

CULTURAL IDENTITY FOR KOREANS IN JAPAN MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS

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Introduction

The relationship between Korea and Japan is one that spans more than fourteen hundred years. Beginning with the invasion of Korea in the sixteenth century by the Japanese the relationship has been one of animosity toward the Japanese by the Koreans and the Koreans by the Japanese. Before that time there was peaceful mutual cultural interaction between Japan and Korea. The darkest period was the Japanese colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945. During the colonial period Korean immigration to Japan was enforced either by exploitive colonial policy or by wartime conscription (Lee, K. 1983). In Japan these Koreans were exploited, lived in substandard housing, suffered a forty percent illiteracy rate, and were oppressed by Japanese government policies and society. Because they were aware of the subjugation of their country and their oppression from 1910 on, Koreans could only feel helpless rage at their condition (De Vos and Lee, 1981).

In modern times, Koreans in Japan still remain a segregated, poor and persecuted minority in the midst of an increasingly affluent Japanese society (Goldstein, 1972). It is from this history that I will deal with the issue of cultural identity for Koreans in Japan. I will discuss three models and frameworks for understanding the issues that face Koreans in Japan. I hopefully will be able to provide the reader with these models and frameworks as tools for developing a better understanding of the largest minority that lives in Japan.

In an effort to get a better understanding of this subject I felt I needed first hand experience talking to Korean Japanese and to see their faces as I listened to them relate to me their experiences of being a Korean Japanese living in Japan. I had read many such interviews conducted by other researchers and educators. The majority of such interviews centered on the problems of self-identity among Korean Japanese youth in Japan. The main themes were discrimination, anger, self-hate, negative self-images and the search for a positive identity. Although I did not doubt these interviews, I felt that without my own field research I would have to accept the fact that the largest majority of Non-Japanese living in Japan pursue their lives on a day to day basis in dread of discovery, the knowledge of certain discrimination and prejudice, and the denial of their cultural identity. I soon discovered the same themes that appeared in interviews I had read also would be related to me by my interviewees.

I conducted three interviews with Korean Japanese, Ahdoja Hwang, Misun Chon, and Rikka

Hoshiyama and one with a Korean American, Aleena Gates. Two of the interviews were done in the U.S. and in English. The other two were done in Japan and in Japanese.

In looking at issues of assimilation, cultural identity, cultural conflict, many models exist. By doing my personal interviews. I have been able to come up with my own framework for looking at how Korean Japanese deal with the discrimination that they face. However, before describing my framework I would like to describe two models dealing specifically with Koreans in Japan that have been developed by John Ogbu, and Yasunori Fukuoka and Yukiko Tsujiyama respectively. The Ogbu model addresses minority status from the viewpoint of how one becomes a minority and what affect that has on predicting school success.

Ogbu Model

There are two types of groups in this model: Immigrant Minorities and Involuntary Minorities. Immigrant minorities have moved to their present societies in the belief that it would improve their economic situation, provide better opportunities, and more political freedom. These expectations influence the way they perceive and respond to their treatment by the dominant group members and institutions. (Ogbu, 1991) On the other hand the involuntary minorities are people that were brought to their present society through colonization, conquest, or slavery. This group carries great resentment at their loss of freedom and perceives social, political, and economic barriers as oppression by the dominant group. (Ogbu, 1991)

The cultural models of immigrant minorities and involuntary minorities differ in these ways: (1) frame of reference to compare their present situation and future possibilities. Immigrant Minorities see the social barriers as temporary problems that can be overcome with time, hard work, or more education. They have a positive dual frame of reference that helps them have an optimistic view of their future. i.e. comparing their former situation with their present one. Involuntary minorities do not have a former situation to compare with the present one so they interrupt their status with the members of the dominant group as worse off than they ought to be just for the fact they belong to the subordinate or disparaged group. They view the discrimination against them as permanent and institutionalized. (2) a folk theory of getting ahead. Immigrant Minorities view education as playing a central role to overcoming barriers against them. Involuntary minorities realize or believe that education is not enough. Their theory is one of collective effort for overcoming opportunity barriers against them. (3) a sense of collective identity. Immigrant Minorities bring with them a strong sense of who they are before emigration. Involuntary minorities lack this sense of self or it is quickly lost. (4) a cultural frame of reference to appropriate behavior, group membership and solidarity. Immigrant Minorities bring with them their cultural frame of reference and apply it to their new situation only as far as or enough for them to get ahead. Involuntary minorities tend to be swallowed by the dominant group and lose their cultural signposts. (5) trust of the dominant group and the institutions they control. Immigrant Minorities tend to rationalize prejudice and discrimination as the price worth paying to achieve their immigration goals. Involuntary minorities distrust the dominant group and the institutions they control. They find no justification to the discrimination and prejudice, which they see as institutionalized, other than they are the disparaged group.

