they picture Korea today. Because K-pop culture is more widely available today through the Internet than in the past, non-Koreans are now more aware of K-pop culture, and their knowledge of K-pop culture connects them to Koreans more smoothly. During
the interviews, numerous students shared their opinions and thoughts regarding their encounters with non-Koreans who were very aware of the K-pop culture:

Ivy: [When I watched the YouTube video of MIT students dancing to Gangnam Style.] I was really proud. … Ten years ago, no, not even ten years but like five years ago, when [non-Koreans] talked about Korea, they immediately thought about the Korean War and their grandparents who went to the War and stuff. But now it’s more about the current K-pop culture.

Jay: [K-pop culture changed my daily life] ‘cause Gangnam Style was crazy. Have you seen my school’s flash mob dancing video? People danced to Gangnam Style in front of the school statue. And when I was hanging out with a Korean friend one night, girls next door were playing Gangnam Style and asked us if we were Korean, and they wanted us to show us how to dance to Gangnam Style. So we joined their party and danced Gangnam Style.

Jisun: What surprised me the most was that one of my friends from a rural area of Africa watches Korean soap operas. She visited Korea to go to the Yeosu Expo last year! Even I haven’t been! She texts me in Korean. And my roommate, who is Chinese American, watches Korean soap operas. K-pop culture is more common in the U.S. than what I expected.

Yebin: I went to In & Out with my Chinese friends one day when Gangnam Style was so popular, and this group of white guys who were sitting behind us started dancing to the song. Then they asked us if we were Korean. Before the K-pop culture became popular worldwide, I think everyone asked me if I was Chinese or Japanese and I used to feel bad about it. But now, people ask me if I’m Korean. People know more about Korea now.

Interestingly, while many Korean international students recognize K-pop culture as an integral part of their Korean identity, some view it as an element of Koreanness in the eyes of non-Koreans only. In fact, one interviewee Grace tends to think of Koreanness according to the perspective of non-Koreans:

Koreanness according to the perspective of non-Koreans:

I think I tend to think of Koreanness as what non-Koreans think of it as. … I mean, usually, the first thing that comes to non-Koreans’ mind when they think of Korea is probably the K-pop culture.

Grace’s quote suggests that Koreanness is a looking-glass concept: definition of Koreanness depends on the perceptions of non-Koreans (Cooley 1902). Even though Korean international students establish a bright boundary against non-Koreans according
to several specific elements of Koreanness as examined in Chapter 4, Koreanness itself may be based on the students’ understanding of how non-Koreans perceive Korea. Korean international students like Grace imagine themselves or Koreanness as non-Koreans see them, and what non-Koreans see is like a reflection in a mirror (Cooley 1902). In other words, Koreanness, which is a criterion to draw a bright boundary against non-Koreans, is shaped by perceptions of non-Koreans. In this aspect, Koreanness clearly is an ironic, inconsistent characteristic.

ii. Self-evaluation: “How Korean are you?”

After asking the students to define Koreanness in their own words, the survey and the interview asked the student participants to rate their Koreanness on a scale from 1 to 10, according to the adjectives or nouns that they chose earlier to describe being Korean. No significant gender differences were observed: the average score of 20 male students was 7.05, while the average score of 36 female students was 7.16. The overall average was 7.13. When the interviewees were asked to elaborate on the score they gave to themselves, they said that they feel that they do not fit the descriptions of Koreanness perfectly because as international students, they are different from other Koreans, namely Koreans in Korea. They said that their score of Koreanness often depends upon the judgments and opinions of other Koreans. The following quotes from Grace and Jay illustrate how the Korean international students of this study understand their Koreanness as different from Koreans in Korea:
Grace: I personally think that I am very Korean. I am 100% Korean, [and I am] more familiar with the Korean culture [than any other cultures]. But when I actually go to Korea, it’s a different story. I think how Korean I am depends on where I am. When I’m at [my college,] I am pretty Korean among the Korean international students here. But when I go to Korea, I’m [less Korean according to Koreans in Korea.]

Jay: I’m not completely Korean ‘cause people in Korea see me differently. When I was in the army, people used to say, “Oh, you American” although I was serving in the army! They don’t see me as a normal Korean, so I’m not Korean.

5.3. Multiculturalism

i. What does it mean to be multicultural?

The characteristics and behaviors of multicultural individuals identified by the student participants of this study include: (1) open-mindedness; (2) flexibility and adaptability; (3) willingness to explore new cultural domains; (4) knowledge; (5) ability to accept differences; (6) multilingualism, and more. All 20 interviewees used the word “open-mindedness” in their definitions of multiculturalism. Korean international students’ descriptions of multiculturalism demonstrate how they see multiculturalism as a necessary skill to fit into a “regime of flexible accumulation,” or internationally mobile corporations and financial systems that have gained flexibility in the labor force (Harvey 1989). This regime of flexible accumulation is central to the “diffuse political, social, and cultural shifts that mark the postmodern condition” (Harvey 1989; Thompson and Tambyah 1999:227).

Students mostly talked about the importance of traveling, having many cultural experiences, or constantly being exposed to diversity in becoming multicultural. Sophie said: “I think [traveling a lot] in the sense that you try to immerse yourself in a [different culture] and be very open to that culture.” Grace talked about how her growing up in the
U.S. prior to college gave her useful multicultural skills such as the ability to compare and contrast different cultures:

Being able to compare and contrast different cultures [is a multicultural skill.] I think about this a lot these days: if I grew up [only] in Korea, I probably would have studied and focused only on Korean politics or Korean history. But I [grew up] in the U.S. [as well]; being exposed to American politics, American way of life and the American society and having experienced both America and Korea, I have the ability to compare and contrast the two.

Dongwoo, an Economics major at a college in Massachusetts, shared a list of his own skills and behaviors that he considers as multicultural:

I’ve been learning Japanese and Chinese. Back in high school, I studied French for four years. Now, I’m planning to study the Indonesian language and the Malay language. I mean, [to be multicultural,] you need to deviate from the norms about studying the languages of the developed nations versus the languages of the developing nations. I also Google random facts about various countries in the Internet, usually checking out Wikipedia. I even memorize the names of the capitals and what others might consider useless (laughs). And whenever I have a chance, I go to other countries – foreign countries that are new to me – to experience new cultures.

Interestingly, while Korean international students acknowledged the importance of being able to speak different languages, they argued that the fluency in foreign languages is not as important as one’s open-mindedness or willingness to experience a multiethnic environment. The following quotes from students illustrate this view:

Hyunjun: Personality is more important than linguistic capability. I heard from somebody that when non-native speakers, like me, are speaking English, non-Koreans are aware of the fact that they’re not native speakers and thus might have some accents. And because they are aware of this, they’re totally fine with it.

