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ABSTRACT

RE-ENTRY CHALLENGES: COMPARISON AND CONTRASTS  
BETWEEN KOREAN AND AMERICAN MKS

by

Ok Kyung Ha

Adviser: Cheryl Doss

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: RE-ENTRY CHALLENGES: COMPARISON AND CONTRASTS BETWEEN  
KOREAN AND AMERICAN MKS

Name of researcher: Ok Kyung Ha

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Cheryl Doss, PhD

Date completed: April 2018

### Problem

Missionary Kids (MKs) have a different experience in the mission fields in terms of culture, language, and social adjustment when compared with their parents. They also face another challenge when they return to their parents' home country, for they feel out of place and often do not think of their parents' country as home. The purpose of this Masters thesis is to investigate the experience of MKs in the mission field, during re-entry, and to research the common elements or differences between Korean MKs and American MKs in their re-entry process.

### Method

The research method used in this Masters thesis consists of the use of library

resources, web resources, and a few personal interviews. The Research Questions that will guide this research are:

1. What general information is available concerning Asian and Western missionary children who live at least one year outside of their home culture?
2. What re-entry challenges do Korean and American MKs face?
3. What are the implications for Adventist mission?

### Results

The primary research on Korean MKs and Japanese returnees indicates that their parents, society, and church want them to maintain their ethnic identity regardless of the fact that their enculturation, language acquisition, and worldview development has shaped them in very different ways. On the other hand, research on American MKs is focused on the individual rather than on the in-groups they belong to. These differences between the two groups stem from whether their home culture is collectivistic or individualistic.

Similarities among Korean and American MKs include experiencing a cultural clash when returning home, difficulties in making friends, adjusting to new family dynamics, and home cultures. They may struggle with education issues due to different educational systems and increased study loads. They may also struggle with the burden of meeting the high expectations of being MKs as experienced by the sending church and its youth groups. They may consider themselves as strangers in terms of their identity.

Differences found between Korean and American MKs are that Korean MKs with a Western background may struggle with returning to a monocultural home culture. They also have issues with mother tongue proficiency, college entrance exams, hierarchical

relationships between seniors and juniors, with not disappointing the expectations of their parents and the sending church, and striving to resolve the issue of their ethnic identity. On the other hand, Western MKs with Asian backgrounds may encounter difficulties with Western ways and mindsets when returning to the United States, they may have issues with their accent, with plagiarism, and with American college life, in trying to figure out what they can do to resolve spiritual issues, and their desire to create their own in-group where their diversity and international mindset can be understood and appreciated.

Although Korean MKs and American MKs have several things in common in terms of re-entry challenges, each of them has differences as well. Those differences mainly have to do with whether their home culture belongs to collectivism or individualism. Korean MKs encounter unique problems since Korean society requires them to conform to its monocultural norms and rules influenced by some of the Confucian values. But American MKs have issues mostly related to striving for their individual achievements and creating their own in-groups. American culture does not require a standardized way to abide by. It is thus interesting to note that various re-entry challenges of Korean and American MKs have to do with the clash between collectivism and individualism.

### Conclusion

Based on various re-entry challenges of Korean and American MKs, implications for Adventist mission were explored. To better understand and care for Adventist MKs in general and meet the needs of Korean MKs in particular, suggestions were made that

included: (1) the need for understanding MKs in the Adventist Church, (2) the need for research on Adventist MKs, (3) the need for MKs to understand TCK concepts, and (4) the need for Korean church leaders to understand MK needs.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

RE-ENTRY CHALLENGES: COMPARISON AND CONTRASTS  
BETWEEN KOREAN AND AMERICAN MKS

A Thesis  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Ok Kyung Ha  
April 2018

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Ok Kyung Ha

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IWM	Institute of World Mission
MK	Missionary Kid
TCK	Third Culture Kid

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO MISSIONARY KID RESEARCH

#### **Background of the Problem**

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts reported that around 430,000 Christian missionaries are working in various countries in the world (Johnson, Zurlo, Hickman, and Crossing 2017). Among missionary-sending countries, North America ranks first with 127,000 missionaries, Brazil ranks second with around 34,000 (Steffan 2013), and Korea ranks third with 27,000 (Christianity Daily 2016).

The number of Adventist missionaries sent each year ebbs and flows. Cheryl Doss, director of the Institute of World Mission at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, has pointed out that “these figures constantly change as families come and go from the field” (personal communication, October 31, 2016).

The children of missionaries, called Missionary Kids (MKs), “experience living in and adapting to different cultures, learning new languages, and adjusting to local customs and living arrangements” (Gorin 2004, quoted in Kwon 2006, 3). Missionary kids, a subgroup of Third Culture Kids (TCKs), “spend a significant period of their developmental years in a culture outside their parents’ passport culture(s)” (Pollock and Van Reken 2009, xi). Third Culture Kids are a distinct group that has emerged as globalization becomes a norm and many more people are engaged in international careers.

Among potential issues that missionaries face in the field, matters concerning MKs are often the most critical ones. Missionary Kids have a different experience in the mission field in terms of culture, language, and social adjustment when compared with their parents. They also face another challenge when they return to their parents' home country, for they feel out of place and often do not think of their parents' country as home. Thus, re-entry adjustments and challenges have a significant impact on the lives of most MKs and TCKs.

In order to better understand the challenges associated with the MK experience, a brief overview of MK research is provided in this chapter. This overview is limited to American and Korean MK research as they comprise the majority of MK research.

American MK research from 1934 to 1989 consists mainly of master's theses and doctoral dissertations, and mostly lacks the structure of later research. However, qualitative and quantitative improvement was seen in MK research in the 1970s and 1980s. Topics of research included: "separations from parents for boarding school, the influence of factors in the host culture, personal integration of Christian experience, academic outcomes, personality traits, readiness for re-entry, the qualifications for boarding and MK school personnel, and others" (Powell 1998, 453-454).

After the second International Conference on Missionary Kids, some mission organization directors became more concerned about how MKs grow and develop. One of the significant turning points in the history of American MK research was the establishment of the Missionary Kid-Consultation and Resource Team/Committee on Research and Endowment in March 1987. This organization and its research resulted in publications in several journals, magazines, and books (Wickstrom 1994).

David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken's research on TCKs led them to publish the first edition of *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds* in 1999. It contains what TCKs including MKs are all about. Pollock's TCK Profile is included in this book to describe the benefits and challenges TCKs go through in life: "Expanded Worldview versus Confused Loyalties," "Three-Dimensional View of the World versus Painful View of Reality," and "Cross-Cultural Enrichment versus Ignorance of the Home Culture" (Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 87-97).

The history of Korean MK research is relatively short compared with that of American MK research. It was in the early 1990s that the issues of MKs became a topic of interest for the Korean church and mission organizations. Korean MK research was first launched by the Korean Research Institute for Mission in 1993. In 1994 the Korea World Missions Association and 16 other denominations founded Manila Hankuk Academy, the first Korean MK school. And the Korean Missionary Kid's Education and Development Center was established in 1999 to aid Korean MK education (Ha 2012, 62).

Topics of current research include the education of Korean MKs, the importance of helping Korean MKs maintain a strong Korean identity to ease re-entry adjustment, parent-child relationships, psychological issues, and Korean language proficiency (Doss and Oberholster forthcoming, 11-12)

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Masters thesis is to investigate MK experience in the mission field and during re-entry, and to research the common elements or differences between Korean and American MKs in their re-entry process.



## **Methodology**

The research method used in this Masters thesis consists of the use of library resources, web resources, and a few personal interviews. The research questions that will guide this research are:

1. What general information is available concerning Asian and Western Missionary children who live at least one year outside of their home culture?
2. What re-entry challenges do Korean and American MKs face?
3. What are the implications for Adventist mission?

## **Delimitations**

Research on Asian and Western MKs has shown that the majority of it is related to Korean MKs and American MKs. Therefore, this Masters thesis focuses on what these two particular groups go through in their re-entry experience.

## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter 1 deals with a brief introduction to MK research, the purpose statement, and research questions. Chapter 2 conducts a literature review on Asian returnees and MKs mostly from Korea and Japan and Western returnees and MKs mostly from the United States. Chapter 3 looks into the re-entry challenges of Korean and Western MKs and compares their experience from the perspective of collectivism versus individualism. Chapter 4 deals with implications for Adventist missions based on what is discussed in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reports research on Korean and American MKs as a majority of MK research has been done in South Korea and the United States. Research on Japanese returnee children (*kikokushijos*) is also included in this chapter because they share many of the common features of Korean MKs.

#### **Korean MKs and Japanese Returnees**

Eunmi Kim (2001) explored the experiences of Korean MKs attending Faith Academy in the Philippines. She found that MKs had close family relationships, high academic achievements, positive religious experiences, no close relationships with the local culture and people, a positive self-identity as a MK, and placed a high priority on being a missionary as a future job possibility.

Donghwan Kwon (2006) also studied the impact of personal and community factors on Korean MKs at Faith Academy. He found that a strong Western cultural influence was exerted on the students through the nationality of friends, church attendance, and media consumption. Korean MKs intentionally acquired Western skills and concepts to be successful in school and on the global stage. However, they were also aware that they needed to have a strong Korean identity as they would return to a Korea that is “highly monocultural and monolingual.” Kwon suggested that the curriculum and

pedagogy of Hankuk Academy should be reassessed, other international MK schools should be studied, and education and ministry through media should be explored.

Kim and Kwon both agreed that the local culture had a minimal influence on Korean MKs attending Faith Academy. They had a positive experience overall, but it is interesting to note that they were always mindful of their Korean identity no matter how strong a Western influence was exerted in their academic, religious, and social aspects.

In 2003 Jeongho Park suggested homeschooling as an alternative for MK education in the mission field (70). The benefits of homeschooling included spiritual and academic learning with parents, strong identity formation, emotional stability, and low cost. The biggest challenge was the difficulty of being accredited by the Korean Ministry of Education. He suggested that Korean churches, mission organizations, and the Korean government should come up with a system and curriculum to make homeschooling available to Korean children overseas.

Jiseon Ha (2012) studied the educational options that were available for Korean MKs in the mission field. Unfortunately education for MKs in Korea has been neglected with few programs geared for their special needs. MKs are confronted with many challenges in the mission field, and additional challenges when they come back home, especially when entering a typical Korean school; therefore, Ha suggested homeschooling as an option (64-67). This would allow additional opportunities for MKs to spend more time with their parents in the mission field until they were able to adapt themselves to a new environment. She also suggested that curriculum should be developed to help MKs nurture a Christian worldview based on the philosophy of Christian education. She argued that curriculum developed in Korea could have an

impact on the stability and constancy of the mission of Korean churches and mission organizations.

Park and Ha also suggested homeschooling as an alternative for Korean MK education in the mission field. I find it meaningful in terms of broadening the educational options for Korean MKs; however, I wonder if Korean missionaries have enough time, resources, and skills to homeschool their children. Also Park and Ha did not present a sample curriculum for Korean missionary parents to consider.

Eunkyung Kim's research in 2006 explored the issue of education for MKs. The rapid church growth in Korea enabled churches to send out many missionaries, but many of them returned home early due to MK educational issues. Educational problems also increase as MKs grew older; therefore, she recommended that parents and the sending organizations should take greater responsibility for MK education to smooth both their time in the field and their re-entry (40-47). Otherwise, missionary dropout rates will continue to increase.

In 2012 Jeonghee Choi conducted an interesting research project concerning Korean-language proficiency among Korean MKs dwelling in Turkey. The results showed that the level of their Korean-language proficiency was higher when their Korean cultural identity was stronger and when they immigrated to Turkey at a later age (523-524).

Research on Korean MKs in the mission field has mainly dealt with their education and Korean cultural identity. This emphasis on Korean identity seems to indicate that Korean missionary parents are always concerned that their children maintain their Korean identity to enable them to experience a smoother re-entry.

Jihyun Kim (2000) examined the role of parents in the formation of personal identity for Korean MK returnees living in Seoul (179-212). The findings were as follows: (1) Korean MKs upon re-entry had a positive identity and had not been influenced very much by the local culture in the mission field, and had largely been successful in keeping their Korean identity, (2) the study supported the idea that their parents' educational philosophy on Korean language learning and provision of emotional stability were important in maintaining a stable Korean identity, and (3) it was found that their spiritual identity as Christians was essential in understanding themselves, their parents, and their ministry as MKs.

Eunjin Jeon (2016) looked at identity formation of MKs upon re-entry. She suggested several ideas to better care for MKs upon their re-entry. Parents were encouraged to help their children have a good understanding of their multi-cultural identity. Sending organizations were encouraged to provide continuous support after MKs returned home. Finally, MKs who had overcome their own identity issues were encouraged to help other MKs with their re-entry issues.

Kim (2000) stressed the role of missionary parents in keeping their children's Korean identity, whereas Jeon suggested that parents should understand their children's multi-cultural identity. This implies the significance of identity issues in terms of Korean MKs' re-entry process.

In 2006 Sookkyung Lim studied Korean MK re-entry challenges. She pointed out that some returnees faced a language barrier in Korean and were uncomfortable in adapting themselves to a Confucian culture that places a strong emphasis on harmonious family relationships, hierarchical relationships, and saving face. Returning MKs also

struggled with financial difficulties, the busyness of life, disappointment in the Korean society, loneliness due to separation from family, and a lack of a solid identity formation. The sending church was often indifferent to MKs upon re-entry and expected them to be available for all types of duties in the church. On the other hand, some of them learned to appreciate their experience in the mission field, understand their parents better, establish their Korean identity, and had a firm belief in salvation. Lim goes on to suggest the need to create a department for MK care, set up MK hostels, provide them with scholarships, create MK small groups, develop re-entry adjustment programs, and offer counseling sessions for college entrance, future careers, and marriage (78-82).

Saeyong Lee (2009) studied different levels of stress Korean MKs went through upon re-entry. He found that they were stressed with the expectations people had for them as MKs, inconsiderate friends, the heavy study load, the fact that some teachers treated them like they were a bother, and a very busy life (23-27). Lee came up with a practical learning program to help with their stress management. It consisted of five units: (1) family life, (2) friends, (3) culture, (4) study, and (5) future career (27-45). These suggestions were part of Lee's thesis, but had not been field tested.

In 2012 Hye Eun also investigated the stress levels among Korean MKs in Korea from ages 19 to 24. She categorized their stress in the following areas: resentment and confusion due to frequent transitions, loss of friendships, separation from parents and family, burden and disappointment with life in Korea, isolation from Korean classmates; and an unstable future. She suggested that they should learn to manage stress, that training programs for them and their parents should be developed, and Korean churches and mission organizations should help them with residence, living expenses,

scholarships, and job training (61-62). This too was a list of suggestions in an academic paper that lacked field testing.

Lee and Eun approached the re-entry adjustment of Korean MKs by analyzing their stress levels. They came up with suggestions to help Korean MKs with their stress management, but more concrete plans and actual field testing of the suggestions need to be done.

Okkyung Ha (2016) conducted interviews to identify the spiritual challenges and parenting interventions of the Korean Pioneer Mission Movement MKs whose fathers studied at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. One of the spiritual challenges mentioned was that one of the MKs had become so used to classmates bowing and praying to idols that it seemed natural and culturally appropriate to join in. Two additional challenges were confusion over the difference between the spiritual atmosphere in the mission field and what they experienced in the home culture, and unsatisfactory responses from their parents to their spiritual questions (14).

The parents responded by saying they addressed those issues by explaining the dangers of idol worship to help their children establish a firm Adventist faith. They also provided their children with a chance to make right choices when they returned to their home culture, and empathized with their children and explained as much as possible when they raised spiritual questions.

Ha found that the parents were sometimes reluctant to speak openly and seemed uneasy dealing with these types of issues. She has pointed out that such responses were due to saving face and the desire to live up to the high expectations people had of a missionary (16).

