KOREAN DIASPORA IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: EARLY STUDY ABROAD (ESA) COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE MIDWEST

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the unique experiences of international Korean college students in the Midwest who have gone through the early study abroad (ESA) period in the US during their formative secondary school education and the influence of the experiences into their college lives in the mega campus. Two overarching research questions are: 1) how do international Korean college students retrospect their ESA experiences? And 2) how do their ESA experiences place them in unique and critical ways in their transition period into the US higher education, particularly at Midwestern University (MU)?

According to the narratives of the participants, there was a potentially hostile climate for international students who experienced discrimination and segregation for the first time. A “Chilly Climate” of campus environment is not new in the US. As Smith (1989) points out, many studies suggest “some campus environments are chillier than welcoming, more alienating than involving, more hostile than encouraging” (p. 20). Without the understanding of this newly emerging group of students, the slogan of internationalization will be “out of sync with the reality” as Ewell (1998) states, and the Korean ESA students would be easily lost within the system of US higher education.

“Case Narrative” method was applied to acquire a thorough knowledge of the daily lives of the participants, their motivation and experiences of ESA, and the way they constructed, and continue to construct, their socio-cultural lives in a US university. Five Korean college students participated in this study.

The results revealed that the Korean ESA students experienced not only a severe sense of isolation and loneliness, but a power structure from the host family they lived with and the main
stream students of US high schools or colleges. When the participants encountered the power of race and the English speaking people during their secondary school days in the US they kept silent to avoid problems, disregarding their right to speak and seeking a resolution. Later, on the US campus, the only adaptive strategy the students selected was proactive response to the outer context that was aloof toward international students. It was creating a strong bond with only other Korean international students to make secure their own culture, emotion, and the feeling of solidarity. In this sense, the solidarity of Korean ESA students was involuntary, but at the same time, self-segregation.

The significant contribution of this study was that it enhanced the understanding of Korean ESA college students, documenting their detailed life experiences during their ESA period and college years in this global era.
I dedicate this dissertation Anna, Changsu, Dongha, Eugene, and Frankie

who opened their hearts and invited me to their life stories.
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When I look back the path I have went through, I can say that “You raised me up to more than I can be.” Now, I will go to the new field to empty myself for the students who are in needs.

“Thus far has the Lord helped me” (1 Sam. 7:12). I will raise my Ebenezer.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Globalization and Global Student Migration</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESA Phenomenon in Korea</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Higher Education in the Global Era</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Studies on Transition to College and Korean ESA Students in US</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Roles</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER FOUR: EXODUS OUT OF KOREA: PLAY IN THE BIG LEAGUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna: A Dream Chaser</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changsu: “Play in the Big League”</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dongha: Que Sera Sera</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugene: “Juliard, Here I’m Coming”</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankie: “It was a Training Camp!”</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSITION TO US UNIVERSITY: CANAAN OR STILL WILDERNESS?  
Campus Life .................................................................................................................. 107  
Academic Performance ................................................................................................. 116  
Challenges .................................................................................................................... 128  
Global Positioning ....................................................................................................... 136  
Multiple Identities ....................................................................................................... 143  

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION ......................................................................................... 149  
Recap .............................................................................................................................. 150  

CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION ................................................. 166  
Significance of the Research ......................................................................................... 166  
Limitation of the Current Study .................................................................................... 168  
Recommendations for Further Research ....................................................................... 169  
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 170  

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................... 173  

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .................................................... 182
Chapter One

Introduction

This dissertation examines the unique life experiences of Korean college students in the Midwest who have gone through the early study abroad (ESA)\(^1\) period in the US or in foreign countries during their formative secondary school education within the socio-historical backdrop of South Korea’s quest for global competitiveness. To accomplish this goal, I sought to investigate two primary research questions: 1) how did Korean college students navigate their pre-college ESA experiences? And how do they reflect retrospectively on that experience? 2) how does ESA affect transition to college: namely, how does this experience shape their response to the culture and practices of the American university? The first question focuses on participants’ ESA decision-making processes and their life experiences during high school. The second question examines more fully their campus experiences at the Midwestern University (MU)\(^2\) as freshmen. These overarching questions drove this research project and were central to data collection and analysis. In this chapter, I first lay out the background of this study as well as the research problem. Second, I will outline the purpose of this study juxtaposing the research questions. Then I will address the importance of this study. Finally, I will provide the organization of this dissertation chapter by chapter.

Background of the Study

Encountering Korean ESA Students.

My dissertation topic evolved from my previous research interests in relation to Korean students in the US and the issue regarding the loss of their heritage language. In 2005, when I

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\(^1\) Generally, the so called “early study abroad (chogi yuhak, ESA hereafter)” means that the students from elementary through high school level receive education in foreign countries more than six months (Kim, 2006).

\(^2\) Midwestern University is pseudonym.
came to study for the doctoral program at my current university, I had an opportunity to teach at the local Korean Language School (KLS). The school was affiliated with the local Korean church and there were about 90 to 110 Korean PK-5th graders. There were very few children from Korean immigrant families in the sense that their families’ “settlement” in the United States was absent. Most of them stayed in the US for a short time period of less than five years. During the three years that I taught, I observed how the majority of Korean children, in myriad ways, often found ways to “resist” learning their heritage language, Korean. Through that initial experience, I decided I would conduct my early research project investigating Korean parental choice and children’s bilingual and biliteracy development. Through the study, I discovered that while Korean parents place tremendous interest and investment in their children to rapidly develop native-like proficiency in English, little attention was paid to the costs in terms of first language development. In addition to furthering the parents’ career, one of the primary motivations in coming to the US for these families was to give their young children the benefit of early English immersion. Following the idea of Cummins (1979), it could be BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) that the children acquired within this short time period. However, the Korean parents were quite satisfied with the improved oral fluency of their children and sent them to the KLS expecting that it would be better than nothing to prepare their return to South Korea.

Meanwhile, my concern moved towards a specific group of Korean secondary school students who came to the US with the purpose of participating in ESA. Some of them came alone. Others came with their families and were left behind in US, whereas their parents returned to Korea. The main purpose of those students was to continue their study in the US and to eventually enter US colleges. However, the more I interacted with those students personally, the
more I realized that they struggled not only with academic and second language learning but also with their low self-esteem, confusion over identity issues, and the sheer sense of loneliness from those who were separated from their family. Since 2008, I have been in charge of a Sunday Bible study class with high school students at one of the local Korean churches. Through my roles as a Sunday school instructor and as a tutor, I had numerous opportunities to develop close relationships with these Korean students who came to the US as ESAs. To be sure, a handful of them managed their lives and studies well. At the same time, I witnessed many others who experienced an inordinate amount of hardships.

In particular, it was “Mike’s” story, which initially developed through a pilot study interview, and understanding his experiences that drew me to further investigate the complex ways that young adults struggle to “make sense” of their displacement as global ESAs. Mike came to the US as an eighth grader following his father who came to the MU as a visiting scholar. He was born and raised in California for five years while his father pursued a doctorate degree. Mike’s English competency was not strong enough when he came back to the US in the eighth grade, but was able to keep up with the school work during his middle school years. After a year his father returned to Korea leaving Mike and his mother behind. After another year his mother went back to Korea, and from that time on he lived with a guardian. It was during the second year of his “home-stay” that I tutored him, and found that he was already addicted to computer games; primarily as a means of escaping his reality. The only thing he did after school was play online games alone in his room. Because of that, his grades fell below average and further stunted his ACT preparation. One day I had him write an email to his parents to confess his addiction, expecting some positive changes from such an action. However, his parents replied telling him, “Just hang in there.” Needless to say, the response did nothing to change his habit.
The underlying message of his parents’ response was that Mike had no choice but to just keep going in the US.

While I observed Mike’s life closely and wrestled with him to make a change for the better, I could not help but think of what thought processes were going through his mind while playing computer games day in and day out; perhaps as a way to drown out the constant reminders of Korea and his family? At the same time, I was cognizant of Mike’s obvious stated goal: to gain admission into a (prestigious) university in the United States. That was all; no more no less. When Mike’s parents brought him to the US and left him behind, they did so to provide him more freedom and opportunities to engage in the social privilege of living in the US. However, he just confined himself in his small room indulging in online games to break up the unbearable monotony. Why did Mike come to the US? What sustained him to live such an uneasy life? What were the driving forces that allowed for Mike’s parents to leave their child in the US? What did they think when they sent $2,000 every month to the US? Once the parent’s goal of seeing their child enter a US university was actualized, what would happen then? How was Mike and his parent’s predicament and situation a larger reflection of the ESA experience in South Korea and the US? All of these questions, entangled in so many complex ways, became the critical starting point of my dissertation project.

**Korean ESA Students in the United States.**

According to data from the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, approximately 110,000 South Korean (hereafter Korean) students studied in the US in 2009, the largest group of international students for the fourth year running (US ICE, 2009). Compounding the situation is the recent phenomenon of Korean “early study abroad” (ESA) students who spend some of their formative, K-12, years studying in US (or any other foreign country) schools with or without one
or two parent(s) (Kim, H. W., 2001). The rising influx of Korean ESA students has played an important role in shaping the rapid increase of Korean students studying in the US. According to statistics from KEDI (Korean Educational Development Institute), the number of pre-college students who left Korea solely to study abroad increased from just over 2,000 in 1995 to a peak of about 30,000 in 2006. And this number did not include students whose parents work or study overseas. This increase nearly doubles that from the 2004 figures and reflects an almost sevenfold increase from 2000 (KEDI, 2006). These figures reveal the extent to which Korean society and parents have, in many ways, openly regarded the growing exodus of students as a necessary step towards developing citizens for a competitive, global market that privileges westernization and English fluency.

In this circumstance, at institutions of higher education in the Midwest for example, the numbers of Korean students are even more pronounced as their visibility on college campuses marks a distinct sense of difference between native-born “Americans” and Asian Americans. To date, relatively few studies pay attention to the experiences of Korean ESA students in the US (Kim, 2007; Ly, 2008; Park, 2007). In addition, the emerging literatures on Korean ESA students are underexplored especially in light of the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the ESA phenomenon. My dissertation thus highlights the complex nature of the range of Korean ESA students’ experiences in light of secondary and higher education in the age of globalization. Developing an understanding of how students draw on their early study abroad experiences shed important light on an ever increasing trend and hopefully addresses ways in which administrators in post-secondary institutions can develop a more sophisticated understanding of these students’ needs.
Statement of the Problem

Given the background of the study as addressed thus far, the problem being explored in this project is how to understand Korean ESA students in the US higher education system. First, in order to understand Korean ESA students, we need to examine the social phenomenon surrounding the ESA issue in Korea. Even though it is not the ultimate goal of this project, without the holistic understanding of ESA related social phenomenon, it would be easy to make one-sided judgments on ESA students based on anecdotal or fragmentary information. We need to pay closer attention to the current trend of internationalization of the American universities pursuit. Considering the rapidly increased number of international students during the past decade, especially among the large public campuses, we can say that there is a good level of internationalization in the US higher education. However, in comparison with the effort of US universities to recruit international students, it is still questionable as to how much attention the university authorities have actually had to individual levels of internationalization in terms of how international students adjust to the American university environment and how they interact with other people in and out of the campus.

First, we need to understand the modern genesis for the occurrence of ESA phenomenon in Korean society to avoid having a fragmentary understanding. Many scholars generally agree that this social trend started in the mid 1990’s and exploded right after the Korean financial crisis of 1998 (Min, 2000). Even the economic crisis of 2008, caused by US subprime lending mortgages, did not affect greatly the increasing number of Korean ESA students. The ESA phenomenon is thus examined in light of South Korea’s recent emphasis on global competition through the privileging of English language acquisition (and education) as a means of securing
one’s position in the global marketplace, and the processes by which families succumb to the
lure of what the resulting ESA experience will ultimately provide.

A hasty glance at the ESA phenomenon will only reveal misconceptions about Korean
ESA students and their families. For example, one of the more popular conceptions referred to as
the “drop and run,” (as in the case of Mike’s family) typically occurs when Korean visiting
scholars and male graduate students, who finish their study in the US, leave their children behind
with their wives or guardians to live in the US, and go back to jobs in Korea (Ly, 2008). To
Americans, it is difficult to understand the justification of Korean parents’ decision to separate
their families.

Furthering the facile understanding of the complexities involved in the ESA experience
comes from a major daily news magazine in Korea which released a series of “research” results
from the first generation of Korean ESA students. The news story defined the Korean students
who left Korea between 1994 and 2000 as the first generation of ESAs. The reporters collected
data from 100, first generation Korean ESA students, who have now entered a profession after
finishing their study, to investigate their current income status. The conclusion of the report was
that “half succeeded, half failed.” The criterion of the evaluation contained simplistic
calculations of the expenses incurred during their ESA period in comparison to their current
earnings. There were no other bases on which to evaluate the ESAs “success” and “failure”
(Youm et al., 2009). Such uncritical perspectives and results of ESA experiences only work to
exacerbate misunderstandings of ESA students’ experiences. The following chapter addresses
some of the complex socio-historical and educational contexts that gave rise to the ESA
phenomenon.
Also, it is necessary to understand the environment surrounding the US higher education system, especially the Midwestern University (the MU) which is the main site of this study. According to the MU’s official web home page, it trumpets the university’s achievement as a leading campus of “internationalization” in the states. Surely, there are lots of information and data supporting this fact. For example, the “MU International Pamphlet” made by the Office of International Programs and Studies (OIPS) addresses that the MU is a national leader with the number of international scholars it hosts, with well over 1,500. In addition to offering courses in commonly taught foreign languages, MU is a national leader in its course offerings of Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL). Including Arabic, there are 27 total languages that are being taught at MU.

However, at the same time, we need to pay closer attention to some other figures. The web page also speaks very highly of the fact that this Midwest state has annually been first among public universities in the US and fourth among all American institutions of higher education with the enrollment of more than 6,500 international students (in the three campuses) from over 100 countries. As a result, MU was awarded the 2008 David Brown\(^3\) Award for Campus Internationalization. In addition, former Chancellor was given the 2009 Philip Williams\(^4\) International Leadership Award by the Association of Public Land Grant Universities.

\(^3\) Pseudonym

\(^4\) Pseudonym
The above graph (Figure 1) and table 1 show the increasing enrollment of international students including Korean and Chinese in the MU campus only since 1997. An interesting fact is that the increasing line of Korean international students seems to correlate with the increase of ESA students in Korea since the early 2000s. Another notable fact is that while the increase of Korean students has slowed down from 2008, the line of Chinese students surged sharply from that time. In other words, among the current enrollment of all international students at the MU, Korea and China comprise two-thirds of the total.
Although identifying the factors in the increasing number of Korean or Chinese international students is not the goal of this study, having the demographic information of international students at the MU is helpful to understand the positioning of Korean ESA students in the university demographic. The President of the MU, announced the Global Campus Message to university faculty and staff on January 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2007. In his message, the Global Campus initiative was meant to develop and reinforce online education as a mission for enabling non-traditional students, under-represented minorities, place-bound individuals and single parents to earn a college education. He counted mastery and money as the driving force, in that order respectively. While critiques of the Global Campus initiative were extant, at all levels, current reform efforts in higher education under the slogans of “globalization” and “internalization” require further analysis. In particular, how international students on college campuses experience what it means to be “global” and “international,” in sometimes a hostile environment, will be significant.

**Purpose of the Study**

The queries and problems posed provide the basis from which my dissertation seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of the Korean students who went through the ESA period during their secondary school years and how they subsequently ended up at the MU. The study of the contextual formulations that led up to the ESA phenomenon provides for important lenses to frame the lives of ESA students in the US. The critical moments of their study abroad experiences, occurring during adolescence, and oftentimes spent apart from one or both parents, will be captured through their retrospective narration of their high school days in relation to their current campus lives as freshmen in college. Further, the ESA students’ current lives as college students will be examined to garner deeper understandings of how their high school experiences
as ESA students position them in a particular way to respond to the American university. Without the understanding of this newly emerging group of students, the slogan of internationalization will be “out of sync with the reality” as Ewell (1998) states, and the Korean ESA students would be easily lost within the system of US higher education.

To accomplish this goal, I will focus on the Korean ESA students’ transition to MU. Since they are the students of a special cohort of international undergraduates, their stories may be a little bit extreme rather than typical. However, still they tell us something about the whole equation of educational migration in the global era and the issue of racialization at large American public universities like MU. Therefore, in this study I will delve into the life experiences of the Korean ESA students’ high school days and examine how their high school experiences of race and power in the US have significant impact on their transition to US colleges.

On the other hand, my research also aims to “invite readers into a room” (Tannen, 1989) where they can meet the participants of this study and listen to their life narratives. As I address the first purpose of this study, I investigate and discuss the ESA social phenomenon and the Korean ESA students’ life experiences during their secondary and postsecondary school days in the US in the global era. However, according to the narratives of the participants, there was potentially a hostile climate for international students who experienced discrimination and segregation for the first time. A “chilly climate” in the campus environment is not a new notion in the US. As Smith (1989) points out, many studies suggest “some campus environments are chillier than welcoming, more alienating than involving, more hostile than encouraging” (p. 20). Then, through the students’ narratives, I try to appeal to readers’ emotions so that they can understand those Korean ESA college students more deeply. Therefore, another important goal
of this project is to approach the readers through the microscopic level narratives to win their empathic understanding. This is not a wishful thinking because it was what I already experienced through this research process.

**Significance of the Study**

By providing a more complex and nuanced view of the Korean ESA experience, it is my hope that educators and teachers K-16 settings can develop a more sophisticated understanding of ESA students and their experiences beyond the typical immigrant story. Providing space for students to express their own voices also lends for critical understanding of their own individual struggles during adolescence and adulthood, oftentimes separated from their own families. How students adopted strategies to not only cope with new school environments, English language acquisition, and thinking of life beyond the college degree are also explored. Their past, current, and future trajectories also intermingles the myriad ways that they have negotiated their identities as “Koreans,” “Korean-Americans,” or sometimes “American” throughout their schooling. Their stories also raise attention to the status of current ESA college students throughout the US and that of higher education in the age of globalization. The degree to which the particularities of the Korean ESAs at the MU provide a window to understanding the bigger trend towards internationalizing college campuses is indeed significant as it may signal the ways in which higher education needs to serve this particular student body.

Particularly, this study provides educators in post-secondary institutions with a more in-depth understanding of these international students’ needs and possible strategies of how to meet their unique, specific linguistic and cultural needs in the global climate. If educators and teachers of K-16 want to understand international students and meet their linguistic, academic, and cultural needs, a “one size fits all” approach is not appropriate at all. Labeling a generic
“International Students” name for the sake of convenient categorization does not give any true appreciation of diversity. Therefore, as I strived in this study, paying attention to the individual voice of a particular group of students would foster a welcoming environment cultivating diversity rather than viewing it as an obstacle to overcome.

Also, even though this study focused on specific appeals of one specific group, the results and the implications of this study are highly relevant and significant for the entire sector of international students.

**Overview of the Study**

The next chapter, the literature review, lays out the relevant literature and I address the overview of the historical and socio-cultural origins of the ESA phenomenon positioning “English Fever” in the modern history of Korea as well as the government-driven globalization effort, “Segehwa.” I then include some critical views on US higher education in the global era to point out the correlationship of market-driven strategy between universities and globalization. To provide a more directly related background of global students’ migration, I include Johanna Water’s (2008) study on educational migration of Chinese students. I also locate my study in the context of other important studies on Korean college students in the US e.g., Abelmann (2009), Kim, W. (2007), and Lee (2010) and summarize the meaningful knowledge that has been generated from those previous studies. Especially, I review the literature on transition adjustment to college of domestic students and international students in order to see what kind of unique features Korean international students who went through ESA period show.

In Chapter Three, I include the theoretical framework on which this study is based and a detailed discussion of the methods that were employed in the project. For the theoretical framework, I select the notion of “habitus” and “Reproduction Theory” of Bourdieu (1999) to
explain the underlying socio-cultural ideology of the current trend of ESA in Korea. Later, in the discussion, I argue that it is important to broaden the notion of ‘habitus’ to recognize and apply it to the other socio-cultural environment of the US campus. Also, to discuss the English language development process of Korean ESA students, I choose “right to speak” of Pierce (2000) as an important conception. Then, I outline the rationale that has guided my choice in terms of employing case narrative as the research method. I then introduce a description of the pilot study that provided me with a motivation and a plan for this dissertation project. I also describe background information about the target university, the local Korean church, and the six participants of this study. Then, I explain in detail how I collected and analyzed data. Finally I will describe my position as a researcher, mentor, and confidant in this research procedure. I address that the subjectivity of the project is an inevitable part of how I collect, interpret, and represent the data.

In Chapter Four, I provide the participants’ individual and reflective narratives to provide more detail of their socio-cultural and family background as well as life experiences in foreign countries during their adolescent period. Through this chapter, I show how they made a decision to become an ESA and how they worked to identify their ESA experiences. More importantly, in this chapter, I document what are those Korean students’ experiences as pre-college study abroad students and their encounters with the power structure of English language and the issue of race in the US, analyzing these through the provided theoretical frameworks.

In Chapter Five, I present the ways in which the students’ ESA experiences influenced, and continue to influence their current college life. I also examine how they develop their global positioning in the public university through their academic journey during their ESA period and more importantly how after accomplishing their goal, they enter the universities in the US.
Further, I state how their high school encounters effect the social and academic choices they make during the campus life.

In Chapter Six and Seven, I offer detailed discussion and implication integrating the ESA college students’ ESA experiences and campus lives. Also, I provide some suggestions for further study to be followed before conclusion.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the literature and research related to the Korean ESA phenomenon and Korean students in the US higher education system. This review of literature is comprised of four main sections: (a) globalization and global student migration, (b) ESA phenomenon in Korea, (c) US higher education in the global era, and (d) current studies on transition to college and Korean ESA students in US higher education.

Globalization and Global Student Migration

Globalization.

In political, business and academic fields, globalization has become the buzz-word since 1990s (Hay and Marsh, 2000). Recently, the notion of “transborder” or “borderless education” has been used to describe the growth of internationalism as a commercial enterprise providing greater value than nationalism and protectionism (King, 2004, p. 47).

Among many globalist theorists, there are scholars who emphasize that globalization is not necessarily westernization but mutual exchange between the East and the West. Isin and Wood (1999) state that the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ are not exclusive to each other but are “mutually constituting elements of globalization” (p. 94). Rather, Papastephanou (2005) points out that “the lack of terms theorizing e.g. ‘Esternization’ is very telling regarding the asymmetries of cultural interplay” (p. 541). Even he considers the criticism of globalization which insists that globalization is a Western-led homogenization developing ‘Americanization’, ‘Westernization’, or ‘McDonaldization’ is too simplistic an argument. These opinions and assertions reflect well the idea that there would be mutual interplay rather than one-way assimilation when two different cultures come across.
On the other hand, there is also a group of scholars who insist that we should not overlook the power relationship that exist in the New World order and the aspect of ‘flow’ between different cultures. For instance, Stackpole (2002), examining the impact of globalization on the Asia-Pacific region and its security landscape, views America as “a reluctant superpower faced with realities that mandate a new approach to security matters” (p. 79). He believes that the United States will play a significant role in the age of globalization. However, scholars such as Yang (2003) indicate that today’s unstoppable market-driven globalization which pursue only profit rather than people’s welfare is distributing its opportunities and rewards unequally and inequitably. He writes “globalization is concentrating power and wealth in a select group of people, nations and corporations, while marginalizing others” (p. 272).

Magbadelo (2005), who is the Director at the Center for African and Asian Studies in Nigeria, examines the various ideologies that have dominated global thinking from the viewpoint of underdeveloped Third World country. Those ideologies are Westernism, unipolarism, Americanism, and globalism. His study emphasizes how the four concepts could serve as explanatory variables of the historical sequence of Africa’s marginality. According to him, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the defeat of socialism in the ideological battle for supremacy during the Cold War period, the United States claimed itself as the political and economic leader of the world creating a “unipolar world system” and preaching Americanism (p. 94). In this view, he defines globalization as “superimposing values of a dominant group over the rest of the world” (p. 98) even though the catch phrase of globalism appears to be “the systemic portrayal of the world as a single village that offers all countries an opportunity to engage in trade beneficial to its citizens” (p. 90). Consequently, he even insists that globalization should be resisted so that Africa and any other exploited countries can be emancipated from the regime of globalization.
In this global circumstance, researchers who have studied on young people’s migration argue that mobility can be an important influence on identity formation (Brooks & Waters, 2011). It is because, as Dolby and Rizvi (2008) suggest, more and more migrating young people view themselves as neither tourists nor immigrants, but occupying an entirely new cultural space. More specifically, Dolby and Rizvi (2008) categorize those young people who are geographically mobile into three groups: 1) young people who move throughout the world with ease, 2) people who move under more constrained circumstances – to escape political repression or poverty, and 3) youth who move for educational purposes and, in doing so, create new networks and circuits of identity (p. 5). The third group is a growing category of youth movement which is still largely uncharted and relatively neglected.

Following the above categorization, Korean ESA international students would fall under the third group because they have very obvious academic purposes to go abroad. However, considering another type of mobility, “educational immigration” (Butcher, 2004), identifying Korean ESA students as international students or educational immigrants is blurry. In many cases, Korean ESA students hold ‘student visas’ to come to the US. In this view, they are international students as many US higher education institutions would categorize them as. However, still many others try to consider themselves as educational immigrants because some of them hold US citizenships (like Mike) or they have stayed in the US for a long time since their elementary or secondary school days. Therefore, as Brooks and Waters (2011) state, the distinction between international students and immigrant students is rarely clear-cut (p. 50), and in the case of Korean ESA students it is even more so.
**ESA Phenomenon in Korea**

ESA is a very unique socio-cultural and educational phenomenon which can be seen only in South Korea. Compared to the population of China and India, which are known as major sending countries for international students to the US, Korea has the smallest population size. Nevertheless, the fact that this unique social phenomenon had started in Korea and that the country became one of the top senders in the world provides us with an important code to understanding and interpreting student migration in the global era.

According to the Korean Educational Development Institute, 29,522 children from elementary through high school level left South Korea in 2006; nearly double the number in 2004 and almost seven times the figure in 2000. The numbers did not include children accompanying parents, who left South Korea to work, emigrate, or study abroad (Onishi, 2008).

From the perspectives of parents or children, ESA is not a simple affair at all. In addition to the huge financial investment it takes for parents to embark on the ESA process, the students who are not mature enough physically and intellectually have to adjust to a foreign environment and culture alone, or with their mothers, leaving their fathers back in South Korea to support them financially. So, some scholars insist that because ESA is not a matter of some special social class any more, it should be recognized as a educational and social problem (Lee, 2005).

This ESA phenomenon provides a critical platform on which to investigate the processes by which the ideological structures of modern Korean history and its recent socio-economic contexts shaped its formation. If we see only the outward phenomenon of ESA, it would be easy to misunderstand with a few fragments without viewing the whole picture. While Korean parents say that because they could not stand any more the excessively competitive environment in Korean schools for choosing to bring their children to the US, they in many ways, drive their
children towards excessive competition for academic success with native English speaking students and/or with other ESAs. Therefore, in order to understand more fully the ESA phenomenon, we need to understand the ideological underpinnings of Korean parents, as shaped through social forces, in “choosing” to have their children study abroad at an early age. Also, in this investigation, the examination of the current educational status of South Korea also provides an important place for critical understanding.

In this context, the purpose of this section is an examination of the current ideologies that shape formal (school-based, Ministry of Education) and informal (familial, community, and for-profit “cram schools) policies about Korean and English language study for adolescents. In order to accomplish this goal, this section tries to explain how these ideologies reflect ideas about and the influence of globalism, socio-linguistic research, and immigration to English-speaking countries. Therefore, in this section I review the socio-cultural environment along with the diverse educational context that impacted on the rising of ESA in South Korea. Next, I also consider the structure of social and linguistic ideologies that Korean people have.

**Educational Environment in Korea.**

ESA is not a social phenomenon that started in a day. This section will investigate some major educational issues in South Korea which are intertwined with ESA. These two major issues are crippled public education and thriving private education.

**Crippled Public Education: Growing Distrust.**

*High school equalization policy.*

According to Lee Chong Jae, president of the Korean Educational Development Institute, the equalization policy was formulated as a countermeasure to Korea’s education conundrum in the late 1960s and early 1970s (C. J. Lee, 2008):
Competition was fierce for entrance into secondary schools, and the entire nation’s students seemed prone to catching gukyukbyeong (literally, “sixth grade illness”) and jungsambyeong (“ninth grade illness”)\(^5\). In an attempt to cure gukyukbyeong, the government introduced a policy in 1968 that eliminated the implementation of middle school entrance exams. A remedy for jungsambyeong soon followed in the form of the high school equalization policy that went into effect in 1973. (p. 1)

Since the purpose of this section is not to discuss the success or failure of the equalization policy of Korean government but to provide the backdrop of growing distrust in the public education of Korea, I focus on the responses of Korean people on this equalization policy.