Sophie: No, I don’t think [speaking perfect English is required to become multicultural.] I mean, I feel [that] anyone can be multicultural, and you can be quiet and don’t speak English very well, but you can be very understanding. [On the other hand,] you can be a good English speaker and outgoing and everything like that, but still be very racist – or very not multicultural.
Yebin: First of all, getting rid of your prejudice or stereotypes is more important than being able to speak other languages. Even if you speak English really well, if you still have that prejudice – like, “Oh, this guy is from somewhere else so we can’t really become friends” – then you’ll never be able make good friends. But people who are very open-minded can hang out with everyone even if they don’t speak English that well.

**ii. Self-evaluation: “How multicultural are you?”**

In the survey, 98% of the students agreed with the statement that they feel that their experience in the U.S. has changed them as a person by making them more appreciative of other cultures; 93.8% agreed that they became more open-minded (Figure 5-1). After asking the student participants to describe their own definitions of multiculturalism, the survey asked the students to rate their multicultural characteristics on a scale from 1 to 10. Again, no gender differences were observed: the average score of 20 male students was 7.9, while the average score of 32 female students was 7.7. The overall average was 7.8, which was just a little higher than the students’ average score of Koreanness (7.13). It is interesting to mention that the students who scored 9 or 10 for Koreanness and the students with a score of 2, 3 or 4 for Koreanness all scored 8 or higher for multiculturalism. Korean international students clearly saw themselves as multicultural individuals.
Students talked about how the U.S., a multicultural society, naturally made them multicultural, and also said that their American academic institutions provide multicultural settings where students can develop cosmopolitan worldviews. 92.4% of students stated that they feel that their American institution is very open to students of different cultures. Korean international students view the possession of life experiences that transcend and/or travel across the East-West cultural divide as an essential factor that increases an individual’s multicultural characteristics. Environment, therefore, plays a huge role in shaping students’ worldviews. The following quotes by various students illustrate this:

Soo hyun: I’m like stem cell: I’m like stem cell that’s in an environment to become a bone so I’ll become a bone – I am not becoming a bone because I have to but because I’m in that environment. If I’m in an environment to become muscles, then I’ll become muscles. I’m multicultural because I’ve been in a multicultural environment.
Jinsil: I have experienced and seen so many things since I came to the States. I have learned and also “felt” more things in the States than when I was in Korea. … I learned that what I had seen in Korea was not everything; there are more things – so many more things – over here. I came here so now I’m able to see more things and experience more, so I can understand [different cultures] more.

Jay: [My experience in the U.S.] made me more multicultural but… when I’m abroad, I do feel more proud of being Korean [than when I’m in Korea,] but then there are other moments in which I am disappointed in Korea or Koreans. I think my Korean awareness becomes stronger as I become more multicultural.

Grace: I am thankful that I can travel back and forth between being Korean and being multicultural. I am thankful that I was able to experience a lot since I was a child.

Sophie: I’ve become more multicultural. … I [now] describe myself as more of a “third culture kid” than being Korean. And when people ask me where my hometown is, I usually say [something] like, “I didn’t really grow up [in] anywhere’ or ‘I don’t know, the world.”

Hyunjun, who gave himself only a 4 out of 10 for his multicultural characteristics, said that even though his score is low, it is still an improvement from a score of 1 from the past. It is interesting that Hyunjun thinks that he is multicultural despite the fact that he doesn’t have many non-Korean friends:

Three points went up – from 1 to 4 (laughs). I think normal people would have gained like 8 points. … My friends always ask me, “How come you’re always with foreigners and have spent nine years in the States and still don’t have non-Korean friends?” I think Koreans who only have spent six months or a year [in the States] have more non-Korean friends than I do (laughs). It’s just that although I’ve become multicultural, I am still introverted and I don’t really approach other people first. I can’t do anything about it. But I’ve become more multicultural, and I feel that the social distance between me and non-Koreans is now narrower than before.

86.5% of the survey participants answered that they feel that they receive more benefits for being multicultural than being Korean. It can be assumed that Korean international students idealize flexibility in the system of postmodernity: in postmodernity, “the business press touting the economic benefits of flexible specialization” and “flexible information systems, products, and services” favor flexible
individuals (Thompson and Tambyah 1999:227). Korean international students see multiculturalism as a cultural skill that corresponds to the economic structure of the current postmodern society.

But 35.4% of the students expressed their concern about disadvantages of being multicultural. These Korean international students argued possessing a fluid identity means lacking a single stable identity. They see multiculturalism as an ideal that demands in-betweenness. Consequently, as students stated, absence of a solid group identity may lead to identity loss and identity confusion, which may add to students’ loneliness and alienation. An anonymous student at a university in the Midwest said in the survey: “The worst case scenario [of being multicultural] is that you end up being a loner.”

5.4. Balancing Koreanness and Multiculturalism

i. Middle position: in-betweenness

Student participants’ average score for multiculturalism was approximately the same as their average score for Koreanness. This suggests that as a group, Korean international students feel that they are Korean and multicultural. But simultaneously being Korean and multicultural is a challenging task for Korean international students because they occupy a “bicultural middle.” As explained in Chapter 4, Korean international students in the U.S. are located in a “bicultural middle” position or a multicultural middle position, which is a vague and shifting space (Pyke and Dang 2003:157). As a result, Korean international students often feel of being out of place, admitting that the bicultural middle is a site of constant accommodation.
However, the bicultural or multicultural middle position offers numerous benefits as well. As the individuals who inhabit a flexible space in between the cultures, Korean international students occupy a safe, non-stigmatized identity zone in the U.S. They are defined by what they are not: they are neither the “FOB” Koreans nor the “whitewashed” Korean Americans. Besides, Korean international students’ in-betweenness becomes an asset when they can navigate through their flexible, fluid, and unstable identities to choose an identity that best fits a specific situation. In this context, being a Korean cosmopolitan means utilizing the in-betweenness in the most effective and efficient way; that is, being able to freely select an identity according to a specific situation and based on the individual’s needs.

ii. Compatibility of Koreanness and multiculturalism

When the interview participants were asked whether or not they think that being a Korean cosmopolitan is possible, 18 participants answered that they think it is possible; only two participants answered that they think it is impossible. These two students, Soohyun and Paul, view Koreanness and multiculturalism as the two opposite ends of a continuum: when an individual moves towards the Korean end, he or she moves away from the multicultural end.

Soohyun: Honestly, realistically speaking, you can’t be 100% Korean if you experience a lot of different cultural things. I think you’ll always think like, “oh, this culture is better for this situation” and stuff like that.

Paul: No, being Korean and being multicultural can never be compatible. You’ll always lean towards one side over the other side.