Research on Korean MKs mainly covers educational issues in the mission field and upon re-entry. But the underlying topic of interest for their parents, Korean churches, and mission organizations seems to be helping Korean MKs maintain a strong Korean identity. Further research on how to balance this expectation with the multi-cultural identity of Korean MKs needs to be conducted so that they do not have to go through such traumatic challenges in the area of personal identity when they return home.

Although not much research has been done on Asian MKs in general, the contribution of Polly Chan in this regard needs to be noted. She has published several articles on the needs of Asian MKs and in 1997 she published research concerning the need for MK care. She made several suggestions for Asian parents concerning MK education, the need to prepare Asian MKs for the transitions they face, the benefits of providing education during furloughs, the need for multicultural education, and the training of Asian MK specialists. In 1998 she explored the need to care for the educational needs of Asian MKs. She has pointed out that the increased missionary movement in Asia has created an urgent need to seriously consider MK education (346). Her research also addressed the urgent need of creating suitable educational models for Asian MKs.

Hardly any research has been done on Japanese MKs, but it is interesting to note that quite a few studies have been conducted on a particular Japanese group called *kaigai/kikoku-shijos*. They “experience *temporary* (if lengthy) stays overseas during their formative years and eventually return to their passport country.... Unlike TCKs, whose parents may be military personnel or religious missionaries, the overwhelming majority of *kaigai/kikoku-shijos* are children of corporate employees” (Pollock and Van Reken



2009, 279-280). They may not share the same re-entry experiences of Asian MKs in general and Japanese MKs in particular, but research on them may be beneficial in understanding the challenges Asian returnees face.

Kazuhiro Ebuchi (1988) studied the impact students returning to Japan had on the educational system of Japan. Returnees had the advantage of cross-cultural experiences and intercultural communication skills; however, they also had some disadvantages. They had to compete for places in high school and college, but because they had different educational experiences and lacked the typical preparation for entrance exams, they were often not accepted. To smooth their re-adjustment into the Japanese school system, various attempts were made by organizations and schools such as special admission policies and separate school programs. Nevertheless, many returnees still experienced difficulties in being fully accepted by their classmates. Ebuchi suggested that further research needed to explore the psychological impact on returning children who were struggling with their identity, and if they still identified themselves as Japanese both internally and outwardly.

Louise H. Kidder (1992) in her paper observed an interesting phenomena in the behavior of Japanese returnees (385-389). Many showed visible changes in their mannerisms: some colored their hair and wore clothing that was not normal in Japan; some changed the way they walked, the way they moved their arms and their social expressions; and some had undergone some serious changes in the way they related to people and expressed themselves—all changes that made them “un-Japanese.” Many of those studied recognized their differences were causing problems, but they were reluctant to give up their newly acquired cultural ways.

Takeshi Tamura and Adrian Furnham (1993) studied the re-adjustment of Japanese children returning from an overseas sojourn by using a questionnaire among children from ages 6 to 18. All the respondents had lived overseas for more than one year before returning home. Their survey showed that returnees had a lot of dissatisfaction with their lives in Japan. It also indicated they had no greater adjustment difficulties than other children in Japan, nor were they worried about academic achievement or interpersonal relationships (1184-1185).

In 2000 Yasuko Kanno researched the topic of *kikokushijo*. He asked the following questions: If someone moves to another country during his/her formative years and grows up with two languages and cultures, to which society and culture does he/she ultimately belong? This question has to do with identity recognition. According to Kanno, there are many *kikokushijo* children of Japanese expatriates whose readjustment difficulties are well documented. It is interesting to note that Kanno observed that the factors blocking the returnee's adjustment came from both the society and the returning students. Japanese schools both in Japan and abroad still had a tendency of looking down on bicultural students while giving little recognition to their bilingual and bicultural abilities. Kanno also found that some *kikokushijo* refused to identify themselves with Japanese society after returning home and just went into isolation (378-379).

Momo Kano Podolsky (2004) compared *Kikoku/Kaigai-shijo* studies and TCKs literature in terms of how their cross-cultural upbringing impacted their life experience. This study presented common elements TCKs faced such as frequent transitions without any say in the decision, exposure to different cultures, and feeling marginalized/emancipated due to distance from their home culture. In terms of

differences, he found that TCK literature focused on individual and personal characteristics resulting from frequent transitions and cross-cultural upbringing. But *Kikoku/Kaigai-shijo* studies also included how society approached the issue of *kikoku/kaigai-shijos*. He also found that TCKs tried to find their identity by themselves, whereas *kikoku/kaigai-shijos* did not feel comfortable being grouped as such. *Kikoku/kaigai-shijos* were concerned that Japanese society might hold prejudiced views towards them once they were viewed as different.

Research on Japanese returnee children indicates how they and the Japanese society try to accommodate each other. It is interesting to note the similarities found in the re-entry challenges of Korean MKs and Japanese returnees due to the fact that the Japanese society and the Korean society are highly monocultural and monolingualistic.

In summary, research on Korean MKs mainly deals with educational issues in the mission field and upon re-entry. Helping MKs maintain a strong Korean identity seems to be the underlying topic of interest for most parents, Korean churches, and mission organizations. Research on Japanese returnee children indicated that both Japanese society and Japanese returnees faced large adjustment issues. Highly monocultural and monolingualistic cultures like Japanese and Korean societies create interesting commonalities found in the re-entry experiences of Japanese returnees and Korean MKs.

### **American MKs**

Karen L. Mutchler (1997) wrote “Keys to the Effective Schooling of MKs.” She pointed out that one of the greatest concerns of missionaries was their children’s education. To meet the educational need of their children, many missionaries do homeschooling and when children are ready to enter high school, many missionaries send

them to institutional mission schools. Homeschooling offers several benefits such as parents and children being able to stay together during those critical early years and that homeschooling can provide positive circumstances for their children's education. In her research Mutchler raised several important questions: What do children need most to succeed in their isolated, overseas setting? What are the key elements for success? In order to answer those questions she surveyed North American missionary parents who had taught their children at home. She was able to find ten key factors for success in homeschooling:

1. Satisfactory curriculum.
2. Flexibility.
3. Home schooling as mother's first ministry priority.
4. Mother enjoys and values her role as teacher.
5. Specified study area with desks or table.
6. Good relationship between parents and children.
7. Understanding of the children's development and learning style.
8. Regular class schedule.
9. Husband-wife relationship.
10. Lesson plans. (Mutchler 1997)

Mutchler also listed additional useful findings. First, relationships within the missionary family are very important for success in homeschooling. Second, when a mother makes her teaching a priority at home (as a parent-teacher), homeschooling is much more successful. Third, homeschooling missionaries must place a high value on the program they choose and must insist on a good curriculum, textbooks, and lesson plans. Finally, homeschooling missionaries should set up a budget for purchasing necessary reading materials and other educational resources.

Michael Firmin, Susan Warner, and Amybeth Lowe (2006) researched the issue of "Social Adjustment among Students Growing up in Foreign Mission-field Contexts." They targeted students who had spent time in the mission field and who had grown up as missionary kids. In-depth interviews were conducted. The basic goal of the research was to provide a phenomenological perspective of college life adjustment for the students.

According to their findings, MK students had a strong desire to fit into American culture. They did not want to be awkward among their friends who had no foreign culture experience. Many felt that their identity as a MK often resulted in them being socially rejected. The research indicated that MK students often did not have adequate social support since their families were still working abroad. They also pointed out that fitting into American culture was difficult for MKs since it was not the culture they felt they belonged to.

In 2009 Pollock and Van Reken, in their book, *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds*, addressed TCK's issues by looking at several contrasting views. Did they have an expanded worldview or confused loyalties? Did they have a three-dimensional view of the world or a painful view of reality? Did they cherish their cross-cultural enrichment or did they feel they were ignorant of their home culture? Pollock and Van Reken analyzed the issues by listing benefits and challenges. First, described the benefits of an expanded worldview. TCKs grew up in multi-cultural settings and often visited a lot of countries. They recognized various geographical differences in the world. They discovered that people look at life from different philosophical and political angles. However, Pollock and Van Reken observed that TCKs could also have confused loyalties toward politics, patriotism, moral values, and other issues. They could even be viewed as unpatriotic and haughty by their fellow Americans.

