Understanding Workplace Adaptation as an Acculturation Process: A Qualitative Examination of South Korean Highly Skilled Workers in Japan

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Abstract

Although study on job stress and coping among Highly Skilled Migrants (HSMs) has been increasing around Anglo European countries, little is known about Asian migrants working in Asian countries. The present study examined stress factors among South Korean HSMs in Japan and explored their coping strategies in relation to acculturation processes. Semi-structured interviews with eight participants found three main domains affecting work adaptation-related stress: acculturation and adjustment, life events, and job stress. Job demand, relationship formation, and company climate were identified as major job stress factors. HSMs tended to perceive job stress factors as being related to a cultural difference or unique characteristics of Japanese organizations. This qualitative study addresses an initial step towards researching Asian migrant workers in Japan society, suggesting importance of incorporating culture-specific issues in acculturation processes with their job adjustment issues. It is necessary for immigration policy makers to encourage reciprocal understandings between migrants and local colleagues for improving mental health and well-being of both groups in organizations.

Keywords: acculturation in Asia, Japanese immigration policy, job stress, Korean migrants, migrant workers, workplace adaptation

1. Introduction

As a consequence of globalisation, work-induced mobility and economic migration across national borders have been increasing over the past decades (Carr, 2010). In Japan, declining fertility rates and population aging have increased the difficulty of securing human resources. Therefore migrant workers have been considered as an alternative resource to fill the employment vacancies in the country. In contrast to the past tendency where most migrant workers, mainly from developing countries, were involved in unskilled and low-wage occupations (Iguchi, 2014; Komai, 1997), today, there is increasing national interest in highly qualified migrant workers for securing professional human resources in the globalizing society. As a strategy, the government has established policies to give active support for the placement of international students in Japanese companies. These policies, established in 2008, aid the job seeking and settlement of international students after their graduation. In the current study, we aimed examine migrant workers' job adjustment processes and stress factors in Japan. By doing so, we tried to understand both general and culture-specific stress factors surrounded in Japanese organization.

1.1 Migrant Groups in Japan

In Japanese migration history, there are largely two migrant groups based on national historical background and migrants' purpose of stay: those who settled down early in colonization or the WWII, roughly before 1952 ("old comers"), and those who came to Japan for economic purposes afterwards, especially in or after the 1980s ("new comers", Komai, 1997). The latter group is divided into three sub-groups based on time periods: a first period (from the end of 1970s to the first half of 1980s, known as the period of postwar economic growth), a second

period (the second half of 1980s, known as the period of the high-growth economy), and a third period (after 1990 when the national immigration law was revised).

With increased international competition for securing high skilled personnel since late 1990s, Japan has joined the stream by starting the inflow of IT workers in 2000 from especially S. Korea and started pushing to attract international students and improving reporting systems of foreign worker employment. Based on this background, Lee (2012) adds a fourth period group, who moved to Japan around from mid 2000s when the employment policy for foreign workers was revised to present for their high professional characteristics different from the previous who were mainly involved in low-skilled occupations. This group corresponds to what we call *Highly Skilled Migrants* (HSMs) in Japan in this article. A distinguished tendency among these recent migrants is that they tend to choose to migrate into the country and work not only for economic reasons but also for the purpose of self-actualization, as defined as growth of an individual toward fulfillment of the highest needs, in particular those for meaning in life in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, by using their high professional abilities as well as personal interest in Japanese culture and society.

1.2 South Korean Migrants

The current study particularly focuses on South Korean HSMs in Japan. The Korean migrants group composes the second largest (21.6%), following the Chinese (22.8%) in Japan at the year of 2014 (Ministry of Justice, 2015). The percentage of South Korean workers has been rapidly increasing along with Korean government's strong support for overseas employment with aim of resolving the low employment problem within the country. Japan in particular has been rising as an important job market country among many South Korean professionals as indicated by the fact that 42% of South Korean workers in Japan are involved in high professional occupations (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013).

It is important to consider culture-specific characteristics of South Korean migrants in Japan in promoting their desirable adaptation and well-being. In general, Koreans are understood to have strong family-centered values influenced by Confucianism (Callahan, 1999). Also, based on the historical background such as colonization in the early 20th century, deep-rooted hostility to the Japanese people and society still remain considerably among many of them (Kim, Cho, & Harajiri, 1997). Therefore, it is assumed that these would be meaningful factors to be considered in studying Korean migrants' acculturation issues in Japan in terms of their strong national identification, feeling of familial obligation, and hostility to the host culture and the people.