An anonymous student in the survey shared an interesting visual image to explain why he feels that being a Korean cosmopolitan is impossible. This anonymous student
said that he does not consider himself multicultural because he “[separates his] American self from [his] Korean self, and because these two [selves] are not one, [he is] a different person when [he meets] Koreans and when [he meets] non-Koreans.” He sees a Korean self and an American self as two incompatible beings, and believes that in order to be multicultural, individuals have to reconcile the multiple cultures within one self.

Likewise, although she said that being a Korean cosmopolitan is possible, Sophie still feels that Koreanness and multiculturalism are “almost incompatible”:

If you increase one [side,] [the other side] kinda decreases a little bit. So I feel that over my years [in the States,] I’ve been kind of [becoming] more and more multicultural but my Koreanness has decreased little by little. … It’s interesting.

Moreover, despite inconsistent, vague and undetermined meanings behind Koreanness, some Korean international students stated that they feel that Koreanness offers more advantages to Koreans than multiculturalism does. Based on their own definitions of Koreanness, interviewees were asked to compare the benefits and costs of a Korean identity. Dongwoo and Seokhyun’s quotes capture several themes mentioned by the 13.5% of the students who believed that they receive more benefits for being Korean than being multicultural:

Dongwoo: I think there are way more benefits for being Korean than being multicultural. I think being Korean – like, the Korean spirit of passion and han [or a feeling of oppression or resentment] – is well suited to today’s global capitalist system. You know, in the past, like in the 90s, 80s and 70s, American companies sought to learn the Japanese corporate culture. And today, Korean culture is doing the same thing [that the Japanese did: soon, foreign companies would seek to learn from the Korean corporate culture].
Seokhyun: I think in Korea, being Korean is still more beneficial than being multicultural. Korea has a lot of Korean people (laughs), so compared to the U.S. which has a diverse range of people who come from everywhere around the world, Korea is so not multicultural. I don’t think being multicultural will ever be valuable in Korea – well, perhaps in 100 years? (Laughs) Even though a lot of Koreans are now going abroad, what’s Korean will not be changed that quickly ‘cause Korean things are so deep-rooted and Koreans have received Korean education throughout their lives.

Meanwhile, most students argued that Koreanness and multiculturalism are compatible. 18 of the 20 interviewees argued that they have become more Korean and more multicultural as well because they have two selves within one self, which is in fact the same reasoning that the anonymous student above used to describe why he thinks that it is impossible to become a Korean cosmopolitan. In the survey, 93.8% of the students agreed that it is possible to be strongly patriotic to South Korea while at the same time engaging in non-Korean, multicultural activities.

Eunice argued that a cost-benefit analysis is not suited to discussion of being Korean and being multicultural because “being Korean is beneficial [only] because it adds to [being multicultural] or multiculturalism.” It is interesting to note that Eunice identified Koreanness as an element that is positively linked to multiculturalism: an individual is multicultural when he or she is Korean. In this aspect, Eunice saw a Korean identity and a multicultural identity as compatible identities.

Students like Dongwoo, Grace and Jay also see the two identities as compatible. These students claimed that they themselves are very Korean and very multicultural at the same time; they see Koreanness and multiculturalism as two characteristics that are parallel to each other and thus do not interfere with each other. In other words, an individual does not become less Korean if he or she becomes more multicultural because there are two separate meters to measure these two characteristics: one for Koreanness
and another one for multiculturalism. Before serving in the Korean army, Dongwoo had traveled to Southeast Asia and lived in Africa for a year “because [he] just wanted to explore.” He acquired an extensive amount of cultural knowledge over the years through his travels and in-depth immersion in different cultures. Now, he is involved with two different cultural organizations on campus: Dongwoo is the current president of the KSA and the African students’ association at his college.

5.5 Korean International Students’ Political Attitudes and Post-Graduation Plans

Eighteen interviewees who stated that Koreanness and multiculturalism are compatible expressed how they feel that they can connect to the foreigners in Korea since they themselves have an experience of being a foreigner on foreign soil. Jinsil expressed her empathy towards foreigners living in Korea and talked about how her American experience enabled her to understand hardships of foreigners in Korea:

Jinsil: Now I don’t have much prejudice or stuff like that. When I first came to the States, it was tough. I experienced racial discrimination; I got bullied, and I always felt other people staring at me as if I was weird, and stuff like that. So now when I see foreigners [living] in Korea, I think differently – I don’t have things against them anymore. I definitely don’t have any prejudice against them.

Jay, Hyunjun and Seungchul talked about how their attitudes towards foreign migrant workers in Korea in particular have changed as a result of their American experience:

Jay: If I continued to live in Korea without coming to the States, I could have just talked against those foreign migrant workers in Korea as if they’re not even humans, and I could have thought that it was something natural to do. But I myself have been living in foreign countries and so I guess I don’t do it as much. I mean, they’re foreigners in our country [Korea] and I’m in that kind of situation as well over here [in the States.]
Hyunjun: I think my political views have changed after coming to the U.S. Back in the days when I lived in [Seoul,] there was an immigration office right in front of my middle school in my town, and a lot of foreign migrant workers used to hold demonstrations. Back then, I used to say stuff like, “These foreigners don’t have common sense.” My friends and I would see the Southeast Asians lowly and inferior and ignore them, ‘cause that’s what we heard from the news and the adults around us. But after coming to the States, I mean, in the States, I am a minority, too. I am in the same situation that these foreign migrants are facing in Korea. And I realized that I shouldn’t treat foreign migrant workers in such offensive way.

Seungchul: Now I feel that I wanna be nice to [foreigners in Korea.] I know how hard it is for them. I know how it’s not easy at all, you know, living in a place that’s different from where you used to live. I know better now with my own experience. … I am so worried about [foreign migrant workers in Korea] ’cause [America] is more exposed to multicultural and multiethnic stuff and Americans have experienced diversity but Koreans haven’t. So discrimination against them or how people treat them will be worse and more severe in Korea. I think it’s a big problem. So I always feel like, “Oh, I wanna treat them equally.”

Jisun pointed out that foreign migrant workers in Korea might face more discrimination compared to the foreign migrant workers in the U.S. because “Korean society is unprepared.” Jisun said that she hopes “Korea becomes more open about immigration and [change] its behavior towards immigration” because right now, Korea’s attitude towards immigration is “like how Americans hate it when they hear that Mexicans are coming [to the U.S.],” but even worse than American case.