It is fair to say that Ogbu's Involuntary Immigrant Minority definition accurately describes the majority of Koreans living in Japan. (Lee, Y. 1991)

Fukuoka and Tsujiyama Model

The second model was developed by Fukuoka and Tsujiyama to categorize young Japanese Koreans' attitudes toward ethnic discrimination in Japan. Fukuoka and Tsujiyama describe four types of attitudes: Pluralist, Nationalist, Individualist, and Assimilationist

The Pluralist type has no fixed model lifestyle. They do not identify with Koreans in their homeland nor with the Japanese, but only as a Korean in Japan. Mutual cooperation symbolizes the mentality of this type. They strive for a society based on the recognition of ethnic differences, but free of ethnic discrimination. Their aim is to solve social discrimination through "social change."

The Nationalist can be best described as a "Resident Foreign National" whose agenda is the development and unification of Korea. They attach importance to preservation against Japanese government policies that attempt to violate their rights as foreign nationals. They are strongly critical of Japan and feel no attachment to it.

The Individualist "Self realization" best represents this type. They choose to liberate themselves through social mobility. They view the problem as one of environment. They believe they can change their circumstances by traveling overseas or advancing themselves in Japan.

The last type is the Assimilationist. This type seeks to become "Japanese." They believe that assimilation is the best way to avoid ethnic discrimination. They attempt to cope with social discrimination by eliminating difficulties through adapting themselves to the world around them.

Wiltshire Framework

In the framework that surfaced with my interviews I found correlation's with the two previous models, but found them unsatisfying in capturing all the elements. This is not so unusual with models in that "ideal" types are described and any single individual may combine aspects of one or more types. The individual can also transcend the type through self awareness and understanding.

Many Koreans living in Japan have experienced the same problems and difficulties that the interviewees discussed. As we will see some of them overcame their difficulties in different ways to find for themselves a stable self identity and some could not.

The four categories I will define for my analysis are based on the interviewee's responses about assimilation, cultural identification, and cultural conflict. On the basis of that information I have come up with the following four categories: Hostile, Refugee, Overcomer, and Resigned.

The Hostile type is near to the Nationalist type of the Fukuoka/Tsushima model. They have a critical view of Japanese policies and historical treatment of Koreans. The issue of unification of the two Koreas is not as important as their desire to correct current and past injustices of the Japanese towards Koreans

The Refugee is one that cannot endure the situation for Koreans and leaves Japan or marries outside their group. Theirs is not an effort per se to increase their social mobility as the Individualist, but to liberate themselves from oppressive conditions in Japan.

Overcomer is the type that is fully aware of conditions in Japan and has determined through, family support, self-realization and pride to maintain their Korean cultural identity. They contain elements of the Pluralist type in their efforts to strive for a society based on recognition of ethnic differences, but are realistic about the discrimination they will never be free of in Japan.

Resigned makes great efforts to "pass" as a Japanese. They are successful until they are discovered as is inevitable. At the time of discovery they have their self-esteem deflated. They tell themselves and others it has no effect on them, but they are left feeling helpless against a society that they can never hope to be accepted in, either as a Japanese or a Korean. Their efforts of assimilation to Japanese society by "passing" as a Japanese are always debilitating and in vain.