Regarding a three-dimensional view of the world, Pollock and Van Reken also described its benefits (93-94). Since TCKs lived in different cultures, they could more easily recognize cultural differences and they had real-life experiences that books, movies, and news reports could never provide. They also had a better awareness of what

was going on in the world; however, when they face the day-to-day realities of life, they also feel pain and sorrow.

TCKs also benefit from cross-cultural enrichment since they have a sense of ownership and interest in other cultures and foreign countries. They understand and recognize behavioral differences. The flip side of this is that they are often ignorant of their home culture, their national, local, and family history, and the important events in their community.

Lynette H. Bikos, Julia Kocheleva, David King, Glenna C. Chang, Anne McKenzie, Chris Roenicke, Victoria Campbell, and Katrina Eckard wrote “A Consensual Qualitative Investigation into the Repatriation Experiences of Young Adult, Missionary Kids” (2009, 735-754). They interviewed young adults, repatriated MKs, and those who supported them (parents and mission personnel). Three categories were dealt with for repatriated MKs: (1) adjustment to the home country, (2) MK identity and personal growth, and (3) support system. And four categories were dealt with for MK supporters: (1) adjustment, (2) identity, (3) relationships, and (4) support system (735).

Their findings for MKs were as follows. They found that adjustment to the home country and how to fit back into the home culture was a significant obstacle to repatriation. Many MKs expressed their deep concern in this area and wished to have additional programs or structures to ease their adjustment process. MKs also faced challenges in their daily life such as how things are measured in America with Fahrenheit, pounds, and miles and in the different transportation system, traffic rules, and many other issues where there were big differences between what they had experienced and how things are done in America.

The findings showed that MK and MK supporters had similarities in their friendships. Both expressed some difficulty in making friends. Because of their cultural differences, MKs had difficulties in understanding the way Americans interacted. The study found that younger MKs had an easier time making friends than older MKs due to the social networks that MKs enter.

The research noted that MK and MK supporters had differences in cultural companions, fitting in, and personality influences. Some of the MK friends in the host country had negative feelings towards the United States. This seemed to make it more difficult in making new friends when they returned home. Missionary Kids were also challenged with fitting in because they were not very familiar with American sports, movies stars, music, slang, etc. It was also found that personality played a significant role in their acculturation and adjustment.

Missionary Kids constantly compared American culture with their host culture abroad, and as a result they had a hard time with culture shock. These cultural differences were probably one factor making the MKs' adjustment difficult. Their relative ignorance of the MKs' home passport culture also formed a barrier for MKs and hindered them from developing connections with others because they were often unaware of common idioms their peers used.

Michael J. Klemens and Lynette H. Bikos wrote an article entitled, "Psychological Well-Being and Sociocultural Adaptation in College-Aged, Repatriated, Missionary Kids" (2009, 721-733). Their research did a comparison between 63 MKs and 63 students from a Christian university who had no experience in foreign countries. They found a significant difference in psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation

between the two groups. Researchers defined MKs as “minorities” in their home country and “outsiders” in their host country abroad.

Upon reentry MKs face different foods and flavors, they struggle to decide if they should maintain their foreign customs, and are confronted with unfamiliar pop culture. According to the findings, there were statistical important differences between the MKs and the Christian college group in the areas of psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation. The study indicated that MKs had difficulty when they tried to adjust to the United States upon their re-entry. This survey also indicated that MKs had lower psychological well-being than other non-MKs (730).

Pamela Davis, Kristel Headley, Tracey Bazemore, Jaclyn Cervo, Pamela Sickinger, Melissa Windham, and Mark Rehfuss wrote “Evaluating Impact of Transition Seminars on Missionary Kids’ Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Well-Being” (2010, 186-194). The article dealt with how MKs view their positive opportunities of experiencing diverse cultures, identity struggles, and feelings of cultural isolation. It sought to answer whether re-entry programs help MKs adjust or not since their effectiveness had not been examined. The researchers categorized the scope of TCKs as follows: children of government diplomats, children of military personnel, children of international business people, and MKs (Hervey 2009; Pollock and Van Reken 2001). According to Davis et al., these subgroups of TCKs differ regarding educational expectations, level of acculturation to the host culture, and opportunities offered returnees in their home country or passport culture. Among these four groups of TCKs, MKs have been studied the most with many published articles regarding experiences in transition and repatriation to the United States.



Researchers also pointed out that at the beginning of MK Transition Seminars, quite a few of the returnees had high levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, and had low levels of general psychological well-being. The results indicated that participating in a re-entry program decreased the levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. It also noted that the level of psychological well-being increased (191).

In 2013, Pamela S. Davis, Elisabeth C. Suarez, Nancy A. Crawford, and Mark C. Reh fuss published an article titled “Reentry Program Impact on Missionary Kid Depression, Anxiety, and Stress: A Three-Year Study” (128-140). There were 186 MKs who participated in the research who had lived in 86 countries and represented 68 missionary-sending agencies. The researchers looked at the MKs’ cross-cultural aspects from two perspectives: benefits and challenges. MKs had benefits in areas such as linguistic ability, cross-cultural skills, expanded worldview, and advanced maturity. At the same time, they also suffered from depression, anxiety, and stress. The researchers found that there was a correlation between attendance in a re-entry program and its impact upon depression, anxiety, and stress (134-135). It also indicated that after attendance in such a program, the level of depression, anxiety, and stress was reduced. Further, it was noted that there was a difference between males and females in their psychological well-being. Females scored much lower than males. The researchers concluded that there was significant improvement in psychological well-being when MKs participated in a re-entry program (135).

It is worth noting that research on American TCKs is geared more on the individual than on the society he/she belongs to. Also quite a few research projects on

American MKs dealt with their re-entry readjustment and psychological well-being as well as on various programs to support such an experience.

### **Conclusion**

The primary research on Korean MKs and Japanese returnees indicates that their parents, society, and church want them to maintain their ethnic identity regardless of the fact that their enculturation, language acquisition, and worldview development has shaped them in very different ways. This is due to the monocultural and monolingual settings in Korea and Japan. On the other hand, research on American MKs is focused on the individual rather than on the in-groups they belong to. This seems to indicate that American identity does not need to be closely related to their ethnic identity. These differences between the two groups stem from whether their home culture is collectivistic or individualistic. This difference will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### RE-ENTRY CHALLENGES

In the previous chapter, various research projects on American and Korean MKs and Japanese returnees were reviewed. Much of the research dealt with negative aspects MKs and returnees face; however, there are many positive sides to being MKs. They are often blessed with bi-lingual abilities and an understanding of geography, peoples, cultures, and worldviews mono-cultural people never have. Missionary Kids are not pathetic victims. Rather, their cross-cultural experiences allow for an international mindset, an open-mindedness, and creativity in many areas of life. They also share the privilege of their parents to be called as God's missionaries (Chung 1999, 17).

The TCK experience of MKs may also enrich their future as follows:

The third-culture experience shapes the direction of future plans as the bicultural individual attempts to formulate career and marriage plans that will synthesize, extend, or perpetuate their experiences in all of their cultures. This can result in cognitive activities such as additional language study, the choice of a major, and involvement with groups of international students. It can also result in the choice of an international mobile lifestyle or a career choice that allows the individual to return to the second culture or even the hybrid culture itself. (Stevenson-Moessner 2013, 16)

Nevertheless, it is also true that there are challenges MKs encounter in the various stages of their re-entry transitions. This chapter deals with those re-entry challenges as faced by Korean and American MKs. In examining the similarities and differences between these two groups, the underlying assumption is that their re-entry challenges are closely associated with elements in their home culture that are different from the culture

and lifestyle they experienced in the mission field. Therefore, this chapter deals with MK cultural, educational, spiritual, and psychological issues of re-entry from the perspective of collectivism vs. individualism.

### **Collectivism vs. Individualism**

To begin with, collectivism “stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede 2001, 225). A collective way of life is mainly prevalent in Asia, Africa, South America, and the Pacific (Chan 1998, 348).