Several interviewees mentioned that despite their experiences of being foreigners in foreign locales, their foreign experiences alone could not help them connect to the foreigners in Korea due to different socioeconomic statuses and class privilege. Paul and Harry, two interviewees who claimed that Koreanness and multiculturalism are incompatible, stressed socioeconomic status differences as the main reason for their inability to be empathetic towards foreign migrant workers in Korea. Also, although Yonggyun and Sophie reported that they see Koreanness and multiculturalism as
compatible characteristics, they still said that they could not become empathetic towards foreign migrant workers as a result of socioeconomic gap between themselves and the workers. The following quotes are from these four students:

Paul: Did my American experience help me relate to foreign migrant workers in Korea? No, because first of all, they are illegally staying in Korea. And I am here in the States because my parents can afford my education abroad. I mean, foreign migrant workers and I are not and will never be in the same situations.

Harry: I have a very different purpose, though. The purpose of my abroad experience is to study, [not to work.] So [even though I can’t relate to foreign migrant workers in Korea,] I think I can understand international students from China or America studying at Korean universities.

Yonggyun: Oh, you can’t compare me to the foreign migrant workers in Korea ‘cause first of all, our situations are different. They came to Korea to earn money and I came to Korea to learn. I mean, I’m in a situation in which I can just give up studying, but they’re in a situation in which they can’t give up – ‘cause they came to Korea to earn money; to survive.

Sophie: [I guess my own experience of living as a foreigner in a foreign land can help me relate to those foreigners in South Korea] a little bit in the sense that they’re trying to adapt to and become integrated into a foreign country, but [I can’t relate to them] 100% because I feel like most of [the foreigners in Korea] are [in] a lot more difficult situation [than mine,] [because] I have the privilege of, you know, living abroad with my family and always going to international schools and not having to worry about being accepted as much.

In this context, it is interesting to place students like Jay, Hyunjun, Seungchul and Jisun, who said that they feel empathy towards foreign migrant workers in Korea despite their different socioeconomic backgrounds, next to students like Dongwoo. When he was asked about how he felt each time he made a transition from one culture to another, Dongwoo answered that he experienced smooth transitions because “the elites of most countries are familiar with and share the English or Western culture.” Dongwoo, an international student from an upper class family that has access to many material and sociocultural resources, takes it for granted that he will be interacting only with the local
elites in various countries. To Dongwoo, multiculturalism is a useful tool that lubricates his interactions and communication with global elites. In fact, during the interview, Dongwoo said that Koreans becoming multicultural is a necessary process that Korea needs to go through in order to succeed as a nation in a global economy. In Dongwoo’s mind, a multicultural identity is more like a means to serve self-interest:

Yes, [I believe that Koreans can be Korean and multicultural at the same time,] and that is the only way for Korea to survive [in this globalizing world.] It has to be that way.

Even though Dongwoo, who is the president of KSA and also the president of an African students association, undeniably has a multicultural identity, it is unclear if his multicultural perspective transcends self-interests and will ever be used for an altruistic purpose such as advocating immigrants’ rights.

Unlike Dongwoo who described a multicultural perspective as a medium of self-improvement, Jay, Hyunjun, Seungchul and Jisun described a multicultural identity as an element that extends beyond a fulfillment of an individual’s needs. These four students believed that their multicultural point of view led to a deeper understanding of foreign migrant workers, who represent global working class. They even stated that they envision future Korea as a multicultural nation with a more open attitude towards immigration. This suggests that a few Korean international students may go further with their fluid, multicultural identity and even advocate on behalf of foreigners, foreign migrant workers or immigrants in Korea. A multicultural worldview, as demonstrated, can have different outcomes.
5.6. Where Is a “Permanent Home” for Korean International Students?

One of the last questions in the survey asked, “Can you ever imagine your permanent home NOT being Korea?” 73.5% of the participants answered that they can imagine their permanent home not being Korea, while only nine students answered that they often imagine Korea as their permanent home. Because Korean international students are located in the middle of two cultures, many do not have a clear idea of where their homeland or motherland is. Soohyun’s words illustrate the situation:

I am ready to commit myself to a country that does not require me stuff that I don’t like or stuff that I don’t want. A permanent home? I think that’s an emotion: not like a physical place but a feeling. [It’s] kinda like you visiting Korea and then feel like [you went back to your childhood days] and the feelings that you had back then come back to you. But that’s ‘cause you miss those moments of the past. So if I were to visit the U.S. in some decades, I’m sure I’ll feel the same way about it – I’ll feel like I’m home [when I visit the States] in the future. So I don’t think Korea’s my home. … actually, I don’t know where my home is.

Another question in the survey asked the Korean international students whether they plan to stay in the U.S. or go back to Korea right after graduation. Only eight out of 48 students answered that they plan to go back to Korea immediately after graduation. Unlike the majority of the Korean international students who idealize and seek to become cosmopolitan travelers, these eight students carry a host of emotional ties to family and childhood friends living back home that periodically raise feelings of being out of place.

70.6% of the students said that they expect a smooth transition from the American society to the Korean society; these students are obviously adopting an optimistic outlook. Only 29.4% expect a rough transition. The biggest problem that the students anticipate about their transition is the challenge of adjusting to the Korean work culture or office culture, which they believe to be more hierarchical and strict than the American
office culture (Figure 5-2; Figure 5-3). Student participants do not really see relating to their parents or Korean friends and the advanced Korean language as major problems. In fact, they see being with family and reuniting with old friends as the anticipated joys (Figure 5-3).

FIGURE 5-2. Korean international students’ anticipated problems of going back to Korea after graduation.

Meanwhile, 54.2% of the survey participants said that they plan to stay in the U.S. after graduation. Sophie sees that staying in the U.S. means more opportunities. She said:

I think there are definitely more opportunities if I start here [in the States] and then go back to Korea in the future ['cause] I feel like I’m gonna be kinda stuck in Korea once I go there … so I feel like starting here will give me more opportunities.
29.2% of the participants chose “Other,” saying that they would like to go “somewhere else” other than the U.S. or Korea to explore somewhere new after graduation. One student in the survey remarked, “It’s not about the nation; my decision will depend on the job opportunities.” Yonggyun said that he doesn’t want to stay in the U.S. or go back to Korea because he wants to “do business around the world.” Dongwoo talked about how he plans to work in Hong Kong or Singapore after graduation since he is “[more] comfortable with the Asian culture than the American culture” yet wants to explore non-Korean cultures.

I’m just really, really interested in Asia itself, and since I’m an Economics major, I would like to start a business. But I don’t think there will be that many opportunities to earn money in the States. And emotionally, Asia suits me more than the States, and I know more people in Asia. Asia has opportunities and diverse cultures. America is just too American.
To Dongwoo, the U.S. is not a multicultural site because it is “just too American.” On the other hand, Asia is a multicultural location that also offers him opportunities and emotional support.