1.3 Migrant Workers' Double Burden: Job Adaptation and Acculturation

Being confronted with a new cultural context requires adaptation, which can produce stress. Berry and his colleagues have described the process where people undergo new challenges in a new cultural context as acculturation or adjustment (e.g., Berry, 1997; Berry & Kim, 1988). According to Berry (1997, 2006), acculturating persons generally confront two important issues: 1) is it important to maintain my original cultural heritage? And 2) is it important to engage in intercultural interactions with other groups, including members of the dominant cultures? If the answers to these questions are dichotomized as yes-no responses, four acculturation strategies are identified: *integration* (orientation to both cultures), *assimilation* (orientation to the dominant culture only), *separation* (orientation to the own original cultural heritage only), and *marginalization* (orientation to neither cultures). It has been widely supported that *integration* is associated with the most adaptive outcome, including psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (e.g., Berry et al., 1987; Ward & Kennedy, 1994).

However, the process of dealing with two cultures or more places a burden on the individual and can lead to stress affecting physical and psychological health producing such effects as depression, adjustment disorders, anxiety disorders, sleep problems, and somatic symptoms (e.g., Mori, 2000; Wei et al., 2007). To date, most research in this area has focused on Western cultural contexts where there have been active migrations over the past decades (e.g., Mirdal, 1985; Weishaar, 2008, 2010). Moreover, it has been suggested that migrants' acculturation and their mental health affect their economic conditions and activities (Bhui et al., 2003; Moussaoui & Agoub, 2010); however, relatively few studies have focused on migrants' job stress, job adjustment and their mental health (Ahonen, Benavides, & Benach, 2007; de Castro, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008).

Among the few of studies on migrant workers, Ahonen et al. (2007) suggests that a lack of understanding of work and safety caused by language barriers as well as mental health problems due to homesickness and difficulty in relationship formation are major acculturation issues. However, as the authors note, most of these studies have focused on unskilled workers in the U.S. Therefore, it is necessary to extend the focus to other occupations such as HSMs and in other regions like Asian country contexts. Based on this background, the present study focuses on acculturation and job adaptation issues among Korean HSMs in Japan.

1.4 Work Stress in Japanese Workplace

Workers' mental health is an important issue in Japanese society as it is in many other countries. According to a research report by Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (2012), 60.9% of Japanese workers showed job stress, which also indicates "interpersonal relationships in workplace (41.3%)" as one of major stressors, along with "quality of work (33.1%)" and "quantity of work (30.3%)". However, as described in earlier paragraphs, it is very possible that migrant workers, who have to deal with not only those problems but also acculturation issues, may bear a far heavier burden in work adjustment and coping.

1.5 Asian Migrant Workers in Japan

Although Asian migrants are taking up more than 90% of the entire foreign employees in Japan (Ministry of Justice, 2015), there is considerable lack of psychological research on this group and their coping. This may be partly because Asians are generally less willing to access counseling service (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2007). The few studies that do exist suggest that the low level of literacy about mental health and the lack of public support for immigrants served as obstacles in their ability to seek support for mental health issues (Iguchi, 2014; Mizuno, 2003). In addition, the literature suggests that cultural norms emphasizing harmony maintenance tend to affect Asians' perception that they have to control their emotions by themselves rather than asking others for help, which in turn worsens their mental health by inhibiting adequate coping (Wei et al., 2007).

In sum, the present study examined acculturation issues among South Korean HSMs who voluntarily came to Japan after 2000 for their career goals. We aim to examine both job stress factors that affect workers in Japan regardless of cultural background or residential status and those specific to migrant workers, as well as interactions between the general and specific factors.

2. Method

Our interview guide in the main study was based on the results from previous research about acculturation and job stress among migrant workers as well as results of a preliminary study conducted as an unstructured interview with a participant. The detail of complete guide is explained in the later part of this section.

2.1 Preliminary Study

We interviewed a Korean international student who had just received an offer from a Japanese company and planned to start employment right after graduation (Participant A in Table 1). The student was considered to be a suitable participant for the preliminary study because he had been in Japan for about 5 years and had good Japanese language proficiency, which may be close to the average status of Korean HSMs in Japan. By examining his concerns, worries or expectations, we expected to understand potential stress factors among the HSM group.

The participant expressed some concern about possible difficulties at the company regarding the work itself but also Japanese colleagues' understanding about multiculturalism and attitudes to foreign workers. It was also found that his long-term career goals and future plans were major factors for satisfaction with the current work, expectation about future career, motivation for work adaptation, and at the same time, worries about starting career in the foreign country. Expected job stress factors were consistent with actual stress factors such as task-related burdens, interpersonal relationships, job fitness and life career, as suggested to be important in previous research (Eguchi et al., 2012).