Collectivistic societies place great emphasis on the goals, interests, and achievements of in-groups, such as the extended family, tribe, and company. Members of these societies find their identity in the group to which they belong and depend on each other. The core values of these societies are harmony, confrontation avoidance, saving face, and following societal norms and rules (Chan 1998, 348-355; Landis, Bennett, & Bennett 2003, x-xii; Vinken, Soetes, & Ester 2004, 10-11; Moreau, Campbell, & Greener 2014, 154-160). Asian people can improve their social class through higher education. There is a structured learning environment that is very teacher-centered. Educational success brings family honor, whereas educational failure brings shame. The teaching method of Asian societies is characterized as mechanical and impersonal with a lot of rote learning (Chan 1998, 348-355).

On the other hand, individualism “stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after him/herself and her/his

immediate family only” (Hofstede 2001, 225). Individualism is a cultural phenomenon of northwestern Europe and the United States (Chan 1998, 348).

Individualistic societies stress individual goals and interests. Members of these societies find their identity apart from the group and tend to place great priority on their individuality. The core values of these societies are personal achievement, self-dependence, and confrontation (Chan 1998, 348-355; Landis, Bennett, & Bennett 2003, x-xii; Vinken, Soetes, & Ester 2004, 37-38; Moreau, Campbell, & Greener 2014, 154-160). Members of individualistic cultures are educated to focus on personal self-esteem. Education is often unstructured, self-directed, and student-centered. As a result, study in many Western classrooms is more interesting and challenging than in collectivistic societies (Chan 1998, 348-355).

Based on the concept of collectivism vs. individualism, the cultural, educational, spiritual, and psychological issues Korean and American MKs face in their re-entry will be discussed in the sections below.

## Cultural Challenges

### **Host Culture vs. Home Culture**

The longer Korean MKs stay in the mission field, the harder their adjustment to their home country (Kim 2012, 13-14). If they have been away from Korea for most of their lives, they will have difficulty adjusting to the life and culture of Korea because they have had little chance to learn about and experience Korean culture (Chan 1998, 346-359).

Those who attended schools with a Western curriculum while in the mission field will most likely have even greater cultural clashes when returning home. For instance,

they may encounter cultural issues such as Confucianism that places great emphasis on harmonious family relationships, group-oriented loyalties, hierarchical relationships, and honor (Lim 2006, 49-70). This is what I experienced when I returned to Korea after studying in colleges in the Philippines, Singapore, and the United States. I had learned to be independent and felt equal to my peers in terms of study and social relationships, but I did not feel comfortable having to conform to the cultural norms and regulations of Korean society and school.

Korean MKs may struggle with the absence of their parents when they go to college in Korea because they are financially challenged with expensive tuition and boarding fees, with the need to find a place to stay during vacation, and do not have the support of their parents for their re-entry adjustment (Youn 2011, 279). They may have to find a part-time job to pay for tuition and living expenses as their parents struggle to support them from the mission field. In addition to financial challenges, they no longer have the close support of their family like they experienced in the mission field and may thus feel lonely. They may also leave their faith when no one is caring for them (Jeon 2016, 24-25).

Some MKs are reluctant to talk about their problems with their parents and instead try to deal with their frustrations alone. Another reason Korean MKs may break the traditional Korean parent-child relationships is because of the pressure and high expectations their parents place on them to be a “typical” Korean young person (Eun 2012, 35-44).

Korean MKs may feel that they are considered as Koreans in the mission field but are treated as foreigners when they return to Korea. This results because they may not

have maintained a close relationship with Korean society and have not had a chance to interact with many Korean people. As a result, their social development may be slower than that of their peers in Korea even though they are mature in other areas. Because of these deficiencies they may be laughed at or left out. When they realize that they do not belong to their home culture, they sometimes look for friends with a multicultural background (Park 1999, 45, 79-81).

Wrobbel's sample shows that American MKs who adjusted well to life overseas often have more challenges upon re-entry (2016, 248-254). Huff finds that "MKs who re-entered the United States after the age of 15 reported significantly greater interpersonal distance from others and greater grief over leaving their host culture than those who re-entered before the age of 15" (2001, 260). Some of them feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, and different when they return to the United States because they need to let go of the culture of the mission field and adjust to a different home culture (Bredeman 2015, 5-9). They may not agree with Western ways and thus feel left out. In general, they may have a hard time figuring out how to fit in with the mainstream culture as they have little knowledge about typical American cultural norms (Bikos et al. 2009, 735-754). In recent years technological advances and the internet may help them learn more about their home culture before returning to the United States.

American MKs may also have to adjust to a changed family dynamic. Whereas their family was always together in their cross-cultural setting, life is different once they return home, for the family members get busy and go their separate ways. This change can result in poor relationships with their family and a break-down in family life. Another challenge that may be in need of adjustment occurs when children rejoin the family after

attending a boarding school. For some it can be hard to fit in with their extended family since they have not seen them for long periods of time (Dyer 1992, 14-15).

Bredeman found in his study that American MKs are often disappointed with their new friends in the home country since they have a different worldview, manners, and attitudes (2015, 5-9). American MKs may miss the hybrid culture in the mission field where they are warmly welcomed. They may feel out of place in a home culture where all their peers know their way around, know how to act, and what to do for entertainment (Stevenson-Moessner 2013, 63-64). In order to cope with such differences, MKs may become friends with the marginalized and/or minority ethnic groups rather than with their own ethnic group due to the differences in their values (Dyer 1992, 14-15; Wyse 1997, 8-10). There are also some who want to be accepted and part of the home culture, to make friends, and even those who hide their social identity as MKs (Firmin, Warner, and Lowe 2006, 115-124).

### **Reverse Culture Shock**

Reverse culture shock is defined as “going through the same cycles of culture shock or stress many adults feel when going to a new country for the first time” (Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 227). Korean MKs may experience reverse culture shock because they have not had enough opportunities to experience their parents’ home culture or may not remember much of it. They may be excited about going to a new environment, getting to know Koreans, and living in a society with advanced cultural facilities. But the reality of the home country may hit them hard as it often turns out to be different from their expectations. This may lead to confusion over where they belong (Jeon 2016, 22-23). Lim further explains that they may have cultural clashes with the Confucian values



of Korean society such as hierarchical relationships, harmony in the family, respect for authority, and saving face. Why? Because many MKs studied in schools with a Western curriculum and have been influenced by Western culture such as personal achievement, independence, and self-confidence (2006, 50-51).

The positive side is that the cross-cultural experiences of Korean MKs may enable them to find meaningful future careers. They may support other Korean MKs living in Korea, serve Korean MKs in the mission field through working as teachers and counselors, be involved in helping those who are unprivileged, and work in international companies (Jung 2013, 73).

American MKs may also go through reverse culture shock. As they try to fit back into American life some no longer appreciate their past or want to acknowledge their previous identity. They may complain about the things they do not like from their home culture and may also be frustrated with people who are not interested in their cross-cultural stories and experiences or become depressed when their reverse culture shock is not easily overcome.

To help American MKs overcome potential reverse culture shock there are things they can do while they are still in the mission field. They can be reminded that their MK identity will always be there and can be used as a stepping stone to building another identity when they return to their home country. It is also important for mentors and parents to be there for them to help them with reverse culture shock (Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 228-254).

Both Korean MKs and American MKs may have more cultural challenges upon re-entry if they lived most of their lives in the mission. They may encounter cultural

clashes in terms of making friends and adjusting to a new family dynamic and home culture. However, Korean MKs with a Western background may struggle with the monocultural aspects of Korean society, whereas American MKs with an Asian background may encounter difficulties with Western ways when returning to the United States. Such cultural challenges indicate that Korean MKs may be challenged with the Confucian influences in Korea such as the emphasis on harmonious family relationships and group-oriented tendencies, whereas American MKs may not necessarily encounter problems if they do not conform to traditional American ways since more leeway is allowed in America. They may struggle to fit in with the strong emphasis on individualism.

## Educational Challenges

### **Language of Education**

Mother-tongue proficiency has been pointed out as one of the major challenges that impede Korean MKs from achieving success in school when they return home. Youn found that some MKs struggle with understanding college lectures because of the vocabulary used, adjusting to a different educational system, and developing sufficient academic skills that their Korean classmates have already acquired (2011, 278-279). They may also be teased by their classmates and considered a bother by their teachers due to lack of communication skills (Kim 1999, 61).