5.7. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has explored Korean international students’ definitions of Koreanness and multiculturalism and how they evaluate their Koreanness and multiculturalism. During the interviews, students found it more challenging and complicated to define Koreanness because perceptions of non-Koreans intervened during the process. On the contrary, they had a clear definition of multiculturalism to reflect upon when scoring their multicultural characteristics. Consequently, interviewees needed more time to score their Koreanness than when they were scoring their multiculturalism, and on average, their score for multicultural characteristics was higher than their score for Koreanness.

The chapter also has examined how students’ balancing act between Koreanness and multiculturalism shapes their political opinions and post-graduation career plans. During the interviews, many Korean international students said that to some extent, their personal experiences of being foreigners in a foreign country help them relate to foreigners in Korea. A few students even confessed that they became more aware of discrimination that the foreigners in Korea face. Students’ fluid identity floating in between different cultures contributes to their understanding of foreigners, at least to a limited extent.
However, it must be noted that most students indicated that they prefer to stay in the U.S. after graduating college. Brain drain is a term used to describe the large-scale, often global, emigration of a large group of individuals with skills and/or knowledge. If the immediate plan of Korean international students does not involve a return to Korea, South Korea might suffer a *multicultural brain drain* in the near future. This will create serious problems since South Korea is becoming increasingly multiethnic and the nation needs leaders with multicultural perspectives.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study has used the boundary work stories of Korean international students as a context for analyzing their nationalistic and multicultural worldviews in a transnational postmodern society. I have argued that postmodernity facilitates the accumulation of more cultural capital for the relatively wealthy socioeconomic class by commodifying global mobility. As children of relatively affluent Korean families, Korean international students at American colleges are temporary global migrants who experience the diversity in a foreign country yet still have the possibility of returning to Korea in the future. As the case of Korean international students has demonstrated, cosmopolitan identity work is situated in a nexus of cultural intersections, such as discourses of ethnic identification, economic or class status, political, social and cultural consciousness and more (Thompson and Tambyah 1999). This complex transnational process calls for a new paradigm that challenges the long-held default of equating society and the nation-state (Levitt and Schiller 2004).

The study started with two hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that Korean international students would become more Korean or more nationalistic as they (re)confirm the significance of Korea as their home, or would become more multicultural through constant interethnic interactions during their time in the U.S. The second hypothesis was that becoming more Korean and becoming more multicultural are independent identity processes. Interestingly, the results of the study revealed that Korean international students’ interethnic activities are not the only dimensions that contribute to
their multicultural or nationalistic identities. The study illustrated that the *intra*ethnic boundary work of Korean international students – with other Korean international students, Koreans in Korea and Korean Americans – also occupies a major part of their identity work.

On the surface, an examination of *inter*ethnic boundary work seems to suggest that all Korean international students are simply constructing a bright boundary between non-Koreans and Koreans in the U.S.; indeed, more than 80% of the students reported that they believe that there exists a cultural difference between Koreans and non-Koreans which prevents non-Koreans from fully understanding Korean culture and vice versa. However, the study revealed that although most Korean international students took this *inter*ethnic bright boundary as a given, many students still seek to participate in boundary-blurring activities. For example, 80.6% of the students reported that they were willing to date a non-Korean, an activity that 58.3% of the students classified as a multicultural, boundary-blurring activity.

In addition, an examination of the *intra*ethnic boundary work that accompanies the *inter*ethnic boundary work reveals that Korean international students find it extremely challenging to define Koreanness and evaluate their Koreanness as they realize that there are bright boundaries among Koreans that make it difficult to unite Koreans. In fact, more than 50% of Korean international students were not involved with the Korean students associations at their institutions because of the lack of commonalities among Korean members, including Korean Americans and very recent migrants. The study shows that while Korean international students have a relatively clear vision of what
multiculturalism signifies, they are often confused about their Koreanness or their relationship to Korea as a nation. This study initially aimed to explore the question, “Is being Korean cosmopolitan possible?” Now, the study must ask, “Is being Korean possible?”

In working through the details of my interviewees’ stories, this study demonstrates that Korean international students often find themselves in various kinds of conflicts arising from the “‘freedom and burden’ of designing their own identity” (Williams and McIntyre 2001:397). Korean international students’ process of becoming flexible world citizens who embody multiculturalism confronts their inner desire for the familiar tastes and routines of the homeland. Their inner desire for the homeland, in turn, faces another problem when they realize that even within a group of Koreans, there are multiple subgroups that challenge the students from holding onto a stable, unchanging, unified ethnic identity. As transnational migrants, many Korean international students do not see Korea as a permanent “home” that provides elements of stability in identity construction. With their fluid identity shaped by multicultural experiences in the U.S., Korean international students are able to feel empathy towards foreigners in Korea, and a few students can even relate to the hardship and discrimination experienced by foreign migrant workers in Korea. Clearly, students’ American experience plays a role in shaping their political attitudes.

One direction for further research would be to study the role of college major in the identity work of international students. At academic institutions, most interactions and information exchange occur within the department or the program of study;
therefore, the number of the coethnics or co-nationals in the same department or program may affect the international students’ identity work (Lee et al. 2009). Moreover, since U.S. immigration law itself favors international students in the STEM majors (i.e., science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in terms of offering an extension of the Optional Practical Training program after graduation and thus granting a longer U.S. work permit, international students’ choice of majors may affect their post-graduation plans. This may even lead to useful findings regarding why and how some international students ultimately become or do not become Korean Americans.

Additionally, a study focusing on the role of gender in international students’ identity work may be useful. This study did not detect any significant gender differences. However, in Korean culture, women pursuing prestigious academic degrees abroad are considered to be, at least to some degree, rebellious actors who disobey Korea’s traditional gender role expectations. Conversely, it is culturally acceptable – and even encouraged – for men to study abroad at prestigious academic institutions. Therefore, an in-depth examination of gender in the identity work process may result in interesting findings.

Another suggestion would be a longitudinal study that follows these Korean international students as they make further life decisions after college. Most students in this study reported that they wish to stay in the U.S. after graduation, while some students said that they want to return to Korea or go somewhere other than the U.S. or Korea. A follow-up study might explore the process of staying in the U.S. (e.g., deciding to become a U.S. citizen in future) or the process of returning to Korea and continue looking
at students’ identity work. Studying how international students transfer their multicultural experiences at American colleges to another location or other locations throughout their lives is one of the ways to study how global migrants transfer or translate ideas across borders. Will Korean international students be able to keep their multicultural identity alive when they migrate back to their relatively more homogeneous home country? Will these students be judged as politically liberal and open-minded in Korea? Will they be tolerant of cultural diversity and immigration? My rationale for this suggestion derives from some interesting points of convergence between my study and other studies of international students attending graduate programs in the U.S. who seek to be cosmopolitan academics or businessmen and businesswomen (Haider 2013; Louie 2013). By tracing how international undergraduate students choose graduate schools and/or workplaces throughout their lives, a longitudinal study of international students will treat transnational economic, political, and social processes as one interconnected process.