In Korea, during the 1970s when the equalization policy was started, the whole nation focused on rebuilding the economy of the country and within two decades the nation accomplished striking economic development. However, when people began to believe their economic status got back on track, they started to look around and were concern over their children’s future growth. Some people still welcomed equalizing the level of secondary schools but others were not satisfied with this. Especially, those from the upper-middle class strived and desired to create or maintain a system of hierarchy where their children occupied the upper echelons of school and eventually society such as how Bourdieu had argued in his “Reproduction Theory” (1991). The drive to gain social capital and status resulted in the massive growth of expensive private tutoring programs among this social class.

In order to pacify those group’s discontent, the government suggested an alternative device. To make up for the normalizing effects of the equalization policy, the government established several different kinds of schools to meet the needs of students with varying learning

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\(^{5}\) Note that in Korea, sixth grade is the last grade of primary school, and ninth grade is the last grade of middle school
abilities. For example, “special purpose schools” were high schools that specialize in a certain subject such as foreign languages, the sciences, or the arts (Kim, 2002. p. 2).

Gradually, these special purpose or independent private high schools proved themselves as a guaranteed route to prestigious universities in Korea.

Meanwhile a term, “Classroom disruption,” had appeared in South Korean school environments since the end of 1990’s. It represents the uncontrollable status of classrooms in which teachers have huge difficulties to guide students in academic and in school life aspects (Song, 2002). Song (2002) introduced the nationwide survey result of classroom disruption reporting that out of 450 teachers about 80% answered that it was difficult to maintain regular teaching and learning in their classrooms (p. 241). Teachers chose the rigidity of the educational system (40.6%), the failure of policies of the Education Ministry (31.4%), the rapid change of students’ culture (20.9%). On the other hand, students selected the cramming system of education (40.0%) and the rigidity of educational system (36.5%).

This distrustful atmosphere of public education made students and parents dependent on the private educational system more and more which was perceived as helping them get into the universities they wanted their children to attend (Song, 2002). Private education in South Korea consists of personal tutoring and the private institutes (cram schools) in which students supplement the regular school curriculum, to prepare for college entrance examinations. According to the Korean National Statistical Office, out of ten elementary school students nationwide, nine (88.8%) are enrolled in private tutoring education. The Office calculates that the total expense for the private education of Korea in 2007 would be $14 billion. The monthly average per family is $160.00. However, some other institutes estimate the total expense would be near at $ 36 billion, because there are a lot of unreported works in that business (Mo, 2009).
In this educational environment, from the late 1990s, those of the upper-middle classes turned their eyes abroad and started to send their children to the US or any other English speaking countries hoping their children would acquire “better” education and gain English proficiency. Because, in any case, the parents had to spend large amounts of money for their children’s private education, those affluent people chose foreign education as an alternative for their children. Soon it became a boom in Korea but still only the people who were equipped with upper-middle social capital were able to afford such a high stakes venture.

“Prior learning.”

The climate of preference for prior learning also became an important factor of thriving ESA. “Prior learning” is totally different from “prerequisite learning.” While the latter means required learning which should be acquired by students before learning a specific subject, the former means learning at one grade level above to be more competitive in the class or school. According to Cho (2006), this prior learning is the main cause for the demise of public education. Parents usually wish for their children to occupy advantageous positions in society so they send their children to private institutes for prior learning during vacation. The public school classrooms often end up with children who are bored as teachers cover materials previously learned at the private institutes. When the majority of students show this symptom, teacher moves the center of the instruction to these students isolating those who were unable to partake in the private institutes. In turn, the parents of “less performing” students feel compelled to enroll their children in private tutoring programs, often incurring incredible financial burden. Everybody is locked in a vicious cycle. In this structure the public education cannot function correctly and the school degrades to the status of a “diploma mill”. In essence, the Korean public school education is rendered worthless as a means for upward mobility. The high-stakes,

6 In Korea, summer and winter vacations are two months for each.
ultra-competitive environment towards social attainment, especially amongst a large number of middle and upper-middle class parents, disallows for a system based on equality of opportunity.

Cho’s (2006) survey research shows that Korean parents chose ESA because their children would be able to acquire English competence quickly that the Korean public education could not guarantee. He also argues that many Korean parents decided to send their children abroad because even though they cost much for their children’s private education, entering a prestigious college in Korea is very competitive. In other words, Korean parents believed that their children would rather go to US early than suffer at Korean schools. Still, the important key word is “early” or “earlier” than others.

**English Fever in Korea.**

It was 1883 when English language education was first introduced in Korea for the purpose of enhancing diplomatic exchange and trades (H. J. Park, 2006). However, it was not until 1945 that English became more directly relevant to a majority of Koreans when Japanese colonial rule ended and the US troops moved into the Southern half of Korea (J. Park, 2003). It is said that the influence of English in South Korea has become salient because of strong political and economic dependency on the US since its independence in 1945 and the Korean War in the 1950’s (H. Shin, 2004). Because of the government system led by US military forces, people who could speak English were appointed to all the important government positions, which had the effect of making English a language of the ruling class in South Korea (H. J. Park, 2006). Thereafter, English became a language of importance.

Through South Korea’s international exposure in the 1980s, the government pushed its citizens to be more proficient in English. South Korea’s hosting the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympic Games were landmark turning points in English education from the grammar
translation method to a communicative approach in South Korea (H. J. Park, 2006). Regarding this issue of hosting international sports games, there are incongruent views among scholars. For example, while Baik (1992) and Shim (1994) insisted that these events had a more direct impact on a Korean’s use of English, Joseph Park (2003) and Song (1998) argued that it was difficult to attribute the increased importance of English to the games themselves. However, it was obvious that through their importance as symbolic events, the Korean government started to emphasize the importance of spoken English proficiency to the citizens.

Another government driven transformation in English education took place in 1995. The Kim Young Sam administration proclaimed a national globalization project, Sephyehwa, promoting English for national competitiveness through English education (Shim & Baik, 2000). Consequently, in 1997 English became a mandatory subject for 3rd graders in elementary school in the national educational curriculum (Shim & Baik, 2000). After the IMF (International Monetary Fund) crisis of 1997, in order to reconstruct the economy and recruit foreign investment, the government modified the national curriculum so that English communicative ability was more emphasized than previous grammar based English skills (Kwon, 2000).

The growing significance of English competence in Korea is not limited only in education. In the business field, English fluency has been a survival skill for getting and keeping a job because most enterprises have English proficiency tests in their recruitment examination and it is related with future promotion (Yim, 2007). With these reasons, English competence is a valuable linguistic capital since people who are more competent in English have a better economic advantage in society (J. Park, 2003).

Interestingly, Joseph Park (2003) further discussed that “English was often thought of as an emotional and economic burden, and generalizations such as ‘Koreans can’t speak English
well’ abound” (p. 50). He saw this could be a major reason for parents to invest great money and energy to help their children remove the stigma of “poor English speaker,” even sending them abroad, most often to the US, at a relatively early age in the hopes that they could have native-like fluency. According to him, Korean parents willingly submit themselves to go through family separation or a great financial burden to pay the costs for their children’s future (p. 49).

Therefore, these socio-historical and socio-cultural features related with English language acquisition largely became the basis for the drive towards, “English study fervor” in Korea (Yim, 2007) which has the same connotation with “English fever” that was addressed by Krashen (2003). This strong desire for acquiring English has been a drive to gain a tool for achieving economic competitiveness in the international arena and the global era. However, while these literatures that have been reviewed here described well the phenomena of “English fever” in Korea, still we need some more plausible reasoning to explain the newly emerging issue, “Educational Exodus” of Korea.

**US Higher Education in the Global Era**

In this section I will review the influence of globalization on higher education as a historical and spatial backdrop of this study. Although investigating the US higher education in the global era is not the major goal of this study, since ESA phenomenon is deeply influenced by the worldwide globalization movement and the destination of Korean ESA students is entering the US universities, it is important to understand the major aspects of globalization and its influence on higher education.

During the past few decades, the traditional role and position of universities in society has been being changed under the new pressure of ‘globalization’ and the ‘global economy’. Surely, there has been a positive side in the relation of globalization and education in terms of
“encouraging multiculturalism, group differentiated citizenship, diversity and cross-cultural encounter” (Papastephanou, 2005, p. 544). Ryan (2004) also acknowledges the huge and rapid application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in educational systems as a key feature of globalization’s influence on teaching and learning.

However, those merits should not be overgeneralized to cover up the all negative side of higher education in the age of globalization. In contrast to Papastephanou’s idea, Porter and Vidovich (2000) consider globalization to be found guilty with regards to education because it promotes uniformity over plurality through cultural imperialism. As an example, Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) and Phillipson (2001) argue that linguistic diversity and plurality are being endangered in the worldwide educational system by homogenizing linguistic imperialism.

Additionally, Yang (2003), exposing the negative side of globalization and its effects on universities, calls attention to the uncritical acceptance of globalization as a positive force for higher education. Out of several concerning points he emphasizes the “neoliberal” status of market-driven higher education in the current globalization arguing that it is motivated by profit rather than by government policy or goodwill. In terms of the commercial based motives, he asserts that the largest market is overseas student education, “which is now a multi-billion dollar business” (p. 283). Accordingly, the possible dangers are lack of genuine educational values, quality control and regulation.

Many other scholars also call our attention to contemporary “academic capitalism” or the “entrepreneurial university” (King, 2004, p. 56). According to Readings (1996), the function of the university has been changed from constituting national culture and producing good citizens to being like any other corporation, serving its own private interests. Even Marginson and
Considine (2000) call ‘the enterprise university’ to describe the privatized university that regards its service as a source of income to supplement declining public funds.

**Current Studies on Transition to College and Korean ESA Students in US Higher Education**

**Transition to College.**

Scholars who studied transition to college have talked about the importance of some variables that influence the first-year college students. Many students go through very stressful situations when they enter the university or college (Brooks & DuBois, 1995; Perry, Hladkyj, Pekrun, & Pelletier, 2001). It is because they have to make new relationships, sometimes leaving their family and old friends, changing their study habits, and functioning independently as adults managing their money or time (Parker et al., 2006). In terms of the transition from a high school to a post-secondary environment, there have been a number of studies. Those studies mainly focused on students’ academic success in the university arguing that the most important factors were high school performance (Tinto, 1993), financial status, engagement with the institution (Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999; Sandler, 2000), and/or emotional intelligence (EI) (Parker et al., 2006).

Tinto (2009) pointed four primary conditions that were essential to student success – expectations, support, feedback, and involvement. According to him, students were more likely to succeed in settings in which they had high and clear expectations. He counted academic and social support, especially during the first year of college, as important elements for success. Also, he argued that when students actively involved themselves with faculty, staff members, and other peers, they were more likely to succeed, and the classroom setting is the most important environment for this involvement and interaction.
Fischer (2007) also examined students’ settling into campus life investigating different racial students’ college involvement and outcomes. She studied Black and Hispanic students in order to understand their adjustment to the college environment. According to her, all groups of students showed that having more formal academic ties with professors was positively related to their GPA. Similarly when they had formal (i.e., extracurricular) and informal (i.e., friends) social ties, they had positive college satisfaction ratings.

As shown above, so far many studies of students’ transition from high school to post-secondary environment have concentrated mainly on the academic success of students and their social involvement. This emphasizes the necessity of more extensive research on newly emerging groups of students in recent years. It is because we as educators, cannot simply assume that those the international students’ transition to US universities would be basically an extension of the study results of other domestic or immigrant students.

**Korean ESA College Student in the US**

While literatures on Korean ESAs remain limited, Kim W. (2007) conducted a study to investigate Korean college students’ linguistic ideologies of English and their views on ESA. To understand the conceptualization of English among Korean students in higher education, he conducted a survey of 98 Korean students who studied in US colleges and interviewed 10 students among them. The results of the study provided significant insights into the students’ conceptions of globalization and ESA. According to Kim’s analysis of the interviews, Korean students emphasized the need for “globalization” studies to provide a premise of mutual respect and understanding between different countries. However, one critical finding was of a notion that Korean students hold: globalization is “homogenization or assimilation with American culture” (p. 204). Also, there was no objection to the fact that English language is perceived as the most
important and effective tool for global communication. While Kim’s research addressed Korean college students’ perceptions of their concept of globalization, there was no further discussion on why they showed an inclination and favoritism towards the US for studying abroad.

While documenting Korean college students’ opinions on ESA, Kim (2007) addresses those students that consider ESA as a by-product of an invisible Korean class structure. They believed that in order to reach the upper level of the seemingly invisible social class structure in Korea, a college degree from the US could be used as a shortcut. In other words, an ESA track is seen as a powerful tool for Koreans to elevate their social status. As Philipson (1992) already argued, they were influenced by linguistic imperialism reflecting the hegemony of Western English speaking countries. At the end of the study, Kim, W. (2007) suggests that a possible remedy could be to introduce English early in the elementary school years. Through this, he argued, Korean students would not only be able to keep their national identity but equip themselves for necessary preparation for a global future (p. 197). However, this suggested solution to reduce ESA is too simplified an approach that does not consider Korean parents’ complex decisions to engage their children as ESA students. While they want to provide as much social capital and advantage to their offspring in an increasingly competitive society, effects of how the children themselves are bearing the burden of globalization must be examined.

Lee M. W. (2010) also conducted his dissertation research on Korean ESA undergraduates in the US studying their identity formation process. In the study, he examined how they have formed their identity based on their ESA experiences in terms of their first and second language-mediated social contexts as well as their first and second languages. He interviewed 22 Korean ESA college students and conducted focus group interviews with four focal participants to collect data. Employing a narrative approach he analyzed and interpreted the
data. According to the findings of the study, it indicates that many Korean ESA college students struggle with their identities to find out “who they are” and “where they might fit.” He argues that they position themselves “in-between” two cultures, and this ‘betweenness’ is the most distinctive common characteristic of their identities. As a conclusion, he addresses that considering they are transnational elites who cross the borders freely, they are in a position to be cosmopolitans who can take advantage of the ‘betweenness’, becoming keen critics of dominant cultures in both contexts, and potential social activists who can take actions for social justice. He also insists that the experience of ESA should be understood not only as second language learning opportunity but also as a process by which learners develop social awareness in multiple language-related contexts that can lead them beyond their own circumscribed world of elitism to a position of responsibility for sharing what they experience and understand for the benefit of society.

This study is noteworthy because it delineates in detail how Korean ESA students have developed the perception of “English and America as power and privilege” and positioned their identities in-between two different cultures and languages. Moreover, Lee includes his own narrative regarding his enlightenment:

While studying Korean early study-abroad students, I have also come to realize how I was blinded by the “English is power and privilege” and “America is the number one country” ideologies. Now it is possible for me to look at the full image of America (not the romanticized image of a beautiful country) and criticize these Korean-oriented ideologies. (p. 172)

However, even though the study is based on Gee’s (1996) and Norton’s (2001) ideas that second language learners’ identity is considerably influenced by the socio-cultural environment,
it focuses on only linguistic ideologies that Korean ESA students have. The study does not include the aspects of Korean students’ everyday life in terms of the interaction with the language majority or other ethnic group of students in the university. In this view, his suggestion that making the second language process in the US as an opportunity to be social activists to take actions for social justice sounds too idealistic. Since being caught up in a fantasy of English is the current social problem in Korea, his call is appropriate. However, it is too much slanted towards only a linguistic approach to show the holistic status of Korean ESA students in the US universities.

While focusing on the college experiences at the MU among Korean American students, Abelmann (2009) provides critical insights to understand the complex processes by which students experience their university lives in a way that disconnects with their personal and social trajectories. In explaining later how Korean ESAs “self-segregate” in chapters 4 and 5, Abelmann’s analysis helps to frame how that notion works in conjunction with students’ cultural identities to that of the “mission” of a university. As she notes in a telephone conversation with a journalist for *Time* magazine, she argues that Korean American students do not ‘self-segregate,’ but rather are victims of racism and racialized circumstances of the white dominant university (p. 3). In many ways, the Korean American students’ experiences parallel that of the Korean ESAs. She also pointed out clearly the gaping distance between the rhetoric of the university and what’s lived in “real time” as expressed by Jim:

“I think [the university] does show what America looks like, but people still segregate themselves. It’s hard to make any clear judgment. It’s physically visible, but whether you feel it is a different story…. It doesn’t seem like the university cares about the
segregation. I don’t think they even acknowledge that there is [segregation]. Because of that, it exists.” (p. 11)

Although it was a study of Koran American students who were different from the group of students in my dissertation research, her study has provided me with significant insight to conduct my study. On one hand, my study can be seen as an extension of Abelmann’s study in terms of examining Korean American students’ life experiences and the segregation issue in the US university campus. On the other hand, however, my study focuses on Korean ESA students who are a newly emerging group of students on college campuses throughout the US. In addition, as the results of this study reveals in later chapters, the Korean ESA students reveal varying degrees of navigating a racialized campus environment.
Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative research study aims to understand how South Korea’s push towards globalization places Korean ESA college students in the US in unique ways, but also how it is illustrative of the larger context of what embodied globalization looks like amongst youth through their life experiences of transition from high school to university of five focal students. To accomplish the goal, I designed a case narrative research protocol focusing on the life experiences of five students. I begin with a description of the pilot study that inspired me to develop this full-scale study. I then address the methodological framework and how and why I selected the participants and sites for this research. Next, I also describe the data collection and analysis process. Finally, I close this chapter with the reflection on my role as a researcher. To begin, however, I provide a theoretical backdrop for critically understanding the context under which the ESA students of my study are navigating their college experiences.

Theoretical Framework

The Affective Filter hypothesis illustrates how language learner’s affective or emotional factors relate to the second language acquisition process. These variables include motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. According to Krashen (1981, 1982), generally performers with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image and low anxiety tend to do better in L2 acquisition. On the contrary, low motivation, low self-esteem, and high anxiety may raise the affective filter that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition.

From the view of teacher, it is most desirable for students to absorb every provided input in their brain. However, it is not always probable, because students’ affective barrier hinder the
input process. Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of learning activity of students, teachers need to get rid of or minimize the barrier. Teachers’ helping students be relaxed or be motivated in the classroom would be good examples of lowering the affective filter of L2 learners.

In short, Krashen summarizes the five hypotheses in a single claim: “People acquire L2 when they obtain comprehensible input and when their affective filters are low enough to allow the input in [to the language acquisition device]” (Krashen, 1981, p. 62, cited in Peregoy and Boyle, 2005, p. 56).

While Krashen’s variables pertain to individual rather than the social context, Peirce (1995) argues that language learning is a complex social practice that engages an ongoing construction of (a language learner’s) multiple identities. Drawing on Bourdieu (1977), Peirce reconceptualizes second language learning as a shared responsibility between language learners and target language speakers and expands the definition of L2 competence to include an awareness of claiming “the right to speak”—what Bourdieu calls “the power to impose reception” (cited Peirce, 1995, p. 18). Based on these theoretical frameworks of language learning and social interaction, the Summit Afterschool Program strives to construct a welcoming and warm environment so that English speaking students and L2 learners may enrich understanding of their own cultural identities and the cultural identities of others developing linguistic, social, and academic confidence.

In this study the notion “the right to speak” of Pierce plays important role as a theoretical foundation to see the participants’ social identities reconstruction process and their interaction with other people in secondary and post-secondary school environment. I will reevaluate those Korean ESA students’ staying in the silent period or keeping voicelessness through this theoretical lens.
Bourdieu’s “habitus.”

Thompson (1984) explains Bourdieu’s idea of power and performative utterance saying that “people do not acquire linguistic competence alone but acquire also the practical competence to use sentences in strategies that have numerous functions and tacitly adjust to the relations of force between speakers” (p. 46).

Language is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power. One seeks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, and distinguished. (as cited in Thompson, 1984, p. 46)

According to Bourdieu, “utterances are not only signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also signs of wealth, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and signs of authority, intended to be believed and obeyed” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 66). From this perspective, the influence of the US military forces right after Korea’s independence from Japan and during Korean War could be interpreted possibly as a symbol of power (authority) to be believed and obeyed.

If we follow Bourdieu’s explanation that, “the sense of the value of one’s own linguistic products is a fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place in which one occupies in the social space” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 82), Koreans who were able to speak English during the period of independence and the Korean War might place themselves in a high social space and it could be accepted by others, in other words, it was “misrecognized” as such and thereby “recognized” as legitimate (Thompson, 1984, p. 59). Considering that Korean culture maintained rigid social classes since its founding and that the Independence from Japan, and the Korean War, created new structures for “power” and “equalization”, the entrance of English as the language of power and privilege enabled the development of a new social structure. This can be elaborated further through the important concept of Bourdieu, “habitus.”
Habitus is a structured principle, working predominantly through the body rather than through some sort of creative intellect; it has been accumulated over the past, but it addresses the future in terms of generating the individual’s preferences, choices, perspectives, reasoning, and so on…. Since it is a product of the habitus, taste has a double nature: On the one hand, it is immediate and emotional, beyond strategic calculation; on the other, it is structured by and fundamentally linked to power and social position. (Scheuer, 2003, p. 145)

As Scheuer explained, habitus is structured by and fundamentally linked to power and social position. It means a group of people who have power continuously try to build up their own class and solidify it through “reproduction” processes (Thompson, 1984, p. 61).

Habitus is the embodied disposition shared by members of a class. The concept refers to a person’s way of being: their manner, what they do, how they feel about things, what they buy, how they eat, their leisure pursuits, etc. One’s practices and commodities reflect a set of unconscious underlying principles, concerns and strategies: namely, their habitus (as cited in Hinde & Dixon 2007 p. 413).

Also, Bourdieu stated that, “The habitus enables people to compete for capital by acting in ways that provide advantage within the field while also distinguishing them from other classes located elsewhere in the field” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 50). In this argument, the notion of “field” gives us an important clue to understand the context of South Korea in the modern history related with language ideology. Starting from 1945, the governing authority changed from the Japanese government to US military forces. Although the US did not govern Korea in the oppressive manner Japan had, American culture, economy, and language influenced South Korea immensely. The point I hope to make is that Korea has been changed thereafter towards the
formation of habitus in Korean society. Japanese was no longer the official language of Korean politics and it was later expelled under the language purification policy. The transformation that took place occurred in the endorsement of English as the new dominant language of power. The Korean government, as well as middle-class and educated individuals pursued English acquisition in hopes of achieving economic prosperity in the global era and as well as working to elevate the status of Korea as a modern and industrial nation.

In particular, the habitus of the dominant class enables its members to abide superbly by – and where appropriate, find ways to modify – the rules of the game, thereby always distinguishing their identity as elite and reproducing their power. People acquire their habitus – their tastes, preferences and manner – through exposures and experiences from family, school and elsewhere during childhood (Hinde and Dixon 2007 p. 413).

As Hinde and Dixon (2007) argue, when Koreans struggled to rebuild the country from utter devastation following the Korean War, they competed to enter the higher habitus of the dominant class and continuously tried to distinguish themselves by reproducing their power. In this process, as Bourdieu (1991) insisted, school or education functioned to sustain upper class’ power and to reproduce it. Thus the boom of ESA among students from elementary through high school years, which began in the late 1990s, could be explained within this framework.

On top of that, I will view and discuss the Korean ESA students’ creating their own strong solidarity through this notion of “habitus” because it is their proactive disposition to be distinguished or self-segregated from other groups of students in the multicultural university.
Reproduction Theory.

While Bourdieu’s habitus is a useful framework to understand Korean national level ideologies, his “Reproduction Theory” is also useful to view social and individual level ideologies of Korea.

Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as “accumulated labor and has a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being” (p. 241). According to him, there are three types of capital: economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). While economic capital can be converted to monetary value, cultural capital and social capital are convertible into economic capital in certain conditions. Among these three types of capital, Bourdieu pays more attention to cultural capital with embodied and institutional state, because cultural capital functions important role in the reproduction process of domination and power relationship in a society (Garnham & Williams, 1986). Therefore, the possession of cultural capital is deeply related with the potential of a group of class to create differences in the cultural taste and social status. Besides, Bourdieu (1991) insists that family, school, or social education functions to sustain upper class’ power and reproduce it through imposing thought and perception that the social order and structure between dominant and subordinated classes are legitimate. Bourdieu calls this symbolic violence.

In the socio-cultural context of South Korea, the reproduction process to possess economic, cultural and social capitals can be seen. In South Korea acquiring good academic background or graduating from specific universities means occupying guaranteed and significant position to control those capitals. So, everybody is racing blindly or pushing their children to race to win and attain higher positions over others. Because of this cultural climate the symbolic
violence which appreciates only the people who have capitals is spread out legitimately to the whole country.

**Pilot Study**

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, I had a chance encounter with Mike, who came to the US for ESA. His stories opened my eyes to the struggle of Korean adolescent ESA students and drew my interest to conduct research. My dissertation study emanated from that moment and developed an unrelenting drive to pursue more on the topic, but at the time, the small-scale pilot study was feasible enough to provide meaningful insight regarding the positioning of Korean ESA students and their challenges in the US school environment. The initial pilot study examined how Korean ESA adolescent students defined the period of their stay in the US and the major challenges they faced and how they dealt, if at all, with those challenges. The participants were two Korean high school students, Julie and Mike, who I met at the local Korean church. For this research, I chose a case study method.

**Julie’s Case.**

In Korea, when she was six years old, Julie’s mom told her, “Julie, you have a week to pack. We are going to America.” Julie answered “Ok, mom.” Julie’s parents had been high school English teachers for eight years. They quit their jobs and decided to come to the US to study in the Ph.D. programs. At that time, Julie had no idea of what was going on.

On the very first day of school in the US, her father taught her an English expression. “Julie, repeat after me, ‘I don’t speak English.’ If anybody says something to you, just answer them with this. Ok Julie? Good luck.” From that day Julie’s parents were so busy studying their course works at the university and taking care of their one-year-old baby. Julie had to survive by herself as a shy and silent girl at school. Initially Julie had a hard time at school, but after
acquiring English competence for her grade level, she caught up fast to the classroom instruction and made solid academic results. Meanwhile, Julie’s parents set up higher goals for Julie constantly.

When Julie finished her 8th grade at the high school, her mother got a job in Korea as a professor and told Julie “Julie you have a week to pack. We’re going back to Korea.” It was the exactly same words that Julie heard eight years ago. However, at this time, Julie’s response was totally different and decisive: “Over my dead body.” Julie said “When my parents brought me here, I had no idea what was going on. However, now everything is different. I have lived here for eight years. I go to school here, and I have my friends here. I hate to go back to Korea. My father told me that ‘Because we’re Korean, we have to live in Korea.’ But, I don’t care who I am: Korean or American. The important thing is the fact that my life is here.”

Finally, Julie’s mother went back to Korea leaving her husband and Julie. Both of them lived in huge conflict and tension almost every day. Julie’s father’s basic idea was that “Because you want to stay here, I am sacrificing myself to take care of you during the busiest period in my life.” But, Julie never talked to her father. She hated him. At school, she had no close friends. In this circumstance, the Korean church she attended was the only space where Julie was able to breathe psychologically and socially. Julie was not that religious, but only at the church was Julie able to meet a couple of close friends with which to share her agony.

After another year, Julie returned to Korea when her father finished his degree. “I hate to go back to Korea. I feel like a lamb to be dragged to the slaughter because I like America, no exactly I like this town where I have grown up and I have my friends. I hate Korea not because it is tough to study but because it’s the country and society that forged my parents’ way of thinking.” Julie was so afraid of entering the suffocating environment of Korea with its
seemingly endless competition. She never experienced it directly but knew it well from her parents’ conversations throughout the years. The last word Julie said still lingers in my ears: “I will be back.”

**Mike’s Case.**

Mike’s case was very “typical” of the Korean ESA phenomenon (his background was previously covered in Chapter One). Mike began school in the US in the eighth grade. School life was quite stressful for him because of his limited English competence. Meanwhile, he observed that many Asian students were called ‘nerds’ by other American students because those Asian students always studied hard and were not good at playing sports. Since Mike considered being called ‘nerd’ was a huge humiliation, he tried to stay away from the ‘nerd’ group and focused on doing more sports and less study. In so far, doing sports and playing Internet games became the only sources of pleasure to Mike, who was living in guardian’s house separated from his family.

When I met him for tutoring, I found that his oral communicative English was still limited although he had studied in the US for three years. He said because of the language barrier he had only few Korean speaking friends in and out of school. This limited interaction again influenced the slow improvement of English fluency. Moreover, too much freedom gradually made Mike addicted to Internet games. During winter time, he could not do much outside activities. Besides, there were only females at guardian’s home: the host lady and her two daughters. Therefore, Mike spent most of his time only in his small room and in cyber space.