Hostile

I met Aleena at the School for International Training. She was getting a Bachelor of Arts Degree and I was getting my Masters. She worked in the school cafeteria and by chance one day I asked if she was Japanese. Her response surprised me. She said "Thank God no! I'm Korean, well actually I'm Korean-American." This little exchange was the beginning of some very interesting conversations.

Aleena was adopted at the age of twelve from South Korea by an American family. Her adopted family encouraged her to stay in contact with family members in South Korea and to actively stay in touch with her roots. Although Aleena has never visited Japan she has developed a dislike for what Japan did to "her" country and the Koreans that now live in Japan. It was through our conversations, her research and subsequent paper, "A Study of Colonialism and Change in Korea" that I was to really begin to understand the historical background of these two countries and the very strong emotions, in Aleena's case, anger, that this subject invokes.

Aleena's situation is unusual in the fact that she is more knowledgeable of the history, and plight of Korean Japanese than most Korean Japanese in Japan. It is understandable that she should feel hostility towards the Japanese, but I was left with the feeling that her knowledge was only serving to justify her anger towards all Japanese. It struck me that she was displaying the same attitudes that the Japanese have for Korean Japanese, in so much as it is unfair to pre-judge a people from only one or two aspects of their culture and history.

Refugee

My next interview was done with Ahdoja Hwang, a Korean Japanese studying at the School of International Training also. Aleena had suggested I talk to Ahdoja since they were classmates in the same program. Ahdoja proved to be the most fruitful for personal information of the four. I attribute this to two factors. One, we were outside of Japan, and two, the conversations were done in English. Both factors provided a safe setting and medium of communication, and most importantly at the same time she was on a personal quest of discovery. Like Aleena she was making an effort to learn about herself as a cultural being.

Ahdoja's conversations mainly centered on the negative self-image of being a Korean in Japan (she often used the word agony to describe her childhood) and her efforts to find a positive identity. She did not display anger, but spoke in a saddened voice of the discrimination and the self-hate that she experienced while growing up in Japan. Ahdoja grew up knowing that she was Korean, but was instructed to never reveal this to anyone by her parents. At the time she did not know why, but distinctly remembers that she knew it was something bad and to be avoided.

At the age of eleven she discovered that she had a Korean name from her homeroom teacher. The teacher wanted to know what name, Japanese or Korean she wanted on her graduation diploma. Because there was another student in the room at the time she remembers being very fearful that the student would tell her classmates she was a Korean. Her fear of discovery and exposure became acute from that time on.

She related another incident about her name. Every Japanese has a family register, (a U.S. equivalent might registering the genealogy page of a family bible as a legal document). Koreans and all other non-Japanese do not have a family register. Non-Japanese are required to produce our Alien registration card. Often a copy of the family register (obtained from the city or ward office) is often required in Japan. In Ahdoja case she needed it when she was applying for an entrance examination at a high school. She and several of her classmates went together. She recalled the fear and anxiety she experienced of the person standing behind her noticing she had no family register and discovering she was a Korean. She admitted that she had lived most of her life in fear of discovery until recently.

Upon preparing to graduate from junior college she asked the job placement office to help her find a job. They said there was nothing they could do to help her get a job with a first class Japanese company because she was Korean. Once again she had to face the negative reality of being Korean in Japan. Discouraged and wanting to flee Japanese society she went to England to study English and it was there that her personal growth, self-esteem, and confidence blossomed on her own initiative.

The way Ahdoja found out she had a Korean name is typical for many Korean Japanese. However, her ultimate decision to leave Japan is not. It is to her credit that she was able to realize that for her to find her cultural self, she had to leave Japan and its discriminatory and oppressive attitudes. It was through leaving that she was able to overcome her low self-esteem as a Korean in Japan.