Boundary work is sensitive to local conditions and likely plays out differently in different settings. Each cultural setting tells a different story of boundary work since individuals attribute uniquely personalized meanings to their encounters with cultural difference (Thompson and Tambyah 1999). Nonetheless, most societies today are located within postmodernity and face the tensions between nationalism and transnationalism. Cosmopolitanism discourses and the identity project are not exclusive to Korean international students. Therefore, many of these identified tensions in this study are likely to be relevant to other cosmopolitan elites who are temporary global migrants experiencing the complexities of geographic relocation (Thompson and Tambyah 1999).
A study of Korean international students in American colleges provides a good point of comparison for future studies on international students of other nationalities in the U.S. or other countries. Further studies comparing the international students from various countries will be useful in exploring what kind of commonalities and differences exist among the identity work processes of the international students of different ethnicities.

My study has only started down the path to a comprehensive analysis. The anticipation of a new academic journey seems a fitting place to conclude my study about the identity construction of temporary global migrants.
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction/Background
1. Do you consider yourself as an “international student” different from Korean Americans?
2. What year are you? How long have you been studying in the U.S.?
3. Before you came to the U.S. for college, where did you live and grow up?
4. Are you staying with your family in the U.S. now, or are you staying alone?
   a. If you are with your family in the U.S., with which members of your family are you staying?
5. How familiar are you with Korean culture? How familiar are you with American culture?
   a. How often do you speak Korean on a daily basis? Do you feel more comfortable speaking Korean, or English?
   b. What about the Korean etiquettes or the manners?
6. How is living in the U.S. different from living in Korea?
   a. How do you feel when you go back to Korea after a semester or an year in the States?
   b. What difference strikes you the most?

On-campus Interaction
7. What kind of on-campus activities are you involved with?
8. Are you a member of any cultural organizations on campus? Why or why not?
9. Are you a member of Korean Students Association (KSA)? How often do you go to general meetings or events?
   a. Why or why not are you involved with KSA? Do you feel that you and other KSA members have a lot in common?
10. How do you define a “typical Korean” versus a “typical American”?
11. How is hanging out with Korean friends different from hanging out with non-Korean friends?
12. Approximately what percent of your friends are Korean friends? Non-Korean friends? Are most of your closest friends Korean, or non-Korean?
   a. (If interviewee has more Korean friends) Do you want to make more non-Korean friends? What prevents you from making more non-Korean friends?
   b. (If interviewee has more non-Korean friends) What prevents you from making more Korean friends?
13. Do you think multiculturalism requires certain attitudes or skills, such as being extrovert, outgoing, or social, speaking perfect English, and more?
Transnationalism

14. How do you keep in touch with your friends and family in Korea?
15. How do you stay informed about cultural or social issues of Korea?
16. How often do you travel to Korea?
17. Do you attend a “Korean church” regularly in the U.S.? What kind of church do you go to – e.g. if Christian, Protestant or Catholic? What do you like about the Korean church? (Religion)
18. How does a social networking site like Facebook – or the Internet in general – play a role in shaping your identity as a Korean student studying and living in the U.S.? (Media)
19. Thanks to YouTube, Korean popular culture is gaining popularity these days (e.g. PSY’s Gangnam Style went viral worldwide through YouTube). How has the rise of Korean pop culture outside Korea affected your everyday life in the U.S.? Any anecdotes? (Media)

Korean-ness/Nationalism vs. Cosmopolitanism

20. What does “being Korean” mean to you? What kind of characteristics does “being Korean” entail?
   a. Could you give me three adjectives or nouns that you would use to describe “being Korean”? Why did you choose those three?
   b. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest, how Korean do you think you are, according to your own definition of “being Korean”? Could you explain how and why you rated yourself so?
21. Multiculturalism is commonly defined as the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity, recognizing and accommodating different identities. Based on this common definition, do you see yourself as a multicultural cosmopolitan who is able to possess different cultures?
   a. On a scale from 1 to 10, how multicultural do you think you are?
22. What do you think of the costs and benefits of Korean-ness and multiculturalism?
   a. Do you think you have more benefits for being very Korean, compared to being very cosmopolitan? Or the other way around? Could you elaborate on your opinion?
23. (If interviewee is male) What do you think of Korea’s mandatory military service?
   a. Have you served the army yet? Are you planning to? Why or why not?
   b. Do you think serving in the Korean military is an element of “being Korean” for Korean men?
24. What kind of behaviors would you associate with “multiculturalism”? For example, do you enjoy eating ethnic food, listening to music of different countries, hanging out with friends of different backgrounds, watching foreign movies, dating a person of different ethnicity or race, and more?
25. Have you ever been in a trouble because of such multicultural behaviors or perspective? Could you explain the situation in detail?
26. Do you think it is possible to be Korean/nationalistic and multicultural simultaneously? Do you see them as compatible? Why or why not?

27. Many Korean people claim that “one-bloodness” (danil minjok) and “family” are the core values of Korean society. What do you think of interracial dating, in terms of your own opinion, the role of your family, and the Korean society to an extent?

28. Some people say that they are willing to make foreign friends but they will not date foreigners or seek romantic relationships with foreigners. Is there a line that you will never cross, like this example?
   a. What is the *most multicultural* thing you are willing to pursue?
   b. What is the *most Korean* thing you are willing to pursue?

*Self-Evaluation*

29. Has your definition of Korean-ness changed over the time you spent in the U.S.? How?

30. How has your experience at an American college influenced your attitude towards foreigners over the time you spent in the U.S.?
   a. Do you think you became more Korean, or more cosmopolitan? Why?
   b. Do you think your American college experience has made you more open to new cultures, that is, made you *multicultural*? In what ways? Could you give specific examples?
   c. Has your opinions on certain political or social issues in Korean society changed? For example, what do you think about the immigration issue in South Korea today, with an increasing number of foreign migrant workers from the developing countries working in South Korea?