Through the pilot study what I found out was that Korean ESA adolescents were being suffocated by their parents’ pressure, being in a different school, and cultural environment. Overtly or covertly, positively or negatively, they were looking for some space to breathe freely.
“Educational Exodus” has become the catch-phrase to describe the massive movement of Korean ESAs to countries abroad, typically English-speaking countries. To use a biblical metaphor, it is difficult to discern exactly where the Korean ESA students are at: in the desert or Canaan? We cannot say that they are in Canaan because they are in the US territory. Even though the ultimate goal of Korean ESA adolescents is to enter a “prestigious” US university, the inevitable questions arise: “What would happen then?” or even “What this is all about?” So, with these initial but fundamental questions in my mind, I decided to conduct this dissertation research with five undergraduate participants and the specific research methodologies that I would employ.

Research Design

In order to gain understanding of the transition from high school to US college of the five Korean ESA college students, I acquired a thorough knowledge of the daily lives of these students, their motivation and experiences of ESA, and the way they constructed, and continue to construct, their socio-cultural lives in a US university. Determined by the nature of the qualitative research topic, I chose cast narrative, the art of acquiring more in-depth analysis of the phenomena (Shkedi, 2005), as the methodology for my research.

Merriam (1985) states that case narrative report is an intensive, holistic description and explanation of the particular phenomenon under study. Eisner (1979) also argues that narrative enables readers to empathetically participate in the events of the narrator. Chase’ (2005) definition of narrative provides more rationale of the reason I selected this method. According to her, narrative is:

(a) a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters such as an encounter with a friend, boss, or doctor;

(b) an extended story about a significant aspect of one’s life such as schooling, work,
marriage, divorce, childbirth, an illness, a trauma, or participation in a war or social
movement; or

(c) a narrative of one’s life, from birth to the present.

In this view, considering that the purpose of this study is to enhance readers’ understanding
of the ESA phenomenon and Korean ESA students’ life experiences, cast narrative method
serves this purpose well because it is epistemologically in harmony with the reader’s experience
(Stake, 1978). Even though readers may not be Korean or they may have never been to foreign
countries to studying, per se, when they listen to or read the participants’ narratives, they would
be able to feel a sense of empathy for the students’ experiences of separation, disconnection,
segregation, or any other types of life stories.

Even though its generalizability is limited, a rich narrative illustrated by the multiple
participants will be meaningful in serving as a bridge by connecting historical moments and
personal lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is because, as Shkedi (2005) addresses, I tried to
extract several case narratives and introduced them as unique cases and eventually to find some
patterns. In the macro historical setting of global era, I delved into the micro cases of students’
individual life experiences. Such exploration is the goal of narrative inquiry to discover and
describe the personal lives of a particular people at a particular moment in a particular space.

Selection of Participants.

Since my purpose of this study was to examine the life experiences of Korean ESA
students during their transition period from high school days to the first year in a US university,
it was crucial for me to understand how they navigated their ESA days and how they managed
their lives and studies in college including what they felt, what they thought, and what they did.
With this direction, I selected five Korean college students who were born in Korea or in the US
but spent the majority of their childhood in Korea and came to US in their secondary school years as ESA students for the purpose of pursuing higher education.

I recruited five participants from a local Korean church where I attend and serve in the role as an informal “youth pastor.” When I completed the pilot study and was planning the dissertation research, a pastor, who was in charge of the undergraduate ministry group in the local Korean church I attended, requested me to lead a Bible study group composed of six Korean undergraduate students. I accepted his request and started meeting with them. On the first day when I met them, I realized that all of them were freshmen at the MU and had ESA experiences. The more I met them, the more I heard their diverse life stories. They were the very men I wanted to study.

When I decided to recruit those students into my research, I had two concerns related with ethical issue and validity of sampling. However, following the code of ethics and clarifying the purpose of the study, I could resolve those issues. Since they were members in the Bible study group that I led, the relationship between me and them was that of teacher and students or leader and followers. So, to avoid possible coercion, I acquired the “informed consent” (Christians, 2005; Krathwohl, 1998) from the students to guarantee their voluntary participation. To my surprise, they revealed their willingness to be involved in this study to share their personal stories with the ultimate wish to be understood by others. Regarding the sampling, if I wanted to generalize the data from the participants, I would conduct quantitative research recruiting a large number of participants randomly. However, considering the purpose of this study was to explore the in-depth life experiences, the trust based relationship with the research subjects functioned positively in the data collecting process. I address more the relationship with the participants in the “Researcher’s Role” section.
I also acquired permission to conduct research with the group from the pastor of the church. When I provided the pastor with a letter that detailed the purpose of the research project, not only he allowed me to do research with them, he requested that I share the results of the study with him later. He came to the church only two years ago from Korea to take charge in the undergraduate ministry. However, he expressed that he had difficulty to understand Korean ESA college students because they were really different from the Korean college students who he used to work with in Korea. After acquiring permission from the pastor, I scheduled days to conduct group discussion and interviews.

The reason I targeted freshmen in college was because gaining admission to a US college was the ultimate goal of ESA students and their parents. Therefore, following and gauging the freshmen’s experiences as ESA students provided unique and critical perspectives as to how they have not only come to understand their “place” in higher education, but also to see if they have witnessed the “fruits of their labor.” In other words, was the sacrifice of leaving their home country at an early age worth the price of admission? In addition, in some cases I contacted them again when they were in sophomore to conduct follow-up interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Former State/Country</th>
<th>Form of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Dormitory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Changsu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Dormitory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dongha</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Dormitory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eugene</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Dormitory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Frankie</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Dormitory, Apartment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the participant, Bada was not a typical ESA student because he came to the US right after graduating high school in Korea. However, he attended a foreign language high school and studied in an “international class” with the purpose to enter the university in the US. Considering the most of classroom instruction was delivered in English and the students in the international class were oriented to go to foreign colleges studying SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), I included him in my study.

**Selection of Site.**

**The University.**

The five Korean ESA college students in this study attend “Midwest University” a large, land grant university located at the center of the two adjacent cities which have approximately 120,000 residents (US Census Bureau 2009 Census). According to the figures the MU released, 918 Korean international students (out of 3,481 total international students) are registered in the undergraduate program for the 2009-2010 academic years. The numbers of students have increased dramatically since 2001 and witnessed more than three times an increase from 2003.

Table 3

*Tuition and Expenses at MU (2010-2011 Academic Years)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Non-residents/International</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuition and fees</td>
<td>$13,658 - 18,386</td>
<td>$27,800 - 32,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books and supplies</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room and board</td>
<td>$9,714</td>
<td>$9,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other expenses</td>
<td>$2,510</td>
<td>$2,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Estimated Costs</td>
<td>$27,082 - 31,810</td>
<td>$41,224 - 45,952</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As the table shows, MU charged much higher tuition and fees to international students.
However, the reputation of the university as one of the leading public universities in the US has attracted many international students constantly, especially from China and South Korea.

In addition, there is a two-year, public community college, Pinegrove College\(^7\), located in northwest of MU. Even though this college is not the major site of this study, I need to briefly introduce it because one of my subjects, Frankie had to move from MU to this college. According to the Pinegrove College Profile, the school had an enrollment of approximately 11,000 credit students, including minority (26 percent) and international (4 percent) students. According to Frankie, including him, many Korean ESA or international students have come to this school to transfer to MU after graduation.

*The Korean Church.*

The local Korean church, KCC\(^8\), is another main site in this study. In the community, there are a total of six Korean churches. Considering the number of registered members, KCC is the largest church with more than about 600 from children to adults. Among them, more than 200 Korean undergraduate students are registered. According to the pastor who is in charge of the undergraduate student group, more than 90 percent of them are Korean international students who came to the US as ESA students or directly after graduating high school in Korea.

In Korean American immigrant histories, Korean ethnic churches have traditionally served important functions of preserving and maintaining Korean culture and identity (Lee, Chang & Miller, 2006; Pak, 2003). In a similar vein, Korean ESA students in this area tend to flock to the local Korean church. According to the pastor who is in charge of the undergraduates group, through the church promoting period at the beginning of fall semesters and by word of mouth among students, usually more than 200 undergraduate students come to KCC initially.

\(^7\) “Pinegrove College” is pseudonym.

\(^8\) “KCC” is pseudonym.
Then, averagely 100-120 students regularly attend the church all year long. Such as Korean immigrants who have affiliated with Korean ethnic churches for religious and or social networks, Korean ESA students attended the Korean church not only for religious purposes but also to develop, enhance, and deepen social relationships. Interestingly enough, and important to note was that the Korean ESA college students at KCC shared very diverse backgrounds. While some of them entered college directly after finishing their high school in Korea, many others came to the US when they were in middle or high schools. In this context, the Korean church was an accessible site that provided opportunities to meet diverse Korean ESA college students.

**Data Collection.**

Data collection for the study involved what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have described as the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, in order to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (p. 5). Patton (1990) also categorized three kinds of data collection in qualitative methods: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents (p. 10).

In order to listen to the voices of Korean ESA college students to understand their global positioning and life experiences, I conducted semi-structured interviews and small group discussions and kept extensive field notes. I collected data during the months of January 2010 to May 2010, and I conducted four more follow-up interviews in February 2011. Every time when I collected data, I made it clear that they held the final authority as to the extent of their participation, which might include both interview and group discussion, or one or the other.

First, in order to collect the participants’ narrative data, I conducted a total of two to three interviews per participant, composed of open-ended questions. Each interview took approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Participants chose the site for their interview based on where
they felt most comfortable: school cafeteria, rest area in a library, or coffee shop. Even though most of the participants had no problem speaking in English, all participants preferred to use Korean for the interviews. Mostly in the first interview I focused on their family background, life story in Korea, motivation and decision making process of ESA, and experience during ESA period. In the following second or if it was necessary in the third interview, I concentrated on their selection of university, academic performance in the university, friendship, challenges in the campus life, and community or church life. Code switching was allowed through the interview, so sometimes they used English to express or emphasize specific meanings. Every interview was conducted face-to-face, and I audiotaped the conversations with the participants' consent. I transcribed all of the collected interview data by September 2010 and all the identifiable information was replaced with a pseudonym.

In addition, in order to find out the participants’ EAS experiences and their perspectives on the campus life, I created four group discussion sessions and employed participant-observation method (Cohen et al., 2007). While I have met them for two semesters, fall 2009 and spring 2010, as I already mentioned, I started collecting data from January 2010 and organized group discussion session almost once a month, on the last Saturdays after the Bible study meeting, during the spring semester of 2010. So, through the sessions, they discussed topics related to their ESA experiences, campus life, and their community or church life. Through their discussion, I examined what value system they had and how they developed it. In the group discussion, I became a participant observer. Instead of providing value judgment, I tried to maintain an objective stance and encouraged students’ participation. However, if it was needed, I took part in the discussion to suggest guideline or to provide proper knowledge. For example, sometimes I contributed to the discussion making clarify the historical background of South
Korea and ESA social phenomenon.

**Data Analysis.**

Upon completion of data collection through interviews and group discussions, I transcribed the audio-recorded data for further analysis. In order to analyze the collected data, I employed analytic lenses of Narrative Inquiry. Chase’ (2005) statement of narrative was helpful in this process:

Unlike a chronology, which also reports events over time, a narrative communicates the narrator’s point of view, including why the narrative is worth telling in the first place. Thus, in addition to describing what happened, narratives also express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations. (p. 656)

So, as she points out, I tried to put myself into the narrators’ point of view to understand not only what happened in their lives but also how they felt, thought, and did in response to the interaction with their communities, local settings, organizational and social environments.

On top of that, as Stake (1995) addresses “to gain the needed confirmation, to increase credence in the interpretation, to demonstrate commonality of an assertion, the researcher can use any of several protocols” (p. 112), I utilized “triangulation” to secure the credibility of interpretation. Through this process, I tried to see if a participant’s opinion or response remained the consistent in other data and or interaction points (Stake, 1995, P. 112). Denzin (1978) broadly defines triangulation as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (p. 291). So, with this approach I triangulated the date.

For instance, I asked my participants to recollect and define their ESA experiences in the US or any other foreign countries to understand how they reflected and identified their ESA period. They might evaluate their experiences positively or negatively. Also, they were able to
retrieve valuable or meaningful lessons or regretted not having a better result during their ESA. Then, I reexamined their ideas, attitudes and beliefs when they participated in group discussion or in other interview to see if they were congruent. This multiple operations increased the validity of data analysis (Denzin, 1978).

**Researcher’s Roles**

**Researcher.**

When I studied in a Ph. D. program in Korea majoring in English Linguistics, I decided to come to the US in order to be expertly equipped as a researcher and scholar and to have experience with English speakers and their culture. In the 1990s studying Syntax and Chomsky’s transformational generative grammar was the general trend in the graduate program of English Linguistic field in Korea. However, considering so many Korean middle and high school students struggled with learning English, I was not fascinated by Chomsky’s complicated tree diagrams. So, I chose to study TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in the master’s program at SUNY (State University of New York) at Buffalo. And then, in 2005, I came to the MU to study in the Ph. D. program with the continuous interest in language, literacy, and culture.

Through all of these academic, transnational, and cross-cultural experiences, I was able to stand in a unique position in this study. As a researcher, I shared the roles of “insider” and “outsider” (Bishop, 2005, p. 111). The notion of insider and outsider is similar with the concept of “emic and etic” coined by the linguist, Kenneth Pike, in 1967. As Pike specifies, “While etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system, emic viewpoints results from studying behavior as from inside the system” (McCutcheon, 2003, p. 2), because I shared the same ethnic background with the participants and studied in the US for eight years as a graduate
student, I could have more sensitive and responsive manner than an outsider (Bishop, 2005).
Especially, since I was born and raised in Korea, I could understand and interpret well the socio-
cultural themes and nuance from the participants’ responses. On the other hand, through inviting
them into my research and initiating the individual interviews and group discussion, I tried to
adhere to the outsider’s position to perceive the participants’ responses objectively. Of course,
when I analyzed the data, I crossed over the insider’s and the outsider’s stance for the better
understanding and interpretation.

Mentor.

However, at the same time, because I led the small Bible study group since September
2009 at the Korean church, I was a teacher or mentor to those undergraduate students. Usually
they called me “teacher,” and as a teacher I tried to meet their various physical and spiritual
needs. Bible studying together was basic. Additionally, every Saturday, I had to provide them
with a ride from their dormitories to church and vice versa. Many times my wife prepared brunch
for us with Korean food such as Gimbap or Tteokbokki – rice cakes in hot sauce – because they
were always hungry. Once, on the weekend of Thanksgiving break, Changsu gave me a call at
night around eight o’clock to ask me for a night’s lodging:

“May I stay a night at your house? My dormitory will open tomorrow. Oh, by the way,
I’m with my friend. If you don’t mind can we come together? We’re in Chicago now. So,
please come to the bus station in three hours to pick us up.”

With this relationship, sometimes they considered me as a big support for them. In the
case of Frankie, when he struggled with low academic achievement and financial difficulties, he
nearly cried on my shoulders.

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9 In Korea “teacher” is a general addressing form for students to call a person who is in teaching position.
Confidant.

Related with the role of mentor, another role of mine in this study was to serve as an active listener or trusted confidant. I felt many times during the interviews that the interview process allowed the participants to reflect their past during ESA period and freshman days and encouraged them to confide themselves bringing up their happy and even painful memories through their own voices. If we did not have close relationship, I could not expect the deep communication with them. In a sense, for some students, exploring their inner world through in-depth interviews was the healing process of their wounded emotion. It is through these moments where I felt that my position as an “insider” proved meaningful not only in terms of mere “data” collection, but more significantly as a facilitator to be a positive source of solace and perhaps change in these young peoples’ lives. The privilege of knowing these students also became a transformative experience for me, as I gained so much through listening to their stories. In the same vein, the next two chapters offer the ways in which the Korean ESAs in my study have straddled multiple worlds and identities to carve out spaces of solace and meaning.
Chapter Four

Exodus out of Korea: Play in the Big League

While those five research participants grew up in the different family backgrounds with different social economic status (SES), they had a common driving force behind their decision for ESA. It was the notion of “playing in the big league” inculcated by their parents. “Playing in the big league” implies the Korean parents’ perspective on Korean society and their zeal for providing their children with the legitimate membership of cosmopolitan. Based on this background, in this chapter, I introduce each participant’s family background and some typical patterns I found from the participants’ retrospective reflection on the process of decision making for ESA and their ESA experiences during pre-college period.

Anna: A Dream Chaser

Family Background.

"I thought living or studying in the foreign countries was just another person’s story of a world which had nothing to do with me." Anna began her flashback to her middle school days in South Korea.

One afternoon, when Anna was in her 3rd year of a middle school, her parents came to pick her up earlier than expected. In the car they told Anna that they were heading somewhere to take an aptitude test. About 100 students close in age with her were there already. The test was a kind of English reading test. On the way back home, Anna's father explained that it was a selective examination for an exchange student program and if Anna passed it, she would go to a US school for a year. Anna's father heard that his friend's son went to a US middle school through the exchange student program for a year and it was very good for him. So, he decided to have Anna try it. Even though Anna thought she did not do a good job on the exam, she prayed
eagerly for an opportunity. In two weeks, finally, she received a letter of acceptance. Anna believed that it was a chance God gave her.

Anna said, "At that time I served as the president of her class. My academic performance was fairly good, and I was quite content with my school life. However, a challenging spirit for studying abroad motivated me."

Anna said she had a phenomenal photographic memory. Even she remembered clearly some events of her three-year-old days. "It was the first time I prayed to God. My maternal grandmother, who lived with us, asked me to pray with her for my mother to have a boy. She was about to give birth at a hospital. Since I loved Mickey Mouse so much, I prayed to have a brother who looked like Mickey," said Anna.

Finally, Anna's mother had a son, but it took a while for Anna to understand why her maternal grandmother was so desperate to see a grandson. It was because of Anna's paternal grandmother. When Anna was born, Anna's mother was ill-treated by her mother-in-law because Anna was not a boy. To Anna who was still young, it sounded like an esoteric riddle that Anna's paternal grandmother hated Anna's mother because of Anna.

Anna's mother had Anna when she was twenty years old. There was an age difference of ten years between Anna's mother and father. "Wasn't it hard for her to be a mother at such a young age? Maybe. This is why she brought me up strictly. I blamed her a lot as an adolescent. But, now, I believe she did her best at that time." Anna talked like a grown-up who seemed to know everything.

It was Anna's father who influenced Anna a lot. He used to be a leader at a YMCA. Whenever he made a trip for volunteer activities at rural communities with other college students,
he would take Anna with him. "At that time I didn't have any idea but later I was able to learn that there were many people taking good care of others," said Anna.

Both of Anna's parents were working. Anna's mother ran a small book store in a subway station. Anna's father, who majored in design during college, also operated a small printing business.

Actually, Anna's father had met Anna's mother at the financial company. Anna's mother joined the company right after graduating from high school. Due to her own family's financial status, Anna’s mother could not go to college. After she married, she quit her job, and Anna's father resigned from the financial company and opened a small printing house.

It was at that time when Anna's mother started running a small book store to provide extra support for the home until father's business became stable. Anna said, "It could not be easy for both of them, and there seemed to be some friction between father and mother. I saw them fight sometimes." She continued:

When I was young usually my maternal grandmother took care of my brother and me. When I asked my mom to come to school, she promised to come. However, my maternal grandmother always came instead of her. She never came. I felt so bad. I think my mom felt sorry as a mother. So, after she quit her job, she would try hard to provide me with a good care and support.

According to Anna, she was a very shy and bashful girl when she was young. She seldom approached or talked to any other unfamiliar students. When she was a second grader, she told her mother there would be a class election. Anna's mother enthusiastically recommended her to run for it. She even called Anna's girl cousin who had served as class president to ask how to prepare for the election. "After talking with my cousin, I gained confidence thinking 'Why not
me?" So I decided to run for it and became class president. Since that time, I have never failed to be a class president until I left for the US," said Anna. The role of class president changed Anna's passive and reserved character into a positive and enthusiastic one.

Although Anna had studied English with home-study materials since third grade for extra support, she went to an English institute for the first time when she was in fifth grade. Self-studying English with the home-study materials was not that expensive but quite boring. In addition, there was a decisive factor to stimulate Anna to ask her mother to send her to a real English institute to learn English. During her fifth grade summer vacation, she took part in an English camp. There were some American children. While Anna kept silent because of her limited English fluency, she witnessed some other Korean students talking to the American students freely. Anna felt like she was being overlooked. After the camp, Anna insisted on learning English from native speakers at an English institute.

Anna recalled her parents’ different approaches to her study habit, "While my father thought I would do well by myself, my mother always left it up to me to study. Regarding the future, she didn't say much but a few times she told me 'Because you have pretty voice and your speech is articulate, you can be a newscaster.' It implied that Anna’s mother did not have high expectations for Anna.

In 2005, Anna left South Korea for the US. Initially, she planned to stay in the US for a year as an exchange student. However, since she loved living in the US so much, she asked her parents to allow her to stay longer. Anna gave them a plausible excuse saying that if she goes back to South Korea, she would have to study the same grade again. Finally, Anna got her parents’ approval. In fact, it was her father who promised to provide her with full support. Considering the SES of Anna’s family, it was not an easy decision for her parents. However,
they decided to support even if they had to wear themselves out, hoping of providing their daughter better opportunity to overcome the gender discrimination which was rampant in Korean society.

**Future Goal.**

When I asked Anna about her future goal and how she made the decision, she started talking about her childhood stories about who her heart went out to. When she was in the third grade, there was a violent boy whose name was Kunyoung. While trying to take care of him, she hung out with him frequently. One day, Anna invited him and a couple of other friends to her house to play. When Kunyoung lost two or three card games in a row, he suddenly rushed to the kitchen, grabbed a kitchen knife, and held it to his own throat threatening others saying he would kill himself. Fortunately, Anna's mother came out of her room at that moment and stopped him calming his anger.

During the later years of Anna’s elementary school days, she met some other children who struggled with physical or mental problems. Injun who she met in fourth grade struggled with severe depression. In fifth grade, Minsu, whose father was an alcoholic and whose mother was a hawker, also had an anger problem. When he got upset, he would scrawl all over his jeans with a marker or threaten others with his cutter. In addition, he would go out during classes without any special reason. It was Anna's role to find and bring him back to the class because she was class president. Anna said, "I did not do it against my will. Although I was young, I used to feel some compassion or pity on those who were weak or left out."

In Anna’s sixth grade year, there were a couple of students who were treated as outcasts in her class. Anna tried to encourage them befriend other students. At the time, Hwangyun was a transfer student. He was very shy and feeble. Any other boy students disliked him very much and
started making fun of him. Even though Anna was close to other boy students in the class, she always sided with Hwangyun. Anna stressed saying that, "At that time I had no fear. In Korean school, the fear kids had was that if they hang out with outcast, they will be treated as outcasts, too. However, if somebody became an outcast, I tried to sit next to him to chat and socialize with him.

Maybe, the voluntary community service experiences she would do following her father helped Anna to mature early. This might be why she could not get close to other classmates. She always tried to stand right middle of both sides: the group with power and individuals without power trying to be a peacemaker between them. She was not carried along by the clique culture.

Anna explained how she decided clearly her future career:

It was when I was a senior in high school in the US that I was able to decide my future goal. My school was a mission school and I was supposed to go on a mission trip to Nigeria. To prepare for the trip, I had prayed every day at six in the morning and had prayer meeting with other friends every Monday for six months. I wanted to empty myself and purify my soul and spirit. I thought I had to be emptied so that God might dwell inside of me and other people could see Him. If I was filled by myself like a brick wall, others could not see Him because of me. Then, the mission trip would be meaningless. After coming back from the trip, I thought carefully and I could find links connected to each other. I realized that I liked to help others who were mentally ill or underprivileged. As a result I applied for the Psychology Department at this university. I'm very interested in child counseling. I want to be a psychology counselor. I cannot think anything but that.
Anna who was born as a "daughter" in a family experienced in person the inferior social status and identity of being a female in South Korea by a family that anxiously desired to have a "son." Her own experience of socially unprivileged person sublimated into her active attitude to feel pity on the social minorities. Therefore, when she was in the elementary or middle schools, she would pay attentions to the children who had a mental disability or were treated as outcasts to be on their side. This tendency for Anna continued after she came to the US. I will talk about it in the later chapter.

**ESA and Homestay.**

Regarding the question of the benefit of her ESA experience, Anna answered saying that it fostered her spirit of independence. During her adolescent period, when she was supposed to form the self-identity, she learned how not to depend on my parents. During the ESA period, she had to take care of many things by herself because of the long separation from her parents. Meanwhile, it changed her family to love each other more. Before coming to the US, she never said 'I love you mom.' But, while she lived here, she said those words whenever she made a call. Her mother also replied saying 'I love you honey.' It was a huge change for her family.

On the other hand, Anna recalled that living with different families had challenges. Anna said:

Sometimes it felt like I was walking on eggshells when living with host families. Because I was the one who had entered their family, [I figured] that it was me who had to change. But, I felt like I was the one who was out of place there. In any case, it was me who kept changing -- no it was me who intentionally made an effort to follow their lifestyle. It was not all bad, but I could not but think what an idiot I was [i.e., to be conforming in this way].
Sometimes I heard from other Korean ESA students in this local area that some ESA students living in their guardian's houses requested boldly the proper service from their guardians because they paid the monthly fee. So, I asked Anna if she ever tried that.

Anna said, "I never did that. The second homestay house of my tenth grade was the worst case. I met spiteful people like witches there." While Anna shared her painful story, I could read a lot of mixed emotions from her perplexed look.

Anna said the second homestay period was her hardest time in her life. During those days, Anna remembered that she wished the school classes never ended. She just wanted to stay at school instead of going to her guardians' home.

When Anna moved to their home, they just opened a new restaurant. So, the guardians made Anna do various things after school: mostly moving tables and chairs and cleaning. As Anna's character was just doing her best if she once made her mind to do something, she just did what she was asked without any complaints. It was hard but Anna could not tell her parents about it. Since they were very far away, they were not able to be with her even though she wanted. Also, because Anna knew Anna's parents could not speak English, she could not ask them to talk to the guardians on the phone. So, she just decided to deal with it by herself.

Furthermore, she thought that because she was a foreign student, it would be better for her not to tell anything to teachers at school. She was not sure if any teachers would stand by her. Instead, Anna believed the connection between school and the guardians was stronger than that between school and Anna because actually the school introduced the host family to Anna and all three children of the guardians attended the school. Anna was afraid that the school would not listen to Anna's opinion. Therefore, Anna decided to do her best no matter how hard it was to
live in their home expecting that their attitude would be changed by her commitment. However, it was getting worse.

Anna could not get any necessary support from her guardians for her school life. The monthly homestay fee at that time was $700. It was just for room and board but not for ride service. Since the host family's children attended the same school, Anna could get a ride for school. But any other requests for a ride were declined. So, she could not go to her friend’s house or go bowling after school. One day, Anna was so anxious to play softball that she joined the school softball club and purchased all the required equipment. However, she had to quit because she could not get the ride to go to the practice site. None of the after school activities were available to Anna.

I was dying to know the reason why Anna did not cancel the contract with the guardians and move to another house.

Anna said:

I thought that if I failed to get along amicably with those people, it would be the same wherever I go later. So, I tried to make greater efforts to make the relationship better between the guardians. Then, just one month before completing a year an incident happened and finally Anna moved to different homestay. It was a Bible class. When the teacher read the Bible, a verse from the story of Stephen's martyrdom touched Anna's heart. "Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Acts 7:60)

She continued:

I thought it was a perfect forgiveness. Compared to Stephen’s case, that he forgave the people in such a horrible situation, mine seemed too small and trivial. If I could not
forgive the guardians, how could I be a child of God? However, it was really hard to forgive them. They continuously made me hate them. It was just too hard. So, after the class I went to the teacher to ask a question. I did not want to talk about my guardians but was really anxious to know how I could forgive others like Stephen. I told her I had people who I wanted to forgive but I couldn't. What should I do? Then, I just burst into tears.

Actually, when Anna said this, her eyes became red and were filled with tears. "My teacher kept asking about what happened to me. So, I had no choice but to pour out my heart," said Anna.

After the conversation, the teacher suggested Anna move to her house on that day, and Anna agreed. During that evening when Anna was packing up her things, the landlord felt sorry saying that because of running the restaurant they did not provide good care for her; the landlady blamed Anna for everything.

After that time, Anna met good people to live together. The third homestay was her friends' house. The fourth was her Bible class teacher's and from that time Anna was able to drive her own car, so there were no major problems in her living.

Recalling those hardships, Anna said that it was God who sustained her to get through the period. The more she felt sad, unfair, and lonely, the more she depended on God by praying. She said that during that time she was on fire for God.

Changsu: “Play in the Big League”

Family Background.

"Where do you want to go? America or Korea?" While I was studying in Boston, my parents asked me. I chose the US because it looked easier to study there." Changsu described
how he decided to study in the US for his college days. Changsu's father is a head of department at a major enterprise in South Korea. When he was earning his M.B.A. from Boston University, all the family stayed in Boston for a year: Changsu was in his eighth grade and his younger brother was in fourth grade. After that, Changsu's family went to China, and Changsu attended international schools in Shanghai and Beijing before come to MU.