Based on the findings of the preliminary study, we prepared the interview guide with aim of uncovering migrants' experience of exposure to Japanese culture and their acculturation processes in work settings. Question items in the main interview included the following: "Why did you decide to come to Japan?", "How did you prepare for immigration in the home country (S. Korea)?", "Have you had any stressful experiences in Japan and how did you deal with them (for those who had studied in Japan, such experiences in the universities were also asked)?", "How could you get the job?", "Did you have stressful experiences after entering the company and if so, do you have any coping episodes?", "Did you have meaningful/useful experiences after entering the company?", "How do you feel at present?", and "What are your plans in the future?".

For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on stressful experiences in job settings and coping strategies that occurred only after each participant commenced employment. Also, following the feedback from the participant in the preliminary study who expressed difficulty in delivering his thoughts and feelings well enough in Japanese language, we revised the interview to be conducted in the participant's preferred language between Korean and Japanese. In fact, for bilingual interviewees, mother language is considered to be more efficient in delivering specific emotional states and subtle nuances (Brislin, 1970).

2.2 Main Study

2.2.1 Sample Selection

Among South Korean migrant workers, we targeted those who had been in Japan for 3 years or more and who used Japanese language in the usual work settings. We also limited the career categories to administrative workers or those with professional knowledge or skills mastered. This group, named "Highly skilled professionals" has been supported by the government to secure high quality human resources in globalization (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015). Data was collected by snowball sampling through Korean graduate students and the alumnus community of a university in Tokyo. All participants were residents of Tokyo.

2.2.2 Participants

Five men and three women participated in the research. Being on average 32.8 years old, ranging from 28 to 38 years, they had migrated on average 6.5 years previously, ranging from four to eleven years approximately. Six of the participants got graduate degrees in Japan, implying that they had enough time to experience Japanese culture. Table 1 shows details of demographic information for each participant.

2.2.3 Interviews

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted, which were designed to explore individuals' experiences of acculturation and evaluate subtle differences in ascribing meaning to the experiences and interpreting them (Kahn & Watson, 2005). While a structured interview is stick to a set of pre-determined questions, a semi-structured interview is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview so that the interviewer can explore particular themes or responses further (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews were conducted over two time periods: Session One was from March to October 2009 and Session Two was from July to November 2010. In Session Two, we re-interviewed two interviewees (Participants B and D) from Session One and interviewed an additional migrant (Participant I) to see if similar views are found. Although the data is about 6 years old at the current time of October, 2016, our presentation of the data is justified for the following two reasons. First, the Employment Policy for Foreign Workers executed by the government has been sustained since 2007, implying little difference in the government supports to the migrant groups, which is significant to their acculturation processes. Second, although the population of Korean HSM has been slightly dropped after the 3.11 earthquake in 2011, the number in 2015 indicates no significant difference from 2010 (Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2011, 2015), implying the situation of the group has little changed for the past few years. All these indicate that our data is still relevant and represents the current reality of the Korean HSM in Japan.

All participants were first instructed about research purpose, confidentiality and ethical guideline of the study before their respondents were recorded with a digital voice recorder over the session. Interviews took averaging 98 minutes per session, and were administered by the first author who was fluent in both Japanese and Korean languages. All interviews were basically undertaken in Korean language but at times in Japanese upon participant's convenience. Although the interview contents varied from issues related to motivation to come to Japan to those about long-term acculturation and job adjustment, our analysis focused on psychological and cognitive changes with regard to job adjustment.

2.2.4 Data Analysis

Data from the interviews were analyzed by adopting Grounded Theory Approach（Strauss & Corbin, 1999). This approach is useful especially when a research question focuses on specific process and experiences (Denzen & Lincoln, 2000). We analyzed the data focusing on the main stressors Korean HSM experience, especially how culture-specific factors and their perception of the factors affect the coping processes.

Given the different characteristics of working environment and procedure across participants' occupations, we conducted theoretical sampling setting their occupational status as criteria for each analysis process. Administrative work was analyzed firstly (Step 1, administrator), followed by the other sets of data analyzed based on occupational profession and independence of job contents (Steps 2, 3, 4, system-engineer, technical professional, and researcher, respectively), so that the higher steps included those with less interpersonal interactions required. Step 5 was intended to elaborate the results up to Step 4, by interviewing a participant who had the longest work experiences in multiple Japanese companies and had been promoted to a manager position. Table 1 shows the demographic data for each sampling step. Through this way of theoretical sampling, we aimed to generalize findings of specific groups to the entire work fields.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The coded data was named in each semantic unit (open coding). After examination of detailed contents of each label by eight collaborators who were

unaware of the research purpose, a total of 7 categories and 23 sub-categories were created at the final stage based on the agreed interpretations and the appropriateness of label-naming (selective coding).