*Future Plans*

31. Do you plan to stay in the U.S. or go back to Korea after graduation? If you plan to go back, which do you anticipate: a smooth transition or rough transition?
APPENDIX B. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Face Sheet: Basic Demographics
1. Are you a U.S. citizen?
   Yes
   Yes, but I am a dual citizen (Korean and U.S.).
   No
   No, but I am a U.S. resident.
2. Which school do you go to?
3. Are you male or female?
4. What is your class year (expected graduation year)?
   2016
   2015
   2014
   2013
   Other (please specify)
5. What is your major?
6. Where are you from? Please provide city and country.
7. What is the highest level of education your parents have completed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than high school</th>
<th>High school</th>
<th>Some college</th>
<th>2-year college degree</th>
<th>4-year college degree (BA/BS)</th>
<th>Master's degree</th>
<th>Doctoral degree</th>
<th>Professional degree (JD/MD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. What are your parents' occupations?
   Father:
   Mother:
9. How long have you been living or studying in the U.S.?
   Less than a year
   1 year - 2 years
   More than 2 years - 3 years
   More than 3 years - 4 years
   More than 4 years
10. When was the last time you were in Korea?

Introduction/Background
11. Before you came to the U.S., where did you live and/or grow up? Please provide information for up to two places if applicable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Places</th>
<th>Length of stay</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place 1:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place 2:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. Why did you decide to study in the U.S.? Check all that apply:
   My parents expected me to study in the U.S. since they studied in the U.S. as well.
   I was interested in the American culture.
   I wanted to explore somewhere beyond Korea.
   Other (please specify)

13. Are any of your family members (e.g. brother, mother, uncle, etc.) in the U.S. now?
   Check all that apply:
   Father
   Mother
   Brother
   Sister
   Uncle
   Aunt
   Grandfather
   Grandmother
   None (I am alone in the U.S.)
   Other (please specify)

Perceptions
Now, I am going to ask your views on several descriptions of foreigners in South Korea.
Please choose a category that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

14. Foreigners in South Korea make South Koreans more open to new cultures.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

15. Foreign migrants make employment harder for Korean people.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree
17. Foreigners increase the crime rates in Korea.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

18. Foreigners hurt the Korean traditional way of life.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

Perceptions (cont.)
For each statement below, please indicate the category that best describes your view.
19. Foreigners living in Korea should be able to communicate in Korean.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

20. Foreign migrant workers take less desirable jobs (such as factory jobs and agricultural jobs) that many Korean people do not want anymore, thus benefiting the Korean economy.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree
Perceptions (cont.)
For each statement below, please indicate the category that best describes your view.

22. It is weird when a non-Korean professor teaches a course on Korea-related topics.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

23. I feel that my school is very open to students of different cultures.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

24. I like to check out various non-Korean, multicultural events on campus.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

25. In general, a large number of foreign students at my school has a positive impact on me.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

26. In general, non-Korean students do not have a good understanding of the Korean culture.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
Perceptions (cont.)
For each statement below, please indicate the category that best describes your view.
27. I get anxious when a professor assigns me to a group with non-Korean students.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree
28. In general, I feel more comfortable talking to my Korean/Korean American friends than to my non-Korean friends.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree
29. There are certain conversation topics that only my Korean/Korean American friends would understand.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Somewhat disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree
30. Which of the following conversation topics do you feel more comfortable to talk about with Korean/Korean American friends? With non-Korean friends?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>More comfortable with Korean/Korean American friends</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>More comfortable with non-Korean friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korean politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean pop culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American pop culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean entertainment gossip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American entertainment gossip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental expectations or pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship or dating issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic concerns or stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions (cont.)
For each statement below, please indicate the category that best describes your view.
31. I like becoming friends with students from other countries.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
32. I can be friends with anyone from any country.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
33. I don't have a problem being in a romantic relationship with a Korean.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
34. I don't have a problem being in a romantic relationship with a Korean American.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
35. I am or have been in a romantic relationship with a non-Korean.
   - Yes
   - No
36. I don't have a problem being in a romantic relationship with a non-Korean.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
**On-Campus Interaction**

37. What kind of on-campus activities are you involved with? Please provide specific information for all that apply to you:
   - Cultural organizations (e.g. Korean Students Association, Japan Club, International Students Association, etc.)
   - Musical groups (e.g. orchestra, a cappella group, choir, etc.)
   - Student publications (e.g. newspaper, magazine, etc.)
   - Athletics
   - Community service or volunteer
   - None (type "None")
   - Other (please specify)

38. My school has...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primarily made up of Korean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>international students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primarily made up of Korean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made up of equal numbers of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean international students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Korean American students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39. At my school, I am a member of...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primarily made up of Korean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>international students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primarily made up of Korean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made up of equal numbers of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean international students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Korean American students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
40. At my school, I am a member of the Executive Board of...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association primarily made up of Korean international students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association primarily made up of Korean American students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Korean students association made up of equal numbers of Korean international students and Korean American students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41. For students of schools without a Korean students association:
If your school had a Korean students' association, would you have joined it? Why or why not?

42. How involved are you with the Korean students association of your school?
- Very involved
- Involved
- Somewhat involved
- Somewhat not involved
- Not involved
- Not very involved
- Not applicable

43. What are the major reasons for being involved with the Korean students association?
Check all that apply:
- Korean students association helped me making a smooth transition to American life.
- I like to celebrate Korean cultural events such as Chuseok and Lunar New Year with Korean/Korean American friends on campus.
- Most of my close friends are involved with the Korean students association.
- Knowing and hanging out with Korean/Korean American people at my school let me network more effectively.
- I like to participate in the cultural shows with Korean/Korean American friends.
- Other (please specify)
44. What are the major reasons for NOT being involved with the Korean students association? Check all that apply:
   My school only has one association for both Korean American students and Korean international students, and I feel that it is primarily for Korean American students.
   At times, I have some conflicts with Korean American students because they don't understand Korean international students like me.
   I don't feel connected to the members.
   I don't like Korean international students.
   I am too busy during the academic year to be involved with the association.
   My close friends are non-Korean and they are not involved with the association.
   I don't really like participating in cultural events with Korean/Korean American friends.
   Other (please specify)

45. How often do you hang out with non-Korean friends outside of class?
   Never
   Less than once a year
   About once or twice a year
   Several times a year
   About once a month
   Two or three times a month
   Nearly every week
   Every week
   Several times a week
   Every day

46. How often do you hang out with Korean international students outside of class?
   Never
   Less than once a year
   About once or twice a year
   Several times a year
   About once a month
   Two or three times a month
   Nearly every week
   Every week
   Several times a week
   Every day

47. How often do you hang out with Korean American students outside of class?
   Never
   Less than once a year
   About once or twice a year
   Several times a year
   About once a month
   Two or three times a month
   Nearly every week
   Every week
   Several times a week
   Every day
48. Do you think hanging out with Korean international friends is different or similar from hanging out with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very different</th>
<th>Different</th>
<th>Somewhat different</th>
<th>Somewhat similar</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Very similar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>non-Korean friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean American friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