Changsu's family moved a lot because of father's job. When Changsu was in first grade, his family lived in Shanghai, China for a year. Although he lived in South Korean from second grade to seventh grade, his family moved from one city to another, so he had to enter new schools and make new friends.

On one hand, the SES of Changsu's family and the nature of his father's job, working overseas, affected his decision of studying abroad. However, on the other hand, Changsu's parents' life experiences and academic backgrounds were the main influence on Changsu's decision. Both of his parents graduated the prestigious university in South Korea. Changsu said their usual motto to Changsu was 'play in the big league.'

Changsu's father was born in a small local town in South Korea. From his elementary school days he left home by himself for a big city near his hometown to study there wishing to succeed. He stayed there until his middle school days, and he moved to different city to enter a good and very competitive high school after passing the entrance examination and ended up going to the best university in South Korea.

Changsu's mother was also born in a local city. Although she used to be doing well at school, her father told her to go to the local university. However, it was Changsu's mother who insisted to go to the best university in South Korea and finally she achieved her goal.
Both of Changsu’s parents met at the same department of Chinese Language and Literature at the same university. Changsu said:

My parents were very picky on me to choose my major because it was hard for them to get jobs after majoring in Chinese. Nowadays Chinese is popular, but at that time it was not. My father just got a job at a company, and my mom started English tutoring for a while. So, they wanted me to become a medical doctor because it is a specialized job. At least, they said I have to have professional skills. So, I selected computer science for my major.

In that sense, Changsu’s family’s case chimed in well with the “Reproduction Theory” of Bourdieu (1991). As members of the intellectual elite, Changsu’s parents knew very well the social privilege of getting the degree from the most prestigious university in Korea. Therefore, Changsu’s father wanted his son to be equipped well with the cultural capital to get in the elite group either in Korea or America. Changsu also fixed his father’s words in his mind.

Elementary through High School Days.

Changsu described his school experiences from elementary to high school days. Changsu went to Shanghai, China when he was a first grader following his father who worked at marketing department of his company. After that Changsu lived from his second grade to the beginning of his eighth grade in South Korea. Only during his second grade, he attended school at Seoul and moved to a small local city from his third grade because his father started to working down in the provinces. Changsu said his parents left him free from the burden of studying during his elementary school days. He meant there was not serious pressure of studying from the parents. However, still there used to be some additional input for his math and English. Instead of going to any private institute, he received some tutoring for math. He learned English
reading and grammar from his mother. From his fourth grade, his mother arranged an English native speaker to come to his home twice a week to teach English conversation to Changsu. Thanks to it, his English fluency was improved and he did not feel intimidated on English speaking when he went to the US and China.

From his middle school days, Changsu started to go to the private institute to expand the study area including Korean language arts and science. He still learned English conversation from the native speaker even that time. During his middle school days, Changsu’s parents had different opinion from Changsu’s regarding his academic achievement.

No, my parents didn't think like that. They always told me, 'You have a potential to be a top student.' I agreed but they considered the level of the school was low because it was located in a local province. They thought by academic performance was not good enough compared to my ability. Yeah, I know. I didn't do my best because I studied under compulsion at that time. It should be pitiful for my parents to see me who was smart but did do his best. But my parents always guided to decide my career. When I was an elementary student, they would tell me 'Be a medical doctor like Schweitzer. So, I just thought I would be a doctor in the future.

Also, in the local level Changsu had a clear idea between small and big league. Because it was not Seoul or the major, big city in South Korea, getting high rank in the middle school was not successful enough. Although Changsu did not do his best in academic area, he was already aware of the meaning of playing in the big league influenced by his parents.

When Changsu just started the second year in the middle school, his whole family came to Boston, Massachusetts, because Changsu's father was supposed to attend the MBA program at Boston University for a year. In Boston, Changsu entered a middle school as an eighth grader. It
was the turning point of Changsu's life. In South Korea, when he entered the middle school, he used go to the private institute right after school until late night. However, in Boston, the public school finished around two o'clock in the afternoon, and the amount of homework was always really small almost every day. So, Changsu could enjoy various outdoor activities during his free time after school. It was the moment for him to realize that there is a different world.

At the end of the period in Boston, Changsu had to make a decision where he wanted to go to college. At least, he had to decide the country, in which the college was located, between South Korea and America. If he wanted to go to the college in South Korea, he had to go to Korean high school to prepare the Korean college entrance examination. However, because he chose American college to go to, his father arranged to work in China to send Changsu to an international high school in China. Changsu's parents believed the private international high school in China was a good place for Changsu to prepare to go to the US college. Changsu said, "The quality of the international school was really excellent. There were some students who entered Harvard or Yale University. There were so many smart students in there."

**High School Days in China.**

In China, Changsu lived in Shanghai for a year and in Beijing for three years. At first, while Changsu's father was transferred to a company in Nanjing, he settled his family in Shanghai because there was a good international high school there. It took about two hours from Shanghai to Nanjing by car, so Changsu's father live separately and came over to his family almost every weekend. Changsu added some more his family separation experience.

In China, it was so hard for Changsu's father to live separately again that he requested the corporate headquarters to relocate him to Beijing after a year. Finally, when Changsu was in
tenth grade, all of his family moved to Beijing. At there Changsu attended the second international high school until he graduated.

Changsu recalled the time of family separation during his ninth grade.

I liked that time because my father scolded me a lot with nagging whenever he came over to us. I don't know why but I didn't study hard at the Chinese international school. Maybe it was the aftermath of living in the US.

I asked about his academic performance during his high school days in Shanghai and Beijing. He remembered he would be fifth in his school in Shanghai and seventh in Beijing school. I wondered if those schools release the students' ranks. He replied:

When I was in Shanghai, the school provided a few students with the high honor roles if their GPAs were over some point. I was the one of them. In Beijing, I peeked it accidentally at school when I prepared the application packet for the college. I was the seventh out of 130.

The mismatch between Changsu and his parents regarding Changsu’s academic achievement was continued in China. Although Changsu admitted that he did not do his best, he thought it was not bad. On the other hand, his parents considered it not good enough. In some level, Changsu tried to resist studying very hard as many Korean students do in Korea since he had tasted the American education system. In other words, he preferred to study moderately while he involved in any other extra activities including hanging out with friends.

I asked about his SAT result. He sighed deeply with a hollow smile.

I was over confident on the first result of my SAT. At the end of 11th grade I took the test and received 2120. I thought, 'Yes, it's enough.' and never took it again. At that time my goal was to go to the Carnegie Mellon University. Then, according to the past record of
my high school, the score should be good enough for the University. So, I believed it would not be necessary to take the test again. However, it was said that the competition for university entrance in the US has never been more intense, so I failed.

Changsu told me that he learned a principle through the failure. It was “If you study, you have to be the top. It is useless to do moderately.” It sounded like finally Changsu embraced his parents’ word of advice.

Regarding the extra activities during Changsu's high school days, Changsu said he was involved in the debating, the theater, and the sports club. It looked like he had many opportunities to make a lot of friends and hang out with them.” However, Changsu's answer was unexpected. He said, "Yet, I just kept myself very much to myself maybe because I was going through puberty. I remember I always felt out of place with any other students."

Initially I felt something was mismatched because I thought his socializing skills were well developed because he had moved a lot, and it could mean that he had great adaptability to his environment and new people. However, through the conversation, he revealed his hidden inclination. According to him the frequent moving has seemed to create good adaptability in him to ONLY the physical environments. The ability to make friends has been worsened more and more.

Maybe, it was because whenever I went to the new place, I would begin to get ready to leave. It means that usually I would refuse to open my heart to others widely. Avoiding stepping deeply into the relationship with others became my habit.

Changsu explained that his acquired habit through the frequent moving was like two sides of a coin. He said, "While I have grown up early, I am socially inept."
When we had the weekend Bible Study discussion, sometimes Changsu mentioned that he would lead a wild life during his high school days. So, I asked what the wild life was. According to Changsu's explanation, it was Changsu who went to church first in his family when he was young. But, in China, while Changsu's mother became a woman with strong religious beliefs attending church diligently, he stayed away from the church. Changsu said, "It was the time when I experienced an act of deviance. But that doesn't mean I was addicted to any alcohol or drugs. I didn't study to meet the expectation of my parents. I just lived without any purpose in my life."

The meaning of 'deviation' or 'wild life' was a little bit different with my assumption. For Changsu, living up to his parents' expectations was the status of being on the right track. There should be some strong tension between Changsu and his parents to define what the right track is. Changsu said during his ninth or tenth grade, he just did the school homework for a couple of hours, and he did not put any more energy for any extra study. However, because his grades were always in the upper ranks of his school, his parents left him alone even though they had an unsatisfied feeling with Changsu's usual studying habit. However, Changsu had a feeling of lacking on different area at that time.

I was not able to have fun with cool friends in my school. If a kid did really well in school, other students left him out of their group. Besides, I was not well dressed. I was not fit in well with the other cool groups. I just kept to myself most of the time playing video games or reading some comic books.

When Changsu said this, a deep feeling of something lacking rested on his face. His deviance was something that he resisted against his parents expectation on his academic area. At
the same time, in a way, he found himself as a maladjusted child among other peer group. Such as Mike’s story, he was afraid of being branded at school as a nerd who only studied all the time. Also, it was because his habit not to open his mind to others that he had acquired from the frequent moving.

**Segregation.**

I asked if Changsu experienced any segregation issues in China.

He said, "Well, uh" a little bit he hesitated and continued. "Yeah, I think so." There were some issues even though they were not vivid problems and nobody talked about it in public. Changsu described the demographic information of the Beijing international high school. According to his schools official guide book, there were about 40% of Americans consisting of 10% of European Americans and 30% of Chinese Americans. Also, there were Koreans with 15%. The rest of them were from Singapore, Indonesia, India, and even European countries. There were no Chinese students. Changsu said, "Every time I thought the old adage 'birds of a feather flock together' is true in the school. Whites, Chinese Americans, and Koreans just stuck together by themselves all the time. It couldn't be helped."

Even Changsu mentioned that Korean should hold together to live in China. So, I asked what it meant and the reason of it. Changsu said, "I could feel that Chinese people considered themselves superior to Koreans even though financially we were better. They quite discriminated Koreans. It was the overall social environment of China." So, it was Changsu's idea that Koreans should live together in the same area and help each other.

**Dongha: Que Sera Sera**

Dongha was rather tall and wore black horn-rimmed glasses. Whenever I saw him, he had messy hair and sleepy eyes. Even though I go to the same Korean church with him, I knew little
about him until I got to know him in the Bible study group. He always replied briefly through the interview as he did in the Bible study group.

**Decision for ESA.**

Dongha came to the US in 2006 when he finished his freshmen year spring semester of high school in South Korea. He started sophomore year at a local Christian private high school. After graduating, he entered MU in Physics.

It was Dongha's mother who decided Dongha's ESA. His father hesitated to send Dongha to the US. Dongha said, "Maybe my father believed that there were still possibilities for me to go to a good college in South Korea."

Dongha completed his first high school semester in South Korea. While he was able to get a good score on the first mock test of the college entrance exam, his school record was not good enough to go to a prestigious university in Korea. Dongha explained, "I had to be in top 5% to go to the top three universities in Korea." I asked why it was so important. Dongha answered:

It was because both of my parents graduated Seoul National University (SNU). They wanted me to go to at least the top three universities in Korea. Otherwise, they, especially my mom, told me to go a good university in the US because usually the good US universities are better than SNU. SNU doesn't even rank in the top 100 universities in the world. Now I came to MU which is in the top 50, I believe I'm studying at a better university than the one my parents attended.

While it was somewhat a familiar story with that of Changsu, Dongha’s case was more straightforward and focused on only goal: entering US university surpassing Korean prestigious universities.
The name value of the university Dongha's parents graduated was a huge burden to Dongha from his childhood days. Dongha grew up hearing many people saying that "You must be doing well in school because your parents are such smart people" or "You should at least go to Harvard University later." Dongha was very irritated and mad by those people's remarks. He started to feel the burden when he was a kindergartner.

While Dongha's father majored in electronic engineering, and was working as head of an engineering department of a leading electronic company in Korea, Dongha's mother's was teaching chemistry at a high school.

My mom was a woman of great self-respect, but she was not able to study what she wanted. She wanted to major in Pharmacy, but she ended up with studying Chemistry at the university. So, my mom wanted me to be a Pharmacist because she still has her unfulfilled desire. But, I chose to study Physics because it looked easier.

Dongha's mother would push him to study hard to be a Pharmacist in the future. According to Dongha, it was her desire to get vicarious satisfaction. Of course, the job of Pharmacist is considered as a secure one in Korea.

Another interesting story Dongha shared was that Dongha and Bada have known each other. Bada, who entered the MU majoring in Mechanical Engineering, was the son of Dongha's mother's friend. There is a famous abbreviation of Korea, 'Umchinah': Umma Chingu Adul (My mother's friends' son). Korean mothers often say, "There is my friend's son who is doing well in school and..." The term is often used satirically because of the rejection of being compared with unspecified individuals. However, in this case, Bada was a real 'Umchinah' to Dongha. Bada's mother was one of Dongha's mother's classmates in high school. Dongha and Bada also have

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10 Bada was also a freshman in the MU as a same cohort with Dongha. They attended the same Korean church during their freshman period.
known each other. Dongha usually heard that "Bada ranked top class in his middle school" or "Bada will go to MIT." It was a torture to Dongha because Dongha was not doing very well in school. The real interesting thing was that they met at MIT and took a picture together. Bada took a trip to the US with his family in 2000 and Dongha lived in Ottawa, Canada for a year and a half with his family. They were in fourth grade at the time.

This social phenomenon that Korean parents – especially Korean mothers – compare their children with other children enviously shows well the culture of trying to keep parents’ face. It is true that there is high competition among students to enter good college in Korea. However, on the other side of the coin, there is a perpetual battle for supremacy among parents. Sometimes, it is for saving their faces and in other times for transmitting their cultural capital to their children.

The year of 2000 was the time when South Korea did try hard to get out of the financial crisis which had been started since 1997. Going through this period, the whole nation had suffered great hardships such as bankruptcy from many companies and mass layoffs. Before the financial crisis, the exchange rate was 800 Korean won to the US dollar. However, at the end of 1997, the exchange rate rose sharply to about 2000 won to the dollar. As a result, many Korean students who were studying abroad had to return to Korea because of the increased living expenses by two-and-a-half times. In this circumstance Dongha's family went to Canada to live for a year and a half. Dongha recalled that, "It seemed that my father was laid off from his company. But in Canada, a junior associate at his college introduced him to a temporary job. Luckily, when we came back to Korea, he was able to get a job at the same company."

According to Dongha, his first ESA in Canada was intended to improve his English. His father's lay off could be a possible factor for his decision to go to a different country. Dongha's
mother also took time off from the high school where she was teaching at. However, Dongha remembered it was not that exciting of an experience for him because it was snowy and had international people, especially refugees. Dongha's father rented an apartment in a refugee village because he was looking for an inexpensive apartment. Dongha could see many people from Sri Lanka, Kosovo, Chechen, South Africa, and Lebanon. Also, in Ottawa, English and French were both official languages so he had to learn French at school. Dongha always had the poorest grades in French. Before coming to Ottawa, Dongha said he enjoyed reading books, especially because he really loved to study science books. However, after coming to Canada he put away books because he hated to read English. From that time he just indulged in video games. "In my view, a child who has a sibling or an active personality tends to improve English rapidly. At that time I didn't do any club activities. Every day, I just played the Nintendo 64 right after school with Billy who was a boy next to my house." It was Dongha’s idea on SLA (second language acquisition) that he acquired from his field experience.

Although it was hard to say that Dongha's English competence was improved after living in Canada, Dongha's parents were quite satisfied with his increased English oral fluency. Dongha was not able to speak any English before. After returning to Korea, Dongha did not need to go to any private institute to study English. During his middle school days, Dongha’s English grades were always good without any real effort. However, Dongha was not doing well in school with any other subjects. So, he could not enter a foreign language high school even though Dongha's mother really wanted him to go there like Bada.

Therefore, Dongha's mother would tell Dongha that if he did not make good grades in the first semester of his high school, he'd better go to the US. There was another factor that influence Dongha's mother to have the idea of ESA. Dongha had two cousins who were not interested in
studying at all in Korea but after going to the US they were changed and ended up at the MU as scholarship students. Dongha's mother dreamed the same thing would happen to his son. In addition, there were many students in Dongha’s Korean high school class who left for the US already or were supposed to leave soon. A total 10 students went abroad out of 35.

Ultimately, the goal of Dongha's mother for Dongha was admittance into MU. So, I asked what his goal was. Dongha said, "I don't know. My parents didn't say anything clearly. Oh, my mother wants me to be a professor. I don't have any idea. I hope to get an average job after graduation in either Korea or America and then will be aging gradually."

**ESA Experience: Homestay.**

Dongha came to the US in 2006 and entered a Christian private high school as a tenth grader in the local area. He could have chosen to start from ninth grade. When he struggled with his academic work, he would regret it. However, after entering the MU, he thought he did make a good choice to save time and money.

Since both of Dongha's parents were working in Korea, Dongha came to the US alone to live in a boardinghouse. When Dongha was preparing for ESA, his aunt was living in this town with her two sons, and she provide Dongha's mother with information of the boardinghouse. Dongha stayed at the house just for three months. The owner, who was a Korean, purchased or rented two big houses and took in lodgers of Korean ESA middle or high school students. One house was for boys and the other was for girls.

I asked how the living out there was and why you decided to move out.

Well, at that time there were too many kids. The total was about 16. I shared a room with two other kids. Sometimes I felt uncomfortable. Although it was good to hang out together, playing basketball, soccer, or video games, but it was not good for studying. In
addition, the monthly fee was too expensive. While any other homestaying fee was $1500 per month, the owner asked $2000 including SAT tutoring preparation. He hired a couple of college students as assistants and let them teach SAT. But, it was not helpful at all. They just made us to memorize SAT vocabulary. It was hard because doing school assignments was already a big burden to me. So, I had no other choice but to look for a homestay.

Dongha counted that the inconvenience of living such as sharing his room with other roommates was the biggest hardship. In his house in Korea, everything was his: his own space, stuff, and parents' attention, even though sometimes he felt the last one was too excessive. So, Dongha was used to being alone. Moreover, compared to the high monthly fee, he felt the general service of the boardinghouse was not good enough.

However, after coming to a guardian's house, Dongha had to negotiate again with the different type of inconvenient environment. The guardians were the Korean church's members. When he moved in, there were already two (one male and another female) other students living in the house. Initially he had to share a room with another boy, but in the following year, the other boy graduated and left for the college. At that time, two other girl students came in. So, for two years Dongha had to live with those four other Korean ESA girl students and the guardian couple. It was the main reason for Dongha, who was an already introvert person, just to shut himself in his room.

The hardest thing was using the bathroom. It took so long time for them to use it. Too often I was irritated and mad. And many times I did not come out of my room in the house. I was a kind of an invisible man. Also, the couple was rich but especially the guardian lady was such a tightwad. Sometimes she tried to save money too excessively.
Similar menu was rotated frequently. Gosh! Through the days, I learned to cultivate myself taking a walk or being lost in meditation.

I also asked if he experienced any challenges during his high school period. He answered, "Well, there was nothing typical but the relation between me and Min was not smooth." Min was a roommate who was one year older and attended a different Catholic private high school. While usually Dongha preferred to stay alone in his room, Min wanted to socialize with others. Many times Min tried to gather the home-staying Korean students to hangout: eating out, going to the movies, or going to the Korean "Noraebang" (Karaoke). Those were not bad outside activities for Korean ESA high school students living in a small size town. Dongha did not want to go around in groups but he had no choice but joined them because Min was older than Dongha, and Min would be mad at Dongha when Dongha refused to go out together.

Dongha said, "It peaked when he was a senior. Seniors are very sensitive, aren't they? So, if I had not been docile, he would try to beat me up. He was a good guy, in a sense, to make everybody mingle together all the time."

Dongha shared his sense of missing on something during his high school days. Since there were usually five to six Korean ESA students living in the house, the guardians were only able to provide limited ride services to each individual student. Because of this, Dongha had to give up soccer at his school, something that he really wanted to do. So, after entering MU, the first thing he did was to join a soccer club.

I asked questions about his academic performance during his high school days. Dongha said, "From the Americans' perspective, it was alright, but from the Koreans' perspective, it was very bad." "Why was this?" I asked. "Well, a gpa of just 3.34 was poor." He answered with a light sigh. He continued, "It was a B or B+. English was the problem. According to my parents,
when I was young, I started to speak very late. Maybe it was the reason why I hated the language subjects even though I like math and science. I don't like reading, but I like the numbers. So, I chose physics as my major." I asked, "How were the math and science grades?" He said, "They were not bad even though I didn't study that much for them. However, I only studied hard on English, almost giving up the others, but I still got a B."

Rather, the low SAT score was the biggest stress to Dongha during his junior days. "Well, while every month I spent about $1,600 for the homestaying fee, my SAT score was still low and the day to apply for college was approaching. I was very anxious about the SAT. I should have gotten the score that was worth a thousand dollars. I wondered again why I came to the US instead of studying in Korea."

Dongha recalled his stressful days. Instead of analyzing his studying attitude, Dongha tried to interpret his situation through monetary values. Also, there was an underlying regret that if he studied in Korea, it would've resulted with better academic scores. However, even though he had reservations and regret about the money he paid (actually his parents paid), as well as his poor academic results, he did not consider quitting his ESA and going back to Korea because especially at his age.

"Of course I thought through it seriously but decided not to (go back to Korea). If I went back to Korea, I had to go a year lower in grade level. It meant I had to study with students who were one year younger than me. It's horrible. I remember there was a student returning to school after taking time off when I was in Korean high school. He was isolated from other kids and sometimes beaten up by others with no reason."

"How can it be possible? Why?" I asked with surprise.
"I don't know but there used to be a lot of bad feelings about returning students. So, if I didn't want to be a returning student, I had to drop out of high school and took the GED to get into college. However, I heard that college graduates with GEDs were not welcomed by companies because of their irregular background. So, I had no choice but to stay here."

**High School.**

Dongha shared stories that he witnessed in his high school. They were mostly troubles that Korean students created, but he added his own perspective and opinion. Dongha said, "Most all Korean students behaved well and studied hard. However, some did not. During the three years I was there, two Korean students were kicked out. Sung was not able to graduate middle school even though he stayed in the eighth grade for two years. Taeho and another student quit and went back Korea in the middle of their tenth grade. Some kids broke something in the school facility. Ji broke a trash can with his fist, and another broke a vending machine, and still another other broke a window." I asked, "Why did they do that? What were the reasons?" Dongha said, "They did it just for fun. When he boasted to other kids saying that he had a strong punch, he hit something, and it just crashed. Although it did not seem to be a serious problem, the school administrators treated the incidents very seriously. Some got even suspended from school. From what I know, there were some American kids who did more serious things like drug abuse, but it was not just disclosed."

He also mentioned discrimination issues. Dongha said, "I think there was some racial discrimination. For example, Korean kids were never elected as school president. There have been a total of two Koreans who ran for candidates. They were very good at school and popular among the students, but the whites didn't vote for them. They perceive Koreans as masters of cheating on the exams." I asked, "Do you agree with the idea?" "Yeah, and sometimes I cheated
"How did you do that?" I asked again in curiosity. Dongha said in a calm voice, "Some Korean kids talk to each other in Korean during the exams." "Did the teacher allow them to talk during the exams?" I asked feeling displeasure. Dongha said, "American kids also talk to each other. However, while they ask about 'How much time left?' or 'How much have you done?', Korean kids ask directly the answers of the questions." "Didn't teachers say anything about it?" "Yeah, they did. Initially they didn't know what was going on. But, later they caught on. Even a Korean kid was caught while he used a cheat sheet. By the way, you know what, I thought American students didn't cheat on their exams, but I've seen many of them doing the same thing at the university." Dongha said still calmly and slowly. His face looked like to protest that he was not the only sinner. He continued. "As a result, from that time on, Korean students were banned from speaking in Korean at school. Teachers would tell us that 'You're here to learn English so don't speak Korean at school.' Isn't that funny? But American kids said that they wanted to speak English even though they go to South Korea."

Dongha seemed to justify his resistance of school policy using the opposite example of American students' opinion on using the mother language. "Oh, there was one more new policy to regulate Korean students. Our school decided to accept Korean students who lived with at least one parent in the US. It meant that if a Korean student came to the US alone and lived in the guardian's house like me; he would not be accepted anymore."

Dongha raised his voice as if he decided to expose unfair treatment he received from his school. I already heard the school policy because one of my students who I tutored had prepared the entrance exam living at a guardian's house. However, on the morning of the exam day, he got phone call from the school and heard the changed policy. He was so disappointed that he had to move to different state to enter a boarding school. I asked Dongha if the policy was applied to
only Korean students or to any other ethnic group of students. Dongha's answer was interesting. "There were no other people but Americans and Koreans. So, the new policy aimed at only Korean kids, especially the ESA Korean students."

Eugene: “Juliard, Here I’m Coming”

Family Background.

"It was my birthday," Eugene looked back on the past. "After school, I was hanging out cheerfully with my friends at my home. Suddenly, at four o'clock in the afternoon, my mom threw them out and made me practice the violin. I was so sad. It was my 11th birthday and still sticks in my mind."

Eugene was a freshman at MU and had an undecided major. His father is the president of a construction company in South Korea, and his mother runs a private music institute in Wonju, Kangwondo in South Korea. Eugene said, "My dad is an absolute supporter of me. I mean he always encourages me to do what I want to do." In his voice, deep appreciation was embedded. His father had taught mathematics at a high school until he entered a college again to study architecture to succeed to his father's construction business. Until his own high school days, Eugene's father had usually been an honor student and met his parents' high expectation. Later, however, while he strayed aimlessly in his life, he lost his interesting in studying. So, he wanted to provide better opportunity to his children, Eugene and his elder brother, making them do whatever they want. "My dad, who felt something lacking in his school days, wanted to support not only my elder brother but also me to have and fulfill a big dream. Now, the first year in MU is almost completed and I could not choose my major yet. It made me feel uneasy. But, it was my dad who always talks to me, 'Take time and do not haste. Think carefully what you want to do,'" said Eugene proudly.
Decision for ESA.

Eugene said, "It was April 2003 when I heard from my mom 'Why don't you go to Toronto, Canada, where your uncle lives, to study?" The new academic year just started in March in South Korea and Eugene began making his new friends in the middle school. Eugene said, "It sounded like that they [Eugene’s parents and brother] decided to do that and just asked me to follow instead of asking my opinion on studying abroad." Without any complicated worry or hesitation, he said yes to his mom.

Eugene was an outsider to the family decision making process. Although Eugene assumed always his parents had a deep or serious conversation with his elder brother, they never talked to Eugene like that. So, at that time Eugene assumed that they might discuss a big decision before making it and his opinion would not make any difference.

Rather, at school, when Eugene found envious responses from many of his classmates on the news of his leaving for Canada to study, it was not bad for him to be proud of that.

Only now Eugene can guess several reasons and factors that influenced his parents to decide to send him to Canada with his brother.

"First of all, there were some relatives, especially my mother's side, in Canada and the US So, they believed my brother and I could get some help from them. Most importantly, my mom, who saw my potential in music, considered that going to the US was the only way for me to catch two hares: studying and violin," said Eugene.

Eugene and his brother stayed in Toronto at his uncle's house for a year and then moved to Fishkill, NY to live together with his maternal grandparents for two years. After that they stayed with an American family who were Eugene’s friends.
At that time if Eugene wanted to go to a good college in South Korea, he would have had to choose only one track to concentrate on: studying or practicing musical instruments. Also, since his family lived in *Wonju, Kangwondo*, if he wanted to get quality violin lessons in Seoul, Eugene would have had to drive two hours from his house to Seoul or stay at Seoul alone. On the other hand, Eugene's mother strongly believed that in the US he could be combining both studying and violin. So, going to the US seemed like a win-win game for him.

Playing the violin was very meaningful for Eugene to keep his high self-esteem. Eugene said, “I have huge pride on that. Sometimes it was hard to practice it every day and sometimes I really enjoyed it. When I see somebody else who studied better than I did, then I consoled myself saying that 'I'm good at playing the violin.' Now, I don't practice it anymore, but still I have that idea in my mind."

This notion functions importantly in the hidden competition with his elder brother. Eugene always thought his brother was better than him in many aspects: studying or earning parents' trust. The only thing keeping him from losing his self-esteem and identity was the pride of playing violin because Eugene believed that his mother, who majored in music, appreciated him with his musical talent.

**ESA: The Period of Standing Alone.**

When Eugene and his brother came to Toronto, Canada, they registered at private ESL institute to learn English and adjust to the different culture before they started the fall semester. "I liked the period. I could hang out with some Korean friends there and I was doing just fine with other Canadian or international students" said Eugene. I asked how he studied English in South Korea. He said, "My parents pushed my brother to study hard, but they didn't push me. However, my mom made me practice on the violin every day. Meanwhile, she sent me to a
private English institute to learn English speaking. That’s where I found out that my English was better than my peers’. I asked, "What challenges did you face while living in Canada?" Eugene said, "During the first year, my mom stayed with us at our uncle's house. So, living in Canada was not a big deal to me."