Korean language has its own alphabet called Hangul, which is easier than Chinese characters in terms of pronunciation and writing. Korean MKs may learn how to read and write Hangul before they return to Korea but encounter difficulties when they realize that over 80% of the Korean language is based on meanings in Chinese characters. In other

words, they are able to fully comprehend their mother tongue only when they know enough about Chinese characters and their meanings. So simply learning the Korean alphabet and conversational Korean in the mission field may not be enough to allow them to fit in when they return to Korea to study.

Similarly, American MKs who attended local schools while in the mission field may not have any problems with conversational English but often will struggle with academic English. Especially difficult are things like academic essays, research papers, writing using an American logic system, and research skills (Wrobbel 2016, 248-254). They may also be hesitant to talk as they may struggle to understand idioms people use. Or they may be afraid of being laughed at because of their accent that is different from their American peers (Dyer 1992, 14-15).

### **Educational Environment**

Returning Korean MKs who received an international education from a Western perspective often find that their acquired values clash with the values of their family. Korean culture is heavily influenced by Confucian values. One area where this is most obvious is in the severe competition for education. In Korea, education determines social class. Schools, teachers, and parents train students to strive for academic excellence since education helps them meet social and cultural standards (Beard 2014, 129-137).

Korean MKs are often stressed because of heavy study loads and the pressure of exams (Lee, S. 2009, 23). Catching up in their studies may also be a challenge for those with a homeschooling background and often results in teasing and ridicule by their Korean classmates (Lee, H. 2009, 61-68). College and university entrance exams also present a challenge and added stress since MKs often do not have sufficient information

and materials to prepare for them in the mission field. Returnees also are criticized and accused of benefitting from special admission policies when schools take into consideration their special circumstances (Youn 2011, 278-279). Even if they finally are accepted into college, they may still struggle with college lecture, drinking, the rigid teaching styles, and the authoritative hierarchy in senior-junior relationships (Jeon 2016, 21-25).

American MKs may also face challenges with academic integrity if they attended local schools in the mission field where plagiarism was not an issue. They may also struggle with note-taking, multiple choice, academic records, application forms, and subjects particularly associated with the home culture. They may also have a hard time with the increased workload (Wrobbel 2016, 248-254).

Smith in her research indicated that transition from high school to college may be challenging to both American peers and American MKs. Both groups need to adjust to new residence, independent decision making, a bigger scale in terms of the study body, and making friends. However, American MKs may have additional issues with not knowing “the unwritten rules” (2011 p. 47) of their home culture and not being satisfied with college life since their parents did not explain the rules to them. As a result, they may keep transferring from college to college, struggle with making decisions alone, not have good study habits, miss the mission field, and be not familiar with what is required of them (47-48).

Korean MKs and American MKs may struggle with education issues upon re-entry due to different educational systems. They also may have a hard time with increased study loads. Whereas Korean MKs may have issues with mother tongue

proficiency, college entrance exams, and the hierarchical relationship between seniors and juniors, American MKs may have issues with their accent, plagiarism, and the unwritten norms of American college life. The studies seem to show that Korean MKs are heavily influenced by some of the Confucian educational values, such as education being the determinant of social class. On the other hand, the educational challenges of American MKs may not be directly related to particular values in American culture that forces all its members to follow a certain way of education.

### Spiritual Challenges

#### **Personal**

Like all young people MKs face many spiritual challenges. Jeon mentions in her research that Korean MKs may face spiritual challenges as they move away from dependence on their parents' faith and begin to establish their own relationship with God (2016, 21-25). If the MKs are living away from their parents or if they struggle to communicate openly with their parents about spiritual issues, added stress is placed on the MK. Korean MKs are also pressured to behave themselves and to remember that they have missionary parents (Lee, S. 2009, 23). I can resonate with this challenge as I was so concerned about shaming my missionary parents that I could not share my spiritual struggles, concerns, and questions with anybody.

Korean MKs may struggle with their spiritual identity in their teenage years. They may be obedient to biblical and parental authority and have a close bond with their family when they are young. But when they go to school, they may be influenced by the worldviews promoted by public schools and secular people. Their spiritual values may be

influenced by materialism and peer pressure in terms of fashion, makeup, music, and festivals (Park 1999, 121-122).

American MKs may be challenged in their spiritual life when they encounter people who think they are holier and more spiritual just because they are MKs (Bikos et al. 2009, 735-754). If they were deeply involved with church ministries or youth groups in the mission field, they may also get the impression that American young people are not serious about Christianity or church activities (Wyse 1997, 124-133). One American MK's experience in the home church shows another part of this struggle:

I go to a youth group. I don't relate.... You don't come from the same high school or background. I attend church, but I don't relate to anyone in the church because I am different. I'm a foreigner, almost. In fact, I'm not even a foreigner. It's like I'm an alien. A foreigner is at least known as a foreigner. I'm known as somebody different; I'm an American, but I'm a missionary kid. I'm labeled. No question about it. (Stevenson-Moessner 2013, 65)

### **Sending Church/Mission Organization**

Korean MKs when they return home also encounter conflicts with the sending church when it focuses only on sending out missionaries and does not continue to support Korean MKs and their parents. On return they are often pressured to get involved with all kinds of church duties. After all, they were missionaries. They may also struggle with fitting in with the youth groups or culture of the sending church. They may feel pressured with the high expectations of the church members (Lim 2006, 49-70). Furthermore, the sending church and mission organization may not be fully aware that Korean MKs need the care of their parents upon re-entry (Youn 2011, 278-279). They may think that sending their family to the mission field and supporting them thus far is sufficient. They

may also believe that it is the sacred duty of the missionary parents to remain in their assigned post in the mission field no matter where their children go.

On the other hand, some Korean MKs are willing to support their sending church and feel they belong as they acknowledge and appreciate the prayerful support of Korean churches. They may also continue to feel a sense of belonging if they have communicated with the youth group of their sending church on a regular basis (Eom and Eom 2013, 83-84).

American MKs also face different types of pressure from the sending church. They are expected to act like saints when in reality they are struggling to grow their relationship with God. Some of them have a hard time understanding American wealth and accepting how American churches can spend vast sums of money on non-essential items (Headley 2012, 2-7).

Sometimes they are asked to stand up in church to acknowledge and appreciate what their financial sponsors have done for them so far. But like typical young people they may be embarrassed to be up front and may be reluctant to meet new members. Often they just do not want to be singled out. Such attitudes can cause their financial sponsors to be unhappy with them, since it looks as if they are not grateful for their support. They may also feel forgotten by the church because it no longer posts their family pictures on the wall or prays for them. They have returned home, and the church wants to care for other missionaries in the mission field (Dyer 1992, 14-15).

Both Korean and American MKs seem to feel the burden of meeting the high expectations of being MKs, of not being able to relate to the youth group in their church, and losing the close bond with the sending church they experienced when they were out

of the country. Whereas Korean MKs may be mainly concerned with not disappointing the expectations of their parents and sending church, American MKs seem to focus on trying to resolve their spiritual issues on an individual basis. This implies that Korean MKs are more focused on saving the face of their spiritual community, whereas American MKs try to figure out what they themselves can do to resolve their spiritual issues.

## Psychological Challenges

### **Identity Issues**

Identity has become an important issue for Korean MKs because Korean society is monocultural in nature despite the influx of foreign workers, international students, and multicultural families in the last decades. It reflects the fact that Korea is a collectivistic society where group identity is valued. Therefore, an ethnic identity is significant in Korea. Diversity is not generally accepted. In a way it is related to a Japanese proverb that goes, “The nail that sticks out gets hammered down.” This partly explains why Korean MKs encounter identity issues upon re-entry.

Korean MKs may face identity issues because they are strangers in their home country, have a weak sense of ethnic identity, and are culturally far from typical Koreans. Some of them are teased or neglected by their Korean peers from a monocultural background (Youn 2011, 278-279; Jeon 2016, 21-25). They may feel lonely because they have not formed a typical Korean identity and do not have a sense of belonging (Lim 2006, 49-70).