Table 1. Demographic data of the study participants at each sampling step

Sampling step	ID	Gender	Age (years old)	Occupation	Years of residence in Japan	Years of work experience in Japan
Preliminary study	A	Male	27	Administrator	5 years	-
Step 1	B	Female	38	Administrator	8 years	4 years
	C	Male	32	Administrator	6 years	3 years
Step 2	D	Male	32	Technician (System engineer)	4 years	4 years
	E	Male	33	Technician (System engineer)	4 years	4 years
Step 3	F	Female	28	Technical professional	8 years	11 months
	G	Male	30	Technical professional	4 years	11 months
Step 4	H	Female	32	Researcher	7 years	3.5 years
Step 5	I	Male	38	Fashion design manager	11 years	9 years
Step 6	B	Female	39	Administrator	9 years	5 years
	D	Male	33	Technician (System engineer)	5 years	5 years

Note. Age and years were recorded at the time of the interview in 2009.

Table 2. An overview of the main categories and the subcategories created in the study

Core-category	Category		Properties	Sub-Category
		Adaptation in daily life*	Stress factors	Adaptation in daily life*
			Coping	Information gathering
				Learning through experiences
	Acculturation (related stressor)	Ambivalent feeling to family*	Stress factors	formation of their own family*
				Supporting their parents*
				Attaining and extending social supports
			Coping	Contacts to various communities
Adaptation for building Life Career*				Variation of contact method
				Acceptance
		Job demand*	Stress factors	Career development through work acquisition*
				Imitation
			Coping	Acquisition and learning
	Work-adaptation* (related stress)			Adaptation
				Transformation
		Relationship formation*	Stress factors	Expectation about relation formation*
				Need for relationships as an occupational purpose*
			Coping	Active trials to make interpersonal contact
				Making use of official gathering opportunities

		Keeping minimal relationships even if superficial
Company climate*	Stress factors	Lack of multicultural understanding among colleagues
		Re-understanding of Japanese culture*
	Coping	Acceptance and reinterpretation
		Efforts to understand the other's culture

Note. * These categories are used in the model of Korean HSMs' workplace adaptation process (Figure 1).

3. Results

With the categories and sub-categories created through analyses (Table 2), we present the model showing Korean HSMs' workplace adaptation process. Overall results show that all participants understand job adjustment in Japan as a part of their entire life project to build their life career. That is, despite various stress factors causing mental demand, they had strong motivation to adjust to the society and organization for the sake of career development and career life after returning to S. Korea. Importantly, developmental tasks such as family formation and supporting parents tend to play ambivalent function in that it increases their motivation for the adjustment, but also sometimes amplifies anxiety and conflicts for the cases where returning to the home country becomes invisible. The following sections present relevant stressors for each category with descriptions in detail.

3.1 Stress Factors among Korean HSMs

There were five factors identified as major domains related to stress among migrant workers: cultural adaptation-related stress, stress from life events, job demand, formation of relationships with colleagues, and company climate. Whereas the first two factors were considered to be domains where any migrants would feel or experience regardless of occupational status while adjusting to the new culture (acculturation-related stress factors, hereafter), the other three were commonly identified as a set of stress factors participants face as workers of their companies (work-related stress factors, hereafter). Where relevant, we discuss the acculturation issue in reflection of Berry's (1997) model of four orientations.

3.1.1 Acculturation-Related Stress Factors

First, many respondents expressed stress about adaptation to the new environment, because it required them to attain knowledge of new social norms and skills. Specific issues varied from language acquisition, understanding about Japanese culture, relationship formation with others to food and life styles. Those who started work without previous experiences of studying abroad in Japan (Participants D and E), despite having been in the country for nearly 5 years as workers, described a lot of stress due to the lack of knowledge and experiences about the new culture out of work settings and the society in general, such as going to the bank, recycling, and paying taxes. Compared with international students who have many opportunities of getting guidance about on- and off-campus life, workers who are hired to produce good work performance and outcomes for the company get few opportunities to learn about how to do things in everyday life.

Another stress factor was related to general human developmental process. While the earlier adjustment problems remain unsolved, new life events they are faced with, such as marriage and childbirth, tend to increase the stress level. This factor is distinguished from cultural adaptation-related stress because it can exist regardless of residence status, so that even local people would experience it to some extent in life development. However, the influence to migrants would continue more strongly, interacting with cultural adaptation problems. Not only existing as the current problems, such issues can also remain a psychological burden because it is directed to a fundamental question about where the new family should settle down with regard to the issues of nationality, children's education, etc. (Cho, 2016). For instance, Participants C and G responded that they wanted their children to learn and form national identity as a Korean rather than participating in acculturation actively. This implies that the participants were motivated to keep their national identity and might feel stress seeing their children's identity transformed or integrated over the adaptation to Japanese society. This corresponds to the "separation" strategy in Berry's acculturation model, in that they appear to place a value on holding on to their original culture concerning their children getting accustomed to and interacting with the other (i.e., Japanese culture).