Eugene enjoyed living in Canada because of the small amount of studying load. Even though it took time for him to adjust to the unfamiliar environment, Eugene was happy every day in Canada due to the less pressure from her mother. However, it was Eugene’s father in Korea who suffered from the separation of family. Because Eugene’s mother accompanied her children to take care of them, Eugene’s father had to stay in Korea alone to support his family financially. They became a so called “Wild geese family.”

*Wild geese family* is a unique social phenomenon that can be found among people in South Korea. When parents send their child(ren) to a foreign country for academic purposes, mothers often accompany their children to take care of them. Another common case involves one parent’s using an academic or business trip to the US as an occasion to bring the rest of the family over. Generally, such parents (usually fathers) come as visiting scholars to spend their sabbatical year abroad. After the year, although one parent returns to South Korea, the other stays longer to take care of their children.

*Fishkill, NY.*

"It was very hard during the first two years. Maybe it was the toughest season in my whole life. My mom returned to Korea: my brother didn't pay attention to me due to his own study load: and, at that time, I reached puberty," remarked Eugene unexpectedly.

In June, 2004, after a year of staying in Toronto, Canada, Eugene, his brother, and his mother returned to South Korea to spend their summer vacation with their father. However, at
the end of the summer, only Eugene and his brother boarded the plane to go to the US during the family’s separation, Eugene's father had struggled a lot, so Eugene's mother decided to stay with him. Instead of going herself, she arranged for her parents, who had lived in Maryland, to move down to Fishkill, NY to live with their grandsons.

Although his parents had hoped that their time in Canada would prepare their children for living in the US, Eugene’s life in Fishkill was more difficult than expected. The brothers attended a small, private Christian middle school and high school. It took about 40 minutes to travel there from Fishkill. Eugene could not find any Asian students there. There were only 200 students in the whole school, and most of them were white. "I just briefly hung out with my old Korean friends during the summer, but it made me suffer from homesickness seriously. From that time I started doing Cyworld (a website similar to Facebook) every day to comfort my loneliness."

Eugene’s loneliness altered his personality and his behavior at school. He said, "I used to be quite a prankster when I was in South Korea and Toronto. But, in Fishkill, more and more I became passive. Even though I knew how to speak English, I went quiet at school with fear of speaking." Eugene's classmates initially tried to get close to him, but, because of Eugene’s unresponsive attitude, they gave up. "In my memory, I really really hated to speak English in the presence of my brother. I don't know why, but I was afraid that my brother would say something negatively to me, and I was timid in front of him. So, I never said any English in the presence of him." He said. Eugene had a strong sense of rivalry with his brother, and he wanted to surpass his brother in everything. However, his competitive spirit made him silent at school in order to avoid making any mistakes in speaking English.
However, Eugene blames himself for all of his hardship. He said, "Well, by all accounts, it was my fault because there were no bad guys at all in the school. It was a predominantly white Christian school and they seemed not normal Christians. I knew that with my homestay experience. Their parents were devout Christians and the kids were very gentle. However, anyway, it was my fault not to speak any English."

Initially, when Eugene was in eighth grade, some curious classmates would question him about his background. However, since they could not get any response from Eugene, they gradually stopped talking to him. Therefore, Eugene remained completely alone at school, eating by himself in school cafeteria, walking by himself to classes, and sitting by himself in the classroom.

Eugene said, "After 8th grade during the summer vacation I went to South Korea to see my parents. But, because of the visit, my homesickness was worsened and worsened. My classmates did not show any interest in me anymore. From that time I started to feel extremely lonely. It was the loneliest season in my life."

At that time the only thing that sustained Eugene was a Korean church he attended. The Korean church consisted of Korean immigrant families, international marriage families, and Korean families who came to the IBM Company near there for some training purposes.

"Even though some of the kids were quite young, I could hang around with them. Also, some ‘Twinkies’, children of immigrant families, were interested in Korean TV dramas. So, I was able to talk with them every Sunday. It was my only emotional shelter. I just held out week by week waiting for Sunday," said Eugene.
**Homestay.**

Meanwhile, at the end of 10th grade Eugene faced a huge change in his life. His maternal grandparents decided to go to California where many Koreans lived due to their loneliness. A long time ago they obtained the right of permanent residence and moved back and forth between the US and South Korea. Along the way, they came to Fishkill, NY to take care of their grandchildren. However, it was hard for them to live without any Korean friends similar in age to talk to.

Therefore, Eugene and his brother had to switch homestays to their American friend's house. It was from those days when Eugene's school life seemed to have turned completely about. When I interviewed this part, Eugene led the conversation actively with being immersed completely in his story. His eyes were shining with excitement behind his black horn-rimmed glasses. A selected excerpt of the conversation with him is provided below.

[Excerpt 1]

(E: Eugene, I: Interviewer)

E: Yes, yes, I have something very important to tell right now. I went to South Korea after my 7th grade, right?

I: Right, after 7th grade...

E: I went to South Korea for the vacation, didn't I?

I: Yes, you did.

E: Yes, then my homesickness was worsened after seeing my friends. But, I went there one more time after 8th grade.

I: Right.

E: Yes, I mean that explains my more worsened condition. In South Korea I saw
what my friends saw and hung around the same way as my friends did. It made me miss South Korea so bad. However, I didn't go to South Korea until 11th grade.

Eugene's excitement seemed to come from the feeling that he found out his own secret: why he struggled a lot and what the turning point was. ESA students coming back to South Korea during summer vacation is a very normal occurrence, especially in the case of students who live at guardians' houses. However, since Eugene's 9th grade, Eugene's parents told Eugene brothers to stay in the US.

[Excerpt 2]
E: Anyhow I began to have some confidence in using English from 10th grade. I felt it.
I: What caused you to feel that?
E: I don't know. I just felt that I understood teachers' instruction more clearly from that time. I could understand my classmates' English. Filled with confidence, I was able to speak English in front of my brother.
I: What else did you experience with the change?
E: On the first day of my 11th grade, my classmates were very glad to see me. I was exactly pleased to see them, too. They really liked me when I talked to them. In that way, my English was improved a lot with more confidence. So, from that time I could hang out well with my friends. I made many friends at that time.

Another story Eugene wanted to emphasize was that the number of Korean students was increasing at that time. When Eugene and his brother entered the private school, there were no Asian students at all nonetheless any Korean students. It was possible that the school
administrations were so impressed by the good manners and academic results of Eugene’s brother that they decided to take on more Korean students. Interestingly, Eugene did not stay close to them. "I was glad to see many other new Korean students in my school. But, I preferred to hang out with American friends I was familiar with than to the Korean newcomers. Even during lunch I ate together with American friends," said Eugene.

**Bedbug Incident.**

It was not always sunny days. Eugene said, "Oh, I almost forgot a very significant happening. While I was doing just fine in the 11th grade and quite happy at the guardian's house, there were some conflicts between the host family and us, maybe because it was our first homestay experience."

In winter of Eugene's 11th grade, he was about to make a decision to give up the idea of majoring in violin at Julliard. Since he felt something great was missing, he applied for the New York State Youth Orchestra to make a meaningful memory before stopping the violin. He was admitted and had an opportunity to make a trip to Rochester to perform in the Orchestra. After staying at a hotel for days, when he came back to the homestay house, bed bugs were found in Eugene’s brother’s bedroom in the basement. They could not sleep from the annoying bedbugs. The guardians arranged pest control service to treat the room. However, it was effective only for a while. After a few days the bedbugs appeared again.

Eugene said, "The guardian told me suspiciously that I might have brought bedbugs into the house. Although I strongly believed it was not me, I could not deny it because there was nowhere and nobody to be infected but me. However, I felt offended and at the same time felt so sorry to them. Anyway, it was a relief that the bedbugs were found only from the basement not from living room or upstairs. Luckily..."
Finally, Eugene and his brother had to bring their stuff from the basement to the living room and stayed there for a while to sleep on the couch. The door to the basement was sealed, and nobody was allowed to enter. The bedbug incident that started from the Christmas season lasted until the next spring. It was a really horrible period for Eugene at which time had to prepare the SAT because he could not find any quiet place to study alone. There were three boys from the host family.

Eugene said:

Well, it was not possible to put my desk in the play room of the first floor because the three American brothers played video games, screamed, and ran all the time around the room. American students don't study and just play every day. I could not ask them to get out of the room. It was me who had to go out but I had nowhere to go. It was so painful. Eugene's brother just got accepted to a university as an early decision, so he did not have to study anymore. But he did not take care of Eugene. It made Eugene feel deeply hurt.

Senior: My Happiest Time.

After 11th grade, Eugene moved to another homestay house. There was Eugene's American friend's house that he chose, but there has been no available space for Eugene. However, when the friend's brother and Eugene's brother went on to Universities respectively, Eugene was able to move into the house. Eugene said, "It seemed like the happiest year in my whole life."

Frankie: “It was a Training Camp!”

It was two o'clock in the afternoon that I made an appointment with Frankie to interview him. Actually, Frankie entered MU in 2009 with an undecided major. However, after the first
semester at MU, he transferred to the Prairie College\textsuperscript{11} which is a community college in the local area.

Until two twenty he did not show up, but finally my cellphone rang. I read his name on the display screen on the cellphone. When I answered the phone, I noticed his voice sounded like he was still half asleep. "I fell asleep after coming back from school. I will be there soon."

I waited for another twenty minutes to see him. He was in black sloppy sweatpants and a gray hooded sweatshirt with the "MU" logo on it. He came in the lobby of the Union Building putting up his hood and putting his both hands in the front pocket of the sweatshirt. He face was expressionless as always. "Did you have lunch?" I asked. "No, I just slept." He answered. "Breakfast?" I asked. "No, I had to rush to school."

So, I took him downstairs to the food court. "Let's have some food." I said. But, he refused to eat. "It costs money. I'll eat later at home" "No, no, I'll treat you. Choose anything: Chinese, pizza, fast food...." I told him.

Only at that time he said thank you to me and ordered a hamburger with soda. We sat down at a table, and he started eating. While he was biting and sipping, his face gradually came to life, and he opened his lips as if a car needed gas to move.

"Last winter break was very hard for me." He started to talk even before I asked any questions:

I went to Virginia where I used to live during my high school days. My three friends told me they would house me for a month during the break. However, only after I came to them, I realize there were no available places for me to stay. They seemed to speak in earnest, but only what I heard was that he had gone to California or their relatives were

\textsuperscript{11} Pseudonym
already visiting them. So, I had to call the guardian whose house I used to live in. At first he welcomed me, but it was uncomfortable for me to say there long without payment.

I asked "But, if you paid, couldn't you stay there for a month without any problem?"

According to Frankie, to save money he decided to go around his old friends' houses every three or four days. Total, he went through about seven homes. He said, “Anyway, Virginia was a very good place to stay for a month. I didn't spend much money and could meet my old friends.” Frankie said proudly as if he talked about his heroic exploits of the triumph in one month survival game.

Considering the typical pattern of this local towns that in each vacation most Korean international students leave for different places, I asked him. "How do they still stay there? Are they living with their parents? Aren't they ESA students?" "In Virginia there are few Korean international students. There are no students who live in home-stay houses. I was shocked to see so many Korean international students here who are paying the full international tuition. In Virginia, most of Korean families immigrated and tried to acquire green cards so that their children can go to the State University with instate tuition rate."

Even in the initial conversation of a few words, Frankie already revealed his strong inclination to save money. It was the same attitude I had observed as usual from him. I was wondering what had influenced him to think and act in that way.

**Family Background.**

Already Frankie has identified himself as an American citizen several times. "So, how did you get the US citizenship? Of course you should be born in the US." I asked. "No, I was born in South Korea." He replied to me with an unexpected answer.
Although for more than eight months I had been meeting him almost every weekend, it was the first time I heard about his family background. Come to think of it, he had mentioned his mother, but I never heard about his father. "My father's family immigrated to the US when he was about my age, and he became a US citizen. While he visited Korea for business purposes, he and my mother married. When I was only one year old, my family moved to New Jersey and lived there for about three years. However, they fought and divorced. So, my mom took me to Korea to her parents' home leaving my father in the US." Frankie spoke in a subdued voice. Frankie just said that maybe his father had done little; that he did not do his role as a breadwinner of his family.

Frankie's mother voluntarily retired almost a year ago. There must have been serious financial and emotional pressure on his family. "My mom is a graduate of the English department at the one of the renowned universities in Korea and has a teaching certificate. But, she said it is not good enough to teach at school, so, have you heard of TESOL? I heard, she is preparing to acquire a TESOL certificate." Frankie said. "Yeah, I know it. It is so popular in Korea now." I replied.

**Decision on ESA.**

Different from any other participants' cases, Frankie suffered a great deal of stress when his mother told him to go to the US alone. However, the stress was not from fear for the unknown world but from the frustration to part with his close friends. "Who decided and suggested you to go ESA?" I asked. "My mom. When my mom told me to go to the US to study, I felt overwhelmed a lot." Frankie answered. "Why?" I asked. "Well, how can I say that.... It seemed that I found true friends at that time when I was in the second year of the middle school.
It was a really pitiful situation that I had to leave those good friends. Furthermore, it was a too short a notice. It was so stressful that I even had to be in the hospital for three days” Frankie said.

Frankie's mother spoke to Frankie in regards to her plan of Frankie's ESA sometime around December when Frankie finished his second years in the middle school. There were just three months before Frankie had to leave. At that time Frankie was hospitalized after suffering something wrong with his intestines. "I kept asking my mom if I could leave a little bit later after graduating middle school. But, she insisted that I must go at that time. She said that I had to attend the whole course of the US high school in order to go to college without any problem." Frankie added. "Besides, I requested my mom to do something abnormal for my classmates. It was too bad I had to leave like that, so I treated all of my classmates with Derry burgers of Lotteria, Korean fast food restaurant. It was $1.30 per one and its sauce was very delicious. It was how I ended in Korea." There was a note of something missing in his voice. "It was a great pity." I said. "Actually, I haven't met any of my close friends or groups until the first year of my middle school days. However, in the next year I was able to find four great friends who I would like to keep relationships with all my life. My best friend was among them. He was a really nice guy. His parents also divorced like mine." Frankie said.

"Then, why did your mother suggest you ESA in that situation?" I asked how Frankie understood her mother's idea who decided his ESA. "Because I had the US citizenship, she wanted me to succeed well." I could not find the depressed tone in his voice any more. His voice was full of confidence that sounded like it was a quite intelligent choice. "Conditions were set fair for me. I just needed to go (to the US). My mom already arranged the place where I would live in. it was my grandmother's friend's daughter's house in Virginia. It was my first home-stay house." Frankie said. "What do you mean that conditions were set fair for you?" I asked. "It
meant the US citizenship. Because I am a US citizen, I could get in the public school with no problem. So, if I didn't use it, the good opportunity would go to waste. I mean the citizenship." Frankie answered.

I had a strange feeling hearing Frankie say 'If I didn't use it (US citizenship), the good opportunity would go to waste.' According to Frankie's logic, since he is the US citizen who already gave up the Korean citizenship, it was natural that he should come to the US, and rather not doing that would be a silly decision. I asked where his mother got the ESA information or if she had seen any examples around her.

"No, there was no specific resource of ESA. I just was not doing quite well in school in Korea. Until the elementary school days I was doing well, but you know everybody is doing well in elementary school. However, after moving up to middle school, I didn't have good grades because I was not good at subjects which require memorization. So, I think here's the thing. My mom decided to support me until I earn my own crust. Every parent would do the same thing but it's the reason why she still has to work hard. I still have three more years to graduate from the university. In addition, even though I can study with a loan, my mom doesn't want me to do that because she had a painful memory. Once she told me that my dad attended the Columbia University with a loan. But he didn't pay his debts until he married and struggled just to get by without any decent job. It was the reason of their divorce. So, my mom tries not to cast over burden on my shoulder with any school loan." Frankie said.

Frankie's talking was not governed by logic, but I could understand what kind of message he wanted to deliver to me. He tried to put in lots of stories in his limited words. Through his explanation, I was able to conjecture Frankie's mother's meticulous personality on her only son.
Frankie's mother had made Frankie receive private lessons since his upper grades in the elementary school. The tutor was Frankie's friend's mother who used to live downstairs in the same apartment building. After school, Frankie learned Korean language arts, math, and any other subjects which required memorization. The tutoring fee was about three hundred dollars per month, but it was not effective because he did not work hard.

"I was not motivated by school grades, and my motto was just 'ride with the tide.' My mom already seemed to know me well. So, I think my mom decided to send me to the US considering that I would not be able to survive well in the Korean educational system that was focused around cramming and memorization." Frankie guessed.

Frankie also mentioned his future plan:

My mom sent me here not just to study for a while but to get a job and live here continuously. So, one day I asked my mom what she would do when I get a job and make a family. She told me she would like to come here. She wants to be a librarian. She really loves reading. So, when I dig myself in, I will bring my mom and grandmother.

He seemed to be extremely devoted to his mother and even to his grandmother. Behind this idea, there was another aspect to Frankie's family history. When Frankie's mother got divorced in the US and returned to Korea with three-year-old Frankie, she lived off her parents. Already other two aunts were living in the house. Meanwhile, when Frankie's grandfather passed away, those family members were scattered. Frankie's mother had changed jobs a lot following the better conditions and salaries, and at the same time Frankie and his mother had to move several times. Finally, when Frankie entered middle school, Frankie's mother purchased a house with a part of bank loan. And she asked her mother, who lived alone at that time, to live together in the new house. So, Frankie's grandmother consolidated all her property that she inherited from
her husband and came over to Frankie's mother clearing off her daughter's debts on the bank. Since Frankie observed the relationship between his mother and grandmother, he seemed to consider that he would live with his mother and grandmother supporting them in the future.

**ESA Experiences.**

In February 2005, when Frankie was 15 years old, he came to the US as an eighth grader after finishing his second year of middle school in Korea. "Actually, I wanted to play before starting the high school, but just started with the second half semester in middle school to know what the American school looked like. "Consistently, I could not help feeling that Frankie's mother and Frankie decided something after considering from various angles.

**Homestay House**

It was Southern Virginia where Frankie came first for his ESA. After finishing the second half semester in a middle school, he went to the public high school. There were about 1,000 students in the whole school. He recalled that the life in the first home-stay house was like that of a boot camp. "It was like a military camp. On the other hand, if I look back it now, it helped me to build up good living habits. But, it was very hard at that time." Frankie began to talk about his ESA experiences. "I had to be at the table at 6:00 am on the dot to have breakfast. If I missed it, no food reserved for me. Although the guardian lady was a full-time housewife, she was very punctual. The breakfast menu included usually waffle, pizza, donuts, and fruits. Anyway, at that time I ate well. The school lunch was also as cheap as $1.25. Moreover, the lunch lady would offer much food, and I was even able to eat twice, which was worth about $4.00." With this remark, I could see again Frankie's sensitivity on the money matter.

"Was there any reason on the strict time keeping in the house? Was the guardians' personality?" I asked. "Both of my guardians were Koreans, but they had lived in the US for a
long time mostly in the suburban area. It was their second marriage. The guardian lady had a
daughter of the same age as me." Frankie said. "Did you get along with the host family?" I asked.
"Now I get along with them. During the last winter break, I didn't want to go to Southern
Virginia. But, she insisted and I had nowhere to go so I visited them." Frankie said. "It seems
that she like you very much to see she invited you." I said. "Yeah, she likes me. Later days
during my home-staying, I obeyed like a robot." Frankie giggled. "What do you mean?" I asked.
"I mean I did everything that adults would like. For example, I would ask 'May I help you?' when
they worked, and as soon as I heard the door I opened the door saying hello to them or asking
'Shall I carry something?'" Frankie said. "Why did you do that?" I asked again. "I was taught. At
first it was ridiculous. When I was relaxing in my room, the male guardian yelled at me from
outside to come out to help him. He was raking the leaves. Frankie explained with an
emotionally charged voice. "Did they push only you to work? How about their daughter? "They
would do that to her too, but she was usually evasive to avoid working." It was obvious from his
tone of voice that he felt it unfair.

As if he decided to tell the truth now, he started to spin a yarn more and more. "The male
guardian would try to correct others' all the bad habits. For instance, I know it was not a good
habit to sigh deeply. He would tell me 'Don't sigh heavily (in the guardian's voice). Finally, I was
hit by a shoe box when I sighed deeply. But, at that time there was a reason of my sigh. The
daughter of them acted like a kook and enjoyed telling corny jokes. On the day she was telling
her mother some silly jokes and chuckled to herself. Thinking she was just pathetic I sighed
deeper. But, she continued. I sighed again. Then, suddenly the male guardian threw a shoe box to
my head. He said, "You just don't listen, do you? This is my house, and because you're living
with us, you have to follow my rule. You should change otherwise be my guest." He was so mad
and decisive. Don't you think that's a bit harsh?" Frankie almost complained of an injustice to me.

"What an embarrassing happening! So what did you do?" I asked. "I called my mom. I told her everything. However, she said that she understood he was a bit much doing that, but I had to tolerate to live together with others. She thought it could be a good training of me. Anyway, the first year and a half was a hell, but the rest of the year was somehow bearable. I decided to be a robot." Frankie said with a smile on his face. It looked like he was saying that it was all water under the bridge. Then, he introduced another unique rule in the house.

"It was funny that I came to study. There was nothing to do. Really, I studied because there was nothing to do. There were two computers in the house, but the guardians set a limit on using the computer by only two hours maximum. It was like an Internet cafe. Even he didn't allow me to buy my own computer. So, when I came back from school around two o'clock, I had some snacks and started using computer just until around five. Then, there was nothing to do but studying." Frankie said.

"However, sometimes didn't you have any projects or writing assignments?" I asked. "Then they would extend the time but there was still strong pressure (emphasizing tone) that I had to finish by when." Frankie said. I thought the guardians were very considerate people to set such rule because I have observed many ESA Korean students who wasted tons of time playing with Internet. Frankie also somewhat admitted it.

But, right after Frankie mentioned an unexpected story. "By the way, after finishing sophomore year I changed the home-stay house." Frankie said. "Why did you change?" I asked. "They increased the fee. At first it was $1,500 per month, but after two and a half years, they asked $1,800 saying that another home-stay house charged $2,000. Although I could understand
some part, it made me so disappointed. So, I decided to look for different home-stay house. Just in time, my friend who helped me a lot at school when I came to the US first called me saying that his mother would come to him to Northern Virginia. He suggested me home-staying in his house. So, I ended up transferring to the Northern Virginia High School living in his house.” Frankie explained.

School Life.

Frankie explained the two high schools he attended contrasting them. "While there were about 1,000 students and about five AP courses in the Southern Virginia High School, Northern Virginia had 3,300 students and 15 AP courses. Can you guess how big it was? The area corresponded to the Gangnam in Seoul. There were many rich people in the city. Anyway I liked the big size of the city." Frankie mostly focused on the size and the numbers.

I asked Frankie's studies at school. "Wasn't it hard to study?" I asked. "Study? You will be shocked if you know my freshman's school record," said Frankie, laughing at the memory. "At that time my mind was not that different from the days in Korea. It was 'que sera sera' attitude. I didn't pay attention to the scores. I got 3.0 in my freshman year of high school. I had straight Bs, A for math, and C for English. However, in order to get in MU, I need at least 3.7-3.8. So, after that time my guardians arranged tutoring for me to study with my school teachers during break times. Although the tutoring fee was high because they were school teachers, I was able to learn in detail what I had to know at school. During the semesters, I studied with college students. Finally, I got A for English in the sophomore year with a GPA of 3.8. Junior year's GPA was also 3.8." Frankie said.
Challenges.

What kind challenges did Frankie go through during his ESA period? Frankie considered the hardships from the cultural difference at school and the relationship with the male guardian. "I once fought with a school teacher." Frankie brought up a story. "When I was in the freshman year of Southern Virginia, I took a (computer) keyboard class. The teacher was an African American, and there were many African American students in the class because the school was located in the black community. He was very mean to us, I mean especially the Asian students. So, I went to the counselor of the school and told him about the keyboard teacher complaining that he was a racist. I was unable to suppress my rising anger. I rushed into it thinking the teacher should be fired from the school." Frankie spoke in an angry tone.

"What was the significant trigger?" I asked. "One day, I coughed or sneezed in his class. You know what, I used to do like this (Frankie covered his mouth with his hands.). Seeing that the teacher jeered at me saying 'Yuck' instead of saying 'Bless you' or giving me a tissue, I was very embarrassed. In addition, while the teacher didn't mind African American students' making so much noise who were sitting at the center of the classroom, he would be hard on us, Asian students' chatting. So I turned on him in anger saying that he was discriminating students. Then, he told me to change my seat to the right behind the teacher's table. It was at the very corner." Frankie's tone was expressing the feelings of anger of the day even drawing the seating format with his fingers on the table we were sitting at. His voice rose with more gestures.

"So, what happened after talking to the counselor?" I asked. "He set up a three-party meeting bringing in the keyboard teacher. But, since my English was limited, he asked me to bring my male guardian." Frankie said. "So, did you bring him in to the school?" "Yeah. By the way, the keyboard teacher was not fired. I just revealed my opinion through my guardian and we
just closed the case nicely without any more trouble. I worried that if I was out of favor in the eyes of the keyboard teacher, he would give low grade."

"Well, maybe... What was your guardian's response?" I asked in a little bit perplexed emotion on Frankie's ambivalent attitude: boldness and fear to the keyboard teacher. "He told me that the race was very sensitive issue in the US so that I should not be outspoken." "Outspoken?" "Yeah, for example he told me to use 'African American' instead of 'black' to address black people. By the way, during the meeting my male guardian took a very calm attitude to understand what was going on instead of supporting or advocating me. I doubted if I were his own son, he did the same thing." He grudged lacking of the proper support from the guardian when he was in trouble.

**Overcome Challenges.**

I asked Frankie how he overcame the difficult times that he went through during his ESA period. "I told you the first year and a half was hard and the other one year was fine in Southern Virginia, didn't I? Since I started playing tennis, it became much better to live there. The male guardian really liked to play tennis. He would bring his step daughter to play it, but she did not want to because she was scolded often not to play hard. So one day he asked me to play together, and we played almost once a week. Meanwhile, I met some Korean elder students of my school at the tennis court. From that time I used to play with them even during weekdays until the lights were gone. Maybe we played five days a week for three hours each time. The good thing was that we had no snow in winter so we could play all year round. Without tennis, I can't imagine how I could survive." Frankie said.

"Another way was calling through phone." Frankie introduced another way to work off his stress. "Every weekend I used to call my best friend in Korea. We talked endlessly. On
average we would talk for three hours once I called him. I was able to talk for six hours with a
ten dollar international phone card. It was my only haven."

"Did you call your mother, too?" I asked. "I seldom called my mom, but she gave me a
call almost every two or three days. Then I would open my heart to her with stories that I could
not share with my friend. It would be no use telling my friend the hardship from school or home-
stay house. However, it was she who sent me here, so she would or had to understand what I was
doing or what I was struggling with." Like this Frankie sought solace in the connection with his
friend and mother.

**What Sustained Me.**

What was the fundamental base to sustain and motivate Frankie to keep going in the ESA
period? I asked what held Frankie every minute in his ESA days? "It would be a waste of money
because I came here so far." It was Frankie's answer. "What do you mean? Did your purpose of
life motivate you?" I asked. "No, honestly I didn't have any goal in my life. I just thought there
was no money to lose," Frankie laughed. "I just kept going because I didn't want to give up the
opportunity." He continued. "You know what; I didn't want to be a loser in my life. I thought if I
gave it up, I would be a loser because I had seen many Korean students in Northern Virginia who
completely gave up studying, stopped going to school, and took drugs. Frankie's voice was very
decisive as if he knew well the difference between winner and loser, and he would not ever
become a loser.

**America, My Country.**

Frankie closed the first interview expressing his opinion on the US:

"No matter how hard I think, I don't think I can apply what I learned in the US into Korea
because of the cultural difference. Therefore, I believe it would be better to work in the
US with a part time job than to work in Korea with a decent job. Actually, I would like to be an ordinary generalist rather than a great specialist who has a special skill that any others don't have. Besides, I will go up step by step instead of being successful at the first try."

Frankie just listed up his fragmentary opinions to share his preference for the US.