On the other hand, some Korean MKs may have a typical Korean identity because they are relatively less exposed to urbanization and materialism in the mission field. For



example, the Korean MKs who attended Faith Academy in the Philippines had very little contact with the local people and culture and studied in Korean. Their Korean identity was still strong so they experienced better acceptance when they returned home (Kwon 2006, 21).

American MKs may also be considered strangers or “hidden immigrants” (Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 55) as they have the same appearance but hold different views or cultural behaviors. Their struggle to transition back into American culture may not be understood by others, and their lack of familiarity with the mainstream culture may be a challenge to a smooth re-entry (Klemens and Bikos 2009, 721-733; Wrobbel 2016, 248-254). MKs usually can never fully belong to the host culture of their missionary experience or their home culture; therefore, they may have a desire to create their own culture where they can enjoy various cultures and be truly understood (Dyer 1992, 14-15).

American MKs do have issues with identity formation because they need to decide and prioritize how much of their home culture and their host culture will shape their lives. Since their TCK experience often is not understood in their home culture, their identity formation that “involves not only social engagement and roles but also cultural affiliation” may be affected (Stevenson-Moessner 2013, 61).

### **Emotional Issues**

Research indicates that Korean MKs may struggle with stress, depression, grief, anxiety, and separation from their family when they return to Korea because the reality they face is very different from their expectation they had of the home country. One MK expressed such feelings as follows:

Korean MKs encounter another culture shock when they return to Korea for college or sabbatical leave. They miss Korea and feel like going back home when they are in the mission field. But their impression back in Korea is very different from what they expected, and they struggle with the indifference of many people and unrealistic expectations for them. That is why they either hide their identity as MKs or pretend to be doing well while they struggle inside. (Jeon 2016, 23)

Korean MKs also fear that they will be by-passed, left out, or ignored (Eun 2012, 35-44). Some of them look arrogant, seem rude, indifferent, and unkind, but such outward appearances are used to protect themselves from being hurt by meeting a continuous flow of strangers (Park 1999, 116).

American MKs may feel stressed because they suddenly find themselves facing circumstances that they cannot control and having the impression that their TCK worldview is not appreciated. They may be anxious due to adjustment difficulties, separation from family, depression, and instability. Some of them suffer from grief and loss because they have parted with people and possessions in the mission field (Bredeman 2015, 5-9). Their emotional issues may also be caused by the feeling that there is nowhere to go to ask for help (Bikos et al. 2009, 735-754). Some MKs act superior, arrogant, distant, indifferent, unkind, and weird in an attempt to hide their hurt and grief and protect themselves (Dyer 1992, 14-15). Transition seminars for MKs are proven to be effective in relieving the depression, anxiety, and stress of American MKs and boosting their psychological well-being (Davis et al. 2010).

Despite various challenges American MKs may go through, there are some of them who learn how to manage depending on different places, cultures, and relationships. They find a sense of belonging from relationships rather than geographical locations and learn how to understand those who are in a similar situation (Hervey 2009, 4).

Returning Korean and American MKs consider themselves as strangers in terms of their identity issues because they may not be fully familiar with their home culture and their TCK experience may not be fully understood by people in the home country. They may also face similar emotional issues, such as stress, depression, grief, loss, and anxiety. Whereas Korean MKs may strive to resolve the issue of their ethnic identity to fit in with their monocultural home country, American MKs may seek out people where their diversity is understood and appreciated. This indicates that Korean MKs still struggle with fitting into their home country with its monocultural and monolingual aspects, whereas Western MKs feel more comfortable in developing their own in-group where it is acceptable to have an identity that may be different from main-stream American culture.

### **Conclusion**

Similarities among Korean and American MKs include experiencing a cultural clash when returning home, difficulties in making friends, adjusting to new family dynamics and home cultures. They may struggle with education issues due to different educational systems and increased study loads. They may also struggle with the burden of meeting the high expectations of being MKs when attending the sending church and its youth groups. They may consider themselves as strangers in terms of their identity.

Differences found between Korean and American MKs are that Korean MKs with a Western background may struggle with returning to a monocultural home culture. They also have issues with mother-tongue proficiency, college entrance exams, hierarchical relationships between seniors and juniors, with not disappointing the expectations of their parents and the sending church, and strive to resolve the issue of their ethnic identity. On

the other hand, Western MKs with Asian backgrounds may encounter difficulties with Western ways and mindsets when returning to the United States, they may have issues with their accent, with plagiarism, and with American college life, in trying to figure out what they can do to resolve spiritual issues, and their desire to create their own in-group where their diversity and TCK ways can be understood and appreciated.

Although Korean MKs and American MKs have several things in common in terms of re-entry challenges, each of them has differences as well. Those differences mainly have to do with whether their home culture is a collectivist or individualist society. Korean MKs encounter unique problems since Korean society requires them to conform to its monocultural norms and rules influenced by some of the Confucian values. But American MKs have issues mostly related to striving for their individual achievements and creating their own in-groups. American culture does not require a standardized way to live or act. It is thus interesting to note that various re-entry challenges of Korean and American MKs have to do with the clash between collectivism and individualism.

Based on the various re-entry challenges of Korean and American MKs as discussed in this chapter, several implications for Adventist mission will be explored in the next chapter. In addition, several needs will be discussed to better understand and care for Adventist MKs, and specific suggestions will be presented to meet the needs of Korean MKs when they return home.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVENTIST MISSION

The whole process of my research on the re-entry challenges of MKs was very meaningful. I was able to relate to their experiences because I am one of them—an MK. As I looked back on my life, I realized that I had three re-entry experiences. So I would like to share my own story here.

#### **My Story as a MK**

My father was a theology professor at Sahmyook University in Korea and was sponsored to complete his master's degree in the Philippines. I was in the fifth grade and was very excited to go abroad for the first time in my life. I went to an Adventist international school and studied there for a year. I struggled with English as I had never learned it before, but I gradually came to enjoy school and made many Korean and Asian friends.

I was excited again with the thought of returning to Korea after a year. I missed my extended family, friends, Korean food, and Korean culture. When I went back to the school that I used to attend, however, I realized that it was not the same as before. I had fallen behind in my studies because I had not kept pace with Korean education while in the Philippines. I was good at English but struggled with the rest of the subjects. I had to study till midnight to pass the middle school entrance exams. This was not what I

expected when returning home. In addition, I missed my life and friends in the Philippines.

I finished middle school and entered high school in Korea. Then my father was sponsored again to pursue his doctoral degree in the Philippines. I was thrilled to go back to the place where I had such good memories. However, things had changed during the five years I had been away. I went to an Adventist high school where English and Tagalog were used. Once again I had to catch up with a new system and endure prejudice against Koreans. I also had to prepare for college entrance exams within a year. So once again I missed life and school back in Korea.

When I was in the first year of college, my parents decided to send my younger brother and me to Singapore to study in an Adventist college there. I struggled at first but gradually learned to enjoy my school life and Asian friends. Even though I was planning to graduate from the school in Singapore, my parents suggested that my brother and I should transfer to an Adventist college in the United States. I hated the idea of leaving my college and friends again.

But my brother and I eventually transferred to an Adventist college in the United States and started the adjustment process all over again. After a year I decided to leave my brother there and transferred to another Adventist college. While at that school I realized I was in a place away from family and I started to seriously think about my identity. Who was I? I had been transferring to a new school almost every year and was not sure if I could fit in to a new place and feel at home with people. I always struggled when going to a new place and meeting new people. Too often I have had to move on just when I was about to feel comfortable in each new setting. As a result my self-esteem was

low, my grades were poor, and I was discouraged and depressed. But no one knew about my situation as I knew how to behave especially among Korean church members where almost everyone knew my parents.

I finally decided to go back to Korea to escape my unsettled situation. I knew this decision would make my parents disappointed with their eldest daughter, but it seemed I had no other choice. So my brother and I went back to Korea to complete our college years. I was happy to be back home after several years of packing and unpacking. I thought my life would return to normal.