"Although I want to hurry with my marriage, it's hard to find a (Korean) partner here (in Japan), but also it's too early to quit the job and go back to Korea just for marriage … Even if I'll live in Japan after marriage, I'll keep thinking about going back because I have to do so at some point in the future for children's education and identity formation." (Participant C, male, 32 yrs.)

Indeed, such concerns about going back to Korea were found among all participants and tended to play a role in aggravating stress in interaction with development-related tasks in life. While many were satisfied with their current work status in Japan as a means of improving their careers, they appeared to feel a sense of obligation about going back when confronted with critical life events such as marriage, children's education as described above or considering family relationships including obligations of supporting parents and performing ancestral rites. This may well reflect Confucian disciplines, which continue to play a major role in Korean society by constructing the foundations for people's perspectives on what is worthwhile in one's life (Callahan, 1999). For Korean migrants who are confronted with acculturation issues, this seems to serve a Korean-specific factor that more or less affects their smooth acculturation process. The conflict between the opposite motivations seem to be greater as they get accustomed to and feel more comfortable with the current job and life in Japan because then they get more hesitant to compromise with reality. Implications of our findings are two-fold. First, they suggest a meaningful culture-specific tendency that Korean migrants' strong sense of obligation about kinship tends to discourage their embracing the dominant culture, resulting in prohibition of integration in Berry's (1997) term. Second, the increasing conflict implies that one's improvement in sociocultural adaptation such as improvements of job performance and better life adjustment does not solve every problem about acculturation and that it may take time to attain integration strategies because one has to go through psychological dilemmas and burdens about being away from the home country or feeling as if he or she is shrinking from his or her responsibility about Korean family.

To sum up, it was found that Korean HSMs get to have new development-related experiences throughout their long-term stay in Japan. In this process, many have psychological conflicts between the acculturated new life styles and constant motivation to keep the national identity as a Korean. This kind of problems tends to occur repeatedly as they are going through between acculturation and life development.

3.1.2 Work-Related Stress Factors and Coping Processes

1) Job demand

All participants reported that they had difficulty in learning new tasks, while being satisfied with applying their knowledge to real work settings and improving their career experiences. Five participants said that they felt confused at the beginning of their employment, being exposed to organizational system emphasizing interpersonal relationships between members and reality sometimes different from what they learned in university. Such phenomena may be examples of "*reality shock*", which occurs in socialization within a group (Shein, 1978).

To cope with the difficulty in dealing with a new task, participants first tried to imitate the company's rule or manual even if they did not fully understand the task itself ("imitation"). This was followed by the next step where they could acquire a new approach as told by the organization ("acquisition and learning"). Feedbacks from Japanese coworkers or bosses helped their complete understanding of the task ("adaptation"). Once accustomed to the approach and able to make outcomes, they tried more positive and agentic actions, by modifying weakness of the learned approach to the way they think more comfortable or efficient ("transformation"). These processes are reflected in the following example.
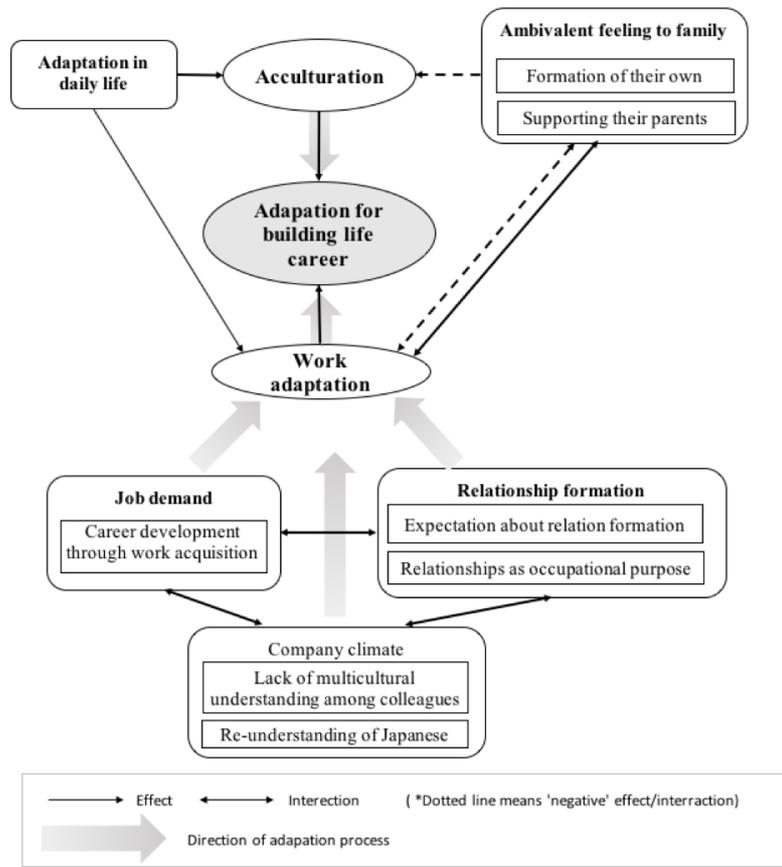
Figure 1. Korean HSMs' workplace adaptation process