"Since I am a US citizen, it would be easier for me to get a job in the US. If I want to work in Korea, there would be limitations because I don't have Korean citizenship. So, I just want to work in the US." "How did you get the idea that the US has more opportunities?" I asked. "Maybe, because it has a huge size of land. Honestly, what I think always is that while Korea is good for playing in because it is small and there are many people, the US is good for working because it has large size of land. So, in the future I want to make money in the US and to visit Korea to enjoy." "Without the US citizenship, could you think like that?" I asked. "No, absolutely not." He answered. "Well, it could be none of your business but what do you think of the current Korean ESA students in the US? Many of them are not US citizens." "Frankly speaking I worry so much about their future. (laugh) I don't have any idea why they are here. For what? Maybe it would be very hard for them to get jobs in the US. About 10% might get jobs. Rest of them should go back to Korea." "Frankie, your last bastion is your US citizenship." I said. "Yes, I think so." He replied.
Chapter Five

Transition to US University: Canaan or Still Wilderness?

Campus Life

In the previous chapter, I delivered the stories of how five Korean ESA students experienced their ESA period in the US or China especially through their own retrospective voices. This chapter looks at how they are currently leading their lives at MU and the impact of their ESA experiences in their transition to the American university.

School and Major Selection.

Changsu.

Changsu added some more detailed explanations of how he and his parents chose to major in engineering at a US university. It was his parents who first suggested that he seek entry at a US university while studying in Boston in the eighth grade. "My mom asked me first 'Do you want to go to a university in the US?' Perhaps she thought that it was the best choice for me," said Changsu. Although it was his parents' wish for him to experience the big world, the real concerns were that it was very hard to enter the prestigious university in Korea and Changsu would possibly be left behind in the competition with other smart Korean students. Another important factor to influence the decision was that because both of Changsu's parents graduated from the Seoul National University (SNU) in Korea, they wanted Changsu to go SNU or a better university than SNU.

When I was in eighth or ninth grade, the regulation of special admission into Korean universities was changed. So, there were two tracks: “12 years” special admission and “regular” special admission. Because I was not eligible for the 12 years track, I had to try with the regular track. But, in that case Yonsei or Korea Universities were the best
choices. SNU did not accept students from the regular track. My parents told me 'Go to a US university rather than to Yonsei or Korea Universities'.

Changsu explained. I asked how Changsu responded to his parents’ suggestion.

I said 'Yes' without any serious consideration exclaiming 'Now, I'm free!' in my mind.

Since I already had experienced the studying practice at the private institutes in Korea, I knew that with the effort of only a quarter or one-fifth from what I did in Korea I would get good grades in the US. In Korea, I was very sensitive with rankings. When I was in middle school, while I would be the fifth of the whole school, I've never be the top in my class. I used to always be second. So, whenever my parents gave me a scolding, they pointed it out.

I also asked why he chose engineering as a major to study.

"I scratched my head over choosing between engineering and medical school. After deciding to go to a US university, I tried to understand if I could go to medical school in the US. But, it was not possible to international students. So, when I was thinking what would be good except medical school, I decided to go to an engineering school and major in computer science because it looked the best," said Changsu.

It was also Changsu's parents' influence to consider medical school. Actually, Changsu did not like to study medical science.

"My parents would tell me that in the US I can study whatever I want: either engineering or medical science. However, in Korea, they said, there is nothing to do except being a medical doctor because working as a salary man in Korea is a miserable job. My father is a live witness. Whenever I didn't study hard, he would tell me that 'Do you want to go to work and to leave
seeing stars?" (in a loud voice imitating his father's voice) So, my parents always emphasized that either I be a medical doctor in Korea or get a specialized job in the US."

Changsu applied to a total of seven universities in the states and to KAIST (Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology) in Korea that provides all students with full scholarship for four years. The top-ranked, elite universities he preferred to go to were Carnegie Mellon and KAIST; the second-tier schools for him were Cornell University, Harvey Mudd College, and the University of Michigan; the “safety-net” school included MU, Georgia Tech, and Purdue University. To his dismay, but perhaps not so surprising, Changsu was accepted into all of the “safety-net” schools. It was a huge shock for him to be rejected from the schools he aspired to attend. He cited his SAT score as the key reason for the debacle, not knowing just how complex admissions policies can be.

"I took the SAT at the end of my junior year. I got a 2120. At that time, my friends got about 1800 to 1900. I checked the previous years' average SAT scores for the admission of those schools and found that my score would be good enough to be accepted. So, I decided not to take it again. But, my friends prepared for the test more and took it again and again. Some of them ended up with getting 2300," said Changsu.

According to Changsu, although he had a high competitive spirit, he did not want to be too tenacious to get a higher score on the SAT. He attributed his optimistic character to his parents’ well support. He meant that he has never been desperate enough to get something because whenever he asked for something from his parents, they bought it for him. However, it was a bitter disappointment for him to fail to be admitted to the universities of his dreams.

"I tasted the bitter fruit of life. With this I realized that when I take a test I have to get the best score not the better one."
He also explained how he chose MU among the three schools of his safety-net schools. When he was at the international high school in China, he and his friends considered MU’s engineering school as the one to not attend. Their reasoning was because of MU’s acceptance rate as being “too high” compared to other top tier universities (even though MU has top-ranked programs in engineering). In his high school, there was a perception that the universities with low acceptance rates were “good” schools. "The main reason I chose MU was that I was selected as a James Scholar when I got the admission. So, I decided to be at least a head of a snake. I mean that I ranked among the high class in the Computer Science department at MU. So, I made up my mind to be the top here so that I can get a good job or get into graduate school later," said Changsu.

"So, you considered MU as a snake not a dragon." I said. "Yeah, I underestimated this school, but not anymore. I met so many smart students here," said Changsu. "The high school you attended seemed to be a good school." I said. "Yes, my school was very competitive. The friends I hung out with went to U Penn, Yale, Northwestern, or Stanford. Among them I was the worst case." Changsu said with a laugh.

Changsu said, he acquired an important lesson from what he got when he did not get what he wanted. "I have not been money-hungry because I have been raised in easy circumstances. Although my parents are not millionaires, I think we belong to the middle class in Korea. We have a house and have never been hard up for money in my memory. My parents provided me with everything I wanted. So, my motto was "To live a life just as much as others live lives." However, I haven't known the important fact that in order to live that kind of life, I had to work my fingers to the bones. Nowadays, after realizing it, I put the principle into practice." "How did you realize that?" I asked. "While I drank a bitter cup of failure in entering
the university, I realized that a half-hearted job could not make success in life. It was the worst failure in my life." It was the confession of a college freshman.

**Friends.**

I asked participants how and with whom they form and maintain friendships.

**Eugene.**

Eugene lives in the 'Six Pack' dormitory. It was the given nick name because there are six dormitory buildings gathered together. He discusses his friendship with other Korean students of Six Pack.

"Almost every day when we have meals, we exchange text messages to each other like members of an organization, especially for the evening meals. If I come, I send 'yes.' Otherwise, 'no.' Then, about more than ten Korean students put together couple of tables and have dinner. Imagine the scene. Almost all of the students are white in the Six Pack cafeteria, and only about ten Korean kids eat together."

I asked why they always eat together.

"First of all, it is real fun to have food together. We can chat a lot. Eating separately in the same restaurant? I can't imagine that. It's nonsense. If a Korean student eats alone, we would regard him or her as a person who disliked us. However, it's understandable to eat with other foreign students. There is Joon who gets along well with American kids. At first, he seldom hung out with us, but nowadays he only hangs around with us instead of Americans."

Nevertheless, Eugene studies by himself and does socialize heavily with other Korean friends, other than at mealtime.

"Other Korean guys prefer to study together, but I am not comfortable with that. It's not my style. However, in my view, they waste lots of time when they clump together to study. It
would be not easy to concentrate on studying. Yesterday, while I was writing my paper, I stopped by the study area where they were. I saw Bada, my best friend, hardly study; only chatting with others even though he had an exam the next day. They look indecisive. But, sometimes, I joined them only when I had a minor study load to do.

Eugene gets along with other Korean students in the Six Pack distinguishing studying and playing time. Also, he explained why Korean students maintain a strong bond at the Six Pack mentioning the locational features.

"Six Pack is located at the southwest area of the MU Campus where many of the white sonority and fraternity buildings also stand close together. So, traditionally the white students choose this dorm because it is easy to hang out with their friends. In this environment, the relatively minor group of Korean students constructs the close link with each other like the family ties. I heard from the elder Korean students that every year Korean students of Six Pack are close between themselves," said Eugene. According to him, it is natural that minority among majority is to bond to gather together.

Although Eugene wishes to expand his friendship beyond the boundary of Korean students, it does not look like that was possible with his current friendship building practice. He has tried to get along with other ethnic student groups in the classroom, but it was not workable. While everybody was busy in the lecture classes, Eugene had chances to talk with some acquainted foreign students in the discussion classes. However, it was hard to build deeper relationships with them because they did not see each other after classes.

"Although the foreign students themselves talked to each other excitedly at the dorm or in the classrooms, they just ended their conversation saying 'bye' stepping out of the dorms or classrooms. They seemed seldom to build up personal relationships between themselves, much
less with Korean students. In other words, we Korean students have an unsatisfied feeling with the limited friendship. We want to build deeper relationship even in the everyday life."

Now, Eugene is creating friendships that are totally different from that of his high school days. "We call ourselves the Six Pack family with the feeling of satisfaction and sense of belonging. More and more we understand and become dependent on each other. We feel safer when we are together." Eugene, who went through an ESA period, is looking for the warmness of family from the relationship between Korean friends. This boundary puts Eugene within the comfort zone.

"When I talk with American students, sometimes I feel uncomfortable. The conversation is dull and I don't like bearing their sexual openness or feeling some burden to respond to it. Because my high school was a Christian mission school, there were no students like that. However, here I have met many American students who spoke sexual jokes too openly. So, I prefer being with Korean students over American kids. Korean students don't say stuff like that even though they don't go to church," said Eugene.

Anna.

As Anna had already showed her generous attitude during the home-stay period, she still kept the attitude to adapt herself to new surroundings, even if it means changing some aspect of herself. These critical experiences developed her sensitivity towards an understanding of 'difference.' After entering MU, she said if she could she really wanted to make friends from India or Africa and to listen to their world view. However, since she was busy with her own study and tried to take care of close people around her, she could not actually go forward and speak to those Indian or African students.
"Well, although I really wanted to make friends with other people rather than Koreans, the stronger thought that kept saying to me that it would be difficult and cumbersome to do that." Anna explained how her ideal desire and realistic choices were in collision.

"For example, if there was a Muslim lady with something on her hair or a blind student, I would like to know what she thinks differently or what he/she can see when I can't see it. However, it is hard for me to approach them without hesitation because I don't know what kind of hurt they get from this society. I want to build a meaningful relationship with other people who are different from me. But, if the level is the hundredth floor, it's too hard for me to go up until 99th floors."

*Dongha.*

Dongha showed certainly a different stance from that of Eugene.

[Excerpt 3]

(I: Interviewer, D: Dongha)

I: Who do you get along with mostly?

D: Nobody. I keep to myself most of the time. Sometimes I hang out with my friends, but there is not a specific group I belong to.

I: Don't you want to socialize with others? Many people want to belong to a group.

D: I prefer to be alone.

I: I know you are a member of a soccer club. Then what's the motivation of doing that?

D: For my personal achievement. I hope to lead my team to victory with my play.
Dongha grew up as a single son, and his parents have worked since his childhood days. Perhaps his family background and growth process influenced him to feel comfortable when he keeps to himself. However, he is not an outcast or left alone all the time. He participates in college group activities of Korean Church and sometimes enjoys playing tennis with his friends. Nevertheless, he seems to not be interested in making close friends or even getting along with them. So, I asked him if he had a comfort zone on campus.

I: Have you had any comfort zone in your ESA period or current campus life?
D: What is that?
I: It could be your own psychological space where you feel safe or secure against any challenges or stresses.
D: Maybe not.
I: What about the relationship between your friends or the connection with your parents.
D: I haven't had any special thing.
I: Really?
D: Yeah, thanks to that I developed the survival ability. Well, if there is any, it would be my bed?
I: What do you mean? (laugh) Your own space?
D: The space I can sleep. During sleeping any thought disappears. Another one would be the basement of Grainger library?
I: The basement of library?
D: It's my best place. I like it because when I go there late at night, there is nobody.

I: So, is it your comfort zone?

D: I like the basement. It's very quiet and the clock on the wall stopped at 9:40.

Academic Performance

Class Attendance and Cheating on the Exam.

Eugene.

Since Eugene entered MU without deciding his major, he has been wondering what to choose for his major. Meanwhile, he set up high standards of academic achievement and has studied as hard he could. However, sometimes his active involvement in church activities influences his studies. While he recorded all 'A's in his report card getting 3.90 for a GPA in the first semester, he is not very optimistic about the outcome of this second semester.

"The GPA of last semester was good. I took part in less church activities than I do currently. Now I know most definitely I'll get a 'B' in Physics. There are a total of three exams for it, and I screwed up the first two exams. However, I thought I prepared well for the last one, but the result was worse. I was really mad," said Eugene.

"If you got a good outcome in the first semester and are getting only a couple of 'B's in the second semester, then don't you think you're doing good considering you are a freshman?" I asked. "I'm not sure. I want to try hard to live up to my parents' expectations. Actually, I was not confident in studying, but because my brother is doing well at school, I believe I can do it, too," said Eugene. I could see a big burden on his mind.

"By the way, unfortunately, whenever my parents called me during the semester, I was at the church with my friends. Only at that time I realized that how often I went to the church. So, my parents told me 'If you only hang out with your friends all the time, just come to Korea.' Then,
I boasted that I would be fine saying 'Don't worry too much.' But, seeing the low scores on some of my exams, I'm starting to worry with big stress. Well, at the same time, considering the spiritual benefits I'm getting from the church, I have an impression that the scores are not all in my life,” said Eugene.

There was a great deal of meaning in what he said. His worrying may be attributed to giving up his dream to be a violinist because he never thought what he can do but being a violinist. He may also be feeling a bit of sibling rivalry and feels a need to do well in college much like his brother who is doing well at the University of Michigan. However, his various commitments to church activities such as praise team, choir, and college group functioned as both positive roles in his spiritual growth and negative roles in time management for his studying. For example, since Eugene volunteered to go to Kenya for summer missions, he and the mission team have been meeting every Tuesday night for about three hours to study the Bible and pray together. Eugene is excited and looking forward to going to the mission trip. However, because final exams were coming up, the time commitment was a burden on him.

"Do you go to classes without cutting?" I asked. "Well, sometimes I don't attend classes." Eugene answered with an abashed look. "I don't know what is right. In fact, there are some courses that I can utilize the time by myself instead of attending the classes. Of course, some of my friends told me to go to the class saying that it would be better rather than to make it up later. For example, I have never attended Chemistry class. There is no attendance check because it is a lecture. I am getting fairly good grades from the course by study alone. But, I always go to the discussion classes and preparing the assignments well. Yeah, I know I'm a bad guy. By the way, everybody says that this is workable only for freshman year. They warned me not to do that again from sophomore year." Eugene confessed.
According to Eugene, cutting class is quite common for freshmen and it is particularly noticeable among the Korean students compared to any other ethnic group of students. He also added the negative result of the cutting class and some dishonest practices to make up the missing classes. Eugene said:

However, the problem is that there are some people who try to borrow lecture notes or class materials just before the exam. Even some of my friends have the nerve to sit next to me during the exam to cheat. I don't like it, but I have no choice but to show them my answers. It doesn't matter if I didn't prepare the exam. However, it hurts to see my friends not doing well on the exam when I studied well. One day I took a math exam. Since I studied it, I solved every question confidently. After submitting the test paper, when I came back to my seat to grab my backpack, my friend asked me to help. With a glimpse of it, I was able to see what his problem was. So, I explained to him, 'Put the key point of x and y...' But, he couldn't understand because he didn't study. While my tone was increased, suddenly, my eyes met the TA's eyes. Fortunately, the TA let it go with a smile on his face. After that my friend said sorry to me, but he asked me to help him again on the next exam. I told him 'I won't help you, but it's up to you to see my answers.' I think he is going too far. So, always I try to prepare exams well. One time, the guy has been caught cheating and got zero points on the exam.

According to Eugene, there are some Korean students around him saying that 'I'm counting on only you for the next exam.' In his view, many ESA Korean students play a lot because they seem to be well-off. Besides, many of them pass the answer-key that handed down from their senior students each other. Eugene mentioned that sometimes he depended on the answer-key when he was not able to solve the questions.
Korean students call the answer-key of quiz assignments genealogical record [jokbo] which has been passed down through numerous generations from their senior students in the printed form. Students pass around the answer-keys for the mostly math or science courses. As the questions of exams are changed every year, the department even posts the previous year's sample questions on the web so that students may refer to them to get some idea of the exam. However, in the case of assignment quizzes, the questions seem to be rarely altered, so many students tend to do the assignments easily relying on the answer-key. Eugene said:

It is not because the questions are easy for me to copy the answer-key. Rather, it is too hard to solve it. Putting it off to the very last moment, I just choose the easy way. However, I learned that either way I end up paying the price on the real exam if I did not solve the questions by myself. So, knowing that, usually I start preparing the exam earlier. I have never done this in my high school days. I went to every class; I did all the home assignments by myself. However, here in the university I seem to study unwisely.

Eugene continued to explain the reason that influenced him to change his studying habit during freshman days:

The large number of Korean students is one of the reasons I changed. Everybody is hanging out with each other. Since everybody is playing, I wanted to play with them. If I study alone while other students hang out, I feel like that I am losing some opportunities and getting isolated from them. Sometimes, when my friends told me "Hey, Eugene! I haven't seen you much lately,' then I worry about what if they become close with each other leaving me out.

Through Eugene’s testimony, I could see a side the communal side among Korean students. Different from his high school days when there were few Korean students, Eugene
rapidly adjusted to the university environment in which he tried to get along with many other Korean students; even if it came at the expense of his academic achievement.

Anna.

Anna is majoring in Psychology and the type of student who studies steadily. Since she also volunteered to go Africa Missions during the summer of 2010, she has attended church meetings every Tuesday to prepare for missions. However, if she had important exams, she would skip the Tuesday meeting to prepare for the exams. Furthermore, Anna is not involved in many church activities like Eugene. Regarding the question of her school work performance, she responded to me saying that her time management was problematic.

"It is my problem that I am not diligent and don't manage my time very well. It seems that I don't do my best every single day. So, my grades are neither too bad nor very good." I asked her if she attends classes regularly.

Anna answered:

I go to classes mostly well except my 9:30am class. Doing the course assignments, I often sleep only three hours. Then I worry myself over whether to go to class or not: feeling tired all day long after attending morning class or being refreshed after sleeping during the morning. Usually I choose sleeping. By the way, I heard that many male students are cutting classes frequently. Initially, it sounded strangely to me. 'Why do they skip classes?' But, many told me it is not a problem. Some senior students taught me that there are some classes that I don't need to go, and I am stupid if I cannot do something else by attending those classes. However, now I think it is wrong. I don't understand why they advised me with inappropriate ideas.

Anna made a moral judgment on the skipping class between right or wrong.
Changsu.

Although Changsu started his university life at MU a bit reluctantly, setting up the goal to be ‘a head of a snake’, he has studied diligently. I asked about his academic performance in his freshman period. “Initially I had a clear goal and studied really hard to make up what I missed during my high school days. However, the pace has been a little bit loosened since the midterm exam of the first semester.” Changsu answered. “Was there any specific reason?” I asked. “After receiving the first midterm result I thought to myself, ‘Well, I am doing good.’” I said, “It sounds similar with your response to your results on the SAT.”

Changsu said:

Yeah, I know. However, fortunately I didn’t fall down at the end of the semester. My GPA was 4.0 in the first semester. All the grades were between A and A+. In this second semester, I found again that I was very competitive. Every course released statistic data of the students’ exam results. I always checked where I was ranked. In this semester, I got on the Dean’s List that goes to the only the top 20% of students. The more important thing is to maintain this status. I heard that it would get harder as time went on. This school kicks out about 20% of students when we move up to the next grade.

Although he spoke to me while staring at the corner of the table we sat at instead of looking at my eyes, I could see his shrewd and meticulous character from his decisive tone and facial expression. Next year Changsu is supposed to serve in KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army) in Korea for his obligation to military service. He is showing his strong desire to get a full scholarship from his department that goes to the top student.

Despite freshman year, you did a good job on your schoolwork.” I complimented Changsu. Then he started to speak about the hard truths on how other students do not go
to class. I really don't understand those who complain that the classes are over their heads when they don’t even go to class. In particular Korean students do that the most. If they think the classes are against their interest, they blindly don't go to the classes. However, how do they know if the classes are beneficial right now? Also, if it is hard for them to follow the lessons, they stop going to class.

He continued to go on as he felt sorry for them:

In my view, there are two different groups of students in terms of their studying styles. The one group concentrates on their classes like I do. Usually I put about 50% of my energy into taking classes and another 50% into reviewing the classes so as to not forget the lessons. The other group I observed uses about 10-20% of their energy in taking the classes and tries to review the classes or study by themselves using 80% of their energy. However, I believe it is much better to concentrate in a class for five hours than to study by yourself at the library for ten hours. You know what, the salient trait of the second group is that they don't study during the day and always try to be up all night studying. And then they whine about not getting enough sleep. In my case, I took 18 credit hours last semester. 18 hours are the maximum units I can take. If I register more, I have to pay more money. It was very demanding, but I used to sleep seven to eight hours every day. Lack of sleep is just an excuse for their unwise time management habit. Hanging out during the day, staying up all night about doing some studying, and skipping the classes due to exhaustion....They can't break out of a vicious cycle. There was a student who came here directly after graduating from high school. I heard that Korean high school students rarely concentrate in class because usually they study harder in cram schools. With that habit, he didn't give weight to the classes he was taking. Furthermore, since
was he used to studying until two or three o'clock in the morning in Korea, he took studying late at night for granted. So, a couple of times I accompanied him to study at the library until late night. What I found from him was that he didn't study for the first several hours. Surfing the Internet for a while as a warm-up, it was not until night when he started studying.

Changsu poured out a barrage of criticisms against other Korean students' crooked attitude toward learning and studying. It was out of his observations of them in the classrooms, dormitory, Korean church, and the libraries throughout his freshman period. Raising his eyebrows and voice, he spoke with many gestures.

In addition, Changsu shared some advice his mother used to give him:

When I was often grumbling to her about my limited ability to study, she used to tell me this: 'No, it's not the matter of ability but effort. So, if those bright students study for an hour, you have to study for two or three hours.' However, those many students who I met at MU don't put two or three times the effort into their studying. They just follow others. When others play, they play; when others stay up all night, they stay the night. In my case, I am above compared to the average level students. But, among the high 20% students, my grades are so-so. Therefore, I have to make more effort to study in order not to fall behind.

Dongha.

Dongha had some illusions of campus life. During his high school days, he would imagine that his campus life would be filled with scholastic passion and romance. Maybe it was the influence of TV shows that depicted US campus life such as “The Paper Chase” or “A Beautiful Mind.” However, entering MU as a freshman was not fresh to him. First of all, he was
disappointed with the same environment of the town where he used to attend high school, and it made him consider nothing was changed in his campus life from his high school days. Rather, the quality and amount of Dongha's studying has been decreased since starting his campus life.

Dongha said:

Looking back on it now, I studied more during my high school days because at that time there was homework to do. But, now I don't study since there is no homework. Early in the first semester, I studied hard at full strain. So, in those days, studying was very easy, and it made me underestimate the level of college work. It seemed as though I could get all 'A's in the semester. However, since then I haven't studied hard.

I asked Dongha what caused him to lose interest in his studies. "I just got bored so I purchased a new video game console. Almost every night I played video games in the dorm room," said Dongha. "Do you have a TV?" I asked. "My roommate brought one." "Can you use it as you like?" I asked. "Sure. I usually play the video game when my roommate sleeps. He's a black guy. He can't complain at all because I never complained whenever he brought his friends into our room and played loudly. It's a kind of like revenge."

However, through the interview I realized that the problem was not because there was no homework from the college courses but because Dongha has underdone his homework. "Are you sure that because of playing video games your grades have dropped?" I asked. "Well, that was not the only problem. Since the mid-term exam of the first semester I have lost the will to study. My body and mind got just tired easily, and I lacked seriousness on studying. Before that, I completed my homework every day. I went to bed at 1:00 am and got up at 7:00 am to start my study. However, now I only depend on the answer-key to do the homework or sometimes I just ignore the homework," said Dongha.
I asked what his actual grade was. "I've gotten almost all 'A's until the mid-term of the first semester. After that 'B's appeared. In this semester, I started to get a couple of 'C's." Dongha answered, "So, what was your GPA?" "About 3.2?" "How about this semester?" I asked. "I don't know. Maybe lower than that." "Do you go to class without skipping?" (Dongha shakes head).

Although Dongha has to take the final exam for this semester, it seemed that his grades have fallen a lot this term. The shattered illusions of campus life and losing the driving force of studying school work were the major things that kept him from studying in the university and caused him to live an idle life.

"I expected that I would learn very different things at the university compared to those of high school days, but it seemed that nothing was different. They were just six of one and half a dozen of the others," said Dongha. "Really? Which subjects?" I asked. "Every subject." "Aren't they good enough to fulfill your intellectual needs?" I asked again.

Dongha answered:

Well, I'm not talking about my intellectual needs. You know what if you watch a movie, you can see the entirely different landscape of a university campus. Oh, did you watch the movie, 'Beautiful Mind'? Like the movie, I expect something like: that professor writes down mathematical formula on a window like mad. But, everything was alike from high school days: the town, classes, and even the people.

During his high school days, even though Dongha lived alone in the guardian's house without parents' care, he had pressing desire to enter a US college, and it became a driving force for him to study. However, after entering MU he lost the desire and the energy to strive for something. He considered it the freedom he acquired. He mentioned the vague worries about
getting a job after graduating MU, but it could not be truly felt yet, as it was not an imminent goal to have to achieve.

Frankie.

After finishing the first semester at MU, he moved to Prairie College near his town. Because his GPA was too low, he was placed under academic probation last semester. In addition, since his mother took early retirement in Korea, he was not able to pay the tuition of the second semester. When his mother told Frankie to come back to Korea for a while, he persuaded his mother to allow him to go to the community college for couple of years and to transfer to the MU again later. This two-year community college was already known as an easier gateway to go to MU. Frankie did not want to talk about how his grade was low or what was the reason of getting the low grades were from the first semester. He just shared his current academic status at Prairie College and his future plan.

[Excerpt 5]

(I: Interviewer, F: Frankie)

I: When are you going to transfer to MU?

F: In order to save money I need to be here fully for the two years. Otherwise, in a year I come back. I'm not sure yet. Anyway I'll complete the general education courses.

I: What is the most important thing for the transfer?

F: GPA.

I: Are you doing well?

F: I'll get 4.0 for this semester.
I: 4.0? Wow, excellent!

F: But, it's really easy to study here. There are some online courses. If I have the past test or the summary note, it's a piece of cake.

I: Is the school quality low?

F: No, we learn everything that we need, but the exam is quite easy. It's very straightforward and not tricky at all.

I also asked how Frankie perceived the college. "I don't think it's my school. Because of my family financial issues I'll just stay here for a while. So, I'd like to transfer to MU again for sophomore or junior. The tuition is very low here. I just need to pay only $800 per semester." Frankie said.

Frankie took out a loan of $1,600 from a bank and got a federal grant of $3,000. It was a grant that was given to only American citizens depending on their financial status. Frankie said he already received $5,000 when he studied in MU. While he paid $17,000 for MU, he only paid $800 for Prairie College. In terms of financial aspects, it was a huge savings. For this saving, Frankie made some additional effort.

"I hired an agent of a filing company to get the scholarship. If I pay $1,500 a year and provide them with my personal information, they search every possible scholarship I'm eligible to receive and the company applied for it on behalf of me. They found the grants I received at MU and Prairie College. By the way, only American citizens are eligible for this. Permanent residents cannot get the benefit." To Frankie, the American citizenship was his last bastion to justify his living and studying in the US.
Challenges

Changsu.

One day during group discussion the participants talked about the negative criticism of Korean companies on the Korean ESA students. The point of the criticism was that Korean ESA students were so self-centered and couldn’t fit in the hierarchical organizational culture of the Korean enterprises. While the participants shared their own ideas of agreement or objection, Changsu's comment was very impressive. He spoke up insisting that Korean companies and society understand the ESA students with more open mindedness.

"Korean enterprises should understand how we got through the tough period of the ESA. We went abroad during our middle or high school days and competed against the American students using our second language, English. In doing that, we had to put more time and energy in studying. Consequently our lifestyle and interest focused on only our own needs: my time, my health, my necessities, and so on. With this aspect the Korean companies made a sweeping criticism saying that, ‘Well, the ex-ESA students should be selfish.’ It is too simplified and only one side of a story. It is not being just."

On the one hand, there was reason in what he said though I was doubtful if Korean society and companies would accept this idea. Later in the interview, Changsu shared an experience from his high school days relating to the Korean clique culture and the negative feedback on that.