However, I again felt alone and realized that I did not fit in after returning to my home country. My adjustment in a Korean school, with Korean people, and Korean culture had to begin once again. I tried to hide my international experience and English proficiency because I knew that Koreans do not like fellow Koreans bragging about their Western influence and English skills. In reality I did not feel I had returned home and began to wonder where my home really was. I had memories of each of the schools I studied in, but I did not know where I should go to feel like I belonged.

I graduated from college and worked in a church organization. It was there I met my husband. One of the reasons for choosing to marry him was that he was not a typical Korean man due to his various international experiences. We decided to go to the United States to further our studies after we had a son. I had no problem living in Korea, speaking in Korean, and acting like a typical Korean. But my experiences abroad had changed my worldview, which caused me to feel uncomfortable living in Korea.

My husband and I studied at Andrews University for three years and planned to work anywhere—except Korea. But after graduating we had to go back to Korea and

ended up living there for four years. I worked where my father used to teach during my early childhood, but my working in that environment did not measure up with my childhood memories. The more I stayed in Korea, the more I wanted to go abroad. And I kept wondering what was wrong with me as I always found myself wanting to move on.

When my husband received a call to serve as a pastor of an Adventist international church in Hong Kong, I was overjoyed. I was ready to leave as soon as possible. Upon arriving in Hong Kong, I began to realize there was another MK in my family—our son. He was not happy leaving Korea as it was not his decision. He did not want to say farewell to his extended family, friends, school, and church family. He also struggled with English and school life at least during his first year in Hong Kong. I started to seriously question if I had been considerate enough of my son's situation. I had been through the same experience, yet I was asking my son to face the same things that had caused me so many problems.

But I am grateful to say that he adjusted to life in Hong Kong after a year and enjoyed his school and the church for the next three years. When my family decided to return to Andrews University in the United States, I wondered what he thought. It was interesting to hear him say that he was going back “home” as he had spent his first three years there. When I asked him about the possibility of going back to Korea, he said he would like to go, but only for a short visit.

I was happy to be back at Andrews, but questions about my identity and unwillingness to return to Korea still bothered me. Also I constantly felt guilty about not being able to resolve those issues despite the wonderful Adventist family I was raised in and the promises of God to walk with me through all my problems. I still had no close



friends because I was afraid to develop deep friendships because of all the expected and unexpected transitions. I did not want to be hurt anymore.

Then I was invited to help with translation for an Institute of World Mission (IWM) program where missionaries and their families got together to be prepared for their work abroad. I was busy translating, but I never imagined I would encounter a term that would transform my life forever: TCKs. I kept asking myself why all my experiences were all listed there. And what a relief it was to realize that there is a whole group of people like me who are not considered strange or weird!

It was such a comforting and healing experience to learn that it is okay to feel the way I did when going through various transitions. It was also a blessing to read *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds* (Pollock and Van Reken 2009). I underlined every single sentence that resonated with me. But above all, I was able to see the blessings and benefits of my MK experience. Then I began to appreciate my multiple cultural identities and bilingual ability.

And yet I am still working on how to raise my son, who is another MK. Although I did not like the way people pressured me to be a typical Korean, I see myself asking my son to keep his Korean identity and not forget his mother tongue no matter where he grows up and what he does. I am not saying it is bad to maintain a Korean identity, but I am interested in looking into this interesting dynamic as a future research project.

As I think about the journey I have had so far, especially in terms of being a TCK and MK, I am wondering what God has in mind for me and how I can serve Him in this regard. I have seen and heard other Korean MKs who have been going through similar experiences, but I know there is no ministry yet to meet their special needs. I also

understand that they are hesitant to open up and share how they feel with others because they do not want their parents to be ashamed of their experience or receive unnecessary attention. But what I really want to do for them is to let them know that they have received such a blessing and privilege that can be used to bless others and give glory to God. I also want to let them know that they are not strange or weird and that it is okay to be different. If they can realize this, I believe they can help other MKs who may be struggling with their family, friends, school, and faith.

### **Need for Understanding**

Based on my MK experience and research I have done for this Masters thesis, I would like to list some implications for Adventist mission. First of all, there needs to be a balanced understanding of MKs in the Adventist Church. An awareness that TCKs including MKs are normal people and are a valuable Adventist resources may be essential in planning for Adventist MK care. The Adventist Church as a whole also needs to know that there are benefits and challenges of being Adventist MKs. The positive sides of them should be acknowledged and appreciated. In that sense, research on Adventist MKs from the perspective of the TCK profile may be a good approach to study them in a balanced way. This profile looks into the positive and negative sides of TCKs: “Expanded Worldview versus Confused Loyalties,” “Three Dimensional View of the World versus Painful View of Reality,” “Cross-Cultural Enrichment versus Ignorance of the Home Culture” (Pollock and Van Reken 2009, 87-98). It would be beneficial for the Adventist Church to be aware and appreciate the blessings Adventist MKs bring into the church and the community.

### **Need for Research**

I also find that hardly any research has been done on Adventist MKs in general. Quite a few research projects on Western and Asian TCKs including MKs has been widely published, but there is no research on Adventist MKs in particular. Adventist MKs from different parts of the world may have their own benefits and challenges; therefore, more research on each of the various ethnic Adventist MK groups should be conducted.

It is interesting to note that most of the articles, theses, and dissertations on Korean MKs are produced by various Korean Protestant church schools. So I feel the need of research projects conducted particularly on Adventist Korean MKs. It can also be extended to Korean American Adventists as they may go through similar struggles.

My research for this Masters thesis has helped me realize that many of the re-entry challenges Korean and American MKs go through are closely associated with cultural clashes between collectivism and individualism. A deeper study into these important concepts should help develop a better understanding of Adventist MKs. Related items for further research should include the role of shame and saving face in re-entry, enculturation, worldview development, and logic system development in order that MK challenges may be viewed from a deeper level of understanding.

### **Need for MKs to Understand TCK Concepts**

When I recall the various challenges I have been through in each of my transitions, I realize the significance of knowing TCK concepts. I now know I am not a weird person who is different from all the other MKs and TCKs. I know there is a big group out there that shares many of my joys and sorrows. But I would not have learned

this if I had not been in the IWM program where concepts about TCKs and MKs were taught and discussed.

What is going to happen to all the Korean Adventist MKs who may have experienced or are experiencing the same challenges that I have gone through? I understand that many of them may not want their personal issues to be publicly discussed in fear of making their missionary parents and family lose face; however, I still feel that there needs to be something done for them or at the very least they need to know they are not weird and are a part of the bigger group of Adventist MKs.

### **Need for Korean Church Leaders to Understand MK Needs**

Most Korean Adventist missionaries and their families have been sent out and supported by the Korean Adventist institutions and churches. Thus, it is essential that Korean church leaders be fully aware of the characteristics and needs of Korean MKs and to plan for re-entry programs. Only then can Korean Adventist MK care be systematically implemented.

### **Sahmyook Leaders**

In order to initiate this very important Adventist MK care in Korea, a seminar or a discussion for Korean MKs could be held in Sahmyook University. Any Korean MK interested in sharing the joys and sorrows of their TCK or MK experience may come and talk about it together with other Korean MKs. Their experience in the mission field and upon re-entry will be viewed from a totally different perspective when they laugh and cry together. Some of the IWM team may be invited to share with them who they are and

why they go through such challenges. This initiation may be a stepping stone to further care for Korean Adventist MKs.

#### Division and Union Leaders

Providing special programs for returning Korean MKs may not be easy to implement. Only when the leadership of the Korean Adventist Church is willing to make this a priority will this happen. I hope that those in leadership positions will open their arms to those Korean MKs who have returned from the mission field with their broad geographical understanding and willing acceptance of peoples and cultures. They may not follow typical Korean Adventist ways of ministry, but they may come up with different ways to reach people with diverse backgrounds and understandings. Therefore, now is a good time for the Church to be more welcoming towards Korean MKs who have been abundantly blessed with diversity and broader understandings. The division and union leaders could start with holding a seminar on Adult Third Culture Kids at the yearly Korean camp meetings to broaden people's understanding of MKs as they seek ways to care for them.

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