"First I did things as asked by the company because I had no idea… but after finding my feet in the company, my performance could get recognized by others and I could gain confidence and some sense of the work. For some parts I felt quite odd or uncomfortable with, I switched how to handle them to a Korean style, which was more comfortable and efficient to me. When asked (by other colleagues) for the reason, I explained it, which was accepted. So now I do things in ways I feel the most comfortable." (Participant B, female, 38 yrs.)

It is noteworthy that many participants similarly tended to attribute the different characteristics of the task itself to the cultural difference by distinguishing between Japanese and Korean work styles. Some preferred adjusting the manual to "Korean style", while others appreciated the Japanese working style, saying that it improved the overall job performance after all. Whether there is a culturally actual difference in characteristics of tasks or not is beyond the scope of our question and requires future work; however, what those responses imply in terms of migrants' cognition of the work environments is that participants perceived desirable work styles or characteristics of tasks in relation with overall characteristics of the society. Their adjustment of the work manual to their cultural origin and application of Japanese styles to their own work reflect Berry's separation and integration strategies respectively. By implication, work settings are another domain where acculturation strategies can be applied by migrant workers, but compared with other acculturation domains, not only national identity but also perceived efficiency of work styles more or less tend to affect their strategy preference.

2) Relationship formation

While most participants showed willingness to form good relationships with colleagues, there were a few variations across occupational categories. Those in office work or trade-related work appeared to experience more interpersonal communications among colleagues, resulting in high concerns about interpersonal relationships. In contrast, those in research or system engineering fields that require little interpersonal interactions but individual tasks tended to have few chances to create such relationships. However, such a lack of opportunities for relationship formation among the latter group was not perceived as a stressor because it rarely affected their overall work performance.

Korean workers sought various ways of creating and improving interpersonal relationships within the company. For instance, they tried *personal approaches* such as initiating a conversation or asking colleagues to go for lunch; and they tried *public approaches* such as actively participating in company dinners or get-togethers (called "*Nomikai*" in Japanese). The results did not appear so positive though: some participants reported a few experiences that Japanese colleague seldom approached to them (Participant E), appeared to keep distance from them, expressed some discrimination (Participants B, F, I), and even ignored them (Participant E).

The data suggests that attitudes to multicultural understanding in various companies may depend on the internal climate of the companies and characteristics of local workers in general. For example, Participant H says that she rarely had uncomfortable experiences with her colleagues because her group mainly involved academic researchers and each individual's characteristics were respected in general, such that cultural differences were perceived as one of common attributes everyone has. As reflected in the response below, she was trying to understand each of Korean and Japanese styles of relationship formation from an objective perspective as much as possible.

"Of course, first I felt difficulty in forming close relationships and my usual relationships were very dry. But looking back how interpersonal relationships around me were in my student life in Japan, there seemed to be some cultural difference in conception about friends or the way interpersonal relationships were created and maintained. Japanese people tend to want to keep some distance from others to have a personal space. So if they put themselves to others' shoes, they would be less than happy. For example, they'd feel a little uncomfortable to meet with their colleagues after work (for dinner) or on weekend even if they'd consider them very close. So now I don't want to think too much about such relationship issues as they can be just individuals' or cultural characteristics, and this way of thinking helps me feel rather comfortable." (Participant H, female, 32 yrs.)