49. In your opinion, what are the possible major reasons for the difficulty of hanging out with non-Korean friends? Check all that apply:
- Language barrier makes communication extremely difficult.
- It is hard to find common interests to talk about.
- There are personality differences between my non-Korean friends and me.
- I am not outgoing enough to make non-Korean friends.
- My non-Korean friends are not as comfortable to chat with as my Korean/Korean American friends.
- My non-Korean friends are not as polite as my Korean/Korean American friends.
- I can't really have fun with non-Korean friends because they might find some of my jokes offensive, while my Korean/Korean American friends will find them funny.
- We have different cultural values to begin with.
Other (please specify)

50. Approximately what percent of your friends at school are Korean international friends?
- 0%
- 1% - 30%
- 31% - 50%
- 51% - 70%
- 71% - 90%
- 91% - 99%
- 100% (Everyone)

51. Approximately what percent of your friends at school are Korean American friends?
- 0%
- 1% - 30%
- 31% - 50%
- 51% - 70%
- 71% - 90%
- 91% - 99%
- 100% (Everyone)
52. Approximately what percent of your friends at school are non-Korean friends?
   0%
   1% - 30%
   31% - 50%
   51% - 70%
   71% - 90%
   91% - 99%
   100% (Everyone)

53. Think of your three close friends in college. Are they Korean students, Korean American students, or non-Korean students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Korean American</th>
<th>Non-Korean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transnationalism

54. How do you keep in touch with your friends and family in Korea? Check all that apply:
   Facebook or social networking site(s)
   Email
   Phone call
   Online messenger
   Video / webcam chatting
   Traveling to Korea
   I don't keep in touch with my friends and family in Korea.
   Other (please specify)

55. How do you stay informed about cultural, social, or political issues and news of Korea? Check all that apply:
   Facebook or social networking site(s)
   Korean newspapers
   Korean major broadcasting companies (KBS, MBC, and/or SBS)
   Friends
   Family
   I don't stay informed.
   Other (please specify)

56. How often do you visit a Korean ethnic church in the U.S.?
   Never
   About once or twice a year
   Several times a year
   Once a month
   Twice a month
   Nearly every week
   Every week
   Several times a week
57. Why do you attend or have visited a Korean ethnic church instead of a regular American church? Check all that apply:
   I like to listen to a Korean-speaking pastor's sermons.
   I like to network with other Korean/Korean American people in my community.
   I like to participate in cultural events including celebrating Korean holidays.
   I feel more connected to the Korean ethnic church because all members share the Korean ethnicity.
   Because American culture can be too liberal or too progressive for me to take in, I need a somewhat conservative space of traditional values.
   I like to pray out loud with my Korean/Korean American friends.
   Korean/Korean American Christians are more enthusiastic than American Christians.
   I like to go to Bible study group with my Korean/Korean American friends.
   Other (please specify)

Korean-ness/Nationalism vs. Cosmopolitanism
58. What three adjectives or nouns would you use to describe "being Korean"? Select three that you find the most important.
   Respectful
   Family-oriented
   Traditional
   Homogenous
   Complex
   Simple
   Hardworking
   Impatient
   Affectionate / caring ("jeong")
   Self-conscious
   Patriotic
   Patient
   Busy
   Other (please specify)

59. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest, how "Korean" do you think you are, according to the three adjectives or nouns you chose to describe "being Korean"?
60. Multiculturalism is commonly defined as the proper way to respond to cultural, religious, or gender diversity. One aspect of multiculturalism is the ability to recognize and navigate different identities. Based on this definition, do you see yourself as a multicultural individual? Why or why not?
61. Another aspect of multiculturalism is the ability to incorporate and embrace different identities in addition to your own. Based on this definition, do you see yourself as a multicultural individual? Why or why not?
62. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest, how multicultural do you think you are?
63. I feel that I receive more benefits for
   being more Korean.
   being more multicultural.
64. In your opinion, what are the benefits and/or disadvantages of being more Korean?
65. In your opinion, what are the benefits and/or disadvantages of being more multicultural?
66. What kind of behaviors would you associate with "multiculturalism"? Check all that apply:
   - Eating non-Korean ethnic food (e.g. Mexican, Japanese, Italian, etc.)
   - Listening to music from different countries
   - Hanging out with friends of different backgrounds
   - Watching foreign movies
   - Taking classes on foreign cultures
   - Dating a person of different ethnicity or race
   - Attending non-Korean cultural events
   - Joining non-Korean cultural organizations
   - Traveling abroad
   - Learning new languages
   - Other (please specify)

67. How often do you participate in the following activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>About once or twice a year</th>
<th>Several times a year</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Every week</th>
<th>Several times a week</th>
<th>Every day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating non-Korean ethnic food (e.g. Mexican, Japanese, Italian, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music from different countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging out with friends of different backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching foreign movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking classes on foreign cultures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating a person of different ethnicity or race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
68. Have you ever been in an uncomfortable situation because of your certain multicultural behaviors or perspectives (e.g. dating a non-Korean)? If so, could you provide more details about that situation?

69. It is possible to be strongly patriotic to South Korea while at the same time engaging in non-Korean, multicultural activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-Evaluation**

70. My experience in the U.S. has changed me as a person by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| making me more appreciative of other cultures. |       |       |       |       |       |
| making me more excited about learning other cultures. |       |       |       |       |       |
| making me more open minded. |       |       |       |       |       |
making me more appreciative of Korean culture.

making me more Korean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71. Right after graduation, I plan to</td>
<td>stay in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>go back to Korea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72. Could you explain your answer choice for the previous question</td>
<td>concerning post-graduation plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73. If you plan to go back to Korea, which do you anticipate: a smooth</td>
<td>transition, or a rough transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transition?</td>
<td>A smooth transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A rough transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74. If you plan to go back to Korea, what are the anticipated transition</td>
<td>problems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems?</td>
<td>Very exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to Korean friends</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to parents</td>
<td>No problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting to Korean work / office culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding advanced Korean language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice or stereotypes against Koreans who studied abroad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75. If you plan to go back to Korea, what are the anticipated joys?</td>
<td>Very exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being with family</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuniting with old friends</td>
<td>Not exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in the homeland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Korean 24/7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working within a Korean work / office culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
76. Can you ever imagine your permanent home NOT being Korea?
   Yes, I can imagine my permanent home NOT being Korea.
   No, I can't imagine my permanent home NOT being Korea -- I often imagine Korea as my permanent home.

Interview
77. In addition to the survey, this research needs rich data from one-on-one interviews. The one-time interview will take place sometime between now and early February via phone, Skype, or in person at your convenience. If you are interested in a paid (an Amazon gift card) follow-up interview, please enter your information below.
   Email
   Phone
REFERENCES