"When I was a ninth grader in China, my school went on a school trip to Tibet. At the time there was a local festival and some villagers gave us liquor in a kettle. China is a country that is not that strict to liquor. Of course teachers warned us not to drink it. But, who could refuse to drink when the liquor was before our eyes? We finished it. Although many other students
drank together, unfortunately, only we Korean students were caught by our principal. He used to have some education related work in Korea, and his wife was a Korean. He severely scolded us saying, "Why on earth is it that only you Korean students create troubles? I traveled many other countries and found that only Koreans get together to make trouble." At that time, I just thought 'Oh shoot, we’re in big trouble.'"

Maybe, out of this previous experience or his independent tendency that was created by his family's frequent movements, unlike any other Korean students, Changsu actively made an effort to make friends not only from Koreans but also from many other ethnic group of students.

I asked Changsu about the boundary of his associates.

"I think I have more options than any other Korean students have. Intentionally I do register for classes by myself in order to meet new American friends. Since my high school days I have observed that usually Korean kids sign up for the same classes to sit side by side in the classes and to chat in Korean. Meanwhile, from my junior year onward I started to take the natural sciences tracks alone. I took the classes by myself and had lunch together with other Korean kids. It was good for me. So, I'm doing the same thing here at MU: taking classes alone and playing together with Korean kids." Changsu explained his own strategy of networking.

I asked why Changsu sometimes avoided hanging out with Korean students.

"I have good sociability past and present. In addition, because my English is not bad, I can communicate with foreign students and understand them. Mind you, I didn't like to exclude them," said Changsu.

"Then, you mean the Korean students who hung out only by themselves excluded any other ethnic group of students?" I asked.
"Yeah, maybe they do. Those Korean students associate with familiar people because the whole circumstance is not familiar to them. Perhaps they are unwilling to challenge new things. Anyway, since they are new to the culture and the people in the US or in this university, naturally they cling together feeling comfortable with each other." Changsu seemed to state confidently his own analysis based on the experience and observation of his high school days.

"What do you think of Eugene's case? Although he experienced the American culture early as an ESA student, he usually hangs out with only other Korean students." I asked his opinion.

"In my view, the case of students like Eugene seemed to be due to a strong longing for Korea. I was the same when I was in eighth grade. As an eighth grader I attended middle school at Boston for a year. There were no other Korean kids but me. So, I hung out with only American kids at that time. It was not bad. Then, after a year when I came to China to go to high school, I met some Korean kids. I was so glad to see them because I found people who had the similar values as mine. I think Eugene is in the same situation," said Changsu.

Changsu explained further why he had different criteria on making American or Korean friends:

I have always felt that if one is smart or doing well at school, people often take advantage of him. Especially, if he is nice, people think he is an easy guy to handle. I was that kind of guy. So, when I was in the high school, some students didn't do their homework properly and then have always copied off mine. Or even sometimes they stuck to me to get some help for exams. I saw some of them in the university, too. They're earning credits by doing that. If I refuse to help them, they pretend to be cool in front of me, but they are entirely different behind their back digging dirt on me saying that I am so cheap.
and nasty. They didn't do anything they had to do. This is typical to Korean kids. American kids can tell clearly if they do not want to do it. If they show their homework, it is because they would like to help. However, Korean kids are doing this reluctantly without choice because of relationship. Rumors are flying fast among Korean students. Once I have found many Korean kids were speaking ill of me. They said I was arrogant. One day after an exam last semester one of Korean classmates asked me how I did on the exam. So I just told him my score. You know what, if I ask, most American kids answer me straight up with their score. I did the same thing. At that time my score was quite good and the guy who heard it from me spread a rumor saying that Changsu was so arrogant. I didn't mean it at that time but he misunderstood me out of his own inferiority complex. Therefore, I should watch my mouth. Finally, the decision that I arrived at was to keep my private and public life separate. I don't hang out with Korean kids when I study or take the classes. But, in my private life or playing time, I hang out with them.

Changsu's case shows the example of diverse tendencies of Korean ESA students. Unlike those Korean students who stick together in and out of the classroom, Changsu was careful in choosing his friends based on his goal and need. While for academic purposes he avoided Korean students and tried to get along with American students, in his private life he preferred Korean friends to hang out with them. This differentiation was due to Changsu's ethical belief and value system he acquired from his ESA experiences in the US and China.

Dongha.

Dongha said that although he joined a soccer club of Korean students and attended Korean church, it was not for making Korean friends or feeling a sense of belonging. Rather,
according to him, he felt comfortable when he was alone. So, I asked if he has never felt lonesome.

[Excerpt 6]

D: Loneliness? Well, I might have sometimes.
I: Did you? When did you feel it?
D: It was... Oh, it was my high school commencement. My parents didn't come though many of my other Korean students' parents came.
I: Didn't your guardians come?
D: They did. But my parents didn't.
I: So, how did you feel at that time?
D: Just bad.
I: What about your usual days?
D: Usually my parents called often.
I: Do you call them, too?
D: No. Ah- I wish I had a girlfriend.

Considering that commencement was at the beginning of June, it could have been hard for Dongha's parents to get a short term vacation. Besides, he was supposed to go to Korea after graduation and to come back to this town again in September. So, it would seem reasonable that they decided not to come.

Actually, I asked, "What about your usual days?" to know if Dongha had actually felt lonely during his usual days. However, he kept answering about the relationship with his parents and suddenly mentioned his desire to have a girlfriend. I did not try to elaborate on my question because I believed he already answered enough with his terse response. Even though Dongha
had a natural tendency to enjoy being alone, his inner voice sought a girl friend who could fill the empty space in his life.

**Frankie.**

For Frankie the basic essentials of life such as eating or everyday living itself were the ongoing issue in his campus life. His mother knew this well, she worried a lot when Frankie left Seoul for MU. Fortunately, a day before his departure she found MU 2013 Club through "Cywold," a Korean web site that is similar to Facebook. From the site she read information of the settlement support service that is provided by the local Korean church. Immediately Frankie's mother called the person in charge of the service program and asked him to pick up Frankie at the LEX Bus stop at the MU campus. Finally, Frankie met the settlement helper at 1:00 A.M. and went to his dormitory.

However, the safe arrival was not the end but the beginning of the challenging campus life at MU. Since Frankie entered the dormitory five days earlier than the official opening day, the dormitory restaurant did not also open yet. Because Frankie was not acquainted with the outside area and did not know the bus route, he held out for three days with some snacks from the vending machine. Then, the settlement helper from the Korean Church came to see him to give him a ride to go shopping. Finally, only on that day was Frankie able to buy his daily necessities including a cellphone, and after shopping they ate together at a Korean restaurant. It was his first square meal after coming to the US.

After completing the first semester Frankie didn't go to Korea, and he said he would stay in this town during the summer vacation to take courses at Prairie College. I asked if Frankie's mother would love to see him. "My mom? She's ok. We quarreled whenever we met." Frankie said. "Why?" I asked. Frankie answered:
When I was in high school, I went to Korea once a year during summer vacation.
Although it's been a long time in seeing each other, only for a couple of days she would be nice to me and then start up on me which always ended in quarrels. Whenever she saw me, she had a feeling of mistrust and thought I was not good enough for her expectations. My mom always nagged me a lot because she wanted me to be better and fast at everything. Last summer when I was in Korea after graduating from high school, I got a chance to work at a private institute as an assistant proctor. One day when I was about to leave home for work at that time, my mom scolded me seriously saying that I was late. Even though I went there early, they wouldn't open the door yet. My mom was always very sensitive on everything even if was related with me.
Of course every parent would do the same, but in the case of Frankie's mother she tried to take great care of Frankie.

Frankie studied at MU only for his first semester. From the second semester he had to move to Prairie College because of his low grades and financial difficulty. He was not satisfied with his life at the Prairie College at all. Besides, when he studied at MU, he lived at the Six Pack dormitory and hung out with other Korea students actively. However, after moving out of the campus apartment the opportunities to hang around with his friends had been reduced. Therefore, he felt lonely a lot. "I'm going through a tough time nowadays. I feel lonely. It seems like that I am totally alone. Maybe it is because I live at a different place." Frankie said in sullenness. "How was your first semester at MU?" I asked. "It was just good. I lived too soft of a life at that time. Perhaps because I came to the university where I wanted to go, I was carried away by the feeling of accomplishment. Although I didn't decide yet my major, the new campus life was just amazing to me. I did laundry by myself and worked out frequently because the gym
was very close to our dorm. Also, like in the movies, I have taken a lecture course in a huge auditorium and joined a club." Frankie said. "What was the club?" I asked. "It was YSD, a kind of debate club that Korean students organized. But, I quit it because it was not very good." "How was your school record at MU?" I asked. "It has fizzled out." "What do you mean?" "It was not good." "Have you taken classes well?" "It was not well; just....Honestly, I haven't taken classes steadily." Frankie looked like that he did not want to talk about his academic performance.

"You know what; the shape of my life has begun to falter since the second semester of my senior year in high school. I was just relaxed and started playing because I had already gotten accepted by MU. Even after entering the university, I have not changed yet." Frankie evaluated his current life style and the cause of his indolence.

In addition, Frankie said that the Korean church he was attending was not as satisfactory as expected. "The church, especially the college group pastor's sermon has seldom touched my heart. I just felt obligated to go to the church due to the settlement help of the church." "How was your church life during your high school days?" I asked. "The Korean church that I attended in Northern Virginia was also a big church. However, many students eagerly involved in the small group activities, and the teachers and the preacher who I met were really good guys. There were some punks in the youth group. I saw that with the steady care of the preacher they were changed little by little." In Frankie's voice and facial expression, I could read his longing for the personal care of the preacher from the Korean church of Northern Virginia.

Therefore, Frankie considered that there was no comfort zone for him. Most importantly, he said, there was no close friend who he could pour out his heart to. He believed that because he changed schools, he grew away from his friends at the Six Pack dormitory.
Global Positioning

Anna.

What does Anna think when recollecting her experiences living in the US since her secondary school years? How would she think after seeing her life changed going through ESA and studying at the MU for almost two semesters? I asked how her view of the US or the world had developed.

"Personally I have experienced a lot of change in my character and personality, all while going through hardship. During that time, I learned a lot and became more mature. In addition, externally, I could broaden and deepen my understanding and interest of new culture, language, country, and ethnicity. When I came to the US, at first I experienced a huge culture shock. For example, if I just lived in Korea, I would have never encountered certain issues like gay or lesbian. But, here, in the US, I have a friend who is gay.

On the other hand, viewing this from another angle, even if I kept living and studying in Korea without ESA in the US, 22-year-old Anna in Korea would not be different from 22-year-old Anna who lived in the US, especially in terms of openness. My fundamental view point on "otherness," especially on the thing which is called not "normal" would be the same regardless of the region where I live," said Anna.

It sounded like a contradiction at first. On one hand she admitted that through the experience of an ESA in the US she was able to broaden her view of the world in terms of 'differences.' On the other hand, however, she believed that without the experience in the US she could have developed similar values through acquiring various influences while staying in Korea. Through this comment I could see her independent character. Growing up as the eldest daughter and taking the leadership position many times in her elementary school days, she built a
character of generosity. Therefore, in her case, to the importance of cultivating a wider outlook on the world would not only be the first hand experience in a foreign culture but also her own character and mindset to the world.

Through this world view, Anna perceived the separation between “mainstream students” and Korean students. “Seen from my experience since the ninth grade in US high school, the old adage ‘birds of a feather flock together’ is true in every case of student ethnic groups. However, recently, I heard people say many times ‘Why is it that only Korean students hang out always in groups?’ I think some students from mainstream culture define white, Europeans, and sometimes even blacks as “we” and distinguish Asians as “others.” Another interesting fact is that Americans are aware of Japanese or Chinese culture a little bit because of their national power or the influence of mass media. However, they don’t know anything about Korean culture. Who knows ‘Hahoetal’? Nobody. The Korean country does not belong to the “we” category of American’s view, so Koreans became the target in this society.”

Anna poured out her opinion of invisible separation between mainstream and international students in the campus. She positioned herself and Korean students on campus depending upon the national position of Korea in the global society. It was her interpretation of “others (international, especially Korean students)” identified by “subjects (mainstream, especially American students)” based on the principle of power.

Then, Anna added how she was also different from other Korean students in terms of their relationship between African Americans. It sounded like her attitude during her elementary and middle school days in Korea when she took sides with outcast students.

"I felt that I would think differently from the other Korean international students here. The typical example is that many Korean students have a vague, negative impression of blacks
saying that 'They're strange,' or 'I can't understand them.' I’ve even heard some Korean Christian students make racist remarks. By the way, every time I hear that I found myself defending blacks. I really like blacks. They are very musical, rhythmical, cheerful, bright, and always looking for smile. Of course, they had their dark chapter in US history, but that doesn't mean they are inferior and we're superior," said Anna.

It sounded quite like a stereotype to me because it could be not the case for all African American. So I asked, "Could you tell me what made you think that?" "When I first came to the US, I studied at Louisiana for a year. At that time, there were more than 60% black students in the school. Whites were only 30%. I made many black friends and got to know that they really enjoyed singing songs together in one loud voice,” said Anna.

I could see Anna’s attitude from her Kenya missions trip that she volunteered at, a trip organized by the undergraduate group of Korean church. “During summer vacation after my junior year in high school, I went to Uganda for a short term mission’s trip. It was so good. On the last night before leaving Uganda, I even wished to escape the hotel to live in the country,” Anna said with her blushing face.

“What was so good for you at Uganda?” I asked.

Anna answered:

The region I visited was not developed well. There was no electric power, water supply, and sewage system. The poverty level was more serious than I imagined. However, I found that their spirits were so pure and clear. Of course, because of their simple-heartedness they tended to be superstitious. The amazing thing I experienced was that while I talked with them, I found my mind also became pure and clean. You know what, in this world, there are so many people who are selfish and have no consideration for
others including myself. But it seemed like the people of Uganda did not know how to deceive others. The trip was more for me to learn valuable lessons rather than me helping them with what I had. I would like to experience the same thing from this Kenya mission’s trip this summer so that I can learn the life that lives for other people’s occasions and lives together with others.

Anna put much meaning to the Kenya mission trip in terms of how she can spend her time, money, and effort not for herself but for others.

**Changsu.**

Changsu rated his ESA experience in the US and China and his college life at MU very highly and positively. "ESA was very meaningful in my life. Since I have lived and studied in the US and China during my secondary school days instead of living in Korea ordinarily, I could experience different cultures and increase my understanding them," said Changsu.

"Understanding of what?" I asked. "Well, the new environments? It was not hard for me to acquire new knowledge because I had open mind to new stuff," said Changsu. "Do you think it would be helpful to your campus life in the US?" "I guess so. Basically Koreans have aversion about 'difference' based on the idea that they have homogeneous ethnicity and culture. In those regards, I have developed a broad understanding of different cultures." Changsu said proudly.

As Changsu mentioned, there is a kind of obsession of adhering to the same thing for a long time without any change in the Korean sentiment even though the whole nation has experienced a very dramatic change through the modern history. From this perspective, sometimes the concept of 'difference' has negative connotations delivering the message of animosity or aversion in the Korean culture. However, Changsu thought his ESA experiences in China and the US helped him to have a more generous attitude towards 'difference.'
In addition, Changsu revealed his critical opinion of the Korean students who entered US colleges in order to gain secure jobs later in Korea. "Here at MU I have met many Korean students who came to the US believing they would get better jobs in Korea with a US degree. I think they are so pathetic. I don't understand why they are here with keeping their dreams closed like that. They should have entered Korean universities. What is worse, they just hang out with only a few Korean friends without trying to make any American friends and even without studying hard...."

"But sometimes it was not their own decision to come to the US to study. Their parents pushed them, didn't they?" I asked. "Yes, it's true. There are many Korean students who came here because it was hard to prepare college entrance exams and to win the cutthroat competition in high school. The educational environment in Korea is really bad. However, as long as they chose ESA, they went through the easy way in terms of studying up to their high school days. While, in the US, it is easy to study until high school, and from there, college students have to do everything by themselves. However, Korean students are unaware of that. That's the problem."

"Yeah, I can understand what you mean. I know that in Korea, students are too dependent on cramming, school teachers and private tutors put everything into their heads. Even in the US it's the same. I have seen some Korean students who were attending SAT cram school and receiving tutoring. I said. "Oh, I really couldn't understand the school work tutoring. I have seen it in China, too. Just concentrating on the school classes would be enough but they were paying hundreds of dollars for it," said Changsu.

Although the conversation between Changsu and I regarding Korean education and Korean high school students was seen through one perspective, it was still true. Changsu, as a student who went through high school and entered a US college, perceived correctly the problem
of Korean education, that it depends too much on private education, and consequently, Korean students who are losing the independent ability.

Changsu places a high valuation on his ESA experience and studying at MU from the view that those experiences were useful not only for his academic benefit but also for understanding diversity. From this perspective, making American friends as well as Korean friends was equally important to him.

Dongha.

Dongha's idea on the US college and his career has been changed through his ESA and freshman period. At first he came to the US believing that if he goes to a US college, especially MU, he would go to the better university than that of his parents attended, the Seoul National University. However, after attending MU for a year he considered that the Korean university and American university are the same and had practical worries about his future.

"I chose Physics because I like science, but there are many errors in Physics." Dongha said that he had some doubts on his decision. "Since Physics is also a study area that human beings are handling, it is not accurate. Although, at one time, Newton's Intermediate Dynamics was the big trend, more and more it seems to be changed. Relativity may not be true in the future. There is no exact truth but God." Dongha said like a philosopher.

"Where did you get the idea? From the American education?" I asked. "I used to think this in Korea, too. From reading," said Dongha.

"It means you march to a different drummer regardless of Korean or American education." I said.
"My mind is free. School education may influence personal capacity, but in my view Korean or American education doesn't matter to me. It's six of one and half a dozen of the other. It is not covered by gold here...," said Dongha.

I continued ask questions to review his motivation to come to the US.

[Excerpt 7]

I: Then, why did you parents send you here?

D: It was because there was a success story from one of my cousins. They made something out of nothing. They had been goofing off at school in Korea but became new people in the US"

I: Then, as long as you study in MU, you are succeeded. Right?

D: The more important thing is getting a job.

I: Are you worrying about getting a job already?

D: (Success) depends on the annual income.

I: What do you want to do?

D: I'm not sure yet. During high school days I just studied and expected that entering college would solve every problem. However, after coming here I don't know what I want to do. Although finally I chose Physics to study, but still I’m not sure if I selected right major.”

I: Didn't you say that you wanted to be a professor?

D: But, nowadays there are few Physics departments at Korean universities.

I: Then, what are you going to do?

D: First of all, to avoid going into military service I have to go to a graduate school.

Then, (in Korea) I can work at a research institute instead of joining the army.
Dongha apparently focused on practical interest, getting a secure job in the future. He did not put much meaning on studying in a US high school and university. In a manner of speaking, it sounded like Dongha learned the knowledge and developed a set of values from books without being bound by Korean or American education. However, he doubted his decision to major in Physics considering that the prospect of his major would be gloomy. In addition, he believed that success in life is equal to material well-being. Moreover, on the way to achieving his goal, he planned how to evade the required military service that would be for him an uncomfortable environment.

In contrast to Changsu, Dongha came to the US by his parent’s decision. He did not seem to be interested in diversity or globalism. His only concern was what would happen to his career? Either a Korean or American environment was not an important factor to him. Dongha considered that any place would be the same for a person to live in. His problem was how to find a secure job without any trouble.

**Multiple Identities**

So far, I have provided different pictures of findings through participants’ narratives in order to look at specific patterns of ESA students. Now, I would like to connect the dots of their experiences in terms of identity formation processes. Generally speaking, they were children of families, middle or high school students, and college prep students in Korea, and now they have been studying in US universities as undergraduate students. However, though this section, I will shed light on how they have identified themselves in different situation and in relationship with different people. More importantly, through tracking the identity formation process, I have found that there were significant relationships between self-identity and English speaking (Grant & Wong, 2008). Drawing on Bourdieu (1991), some theorists in the field of second language
acquisition have claimed that an awareness of the right to speak is a viable factor for second language learners to improve communicative competence (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton 2000).

It is true that through ESA period Korean students acquired in some measure of English fluency. However, considering their identity formation during their adolescent period without their parents in the US, it was hard to see that they created sound identity and claimed their right to speak English freely.

Anna.

After studying in Louisiana for a year as an exchange student, even though Anna knew it was an unreasonable demand, she kept pestering her parents to allow her to study longer in the US. They were not a wealthy family, but her father promised her support.

Since she moved to Oregon, she enjoyed her school life, too. However, she faced unexpected hardships with her host family guardians. When the guardian lady sometimes gave her only Oreo cookies for supper, Anna could not help smiling positively and thought that it should be an exotic cultural experience. Although the guardians asked her to help with some work at their newly opened restaurant in the evening without any payment, she did the work willingly because she learned from her father that helping others is a good thing to do. Even when she had to cancel her extra activities such as softball club or going bowling with her friends because the guardians refused to provide her with rides, she tried to understand their everyday busy schedule. Just day by day, she wished the school classes kept lasting without end so that she might not have to go to the host family’s home. Of course, finally Anna had some brighter days when she moved to her Bible teacher’s home, and more so when she entered her dormitory at MU. As long as she moved around, she was always able to have nutritious food at the dorm restaurant or to any other place near campus.
When I met her again almost a year later for a follow-up interview, she told me about her Kenyan mission trip last summer. It was not only her religious experience but also a self-awareness experience of her English usage.

“Although I believe there is no big problem with my English, I have never felt that I can fully express myself to other native speakers in the US. However, when I stayed in Kenya for ten days, it sounds strange but I felt I could speak English to them much better than I did in US,” Anna said with a face full of amazement. I asked what the meaning was of ‘fully express.’ “What do you mean of ‘fully express myself’? Do you mean the expressing of your emotion?” “No, I don’t think so. I was able to express my emotion with my English. I could put my emotion in my speech through intonation, tone, and my facial or body language.” Anna answered. “Then what was the difference you experienced in Kenya?” I asked again.

Anna answered:

In terms of linguistic communication itself, it would be harder for me to do in Kenya than in the US. As you know, they use British English, and because of the different culture many terms were different from what I used in the US. Moreover, depending on the educational level, their English competence was vastly diverse. However, what I felt was that they were willing to listen to me. They were interested in me and my story. I could read it through their eyes, faces, and attitudes. Many of the children usually have only one meal per day. But one day two little girls brought their food to me. It was a kind of flat and hard bread. They kept saying to me ‘eat, eat.’ I was almost about to cry. Finally, I shared it with them. In a situation like that, I had many opportunities to talk with children, housewives, and male adults. It was an amazing time to me. It was I who was really blessed through the mission. By the way, in the US, I’ve never experienced a moment
like that. I don’t think and expect that Americans pay attention or listen to me in order to understand me.

The rejection that Anna experienced from the guardians during her high school days was the case of the exact opposite from the experience she had in Kenya. She formed positive identity in a situation in which she was valued in the given community and accordingly felt free to speak English to the attentive listeners (Norton, 2008).

**Eugene.**

I could find a similar correlation between self-identity and English speaking right from Eugene’s case. Eugene was a participant who experienced the most painful silent period during his ESA days. Considering his private English learning during elementary school days and one year of studying in Canada, Eugene’s English competence or fluency should not be that bad. However, for three years, from eighth through tenth grade, he stayed in his own silent world especially in school. As he explained, the serious loneliness, worrying about not speaking perfect English, and the competing tension in the relation with his brother could be the possible reasons of his refusal to speak English.

In other words, through the ESA period, Eugene experienced a shift in his identity. Living in Toronto, Canada together, Eugene’s mother functioned as a care giver and buffer zone in between Eugene and his brother. However, without his mother, Eugene perceived his brother as a competitor or even an enemy. Compared to his brother, Eugene thought that he fell behind in every aspect: English, GPA, and social life in high school. The deficit portion used to be covered by mother’s affectionate care in Korea and Canada. However, in the US he had to face it every day without any proper treatment.
Also, the school environment of US high schools was totally different from the school in Canada. There were several Asian or Korean students in Canadian middle school, so Eugene made many friends to hang out together even after school. However, in the US high school, which was a private Christian school, Eugene and his brother were the only Korean and Asian. From the first day of the school, Eugene had no idea how to handle the concentrated interest of his white classmates onto him. Those personal, family, and social environments made Eugene withdraw to his comfort zone, silence, whereby removing his confidence.

Likewise, participants went through the process of transforming identities depending on the situation and the relation with other people. Accordingly, they found or (un)claimed the right to speak (Bourdieu, 1991; Grant & Wong, 2008), or their rights were sometimes limited or deprived by the outer force.

In Dongha and Frankie’s case, they gave up or did not expect anything from the university when they struggled with low academic performance. According to them, they knew there was a counselor in their department and their role was assisting students’ campus life. Although it was mandatory for them to meet the counselor once a semester, they did not expect anything they would get from them to improve or revise their life style.

I asked what kind of advice they received from their meeting with counselors.

“When I was in high school, there was a counselor, too. But I don’t know what his job was. In this university, I was supposed to meet him once a semester. What I heard from her was just ‘Oh, your GPA is very low. You have to study harder. Do not cut the classes.’ That’s it.” Frankie said.

“He just suggested which courses I had to register in the following semester. That was all,” said Dongha.
Of course, they did not reveal the full details of their struggling campus life. The thing they had in common was that they recognized that the cause of the problem was themselves. They just assumed that it was their own problem and that they had to take care of it by themselves, and it would not be resolved by counseling.
Chapter Six

Discussion

In chapter four and chapter five I tried to deliver students’ narratives through their voices. I drew several small pictures as detailed as possible to make their experiences, feelings, and even emotions come to life. In the last section of chapter five I attempted to connect the dots in order to find some meaningful shape out of the patterns (Bell, 2002) in the picture. From this discussion section onward I will begin the work, of putting together pieces of students’ narratives to see and understand Korean ESA students’ lives and experiences in US higher education institutions. Through this process I will reinterpret their narratives reading between the lines.

Contour of the study

As I begin, it would be useful to remind the outline of my dissertation to call to mind where this study started from. The goal of this study was to understand Korean ESA students and to examine their unique global positioning in the US higher education system. At the beginning of this stage, the hypotheses I formulated was first that the ESA was the product of Korean parents’ quest for local and or global competitiveness given the socio-historical context of globalization. Second, although US universities are actively recruiting international students chanting the slogan of internationalization, the infrastructure and perspective of diversity commensurate with the catchphrase need to be more improved in the global campuses. On this groundwork, I developed two overarching questions to accomplish the goal of this study: 1) how did Korean college students navigate their pre-college ESA experiences? And how do they reflect retrospectively on that experience? 2) How does ESA affect transition to college: namely, how does this experience shape their response to the culture and practices of the American university?
For the research method, I adopted the Case Narrative Inquiry. Five Korean ESA college students appeared in my study. If I wrote a report to deliver only the facts of how they went through their ESA period and campus life in the US, the readers could acquire some knowledge of them. However, through only knowledge, it would be hard to expect them to form emotional consensus to change their thought and action. In that sense, narrative writing is an appropriate method to convey a message in the form of plot to inspire readers’ emotion and sensibility (Eisner, 1979). Following the plot with empathy, readers may identify with the participants of the study if they recall their own experiences and life stories that have to do with participants’ (Stake, 1978).

Recap

Global Migration.

In terms of leaving their home country, Korean ESA students are the Korean diaspora in 21st century. However, different from the traditional migration such as immigration, their transnational migration is pivotal migration because they moved around the world on their axes, their parents who are grounded in Korea. From this view, they take on nomadic character.

South Korean Ideologies that Affect ESA Experiences

When those Korean ESA students came to the US, they did not come with empty or neutral mind. In other words, even though they were still in early- or mid-teens, they had already developed a type of value system to some degree influenced by the prevailed ideologies in South Korea. The ESA students voluntarily and/or involuntarily acquired those ideas from the socio-cultural environment in and out of schools and families. Without a doubt, the most influential impact was from their parents who inculcated their ideas into their children.
The most influential message to the Korean students was the idea of “the strong is right.”

To the Korean parents’ generation who went through IMF financial crisis period at the dawn of the 21st Century, gaining a competitive advantage over others was a fundamental surviving strategy. So, many Korean parents more invested in their children’s academic success than any other times believing it was a guaranteed way for their children to get secure jobs in the future. In this context, the social trend of ESA started to thrive until at the end of 2000’s even though the ESA of elementary and middle school students was illegal in South Korea.

**ESA Encounters with US Power Structure.**

When Korean ESA students came to the US, they realized the power structure of social levels, something that they had never recognized in Korea. As soon as they arrived in the US, they had to face a power structure based on race and the English language. Anna, Eugene, and Frankie commonly experienced the power of race, English language, guardians in the host families or the school environment.

**Race and English Language.**

When Frankie had a conflict with an African-American teacher at his first school in the US, he made a decision not only to report the unfair treatment he received from the teacher, but also to make his effort for him to be fired. Considering the facts that he was an only eighth grader and had limited English proficiency at that time, we can understand how it was a serious issue. However, Frankie learned from his Korean-American male guardian about how to behave in the relation with other ethnic people.