Resigned

Rikka Hoshiyama, a thirty five year old snack bar owner, was the most heart wrenching interview that I conducted. What I found when I listened to her was not the injustice of discrimination nor the bullying that Ahdoja or Misun (whose interview appears next) had personally experienced or the anger over the historical suppression of culture and brutality of the colonial period that Aleena expressed, although Rikka shared those experiences and knew of the colonial period, but the resignation of her position in Japanese society. She spoke lightly of her fate as a Korean in Japan and how she was making the best of the situation. But the longer I talked to her and the more she drank her defenses began to drop. She told me stories of discrimination in her childhood and the pain on her face was easy to see. She also spoke with

pride of her great grandfather and family and how they were of high social class in Korea before the Second World War and how they were forced by the Japanese in the 1920's to immigrate to Japan because of her great grandfather's importance as an Astrologer. At that point in our conversation she revealed her Korean name, Itai Re, an aristocratic name in Korea she said. Our conversation went in fits and starts and she would often change the topic. I let her wander trying not to force her. She confided that her parents had become Japanese nationals in the 1970's with a legal Japanese name although she refused to do so. She did not explain why even though I asked her. I was left with the impression that she retained a sense of pride as a Korean, but took it as her fate to make the best of her life as a Japanese in Japan.

Rikka's attitude of resignation is typical of most Korean Japanese of her age group and this is especially true for third generation Korean Japanese. The attitude changes for fourth generation Korean Japanese though. They have no sense of being Korean. Their whole acculturation experience is one of being Japanese. Most of these fourth generation Korean Japanese would not think of themselves as resigned, but as adapted to Japanese society as the Japanese.

Overcomer

The last subject was Misun Chon. She was a first year junior college student in Osaka. She was educated in the North Korean school system (*Chongnyon*) in Tokyo from grades K-12. Unlike Ahdoja and Rikka, Misun spent her school life being acculturated as a Korean. She used her Korean name although she admitted she did not like to when she was younger; and she received support of her ethnic identity from her family who spoke Korean most of the time at home, and openly displayed their ethnic identity to Japanese society. The most notable impression I got from Misun in our conversation was a sense of pride conveyed in the way she spoke of herself and her family. She did not display the anger of injustice that Aleena had nor the agony of Ahdoja, even though she had firsthand experiences with discrimination and prejudice in Japanese society. Instead she displayed a sense of freedom, identity, and self-confidence.

Misun has had the distinct advantage of having a Korean school experience that the other interviewees did not have, and more importantly a family that actively and in positive ways provided and reinforced hers and their own cultural identity as Korean Japanese.

In these interviews a central point kept surfacing. It is how each person's family and home could play the most central role in persevering and supporting cultural identity and self-esteem. The cases of Misun and Aleena show how important it is for parents to provide positive reinforcement and instill a sense of pride in cultural roots. Because of their parents help, Misun and Aleena were able to develop a balanced and healthy view of themselves. Misun's parent's own positive attitudes about their Korean identity were I believe the most influential in the development of her self identity and self-esteem. While Aleena still has negative feelings towards the Japanese, thanks to her parents she has no self-doubt or negative feelings of being a Korean living in America. Both of these women were empowered by their parents and therefore able to cope better with discrimination and prejudice.

I am sorry to say that this is not the case for Ahdoja and Rikka. In my opinion their parents failed them. In their efforts to protect and shield their children from pain by withholding from

them the knowledge of their cultural roots or by giving them a negative cultural image, Ahdoja and Rikka's parents denied them a chance to have positive cultural pride and severely impaired these two women. Ahdoja has only now begun to deal with and accept a positive attitude. Rikka may never be able to do so. I believe the low self-esteem both these women have are a direct result of their parents' negative self image of being a Korean in Japan.

Conclusion

This paper presented two models and one framework. These two models and one framework use different cultural, historical, and social aspects for developing their frameworks. The Ogbu model divides immigrants into two groups, Immigrant minority and Involuntary minority to predict school success. Understanding his model lets us conclude that Korean Japanese are in the involuntary immigrant group. The Fukushima/Tsujiyama model categorizes young Korean Japanese attitudes towards ethnic discrimination in Japan. They prescribe four types; Pluralist, Nationalist, Individualist, and Assimilationist. The last model is the Wiltshire framework. It attempts to categories Korean Japanese cultural identity and the effects on their self-esteem. There are four types; Hostile Refugee, Overcomer, and Resigned. Using one or both of these model or the framework allows us to gain understanding into the mind set, struggle, and behavior of the largent non-native minority population in Japan. The Korean Japanese.

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