According to studies of interpersonal relationships among international students in Japan, many Asian international students value on friendships but actually have low satisfaction with their interpersonal relationships (Tanaka & Hujihara, 1992). Sakoda, Kodama, and Tanaka's (2008) study suggests compared with Japanese students, Chinese international students tend to limit the range of friendship or genuine interpersonal relationships to more intimate contexts so that complete self-disclosure is achieved between individuals. This is similar to our current finding that some participants mentioned that Japanese people tended to favor limiting their work-based relationships to the public space, whereas Koreans tended to extend such relationship to their personal space. Another study suggests that there is a cultural difference in a psychological sense of community, such that non-Japanese Asians (e.g., Koreans) are more influenced by, hence more sensitive to ingroup belongingness than Japanese people (Ikeda, 2006). Those results may be interpreted by that Japan is relatively more individualistic than and not as collectivistic as other Asian countries such as China and South Korea (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). To sum up, the reported unexpected outcomes from interpersonal relationships with Japanese in the present study could partly because of the difference in occupations or characteristics of tasks described earlier, but as suggested in the previous studies, also be explained by the cultural differences in relationship formation between Japanese and non-Japanese (e.g., Chinese, Korean) groups. It implies that better understanding about cultural differences in perceptions of interpersonal relationships and closeness can be an important key to protect maladjustment, disappointment or even conflicts in interpersonal relationships at organizations.

So far, we have suggested that job demand and relationship formation are important work-related stress factors among Korean HSMs. We speculate that these two factors would be interrelated in terms of facilitating or hindering workplace adaptation processes. For example, one with bad relationships with other colleagues cannot make good outcomes after all, because interpersonal relationships in the company could affect his or her work performance directly or indirectly. Indeed, the obsessive thinking that they have to keep good relationships within the company appeared to serve another stress factor to many participants. On the other hand, those who had fewer difficulties in relationship formation tended to perceive job-demand-related stress and psychological burden as less severe.

"My boss was Korean, who helped me in many ways to adjust to the company environment and gave me detailed instructions on how to do things I was not sure of. Thanks to him, although starting a new career would be challenging to anyone of course, I think I was under relatively little stress." (Participant G, male, 30 yrs.)

3) Company climate

Company climate factor is a little complicated because perceived company climate is actually used in their perceptions or understanding of many aspects of the organization such as pursued work style, relationship formation styles, and the like as described earlier. Nevertheless, we distinguished this factor from the other two

because it was considered to have rather indirect effects on individuals, relevant to a macro-level aspect. Defined as people's perceptions of a corporative work environment, the organizational climate is the sum of overall impressions or perceptions about all members of the group (Lawler, Hall, & Oldman, 1974). In this sense, company climate, what is considered to be a typical example of organization climate, can be understood in relation with the overall culture of the nation where national characteristics are imbedded. Likewise, the Japanese company climate where Japanese management styles or national characters are reflected could be an important task to migrant workers not only for adjustment to the company but also for acculturation to the host country. The following paragraphs describe a couple of example responses implying overlaps between company climate and cultural characteristics.

Participant F who works at a French company expressed the company climate as full of "Western thinking style" that emphasizes actual tasks and outcomes in dealing with troubles occurring in internal relations. Participant C mentioned some possibility that company culture influenced by CEO's cultural background could also affect the company climate or group thinking style. These two episodes imply direct influence of CEOs' cultural background on company climate.

"Maybe because it's a foreign (Western) branch, actual performance is emphasized than any other things in our company. In fact, I had a harsh time at first because of my boss's discrimination, … but because my outcomes were quite good, the company supported my work environment more comfortable. For example, they listened to my problems through consultants with the human resources team, and now I don't have to see the boss often because he moved to a different department. Though, I feel a sort of pressure all the time that unless I make more outcomes, such supports wouldn't be available any more… To say verbatim, it's a kind of give and take." (Participant F, female, 32 yrs.)

"My CEO is Korean Japanese, and I feel a little difference in his management style, attitudes to foreign employees including Koreans, and the company climate from those of average Japanese CEOs in other companies. I didn't notice that first, but hearing about typical Japanese companies from my friends working in those companies, I could certainly see it." (Participant C, male, 38 yrs.)

Sometimes the effects of CEOs' cultural background can be more subtle by encouraging certain climate among workers in the workplace. Also, company climate can be established through converging attitudes shared by the majority of workers, which at times triggers disharmony and conflicts. For example, Participant B described her experiences where she had difficulties in job adjustment because her local coworkers explicitly belittle or discriminate Korean culture or the people. On the other hand, Participant C expressed satisfaction with the work environment because his colleagues are supportive showing no ignorance or prejudice towards him.