Yeah, for example he (Korean-American male guardian) told me to use 'African American' instead of 'black' to address black people. By the way, during the meeting my
guardian took a very passive attitude (in front of the white counselor) attempting only to understand what was going on instead of supporting or advocating me.

Frankie expected that his male guardian would advocate him because he was under the male guardian’s protection. However, when Frankie observed the male guardian’s objective manner to understand what was going on and his nice attitude in front of the white and the black teachers, Frankie changed his mind not to bring up his complaint any more worrying that he might get any bad grade from the African-American teacher.

**Host Family/Guardians.**

When Anna was placed in difficult circumstances in the home-staying house, she considered them as trials that she had to bear to succeed in American life. Even though the guardians provided her with Oreo cookies from time to time instead of decent meals for dinner, and refused to give her rides for after school activities due to the relatively inexpensive home-staying fee, or told her to sweep the floor, move tables at their newly opened restaurant, she took them for granted because it was America.

Anna said, "I thought that if I failed to get along amicably with those people, it would be the same wherever I go later. So, I tried to make greater efforts to make the relationship better between the guardians.” Anna chose to change herself to adjust to living in the US where she would meet many people who gave her a hard time.

She also identified the relationship between the school and her as a dichotomy: the powerful and the powerless. Of course, finally the Bible teacher was aware of Anna’s hardship and helped her resolve the problem. However, instead of identifying herself as a high school student who was ill treated by her guardians, she positioned herself as a powerless foreign student in the US.
I thought because I was a foreign student, it would be better for me not to tell anything to teachers at school. I was not sure if any teachers would stand by me. Instead, I believed the connection between school and the guardians was stronger than that between the school and me because the school introduced the host family to me and also all three children of the guardians attended the school. I was afraid that the school would not listen to my opinion.

Anna’s narrative was surprising because in Korea she always sided with the weak as classroom president. However, in the US she just tried to accept any unfair situation without raising her voice to point out the problem. Even she did not tell her hardship to her parents because they could not speak English. It meant that Anna believed if somebody could not speak English well, he or she could not stand against Americans even they did something wrong.

In the case of Frankie, he had to conform to fit in the rule-oriented environment of his home-stay house. He recalled that, "It was like a military camp....I decided to be a robot." The connotation of ‘military camp’ revealed how Frankie perceived the relationship between the host guardians and himself. It was a relationship between commanders and a nameless soldier who had to obey orders. His decision to act like a robot meant that denied himself and tried to do submit his emotion and will.

Sometimes trivial misunderstanding caused serious tension between the host family and Frankie. When Frankie sighed during the corny joke that the daughter of the guardian lady made, the male guardian threw a shoe box at Frankie in anger.

"You just don't listen, do you? This is my house, and because you're living with us, you have to follow my rules. You should change your attitude, otherwise ‘be my guest’."
Frankie astonished at the male guardian’s unexpected reaction. He did not dare to reply to him saying that “Your daughter made a silly joke and it made me sigh.” The warning the male guardian made, “You should change otherwise ‘be my guest’” should sound to Frankie like a threat. When the male guardian mentioned ‘be my guest’ in English, it was not a polite expression such as “Help yourself” or “After you.” Rather, it connoted that “you have my permission to leave at any time you want.” In other words, from the view point of Korean culture, it meant that a guest is not a family member and can only stay based upon the premise that one must leave soon.

It reminded me of my reflection on the differences between American and Korean cultures and their respective discipline styles. I know in America, “Go to your room” or “You are grounded for a week” is a severe punishment to children, especially to the teenagers. On the other hand, in Korea, the direction is opposite. When a child makes a huge and serious mistake, (at least when I was young) parents usually yell at the child, “Get out of this house!” Well, I have never imagined a more horrible punishment than this because as a young boy I did not know where to go. Moreover, in my opinion, the expression was derived from the way old houses were structured. With the exception some rich people, many ordinary people lived in a small houses. In that case, there would be no separate room to stay alone in as a punishment. Besides, it should also be related with the social nature of large families. Considering many other siblings were staying in the house without any trouble, if a child has to be separated from the group, it should not only be the punishment from the parents but also isolation from the society where he or she has belonged to for a long time. Then, it is strong enough to strike fear into the child’s heart.

From this perspective, “Get out of this house” and “Be my guest” seem to correlate. Since Frankie felt all the expectations of his single mother on his shoulders, being thrown out of
the guardian’s house would mean failure in the US. Therefore, not to be kicked out of the house, he had to be an obedient child to the guardians who held all the cards.

**White-dominant High School.**

In Eugene’s case, when his mother returned to Korea after living together with her sons for a year in Toronto, Canada, he found himself to be very intimidated by the US private high school. When he lost his safety net that had been provided by his mother, he also lost his confidence to socialize with others in the white dominant small high school. This seriously influenced his English speaking strategy. Since he had no psychological confidence he had kept silence for more than two years until he felt comfortable enough to speak English.

Well, by all accounts, it was my fault because there were no bad guys at all in the school.

It was a predominantly white Christian school. Their parents were devout Christians and the kids were very gentle. I was the one who decided not to speak any English.

It was interesting to see that he blamed himself for not speaking English after he transferred to the US high school. Although as Eugene and his brother were the only Asian students in the school, Eugene would feel intensive closure, he thought he was the responsible for creating the awkward relationship with other white students through limited communication with them.

There is a thread of connections between Eugene’s case and Pierce’s (1995) study on female immigrants in Canada. In her study, Pierce argued that relations of power affect interaction between language learners and target language speakers. Then, Eugene’s long lasted silent period can be interpreted as a resistance of opportunities to speak English instead of his individual problem. His social identity was changed when he came from the multicultural school of Canada to the white dominant high school environment. Nevertheless, when he recalled his
silent period, Eugene just blamed himself for his silence. This case can be an empirical evidence to provide classroom teachers or host culture community people who deal with ELL students with vivid information and strategy of how to understand ELLs and how to secure the opportunity for ELLs to have the right to speak. 

Likewise, when those ESA students - Anna, Eugene, and Frankie - encountered strong power of their guardians or school environment, they tried to change themselves to meet the standards that the host family or school tacitly set up. According to them, they have never struggled to negotiate with the host family guardians to find middle ground. Even though it was not that serious like an infringement upon human rights, the pressure that those Korean high school students felt thinking they had to do well by themselves in a foreign land forced them to adjust to the host country’s culture as soon as possible. Furthermore, this initial experience influenced them to be silent continuously and not to claim their right to speak freely.

**Voicelessness in Response.**

In the power structure these Korean ESA students recognized in the US, they were deprived of their right to speak English. I am not asserting that somebody else forced them not to speak English. Rather, they were intimidated by the power of race, English language, host guardians, and white-dominant high school and did not know how to communicate to resolve the conflicts with them or even did not try to resolve them. In this view, I would define the Korean ESA students’ voicelessness was not voluntary but involuntary.

The students’ voiceless status was exactly the opposite from the picture that their parents expected when they decided and sent their children to the US The students’ parents’ generation went through the 70s and 80s during their young adult period. It means that while they observed
the rapid economic growth of Korea, they had to witness the severely restricted freedom of speech under the long time military regime. It influenced creating strict and competitive company atmospheres and standardized the educational system at school. Although finally, in 1987 Korea started to have a new era of democracy after a long period of military dictatorship in the country, it is said that the country is on the road to realize mature democracy.

This contemporary history of Korea was a motivational influence for their parents to decide to send their children to the US or any other advanced countries. Of course, they anticipated that their children would acquire the power that the English and foreign country’s degree had. However, at the same time, they were anxious for their children to have better education in a developed country. It was not different from the desire that parents’ generation struggled to overcome horrible poverty they experienced right after the Korean War and emphasized the importance of education not to hand over the same poverty to the next generation.

For example, Eugene’s father also wanted Eugene to study in US because he really disliked the standardized educational system in Korea. Anna’s parents also sent Anna to the US longing for her to study in the culture where women are not discriminated because of their gender.

It was common among parents to have wished to provide their children with freedom. Since preparing for college entrance exams is extremely difficult in Korea, they sent their children to the US in order to help them escape all the college entrance nonsense. In this view, the ESA phenomenon that has started from the beginning of 90’s was the huge exodus from the oppression to Canaan, the Land of Promise for a better education, a better self-realization, and freedom.
However, as I mentioned earlier in this section, what my participants encountered in the US was a different type of power that English speaking people had. An interesting aspect of this time was that, at least initially, they tried to submit themselves under the authority without any effort to resist or escape from it such as they did in Korea. In my view, it was because of the myth that their parents inculcated in their mind.

Ever since these students were little, they grew up hearing the world view from their parents: “play in the big league.” To the parents’ view, while the Korean society and their education were the minor league, American culture and education looked like the major league. In order to enlist their children’s names in the major league, they did not spare any effort to support in investing money and enduring the pain of separation. Because those children knew the seriousness of this ESA project, they did their best to cooperate with their parents considering the different type of hardship in the US as a trial they had to undergo for success.

However, the problem was that because of the preprogrammed, underlying assumption even when they received unreasonable treatment, they were not able to tell right from wrong. Instead, they tried to modify themselves in order to match up to the expectations and requests of the powerful who they thought as gatekeepers to the major league.

Anna’s narrative also showed an example of voicelessness.

Sometimes it felt like I was walking on eggshells when living with host families. Because I was the one who had entered their family, [*I figured*] that *it was me who had to change.* But, I felt like I was the one who was out of place there. In any case, it was me who kept changing -- no it was me who intentionally made an effort to follow their lifestyle. It was not all bad, but I could not but think what an idiot I was [i.e., to be conforming in this way].
Likewise, Anna acquiescently tried to transform herself to be assimilated to the way of living in the US believing that is the only way to repay her parents’ sacrifice and prove her value in the big league.

It is, as Bordieu argued, the relationship between symbolic violence and a passive submission to the ruling order. The Korean students followed the process of misrecognition and recognition (Gal, 1989; Thomson, 1984) of the ruling power from the English speakers in the US considering it as legitimacy. The goal of this process is to access or maintain the higher *habitus*, the way of living of high class. In other words, the class movement competition which was performed in Korea has been expanded to the global site: America.

These students’ fundamental notions of the power structure has changed very little even in the university. However, along with the increased number of Korean international students, they responded differently in the mega campus. I will talk about this in the next section.

*Ethnic Solidarity and Self-segregation.*

Before entering university, the focal students’ reaction to their guardians or outer was trivial. Even when they were treated unreasonably, they just swallowed their sadness or complained to their parents making international calls. However, when they met lots of other Korean international students on campus who seemed like they were in the same boat, their reaction started to be visible. They began to bind together.

It is the significant difference between Korean ESA international students and Korean American students who are the children of Korean immigrant families in the US According to Jo (2001), who studied how Korean American students formed cultural identities through a heritage learning process in a university, she concluded that becoming an English speaker does not necessarily mean the loss of an ethnic identity, and that learning Korean (a ‘heritage’ language)
does not necessarily lead to homogeneous ethnic identity formation. Even though they learned Korean heritage language, instead of identifying themselves as American or Korean, rather they developed a unique ethnic identity in the third space. In other words, those Korean American students positioned their ethnic identity in-between American and Korean.

On the other hand, in her more in-depth analysis of Korean American university students, Abelmann (2010) found and argued that Korean American students do not ‘self-segregate’ in the way the term implies, but rather are victims of racism and racial stereotypes. It means that what appears to be Korean students’ “self-segregation” has been made more by “racialized experiences” than by students’ choices (p. 165).

As those scholars insisted, Korean American students in the US higher education stranded in between Americanness and Koreanness. They were victimized by the invisible racism in the campus with the stigmatized tag on their back: “self-segregation.”

However, through this study what I found revealed that those Korean ESA international students were similar but, in another sense, was a more serious condition compared to the Korean American students. It is the strong solidarity of Korean international students, and it could possibly exacerbate and reproduce the racism or segregation in the campus or in the other places.

Before moving on to the next section of the impact of solidarity, I will scrutinize again the important factors of Korean ESA college students’ solidarity. The first main cause was the severe loneliness they experienced during their ESA period, and accordingly they felt the strong appeal of co-ethnic life when they entered college. They felt this only their mid-teens when they left their home, family, and the protection of their parents to live and study in the foreign country. Most of the case it should be their first experience to leave their comfort zone. In fact, unlike
Korea\textsuperscript{12}, without a ride they were not able to go to any places. It was only their room in the home-staying house where they spent most of the time alone after school. Then, it was not surprising to see that finally when they met many Korean international students who shared the similar experience in the campus, they were so glad to get together.

Changsu helped me to understand Eugene’s changed social networking strategy, was used to hanging out with only white students in his private high school and now stick together with only Korean students in the university. He said:

In my view, the case of students like Eugene seemed to be due to a strong longing for Korea. I was the same when I was in eighth grade. As an eighth grader I attended middle school at Boston for a year. There were no other Korean kids but me. So, I hung out with only American kids at that time. It was not bad. Then, after a year when I came to China to go to high school, I met some Korean kids. I was so glad to see them because I found people who had the similar values as mine. I think Eugene is in the same situation.

Anna also explained why they stayed up all night almost every Friday to hang around with other Korean students in one’s dormitory or apartment room. “On Friday night I really don’t want to go to bed. I just want to relieve the stress of the week with my friends all night long.” In this view, the strong solidarity of Korean ESA students was their desperate struggle to find an only alternative from their missing comfort zone a long time ago.

The next factor of strong solidarity among Korean ESA students was their longing for in-depth communication. Those students desired to have someone to speak to and to be understood by. Depending on their high school environment, they were able or not able to have friends from the same ethnic group. Besides, during the high school days, as Eugene, Anna, and Changsu

\textsuperscript{12} Including Seoul, most big cities in Korea have a well-developed public transportation system: subway, city bus, and local bus
mentioned, it did not seem to be too difficult to make friends from the different ethnic group. However, forming close friendships on this mega campus was totally different from that in their high schools. Sometimes, it was because of their language barrier as Eugene said, “Speaking English, I don’t have many topics to talk with American students.” Many times, Korean students found that American students were not interested in building a relationship with them outside of the classroom. Therefore, only when they were with other Korean international students, - in many cases Korean American students are not included in this grouping - they could have real communication becoming true speakers and listeners to each other.

On the other hand, however, Korean ESA students’ cohesion in seeking for meaningful relationships could be interpreted as an active message to segregate everyone else in other ethnic groups. It was an assertion of agency by forming ethnic group. Of course, there were lots of small subgroups that they only associated with. As Eugene mentioned, ten to 15 Korean students hung around together at the Six Pack dormitory, and there were also several core groups with four to five students. Then, what is the meaning of making everyone else as “Others”? It was their first attack to avoid being attacked or segregated. Through their ESA period, they experienced racial discrimination or segregation to some degree. So, when they came to the university, with the help of a large number of Korean students, they tried to carry an independent message saying “we are cool by ourselves.” This aspect was revealed as turning away first from the majority students and isolating themselves from any other minority students. This was a kind of *habitus* of Korean ESA students.

Being treated like an outcast in the big university was not an acceptable status at all to the Korean ESA students. When they tried to get closer to the boundary of American students, they felt that they have become like a fish out of water because of the linguistic and cultural barriers.
Although they had not experienced racial discrimination in Korea, they knew well the problem of bullying in many Korean schools. Changsu said that when he was an elementary student in Korea, if somebody teased him, he should pay back to the harasser to prove that he was not an easy boy. Moreover, Anna, who used to always stand on the side of outcasts in her classroom, said that she observed many students joining actively the majority who left an outcast out in the cold fearing that if they sympathized with the outcast by chance, they would be treated as an outcast too. Therefore, the social experiences they brought from Korea and their ESA period impacted them to conduct themselves in creating a stronghold in order not to feel small before the majority students.

Out of the several other factors of fostering solidarity, what I want to comment lastly is that peer pressure also functioned as an element and should not be ignored. Some Korean students tried to have some opportunities to hang around with other ethnic group students. However, other Korean students who already formed a coterie were critical of them considering they were traitors. So, in this time, the fear of being ostracized by the same ethnic group of students pushed them into staying in the boundary of Korean students.

Eugene, and Frankie chose the Six Pack dormitory with a view to make many American friends because they already got the secondhand information that was a white dominant dormitory. However, at every mealtime when they met a handful of Korean students in the white dominant dormitory cafeteria, they just naturally gathered together at a same table. It was the first step to becoming a Six Pack family.

Eugene said that if a group of Korean students saw a Korean student who was eating with other white students in the dormitory restaurant, they would think, “Who the heck is he?”
“There is Joon who gets along well with American kids. At first, he seldom hung out with us, but nowadays he only hangs around with us instead of Americans.”

It implied that there was a gravity effect and peer pressure among the Korean international students.

**Unexpected or Unconcerned?**

While most medicine packs include instructions on how to dose or understand the effectiveness of a drug, they also had a disclaimer, because every medicine may have some side effect. Even though a drug has a marvelous efficacy, it can be poisonous if one misuses it. Likewise, we need to pay attention to the deleterious effect that the slogan of globalization can possibly create.

What I found through this dissertation research indicated these problems.

First, it was only paradise that most participants and their parents expected when they made a decision to leave for ESA. Since the goal, studying in the US, was so important and absolute proposition to the parents and students, any hardship they would face was not expected or neglected.

The decision making process for ESA showed us how parents were serious in sending their children to the US. Anna had to take an exam to be an exchange student without any advance notice from her parents. Changsu’s parents showed the land where they had to go in the future. Dongha and Frankie were almost forced out of their houses and even their country under the foresight of their parent(s): “You cannot go to any good college in Korea.” In some respects, to sum up these scenes, I would like to call Korean ESA students educational refugees who have been forced by their parents to leave their home country escaping hellish competition for university entrance. In other words, it was their exodus to Canaan, in which they believed they
could get quality education to be global leaders, global citizens, or at least to acquire the ladder to move up to the higher *habitus*.

However, the narratives of my participants denoted that stepping on the US territory did not mean they entered Canaan, their own promised land. Moreover, receiving education in the US high schools or universities did not guarantee them becoming global citizens. Those four male participants, Eugene, Frankie, and Dongha, experienced a serious state of drift during their freshman year. Although there was a difference between degrees, all of them showed the loss of goal, self-control, and self-esteem after entering the university.

Frankie and Dongha did not study at all after coming to MU because they believed the assigned mission of ESA was accomplished by getting the admission letter from the university and avoided establishing any new goals. With low grades, Frankie had to move to a community college after the first semester consoling himself with the fact that at least he could save money. Although Dongha’s parents sent him to the US expecting that he could study at a better university than the one they attended in Korea, Dongha had no interest in not only studying at the university but also socializing with any other students regardless of ethnicity. He just preferred to stay in his own comfort zones: sleeping in his bed, spending time in an empty library, or enjoying Playstation all night long.

On the other hand, it was not only the participants’ parents who had to see the unexpected results from their children. The other party was the MU that recruited actively the Korean international students during the last decade under the flag of internationalization or globalization. It was because consciousness and cultural by contraries, in this view, it is doubtful if it is really an unexpected situation of campus globalization or unconcerned subject of the university.
Chapter Seven
Implication and Conclusion

Significance of the Research

Dual Focus.

The significant contribution of this study was that it enhanced the understanding of Korean ESA college students’ transition from secondary school to US post-secondary institution, documenting their detailed life experiences during their ESA period and college years in this global era. To accomplish this goal, I employed dual approaches. First, as the macroscopic approach, I provided a detailed backdrop of Korean ESA phenomenon in the current historical context of globalism and neoliberalism. In doing so, this study teased out how Korean parents’ success-oriented ideology drove their children to receive US secondary and post-secondary education in the US via Korean students’ eyes. Also, I analyzed the problem of MU in terms of segregation issue among students that was the contradictory environment from the direction that the university pursued.

On the other hand, for the microscopic approach I delivered six Korean ESA students’ voices via a one year observation and in-depth interviews. In this approach, I tried to pay attention to the individual and vivid testimonies that might be easily forgotten under the big discourse of globalism, ESA, and transnational migration. In addition, adopting narrative style, I intended to create a place where the readers of this research can understand deeply those participants and communicate with them, because narrative is a powerful tool to utilize not only our consciousness but also our emotions to understand other’s life experiences.
Wake-up Call.

The inner voices of participants of this study, Korean ESA college students, convey an important message to their Korean parents and MU, the university they attend. They, in a broad manner, may be considered the interested parties of this win-win game\(^\text{13}\).

In this context, capturing the individual narratives and voices of students who have been lost within the system of higher education, this study provided students with the opportunity to send a wake-up call to those parties requesting emergent attention.

According to the participants, the Korean parents’ demands on their children can be summed up in two ideas: First, “Do not repeat the mistakes that I made.” Second, “You have to maintain the vested rights I built up.” While the former is the desire to move to upper classes, the latter is an urging call for maintaining or reproducing their *habitus* (Bordieu, 1979). In order to meet their parents’ expectation, Korean youth students have entered US education system under the name of “being global leaders (or at least citizens).” However, this study requests that Korean parents rethink if their children are proceeding to true happiness or they are being burned out by the parents’ competition. This is not an argument regarding if they have to send their children abroad or not. Rather this calls upon awakening of Korean parents and their children regarding the gain and loss from the ESA and US higher education and taking responsibility accordingly.

On the other hand, this study sends a significant message to US higher education that is recruiting international students actively. As the result of this study revealed, the vicious cycle of cause and effect (power structure $\rightarrow$ lost the right to speak $\rightarrow$ strong solidarity among the same

\(^{13}\text{In an extended research of Korean ESA college students, Choi, Pak, and Kim argue that the lure of increasing international student enrollment is seen as a “win-win situation” in the sense that a degree from a prestigious US university seemingly provides more social capital for future employment opportunities for the individual while providing universities with additional tuition revenue. (Choi et al, in process)}\)
ethnic group) can be reproduced in other places and settings. It means that depending on power structures the segregation phenomena is reproduced among minorities creating intra-orders in other countries. Then, we can say that US higher education, as institutions that have the largest number of international students, have an important responsibility in terms of the fundamental principles of educational equality, understanding diversity, and public good. If higher education in the global era does not emphasize educating students with those, the vicious cycle of creating “others” would be repeated constantly all around the globe. In this sense, the theoretical framework of this study, Bourdieu’s Reproduction Theory, cannot fit for these findings. In the theory, he emphasized the social capital is reproduced from generation to generation in a family through the aid of school education. However, the result of this study needs more expanded concept to explain the reproducing aspect not only in family but also in the societies and nations.

Limitation of the Current Study

There are two limitations that need to be acknowledged and addressed regarding the present study. The first limitation concerns selecting research participants for this research project. There were only six Korean ESA college students who participated in the complete study, and each participant was in a Bible study group I led for a year. Since this study is not quantitative research intended to generalize the result, the small sample size would not be problematic. Rather, the real limitation lay in the fact that those participants might have similar perspectives on their ESA experiences and campus lives because they were recruited for the research from the same group in a church. However, as I previously addressed in Chapter Three, Methodology, because I used information-oriented sampling instead of random sampling, I was able to acquire the richest information from those participants. Also, the data turned out to show that their narratives delivered a very diverse spectrum of their life experiences and perspectives.
The second limitation has to do with the researcher in terms of cultural or personal bias. As a researcher, I admit that I had cultural or personal bias in conducting this research and analyzing the data I collected. It is said that we all have biases and everything is political. Moreover, since this study was launched with a specific research goal and purpose, I can say that the researcher’s bias can also be interpreted as the researcher’s position and perspective on the Korean ESA social phenomenon and US higher education in the global era. However, as Chabris and Simons’ (1999) renowned experiment, “The invisible gorilla,” showed, when I direct my research interest to problematic issues of Korean ESA college students in the US higher education, it may leave the rest of the facts in darkness.

By considering the shortcomings associated with this methodology, perhaps this study could serve as a basis for further research and analysis of the study of international students and US higher education in the future.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

More research about the ways of overcoming segregation in the global campus is required because this study focused on examining the problem of Korean ESA college students in the US higher education. At the present stage I tried to figure out the life experiences of one group of students in a campus. Then, the fundamental theoretical framework and findings can be applied to other ethnic group of students. Also, more importantly, finding ways to overcome the current problems revealed in this study would be very meaningful and significant as further research.

On top of that, follow-up research on those Korean ESA college students is also needed. I studied six freshmen students regarding their ESA and college experiences. When they are in the senior classes of university, how will their life and their response to the global campus have
changed? Also, after graduation how will they negotiate to be global citizens? These studies will provide US higher education and the Korean community with important reflections on the current internationalization trend.

**Conclusion**

Aside from the institutional effects of the Korean ESA phenomenon, this study captures the individual narratives and voices of students who have been lost within the system of higher education. In particular, this study examines the complex nature of Korean ESA college students’ life experiences tracking their secondary and post-secondary education in the US. In South Korea, the government driven “English Fever” trend and the “Educational Exodus” syndrome have produced many ESA students who leave for foreign countries to gain an advantage in competition. At the same time, US universities, especially public institutions, have begun to admit more international students than ever under the systematic umbrella, globalization.

However, as the participants’ narratives reveal, the Korean ESA students experienced not only a severe sense of isolation and loneliness, but a power structure between the host family and the main stream students from their ESA and campus lives. When the focal participants encountered the power of race and the English speaking people, they had conflict; they kept silent to avoid problems, disregarding their right to speak and seeking a resolution. The underlying factor of voicelessness was the preprogrammed ideology they leaned from their parents. It was ‘the strong is right’. In Korea it was dependent on social capital and financial status. Out of this concept, they considered their misrecognition of the power structure as correct recognition, and they granted legitimacy to the power (Bourdieu, 1991). They believed that although sometimes they were treated unreasonably by the people who had the power, it was the gateway they had to go through to succeed in the big league: the US university. So, when they
entered a US university, they breathed a sigh of relief believing they were standing on the territory of “Canaan,” or in other words believing “I accomplished my goal.” However, the ongoing struggles in the American university due to segregation issue showed that their lives in the wilderness were not finished yet, and in a way they were academic refugees who this neo-liberalized and globalized generation produced.

Even though the US university actively recruited international students, it was not difficult to see another form of “sink or swim” policy on the campus. Later, on campus, the only adaptive strategy the students selected was proactive response to the outer context that was aloof toward international students. It was creating a strong bond with only other Korean international students to make secure their own culture, emotion, and the feeling of solidarity. In this sense, the solidarity of Korean ESA students was involuntary, but at the same time, self-segregation. On one hand, because it was reaction to the action, it was their self-defense disposition. On the other hand, because they did not want to feel that they were isolated by the main stream students, they actively created strong bonds together isolating all other ethnic group of students. It was quite the opposite situation from that of the spirit of internationalization.

In this context, more importantly, the vicious cycle of isolating “others” could be reproduced. It means that not only social capital is reproduced from generation to generation in families (Bourdieu, 1986), but also, depending on power structure, the segregation phenomenon can be reproduced among various social environments to create intra-orders. In a way, even though this study focused on one specific group of students, the results and message will be relevant and significant for the entire sector of international and minority students. In another way, this study called attention to the warning that many scholars (Papastephanou, 2005; Yang,
2003) raised; that is, “how can we maintain and encourage goodwill, plurality, and equality in today’s market –driven globalization era?”
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176


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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<Background>
1. Where is your home located in Korea?
2. What is your parent(s)’ job(s)?
3. What is your parents’ education level?
4. How can you identify your family’s social economic status?

<Life in Korea>
5. When did you leave Korea?
6. What was your school life in Korea?
7. How can you describe your academic achievement in Korea?
8. What was the challenge in your school life?
9. What did you enjoy most back in Korea?

<Decision ESA>
10. How much information did you/your parents have about ESA?
11. What was the main source of the information?
12. Who decided ESA?
13. What was your preparation for ESA?
14. How did you study English?
15. Could you tell me the process of your ESA? Which country did you go first? Why?

<Life story of ESA>
16. How can you describe your ESA experience?
17. How was your school life during ESA?
18. What was the challenge in your school life during ESA?

19. What did you enjoy in your school life?

20. Could you tell me your friends in and out of school?

21. What did you do outside of school?

22. Could you tell me your religious life?

23. How did you maintain the relationship with your family during ESA?

<After ESA>

24. What are you majoring at now?

25. How did you choose university and major? Why?

26. What was your expectation on the college life?

27. What are you experiencing through your college life?

28. What is your challenge?

29. What do you enjoy most?

<Globalization>

30. Could you describe how you understand globalization?

31. What is being a global citizen?

32. What were the major sources/factors that helped you understand globalization?

33. What do you think is the most important value/skill you need to acquire in the age of globalization?

34. How is your ESA related with globalization?

35. Is there anything you need to improve to be a global citizen?

<Diversity>

36. How do you understand diversity/plurality issue?
37. Do you think your recognition of diversity is more developed through your ESA experience than before? Why?

38. If you go back to Korea someday, will your belief and practice regarding diversity issue be the same or be changed?