To sum up, formed and maintained mainly by major Japanese members of the company, company climate was another aspect of acculturation and job adjustment tasks among foreign workers. Also, this factor was found to interact directly or indirectly with other stress factors in the company such as intercultural communications between foreign workers and Japanese colleagues in the workplace or intergroup interactions with other national companies. These findings imply that it is necessary for not only foreign workers but also Japanese workers as a dominant national group to understand cultural differences embedded in or possibly felt by some foreign workers in the company. Especially, encouraging employers to get a better understanding of multiculturalism would be important because they are in important positions in facilitating foreign workers' positive adjustment to their careers (Berry, 1997, 2006; Rasmi, Safdar, & Lewis, 2009).

4. Discussion

Our study establishes a first step to the investigation of adjustment issues and coping among South Korean HSMs in Japan. Among acculturation-related stress factors: acculturation and adjustment to a new culture, life events, and job and workplace adjustment, the last aspect was further categorized into three: job demand, relationship formation, and company climate, consistent with the previous findings about job stress (Eguchi et al., 2012). Different from local workers, our participants considered cultural aspects to be imbedded in each stressor and felt more uncomfortable and incompetent in dealing with them for this reason. Nevertheless, migrants' clear sense of purpose in terms of working in Japan played a critical role in their ability to cope with the acculturation- and job adjustment-related problems.

Notably, all participants had a fairly strong motivation to maintain their national identity, which seemed to cause an additional psychological discomfort between satisfaction with the current occupation and life and future plans about going back to the home country, especially for the sake of family-related issues. To relate with Berry's (1997) acculturation theory, those phenomena are seen as psychological dilemmas particularly between one's acceptance of integration as being satisfied with the reality and motivation for separation as feeling obligatory

for his or her family in the home country. To elaborate more, many HSMs externally appeared to use integration strategies with a fair understanding about social norms or cultural practice of the dominant country, while having internal conflicts about ethno-cultural identity regarding such issues as going back to the home country, child education, and supporting parents. As described earlier, this is a complicated issue in relation to South Koreans' culture-specific characteristics along with their history-oriented attitudes toward Japanese people and the society (Callahan, 1999; Kim, Cho, & Harajiri, 1997). Also, it implies that there can be different or multiple acculturation strategies being used by individual depending on acculturation tasks or contexts, which requires further investigation.

Our findings imply that Japanese colleagues' cross-cultural understandings can serve a preventive approach to caring mental health of migrant workers and improving diversity in their work climate. This is consistent with that positive attitudes toward understanding other cultures than their own and interacting with other cultural groups among people in a dominant culture give positive effects on migrants' acculturation (Berry, 1997, 2006). With acknowledgement of mental health problems among workers, the Japanese government announced a new policy to make it compulsory to take a stress-level test regularly as a preventive approach to maintaining and improving employees' health in December 2015. Moreover, in the globalizing work environment with increasing foreign workers and increasing interactions with foreign companies, encouraging them to get better understandings about culture-specific characteristics of foreign workers and the necessity of supports for them would improve not only migrant workers' mental health but also those of local workers by relieving job stress factors they may experience in interactions with foreign co-workers.

The current qualitative study took a meaningful approach to understanding stress factors and coping among migrant workers in Japan by examining the contents of participants' actual experiences and episodes. However, it merely focused on South Koreans for the group-specific reason explained earlier in this paper, which limits generalibility of the present findings to migrant workers in Japanese context. Future studies with samples from different cultural backgrounds can improve understandings about general as well as culture-specific factors by comparisons of various cultural groups. By doing so, one can contribute to providing important information to improve policy about foreign employment including supporting systems for migrant workers. Also, it would be important to consider possible culture-specific characteristics such as familism and historic relationship between the home and host countries as implied in the present findings. Finally, the present study focused on general characteristics of Korean HSMs depending on occupation types, rather than possible influence of personal factors (e.g., gender, marriage status, duration of employment). Likewise, recent research on South Korean workers on job stress and mental health suggests significant relationships between occurrence of anxiety symptoms and experiences of occupational stress stemming from the psychosocial work environment (Lee et al., 2015). Future research can elaborate the present findings by examining influence of such personal characteristics, mental disorders, and environmental factors.

In conclusion, the current study found various factors affecting South Korean HSMs' acculturation and job adjustment processes in Japanese context, which are categorized into the acculturation-related stress factors (cultural adaptation-related stress and stress from life events), and work-related stress factors (job demand, formation of relationships with colleagues, and company climate). The two processes are partly overlapped with each other in interaction with culture-specific factors such as national identity and attitudes to the host country. These findings highlight the importance of taking a long-term preventive approach to improving migrant workers' mental health through monitoring and psychological education for smooth adaptation, and providing a psychological support regarding their integrative and long-term career planning. Also, this study calls for encouraging reciprocal understandings about their counterparts' culture between migrants and local colleagues for improving overall mental health and well-being in organizations.

Acknowledgments

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